

Backyard Habitats Help Wild Birds Brave Winter

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MARYSVILLE, Ohio, Feb. 2 - During winter natural food supplies for wild birds are scarce. And in the coldest months of the year, precious energy is expended searching for food, instead of burning it for warmth. Bird watchers across the world can create backyard habitats that offer shelter and feeding options while attracting a wider variety of wild bird species.

"Regardless of where you live, feeding birds during the winter can provide benefits to the birds," says John Robinson, chief ornithologist at Scotts. "For example, feeding birds in extreme northerly climates may increase the survival rates of some birds during unusually cold winters."

Wild bird feeding has a measurable benefit for birds in northern climates. Severe weather events cause nearly all natural food supplies to become unavailable particularly with extended periods of harsh cold, or when layers of snow or ice cover fruit, leaves, branches and the ground. Recent research discovered that winter survival rates of chickadees in the northern United States were highest in woodlands that had bird feeders versus those without feeders.

In warmer climes, backyard habitats and feeding are equally important. "Even if you live in the South, remember that many of the birds wintering in your yard must change into their breeding plumage, migrate back north in spring, find a mate, build a nest and lay eggs," continued Robinson. "All of these activities require considerable energy and in some instances may take place at a time of year when natural food supplies may be at the lowest. Your bird feeder may give the birds that added advantage they need to successfully migrate north, breed, and raise another brood of young."

- A backyard habitat can be as simple as a
- brush pile for shelter from the weather
 - fresh water source
 - bird feeder
 - and trees or shrubs to offer protection from predators

Because bird feeders provide an easy-to-locate or only source for food, fill it with quality seeds and blends containing oil rich ingredients like sunflower, peanuts, nyger or other high fat content wild bird foods such as suet for an energy source.

Creating a backyard haven is a welcome respite and source of enjoyment for both the wild birds and bird watchers alike.

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