



# BACKYARD nature center News

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## Migration Navigation

At this time of year, when you see migrating birds heading south across the continent, do you ever wonder how they find their way? Many birds travel long distances, and yet return to the same wintering and breeding grounds each year. What would happen if you transported a bird, and it started its migration in a different place? Would the bird instinctively fly the same course as always, only to end up in the wrong part of the world?

An ornithologist named Ronald Lockley designed a series of experiments to answer questions like these, performed on Manx Shearwaters nesting on the island of Skolholm, off Wales. Transported shearwaters that were released in Venice and Stockholm flew over areas they had never seen before and were back in their nest burrows in 14 days. A Manx Shearwater that was released in Boston, 3,050 miles from home, took only 12 1/2 days to return to its nest.

Seabirds generally have excellent navigational abilities, but so do many land birds. In one experiment, White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows successfully returned to California from release points in Louisiana and Maryland.

### Navigational Systems

Clearly, birds do not journey forth “on a wing and a prayer.” They take clues from geographic landmarks, sunlight, stars, environmental sounds, and even wind direction. Most birds are capable of using more than one navigational

system, and they almost always reach their intended destinations.

- **Geographic Landmarks**—most migratory birds move about quite a bit in their nesting territories and so recognize them easily upon return. When migrating, birds often use geographic landmarks—such as mountain ranges, river valleys, and coastlines—to find their way. In

North America, most of these features run north-south and so correspond with the flight paths taken by birds.

- **Sunlight**—experiments in the 1940s and 1950s demonstrated that starlings use the sun for migration.

When kept in cages in which they could only see the sun, the birds

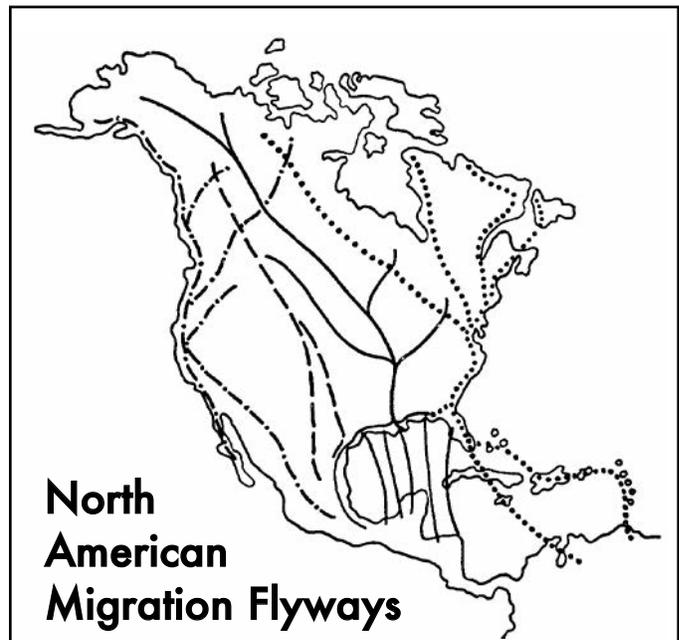
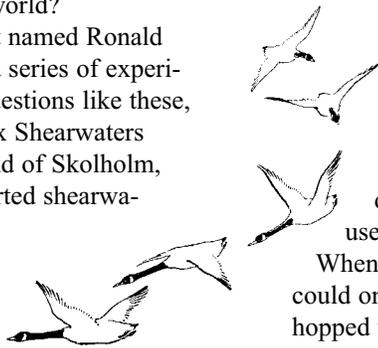
hopped toward and beat against the southwest side of the cage in fall and the northeast side of the cage in spring. The birds continued to base their movements on the direction of the light source even when it was blurred or deflected so that it came from an unnatural direction.

- **Stars**—birds that

migrate at night use the stars for direction. Indigo Buntings placed in a planetarium where the skies were reversed 180 degrees (from what would have been normal) exhibited migratory restlessness that was consistent with the stars they were being shown.

