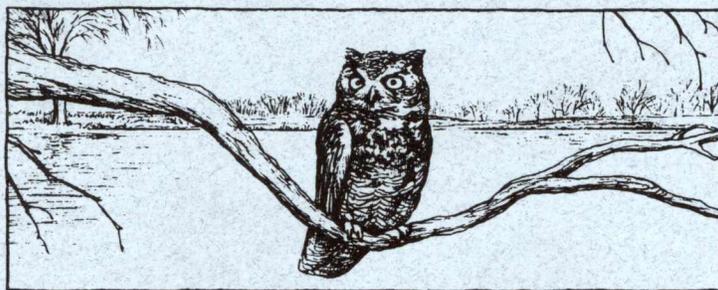


STILLMAN NEWSLETTER



©WINTER 2006

WILD BIRD FEED & SEED

-- Mark Spreyer

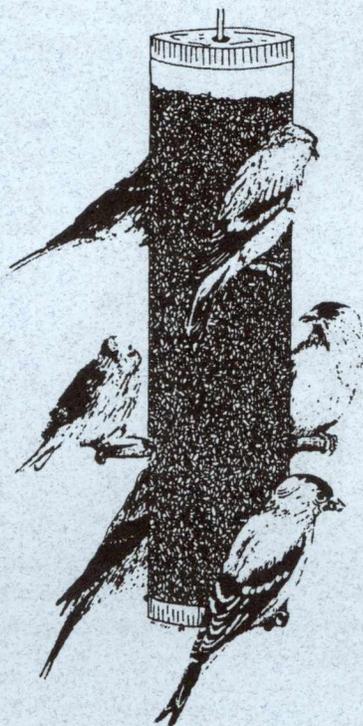
I'm tempted to write the world's shortest article.

Q. What should I feed the birds? **A.** Black oil sunflower seed. The end.

Oh, all right, I'll elaborate. One of the first programs I ever did as a naturalist, over twenty years ago, was on bird feeding. I still have the file I assembled at the time. A four-year Delaware study found that five kinds of seed, out of fifteen varieties available, comprised more than 80 per cent of all seed taken. In decreasing order of bird preference, they were sunflower, peanut hearts, cracked corn, white millet, and canary seed.

Seed aficionados may be wondering, "Which sunflower seed, striped or black?" The Delaware study didn't specify. However, I found a chart in my old file that compared 16 seed varieties. It showed that black was preferred over striped sunflower seed by most bird species.

This chart, issued by the National Wildlife Federation in the early 1980s, included 13 types of common feeder birds such as chickadees, goldfinches and purple finches. The latter three species preferred the black sunflower seed. If goldfinches are your favorite, the same data showed that you could make them even happier if you bought niger (also spelled nyjer and sometimes mistakenly called thistle) seed or hulled sunflower seed. But, for the overall biggest bang for your bird seed buck, black sunflower seed was the choice.



Seeds for the 21st Century

Twenty plus years later, has anything changed? To find out, I stopped by the Wild Bird Center in Fox River Grove and asked **Dave Johnson**. Dave shared the latest data, again from NWF, that had the same 13 birds and 16 seed varieties. Compared to the older information, the new numerical rankings had been simplified to a 0 - 10 scale, a 10 indicating a bird's favorite seed.

The current report is the result of 710,450 observations made in Maryland, Ohio, Maine and California. The research project was orchestrated by the Urban Wildlife Research Program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The findings? Only one seed ranked a 10 with four species of birds. Want to guess which one? That's right, black oil sunflower seed.

This new results indicated that black sunflower seed was the favorite of cardinals, chickadees, evening grosbeaks, and purple finches. Striped sunflower seed was the favorite of only one bird, the common grackle. Take the hulls off the sunflower seeds and then they become the favorite of house finches and goldfinches.

continued on next page

Renewal Reminder.

If you see a 5 after your name, this will be your last newsletter until you renew. If you didn't receive our annual membership letter, just use the form on the back of this newsletter. Please remember, in order to keep Stillman a viable and diverse natural area, *we need your support*. Thank you.

STILLMAN NATURE CENTER

33 WEST PENNY ROAD • BARRINGTON • IL • 60010 • 847-428-OWLS (6957)

Feeders

The seed can be used in platform or tube feeders, both of which are commercially available, or in home-made feeders. If your feeder is on a pole and you don't want to be feeding squirrels, keep it away from low-hanging tree branches and mount some sort of guard to keep the squirrels from climbing up. I found a four-foot section of stovepipe works very well.

