



## Beauty in Your Backyard: Attracting and Feeding Summer Birds

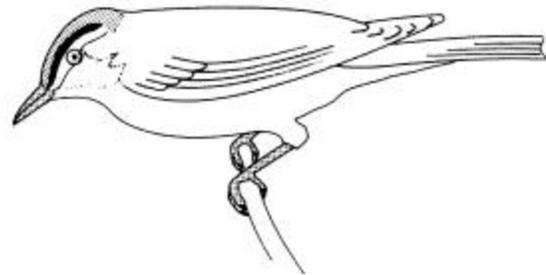
### Introduction

Songs of summer birds provide “wild” and lilting music for your backyard as the colorful plumage of the birds themselves adds interest and beauty to your surroundings. Many birds - including members of the bird families called warblers, vireos, orioles, tanagers, thrushes, buntings, and swallows - live in West Virginia during the summer. These birds, which are known as “neotropical migrants,”



**Barn Swallow - This familiar swallow has a deeply forked tail. The male has a metallic blue-black back and rust-colored underparts.**

spend the winter in warmer climates such as Mexico, and South America and Central America, but nest in North America and West Virginia in the summer where the supply of food is abundant. People enjoy attracting these beautiful birds to their homes. One way you can attract these birds



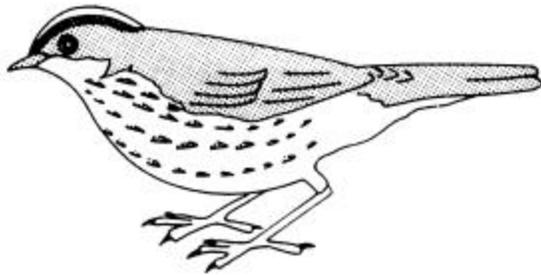
**Red-eyed Vireo - This vireo is one of the most common summer birds in West Virginia. It has an olive green back, a white front, a black-bordered white eye stripe, and ruby red eyes.**

is to plant trees, shrubs, vines, and flowers that serve the various needs of birds by providing places where birds can feed, sing, nest, rest, and hide. Such plantings can help attract birds and beautify your property, your school, or place of business at the same time you help the birds. As you plan for birdscaping your surroundings, remember that birds need the following “habitat ingredients” in order to live and thrive: food, cover, shelter, water, and space or territory in which to seek food and raise their young.

### Food

Every species of bird has its own unique food requirement. Food includes the obvious nutritional parts of a bird’s diet, such as seeds, and supplements like salt. Grit or gravel is also required by many birds for grinding up food in their gizzards. Birds do not have teeth to grind their food. The dirt,

sand, pebbles, and grit they eat gets in their crop and helps grind up food. Adding grit to



**Ovenbird - Ovenbirds have olive green backs and streaks down their neck and front. Their nest, built on the forest floor of leaves, is arched and shaped like an oven.**

your feeder is helpful all year, but is especially valuable in the winter and spring. Crushed eggshells also are beneficial for birds in the spring because they provide extra calcium during the nesting and egg-producing season. During the spring and summer you can grow many kinds of plants that provide fruits and berries, grain and seeds, nectar, nuts, and acorns for birds. The birds' food needs are often met by berries. Catbirds, waxwings and many other kinds of birds are fond of fruit. Plants with juicy fruits such as grapes, raspberries, blackberries, viburnums, dogwoods, blueberries, and even sumacs provide fruit that birds like to eat. To provide food sources throughout the summer season - and even during the winter - it's a good idea to maintain a variety of plants that have fruit and seed at different times, so the birds have a constant menu from which to choose. For example, birds that pass over dry sumac fruit for tastier berries during the warmer season, will consume sumac fruit when little else is available. Different kinds of birds feed in different ways and at varying heights of vegetation. For example, during the nesting season, the ovenbird feeds on the ground, the wood thrush at shrub level, and the red-eyed vireo in the upper tree branches. The way vegetation is distributed is important, so several places or "niches" are necessary to meet birds' feeding habits. You can create these "niches" yourself by providing layers

of vegetation including shrubs, and medium-size, and tall trees.

Insects: Insects are very important to birds. Did you know that during the nesting season from April to July, almost all songbirds, no matter what their diet during the rest of the year, feed their young caterpillars and other insects? Insects provide a valuable source of proteins for growing birds. Many insects are attracted to trees and shrubs, and many insects live under bark. Therefore, trees and shrubs in addition to offering seeds and fruit provide a home for the "bugs" that birds need.

