

IN THE KNOW



Photo by T. D. McNeil

Cardinals taking advantage of a local bird feeder last winter.

FEEDING WILD BIRDS IS FUN AND FUNDAMENTAL TO THEIR WELL-BEING

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February is National Bird Feeding Month and it's a great time to get in touch with the natural world by inviting some hungry birds to your backyard during the long, cold winter. Your new feathered friends will flourish and thank you.

Jenn Donnell, an information and education specialist at the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, said feeding birds in your backyard helps them survive harsh weather.

"Offering supplemental foods through a bird feeder can really help out local populations of birds especially during winter weather events," she said. "When we have lots of snow on the ground it covers up a lot of the birds' food resources, whether that's fallen seeds or fruits or insects that they're scrounging around for in the leaf litter. Whenever you offer that supplemental food in a bird feeder or a suet feeder, you give the birds more options to help weather the storm. I think it's a good reason to have bird feeding month in February because that's when resources are at their lowest."

When you walk into a store that sells birdseed, deciding what to feed your wild birds can be confusing, especially if you're new to feeding birds.

"There are a lot of commercial seed mixes available," said Donnell. "If you're just starting out, whatever your budget and size of bag that suits your needs will work just fine."

"A lot of the commercial mixes out there have filler seeds, a little millet and that

sort of thing, and those aren't necessarily preferred by a majority of the birds that are coming to our feeders. Sometimes they'll just get kicked out of the way for something they prefer more. We typically recommend feeding just straight black oil sunflower seeds."

Donnell said there are also specialty seeds, but these typically come at a higher cost. A popular specialty seed for many dedicated bird feeder people is safflower, which she said is much more expensive compared to other seeds. If you want to buy these or other specialty seeds, she suggested offsetting the cost by mixing them with less expensive varieties like black oil sunflower seeds.

You can also tailor your seed and your bird feeding station to the types of birds you want to see.

"A lot of people like to see goldfinches at their feeder and you can encourage them by feeding them Nyjer or thistle, which comes in a much smaller bag and a little higher cost. You can put this in a sock feeder. But I've had goldfinches come to sunflower seeds just as easily."

She said suet is a good option for insect-eating birds that aren't as comfortable coming into a feeder, such as bluebirds and some woodpeckers. You can buy the little cages and pre-mixed suet or create a suet mix of your own if making your own bird food is something you like to do.

When you set up your bird feeding station, Donnell said you'll notice that some birds like doves, dark-eyed juncos and a lot of sparrows are more comfortable feeding at ground level. Other birds like cardinals are okay sitting up on a platform and finches

are really comfortable on lighter weight swinging feeders that discourage squirrels from taking advantage of the free meal.

When it comes to squirrels, the question Donnell said she hears most often is which bird feeders work best to keep them out.

"I think they can get in every one of them," she said with a chuckle. "There are some that hold them off for a little bit, but they're pretty wily. They'll get into any of them eventually."

One thing you don't want to forget when feeding birds is to also provide them with water. Not only do they need water to drink, but it's also vital for them to have it for bathing.

"If you've got a lake or creek or pond nearby, you may not need to worry about it as much," said Donnell. "But giving birds water to drink and to bathe is especially helpful in cold winters."

"Taking a bath helps them maintain their feathers and that helps them stay warmer. Basically, it keeps those feathers cleaner and in better shape, which helps hold in heat in the wintertime. Most of the time we just think about the birdbaths or water for birds in the spring and summer months but it's a big consideration for wintertime as well."

While providing food and water for the wild birds, probably the biggest thing to keep in mind is the importance of keeping everything clean to prevent disease. Donnell suggests cleaning your feeder(s) at least once or twice a season and when the birds have moved on to natural food sources and your birdseed is starting to mold.

She said you can bleach out your feeders to ensure they're disinfected, but make sure

everything is rinsed off thoroughly and feeders are completely dry before putting them back out with seed in them. Don't forget to also clean your birdbath or other water sources regularly.

"Last year, the country at large was having some problems with disease, especially with finches," said Donnell. "Make sure to clean your feeders, then take a rake or leaf blower and really clean below the feeders to remove the seed and droppings that have fallen beneath the feeder."