- **Environmental sounds**—in periods of bad weather and poor visibility, birds keep on course by listening to sounds that reflect the geography of the area, such as waves crashing against the shore, gurgling streams, or wind through the trees.

When you begin to miss the migrants that have left your area to travel south, be consoled in knowing that you can trust their navigational prowess. You can look forward to seeing them again next spring.





# Should I Feed Birds in the Fall?



Fall is a great time to feed the birds, and the right autumn bird feeding tips can help birders attract a wide variety of both resident species and migrating birds to their backyard buffet.

## Fall Bird Feeding Myths

Several bird feeding myths surround fall feeding and many beginning backyard birders mistakenly assume that feeding birds in fall will hurt their feathered friends. The biggest misconception is the idea that if the birds have a steady source of food available in autumn, they won't migrate, and then when those feeders are empty the birds will starve. In fact, a reliable food source is only a minor factor that affects how birds migrate. Daylight levels, climate and instinct also play important roles in seasonal migration, and feeding birds in autumn does not prevent migration, but can help it. Migrating birds require a lot of calories for the energy necessary to fly hundreds or thousands of miles, and feeders can provide an energy boost to passing migrants as well as help resident birds build up fat reserves for their journey.

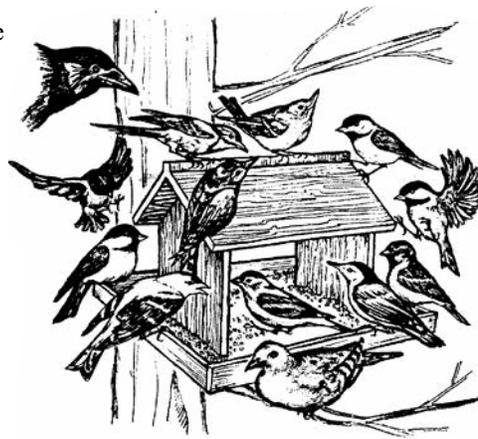
It is also a myth that there simply aren't birds around to feed in the fall. While many birds rely less on feeders in autumn because of the natural harvest abundance of wild berries, fruits, grains and seeds, bird feeders will still see plenty of activity. The composition of backyard flocks will change as some resident birds leave for migration and more northern migrants arrive, but they will all welcome the opportunity to find an easy snack at bird feeders.

## Reasons to Feed Birds in Fall

Autumn is a dynamic, ever-changing season and it can be a very rewarding time to feed birds. Birders should always keep their feeders stocked in fall to...

- Help resident birds build fat reserves for energy once they begin migration.

- Provide an easy food source for any migrating birds passing through the area.
- Offer supplemental food when natural food sources begin to be depleted.
- Attract the first winter bird species and encourage them to remain nearby all season.
- Help birds imprint on the location of reliable food sources so they will return to the same place in the spring.



By feeding birds in autumn, not only do birders assist migrating birds, but they also help other migrants learn where to go next spring for good food, which will increase the size and diversity of their backyard flock.

## Best Autumn Bird Foods

To give migrating birds the best nutrition and abundant energy for their long journeys, backyard birders should provide bird foods with high oil content and the most calories. At the same time, offering a variety of different foods ensures that all passing migrants can find a tasty treat at the feeders. The best fall bird foods include:

- Black oil sunflower seed
- White proso millet
- Nyjer
- Suet

- Nuts
- Cracked Corn
- Nectar

Birders should watch their fall flocks carefully and adjust food supplies as necessary to meet their birds' needs. Migrating hummingbirds may mob nectar feeders in early fall, for example, but later in the season nectar will only be a minor part of the backyard buffet.

## Tips for Feeding Autumn Birds

There is more to feeding fall birds than just providing the right foods. By keeping the backyard safe and meeting birds' other needs, a fall flock will be healthy, active and diverse.