## Cover

Birds require cover for nesting, escape from predators, and refuge from harsh weather. Shelter is especially critical while birds are nesting and raising young. Cover is also necessary when birds sleep and rest



concealed under foliage and among branches. Shelter can come in many forms, including natural cover such as trees, tree cavities, shrubs, grasses, and flowers; animal-made structures such as burrows and dens; and manmade structures like bird houses, roosting sites, and nest platforms. Evergreens including white pines, hemlocks, and rhododendrons provide valuable cover

from harsh weather and protection from predators such as cats and birds of prey. Dense and impenetrable shrubs such as blackberries and raspberries also provide excellent cover for songbirds. Evergreens such as fir, spruce, and arborvitae make excellent cover. Other trees also provide protection, including black cherry, blackgum, hackberry, holly, maple, magnolia, mountain-ash, mulberry, oaks, sassafras, serviceberry, sourgum, sweetgum, and yellow poplar.



Evergreen and deciduous trees (those that shed their leaves during the winter) help attract birds such as cardinals, chickadees, robins, bluejays, towhees, catbirds, mockingbirds, titmouse, and many kinds of warblers, vireos, and woodpeckers.

Vines such as bittersweet, English ivy, grape, and Virginia creeper also provide good cover for such ground-nesting birds as towhees. Annual and perennial flowers such as aster, bee balm, columbine, cosmos, daylily, impatiens, jewelweed, marigold, nasturtium, petunia, phlox, salvia, snapdragon, sweet alyssum, sunflower, and zinnia attract cardinals, goldfinches, hummingbirds, sparrows, nuthatches, and towhees. Salt: Salt is an essential component of wildlife habitat. Pine grosbeaks and crossbills will seek out salt deposits. A burlap sack filled with granular salt where rain can leach the salt into the soil creates a salt lick. Remember that salt can kill vegetation around your yard so you may prefer to suspend salt from a perch or a branch.

## Dusting Areas

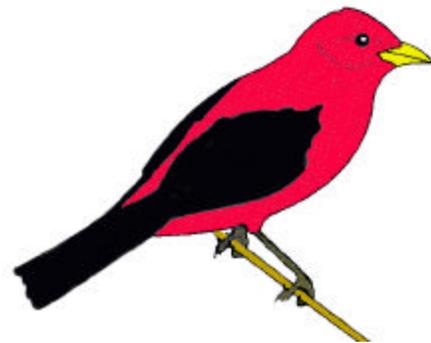
Many birds, including songbirds and turkeys, take dust baths to control external parasites. Dusting beds of fine soil can be made in backyards. A dusting site can be a circle of finely pulverized soil 2 feet across.

## Nesting materials - Mud, An Ingredient Some Birds Use to Make Nests

Birds that make their nests out of mud, including cliff and barn swallows, appreciate a source of mud that is located close to their nesting areas. Barn and cliff swallows are communal nesters - that is, many birds nest close together. After a rain, or even near a muddy bank, you can see the industrious swallows gathering daubs of mud to build their nests.

## Space

Like human beings, all birds have a special pattern of space or territorial needs in which



**Scarlet Tanager**

to live. The bird's home range must be large enough to support its needs, which may include more than your backyard. For instance, bluebirds require several acres per pair for successful nesting. On the other hand, birds such as wood ducks and purple martins, don't defend territories around their nest, so many pairs can nest around a limited area.

The following table indicates the preferred habitat for common summer birds:

Bird	Dense Trees	A Few Trees	Shrubs
Robin		X	
House wren			X
Mourning dove		X	X
blue jay	X	X	X
Catbird		X	X
Oriole		X	
Chipping sparrow		X	
Flicker	X	X	
Cardinal		X	X
Goldfinch			X
Waxwing		X	
White-breasted nuthatch	X		
Downy woodpecker	X	X	
Chickadee	X		

### At Home in the Woods, the Meadow, the Grass - or Your Roof Top

Did you know that all birds don't live in the same kind of places or in the same type of habitat? Birds nest in many different places. The scarlet tanager and the wood thrush prefer to live and nest in the dense woods. Unless your home happens to be in the middle of the forest, you would not find these birds nesting in your yard. However, the chestnut-sided warbler, towhee, mockingbird, and catbird prefer more open shrubby, areas in which to live. These are birds you are more likely to find around your yard or in parks. The bluebird, meadowlark, and many sparrows prefer to live around open grassy areas like meadows. And, yes, there are birds called nighthawks, which look a little like whippoorwills, that will nest on flat roof tops in urban areas. Nighthawks, as their name indicates, fly in the sky at night and consume insects.