She said if you do have a problem with finches getting conjunctivitis, which is infected eyes, you may want to move your feeders to a new spot.

"Some people have a feeding station that's been in the same spot for five or 10 years. If birds are having problems, move your feeder to fresh ground. Most diseases are spread through the droppings, through close contact, so switching things up is a good idea."

Like all wildlife, birds have three basic requirements for survival, which are food, water and shelter. Helping provide some of these resources for them takes a little planning but relatively little effort. With just a few additions, you can transform your yard into an oasis for birds, which can be highly entertaining for you.

Donnell joked that she's seen a bunch of memes that compare watching birds out the window at backyard feeders to watching a sporting event.

"They definitely have attitudes that are fun to watch," she said. "Plus, when you think about winter, it's normally kind of drab. We have great birds that are here year-round or migrate into the state in the wintertime and they can add a lot of splashes of color you may not expect. There are some gorgeous colors out there."

Besides being entertaining, feeding birds in your backyard can be beneficial in other ways. Because you've invited the birds to your home when it's cold, they may also feel welcome to return in the warmer months to feast on those pesky insects that invade your backyard as the temperature rises. It's a nice, mutually beneficial relationship if you think about it and you can be as committed as much or as little as you desire.

"You can feed birds at whatever level is best for you," Donnell said. "If you just like seeing the birds but don't know the species, you can still enjoy watching them. The whole feeding and watching experience can be as low-key or as intense as you want."

For those who want to learn more about the birds they see in their backyards, you'll find tons of resources online. Some suggestions include Cornell's All About Birds (allaboutbirds.org) and Merlin (merlin.allaboutbirds.org) to help you identify birds.

Although the Great Backyard Bird Count (birdcount.org) has already passed this year, you can still look at bird lists from around the globe, share your favorite bird photos and connect with other bird lovers worldwide. However, if you're interested in taking your birdwatching to the next level, you can share your sightings throughout the year on iNaturalist (inaturalist.org) and eBird (ebird.org).

Quapaw BOE votes to extend administration contracts

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The Quapaw Board of Education voted to extend the contracts of the district's administration for another year during its special session meeting on Feb. 15. Administrators include elementary school principal Sheri Compton, assistant middle school principal Aaron Thomasson and middle and high school principal Tamara Bacon. The board previously approved extending the contract of Superintendent of Schools David Carriger for an additional year during its Jan. 17 meeting.

Board members also approved employing Melchesidech "Jay" Porter as a substitute teacher for the 2021-22 school year and Stephen Wealot as an elementary school cook.

In financial matters, the board approved payroll warrants for \$365,993.78 and general fund warrants for \$52,430.07, for a total of \$418,423.85. It also approved building fund warrants for \$3,222.19.

Total general fund warrants paid to date equals \$3,017,978.90 compared to \$2,589,670.32 this time last year. Total building fund warrants paid to date equals \$155,494.87 compared to \$121,590.09 in February 2021.

Board members approved the purchase of 525 HP Chromebooks from CDW for \$169,359.75, which will be paid for through federal funds and grants.

The board also approved the out-of-state senior trip and updates to the school's transfer policy.

The next regularly scheduled board meeting is on March 10 at 6:30 p.m. in the Quapaw Administration Building.

Miami Friends Church

Miami Friends Church pastor David Frazier shared a message, "Top Of Mind." Anything I care about, requires my attention. If it's not at the top of my mind, I will fall out of the habit.

"Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. Matthew 6:19-21 NLT"

The things we value (or treasure), reflect the desires of our hearts. Jesus is trying to recalibrate our hearts and say "so many of the things you consider to be treasure, are going to wear out or get stolen or you'll forget about them"

Why not treasure the things of God,

that are eternal and global in scope?

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. Romans 12:2 NLT

The key to recalibrating our hearts, is to be certain that the things of God are top of mind for us. If we allow this truth to take root in our lives, the more our perspective will be adjusted to see the eternal significance (or insignificance) of the things competing for our attention.

Miami Friends is a church family that believes everyone has value and purpose. We are contemporary in style, and conservative in theology.

We welcome people from all walks of life to join us to worship Sunday's at the meeting house across from NEO.

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