- Keep feeders clean and filled even in poor autumn weather.
- Allow leaf litter to build up under trees and shrubbery to attract birds with shelter and insects.
- Choose fall plants that offer ever-green cover and lasting berries or fruits for fall and winter food.
- Keep birdbaths filled with fresh, clean water, and add a heater to the bath in late fall to guard against early freezes.
- Check feeders for damage from heavy summer use and repair them so they are safe for autumn birds.
- Squirrel-proof bird feeders with different tactics to prevent autumn foraging squirrels from depleting birds' food supplies.
- Protect exhausted backyard migrants from predators such as cats and hawks.

Feeding autumn birds can be a rewarding way to enjoy the changing season just as a backyard flock is changing. By following these autumn bird feeding tips, it is possible to attract a wide range of autumn bird species and ensure they are happily fed throughout the season.

*Written by Melissa Mayntz, About.com Guide*



# FALL BIRDSEED SALE

October 15–October 23

20% OFF

Don't miss our Fall Birdseed Sale! All bulk seed, 20-lb. and larger bags, will be 20% off!

Prepurchase your seed at the 20% discount and let us store it for you by opening or adding to your seed storage account with a minimum \$150.

## The Ground Feeders

by Cathy Clausen  
avid backyard birder and organic gardener

With the first flake of snow, you can expect several different Juncos to appear. Some call them "snow birds"! With their light underbelly, dark back, and the cutest little fleshy pink beak, it's truly a sign that winter feeding has begun. Juncos are what we call ground feeders. Birds that feel more comfortable on the ground will be delighted with sunflower and millet offered on a platform feeder just a few inches off the ground. No tube feeders for these little guys. Our favorite ground feeder is made of recycled composite materials, sits close to the ground, and has two removable steel mesh inserts, allowing rain and snow to go right through, keeping seed as fresh as possible. Juncos love it, towhees, Harris' sparrows, Cardinals, White crowned sparrows and even wild turkeys love it too. It will be your busiest winter feeder. I like to place mine a few feet from shrubs so that the birds can make a quick escape to the shrub for shelter if danger presents itself.

## Got Water?

Water is essential in winter! More birds will die of dehydration even than starvation during the coldest months. Ponds freeze over, as do some rivers, streams. Birdbaths will need a birdbath heater to keep them from becoming a solid sheet of ice. As dry as the summer season has been in our area, there is less natural water available for the birds, less water to freeze over. Consider leaving your pond pump going in winter or even using our new pond aerator to keep a portion of your pond open. A good open water source is key to attracting winter birds.

The BACKYARD nature center is your local resource for binoculars. We offer expert advice while providing you with quality optics.

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any birdbath heater, pond aerator,  
pond heater, or heated birdbath

C111001; Expires 11/30/2011.  
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**316-683-2121**

## STORE HOURS

OPEN 7 DAYS WEEK

Monday–Friday: 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

Saturday: 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

Sunday: 12 noon–4 p.m.

**Return Service Requested**

## How do birds find their food?

Well let's start off by saying "thank goodness we are not Turkey Vultures"! They are one of the few species of birds that uses its sense of smell for finding food. You can imagine why this would work well for a species who lives off of decaying flesh... but we won't go there!

Most other birds rely more on their eye sight, and because of this, no other animal can compete with birds and their visual acuity. Their eyes look deceptively small, but when you look beyond the overlapping protecting bone, you discover that their eyes are really quite large! They really need to have this great vision because of the way they find food. Most birds find their food while on the wing. Imagine the vision needed by a hawk searching for a mouse while flying over a field, a kingfisher spotting a fish from above, or a chickadee looking for a coneflower.

If you look closely at birds you will notice that there is a difference among different birds on where their eyes are placed. For hawks and other birds of prey, binocular vision is absolutely necessary. This means that

their eyes are placed forward on their heads. To see around themselves, they must turn their heads to the side. (Owls do this too, of course, but contrary to folklore they can only go about 270 degrees.)

Most other bird's eyes are placed on the sides of their heads. This allows them to see what is coming from behind as well as to find the insects and seed they need to live on.

For your backyard feeder friends, make sure your feeders are placed where they are easily seen... but do remember to make things a little safer by having some sort of protection close by that they can duck into when they spot that hawk sneaking up from behind!