Don't forget that the kind of habitat you have determines the kinds of birds you will see around your home.

### Water

A source of fresh, clean water is important for birds. Birdbaths can be formal, such as concrete decorative baths, or something simple such as the lid from a large can. The bath should be placed 15 feet from trees and

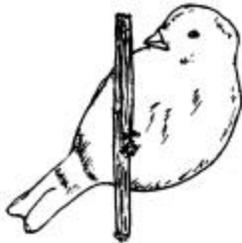


shrubs to provide cover so birds can escape cats and other predators. Dripping water from an overhanging hose or bucket will create a ground-level birdbath. The birdbath should not be more than 3 inches deep and should have a gently sloping side and bottom. The edge should be rough to provide a good perching surface. Some birds such as robins enjoy a fine spray of water

like a sprinkler in hot weather. Most soil also brings earthworms to the surface, which robins will devour. Small pools, even a sandbox or a wheelbarrow full of water also attracts birds including robins and even shorebirds like a spotted sandpiper or a green heron. Garden supply stores have small ponds for backyard water gardens, which could prove to be an attraction to ducks, turtles, frogs, and salamanders.

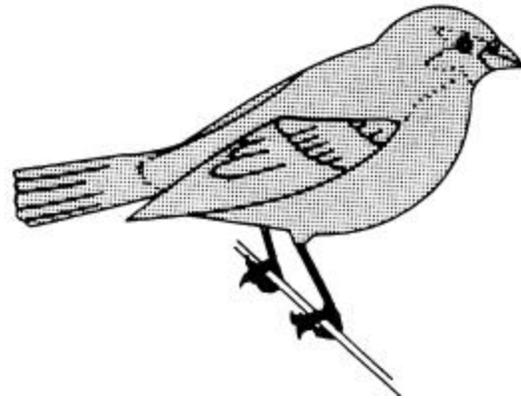
## More Banquets for Your Summer Birds - Seeds, Suet, Fruit, and Nectar

While providing natural sources of food around your yard is a good way to attract birds, you may want to place seeds in your feeders and keep suet available as you do in winter. You want to include much the same offerings as you did in winter, but add foods summer birds prefer, including fresh fruit and nectar. However, be especially careful in summer about warm and wet conditions where bacteria and mold might grow. Keep your feeders clean. Insect-eating birds eat large amounts of animal matter, mostly insects and their larvae. The best substitute for this fare, which you can easily feed your birds, is beef suet. Suet is ideal for helping



birds maintain their high body temperature, which ranges from 100 to 112 degrees. Because stringy suet is hard for birds to digest, buy suet that is not stringy. Also remember that while raw beef fat from the

store is all right to use during the winter, in summer when temperatures are over 70 degrees unrendered suet can become rancid. It's better to use commercially rendered suet during the spring and summer months.



**Indigo Bunting** - This bird is a bright, brilliant blue. Indigo buntings sing throughout the summer, even on the hottest days.

Red-bellied, downy, and hairy woodpeckers, like suet. These woodpeckers may visit your suet all summer long--and bring their babies with them. In addition to the woodpeckers, the suet also attracts chickadees, kinglets, brown creepers, starlings, wrens, nuthatches, brown thrashers, cardinals, and thrushes. Chickadees, nuthatches, and titmice like sunflower seeds during the summer. The indigo bunting, a common bird in West Virginia during the summer, may be attracted by niger or thistle seed in your feeders.

## Attracting Summertime Backyard Birds with Fruit and Nectar

### Fruit

Fruit-eating birds include orioles, mockingbirds, thrashers, woodpeckers, starlings, cedar waxwings, yellow-breasted chat, robins, tanagers, bluebirds, cardinals, jays, and thrushes. Fruits and berries - fresh, frozen, and dried -are an important part of your summer feeding program. Orioles may prefer fruit to anything else you offer them.

