

# ENJOYING BIRDS AT BIRDFEEDERS

Lesson developed by: Geoff Kennedy, Summit County Master Gardener Volunteer

## ACTIVITY OVERVIEW:

Birdfeeders attract a variety of birds and can be enjoyable to watch. A little information and some resources can make the experience even more enjoyable, and might even provide the opportunity for more in-depth involvement for some residents. Right click links to open.

## BACKGROUND

**Birds really are our Fine Feathered Friends!** According to *National Wildlife* magazine, a recent scientific study by an international team of zoologists has attempted to measure the role birds play in controlling caterpillars, aphids, and other plant eating insects. The Earth's roughly 6,000 species of insect eating birds eat 400 to 500 million tons of insects annually. That is about 20 quadrillion individual bugs! Even birds that visit our feeders and we think of as seed eaters often feed insects to their young since insects are so full of protein.

**But birds are in trouble!** According to recent studies we have **LOST ALMOST 3 BILLION BIRDS** since 1970. According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology there are some simple steps you can take to help, including making windows safer, so birds don't fly into them, and providing food, water and nesting area. That is where birdfeeders come in.

## CHOOSING A FEEDER

If your facility already has one or more feeders then you are all set, but you still might want to explore additional options. If you are thinking about a feeder a good starting point is the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. They have a page dedicated to feeding birds at <https://feederwatch.org/learn/feeding-birds/> which includes information on feeder types, food types, feeder placement, feeder maintenance, and discouraging unwanted visitors. There is also a free downloadable handbook on [Winter Bird Feeding](#). You might also



download the free booklet [Attracting Birds in Ohio](#) from the Ohio Division of Wildlife. Basically you are looking for a sturdy feeder that will keep the seed dry, is large enough that you don't need to fill it constantly, and is easy to clean. You might also consider a setup that is designed to discourage squirrels.

## Get people involved!

A fun, if somewhat messy way to get people interested in feeding birds is to have them make feeders using pinecones. A large, open pinecone is best. You will also need some untreated twine or string (safe for birds and people), some peanut butter, and some birdseed. Some plastic spoons or knives, paper plates, plastic gloves, and newspaper will help keep everything and everyone tidy. First put some newspaper down on the work area and give everyone a pinecone and a paper plate. Have each person take a 12 inch piece of twine and tie it to the top of the pinecone. Working on the paper plate, spread peanut butter over the pinecone using the plastic spoons or knives (gloves come in handy here), working it down into the woody scales, but being careful not to break them off.



Once the pinecone is well covered, put some birdseed on the plate and roll the pinecone in the seed so that it sticks to the peanut butter. You can spoon excess seed into the pinecone.



Then hang the feeders in an open area, but with some trees and shrubs nearby for shelter. Hang them high, so cats cannot get to them. The residents who made them will be especially interested to see what visitors their feeders attract and to watch their acrobatic antics. Nuthatches, Chickadees, Titmice and Downey Woodpeckers are likely candidates.

### **WHAT ELSE?**

A feeder is really all you need to enjoy watching birds. It is not necessary to know the names of birds to enjoy their beauty. But once they start watching, many people like to learn to identify the birds they are seeing. A copy of a bird guide in the viewing area can encourage this, and perhaps a pair of binoculars. The Ohio Division of Wildlife has a booklet on [Common Birds of Ohio](#), which is available free for download. If you would like a bound copy of this booklet contact the ODNR at 1-800-WILDLIFE. Cornell has some [free posters](#) to download and print, including one on common feeder birds. Encourage residents to take some time watching the birds and to look for the four keys to identification: size and shape, color pattern, behavior, and habitat. Blue Jays and Tufted Titmice both have crests and Titmice are somewhat blue, but they are very different in size and behavior. Another free identification tool that can be used on a smartphone is **Merlin Bird ID** provided by Cornell. The app uses location, time of year and a few questions about size, color, and activity to generate a list of possible birds.

If some residents get really interested, they may even want to participate in some Citizen Science. Scientists can't be everywhere at once, and observations by the public can provide vital information on bird population trends. Another free Cornell app, **eBird**, allows people to count and share the birds they see. If residents do not have smartphones, they can use written lists like this [Tally Sheet](#), which can be collected and the information entered by a staff member.



### **Contact Information:**

If you have any questions about this activity, please email [mgsummitcounty@gmail.com](mailto:mgsummitcounty@gmail.com).

We hope you benefitted from this activity. Please let us know if you utilized this with a quick email to the above address. Please send your name, facility name, number of participants involved in this activity, and your feedback for improvement so we can measure our impact and improve this product. Thank you!