

08) An Introduction into Attracting Birds to your Garden

FEEDING GENERALLY:

You will be able to attract many different species of birds to your garden by just by putting out a variety of different foods. However, it is a common myth that birds should only be fed in winter.

With the fast disappearing habitats and sources of natural food, birds do need feeding all year round. In spring and summer there are many hungry chicks to feed! In view of this please do not put out whole peanuts on bird tables at these times, as they can choke chicks if they are fed to them by parent birds. Peanuts can still be given in mesh feeders that only permit small pieces of the whole nuts to be removed.

It is best to feed twice a day if possible. Early in the morning, to replace energy lost over night to keep warm, and again in mid afternoon or early evening in order to build up reserves for the night ahead. Once you have started feeding birds do not stop, as they will come to rely on the food you put out to supplement their natural food of berries, seeds and insects, which may be in short supply.

Various types of feed attract different birds. A good way to start is with a good quality mixed bird seed. Many of the cheaper ones contain mostly wheat, which really only attract Pigeons! Peanuts and Coconuts attract Tits, Woodpeckers, Nuthatch and Starling; Mixed Seed attract Chaffinch and Sparrows; Black Sunflower seed attract Greenfinch and Niger seed attract Goldfinch. As a treat and a supplement mealworms (not actually worms but beetle grubs) are probably the best food that you can put out. In dried form they contain 25% protein, but in live form this rises to 48% protein and 40% fat. Mealworms attract all birds, including Robin, Blackbird, Song Thrush, House Sparrow, Dunnock and even Pied Wagtail. Limited amounts of household food can also be put out, such as raisins, apples, pears, grated cheese and chopped bacon rind. Bread, although not ideal, can be put out in small crumbled quantities. Moisten first if hard and dry.

Never put out mouldy bread or food, as spores can develop which will do serious harm to birds and sometimes kill them.

A good selection of quality bird food can be purchased from many shops, most garden centres and Centres at some Essex Reserves.

Make a list of your sightings (i.e. for each day, for each site month, a year list and a 'life' list) and please remember to send in all your sightings to the Essex Birdwatching Society County Recorders such that your data can form a part of the trends and be included in the '*Essex Bird Report*' produced annually by the Society.

Details where to send your data can be found on the Society's Website – WWW.EBwS.ORG.UK or by contacting the Society's Secretary by e-mail – Info.EBwS@gmail.com