Before offering fruit to your birds, chop it into tiny bite-size pieces. Larger sections of fruit and bananas should be attached to the feeder so the birds can't carry them off. Birds also like shredded coconut which can be served in the shell.

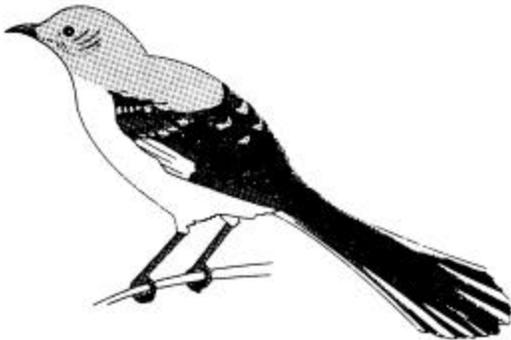
Other fruits that birds like include raw or baked apples, cherries, blueberries, cranberries, fresh or dried currents, dates, grapes, orange slices, raisins, watermelon, pears, and strawberries.

Northern Oriole - Orioles are easy to recognize with their black heads and backs and splashes of bright orange.



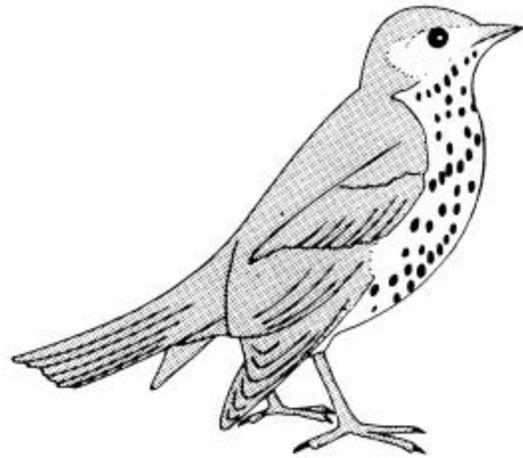
**Northern Oriole**

Northern Mockingbird - Famous for its rapturous singing, this bird is gray with a black tail and white wing bars.



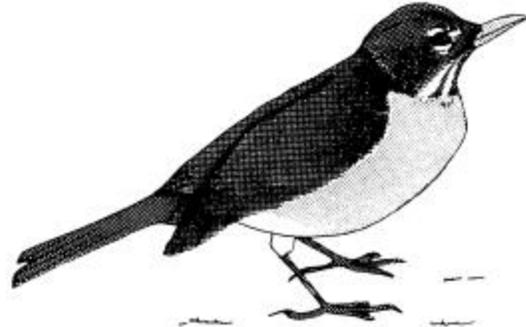
**Northern Mockingbird**

Wood Thrush - This songster has a cinnamon brown back with oval spots on its chest. Its song is flutelike.



**Wood Thrush**

American Robin - This familiar bird, a member of the thrush family, has a brick red chest and a dark gray back.

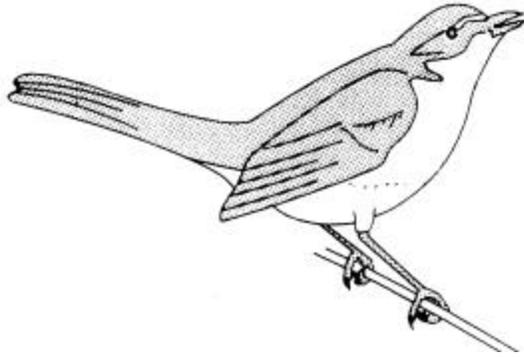


**American Robin**

Cedar Waxwing - This sleek brown bird has soft plumage, a black mask, and a yellow band at the end of the tail. Waxwings tend to stay with flocks of other waxwings.



**Cedar Waxwing**



### **Yellow-breasted Chat**

Yellow-breasted Chat - This is the largest warbler in West Virginia. It has a greenish back and a yellow chin, throat, and chest. As its name suggests, the Chat is very vocal.

### **Nectar**

Hummingbirds will feed at your nectar feeder. Cardinals, woodpeckers, thrushes,

orioles, tanagers, and finches may also turn up at your feeder seeking sugar water.

You don't need to overfeed your birds in summer, as normally they have other natural food available to them in the form of weed seeds, wild berries, and insects. However, summer feeding does give birds a change of menu, which they appreciate.

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