

Recap of our March 2022 Program

By Lara Jackson

Make Friends With the Birds

"I find birds extraordinary. They've been around for over 160 million years – they have been around longer than the dinosaurs – this shows that birds can adapt. In just over 80 years many birds have become extinct all at the hands of humans," stated Alyse Burman, owner of The Wildbird Shack in Mount Prospect, IL, which opened in 2015.

Burman continued, "Since 1500, nearly 200 species of birds have been identified as extinct. This equals one-third of bird species. During the twenty first century, the prediction rate of extinction is a mind-boggling 12 percent, which is 10,000 species worldwide. The domino effect of urban development, industrialization, and climate change; all of which have contributed to the extinction of birds."

Pollution, illegal hunting and poaching, oil spills, poisons and pesticides, overfishing and netting, illegal wildlife trafficking, and even fashion have all contributed to the extinction of birds throughout the years.

Window collisions are the number one killer of birds, with nearly a billion birds killed each year. Birds don't have the ability to perceive glass. Therefore, they perceive glass as a clear passage. There have been attempts to have cities turn their lights off in the evenings to lessen window collisions. There are four migratory flyaways in North America:

1. Pacific
2. Central
3. Mississippi
4. Atlantic

All of these flyways travel through such major cities as Chicago, New York, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and Houston.

The migratory season for birds is twice a year – March 15-June 15 and August 15-November 15.

According to Burman, the mission of The Wildbird Shack is to "...create an awareness of birds, conservation, and nature..."

Creating a Safe and Positive Home for Birds

Burman has created this awareness by educating people about proper outdoor viewing pieces, birdhouses, and seeds, among other items. She discussed birdscaping, which is like outdoor interior design for birds.

"Design an area to view birds for you and the birds, create a whimsical setting with food and shelter for the birds," explained Burman.

Providing a palatable and a variety of foods will ensure that you will have plenty of birds to view. Also, different birds are attracted to different types of food. For instance, Blue Jays, doves, Cardinals, finches, Chickadees, and a variety of other species enjoy black "oilers" seeds and sunflower seeds with or without the hull. The black oil seeds are meatier and provide higher oil, more fat, and protein value. Also, these seeds have a softer shell, which makes it easier for birds to eat.

Burman also explains that when the right seed and the correct feeder are combined, a variety of birds will visit your backyard. For example, suet will bring bluebirds, Nuthatches, and woodpeckers; NYJER and/or thistle will attract common redpolls and sparrows.

The three common types of feeders are platform, fly thru, and hopper. With a bottom made of mesh, all types of birds can use platform feeders – mourning doves are particularly keen on these feeders. With a protective roof, all types of birds can also use the fly thru feeders. Blue Jays, Cedar Wax Wings, and Red Wing Blackbirds enjoy these feeders. Hopper feeders are four-sided with a roof, which provides protection. Birds that enjoy the hopper feeders include smaller songbirds.

Some birds have specific food, shelter, and provision needs. Woodpeckers are vertical feeding birds, so vertical bird feeders are best for them. Hummingbirds can be very finicky – their water needs to be fresh and clean. Hummin birds are also very territorial birds. Orioles, which are only in our area for a short time, enjoy oranges and grape jelly.

Birdhouses are also a positive addition for bird viewing. Birdhouses can be bird-specific. When placing the birdhouse, make sure there is room between the hole and the base of the house, so they can build a nest – when the hole is not at the base this makes it easier for predators to get to the house. Also, never place bird seed in the house.

Hygiene is also an important aspect in proper birdscaping, "Check for mold, droppings, and other contaminants – never use bleach to clean the birdhouse. Dawn dish detergent, water, and a brush works well. Make sure the feeder

is rinsed well. Clean the it out every two to three weeks. Clean out the house once the bird has fledged.” explained Burman.

Educating the Public

In addition to proving excellent bird supplies and knowledge, The Bird Shack offers two programs geared toward the young and old.

Open to children second grade and older, the mission of the Soaring Feathers program is to “engage students, at all grade levels with nature, ecology and the environment through the diversity of outdoor birding.”

The program is offered at the Mount Prospect school district, the Science Academy of Chicago in Mount Prospect. According to Burman “...the kids have been excited to learn about the migration of birds and other topics such as the feeding and cleaning of feeders.”

On the other end of the spectrum is the Tranquil Feathers program for seniors whose mission it is “...to create a richer, more positive quality of life [and is geared toward those with] cognitive impairments, dementia, depression, living alone, and pain management.”

“It is wonderful to see a smile on their face as many are happy to have birding brought back to them and engage with nature,” explains Burman.

For more information regarding these programs or any information mentioned in this article visit www.wildbirdshack.com.