Of course, not all winter birds are seed eaters. We don't want to forget the woodpeckers. There's nothing they like better than good, old-fashioned beef suet. You can buy suet with seed mixed in but I wouldn't bother, particularly if you don't want to attract squirrels. Whether it's hunks of fat trimmed off by a butcher or nicely rendered and packaged at a bird store, pure suet is best. Besides woodpeckers, it will also attract chickadees and nuthatches.

Suet can simply be suspended in one of those plastic, net-like onion or fruit bags, unless you have animal teeth to contend with. Then, I suggest a metallic suet feeder which can either be made or purchased. Dave Johnson, needless to say, can supply you with all your feed and feeder needs.

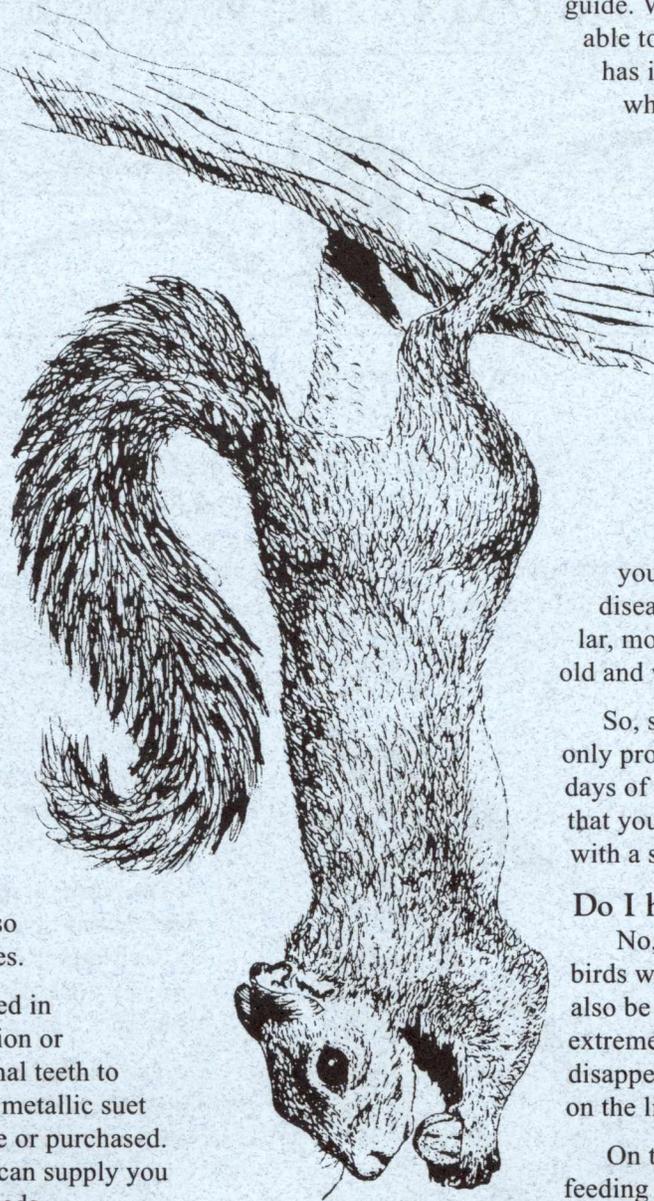
If all the birds coming to your feeders suddenly disappear, look around. Somewhere in your yard there's probably a Cooper's or sharp-shinned hawk. They're there to feed on the birds feeding at your feeders. The food chain; you gotta love it!

Window Collisions

Whether it's a hawk or a cat, a predator can cause a bird to suddenly fly off the feeder. The startled bird may see a nearby window as an escape route. This is often a fatal mistake.

To minimize this danger, place your feeder within three feet of a window or further than thirty feet away. If the feeder is close, the bird cannot gain enough momentum to harm itself. When far away, the bird is less likely to see the window as an avenue of escape.

Thirty feet may seem like quite a distance but most folks who feed birds end up buying binoculars and a field



guide. With a good pair of binos, you'll be able to count the number of seeds the bird has in its beak! (Do I need to tell you who sells both guides and binoculars?)

What about disease?

Human infection by the avian flu strain H5N1 is extremely rare. As of this writing, there have been no cases on this continent. Globally, all reported infections are associated with exposure to domestic poultry and their excretions. This headline-getting flu is not found in backyard birds such as blue jays, cardinals, chickadees and the like.

However, if you get sloppy with your feeding, birds might get ill with diseases that only affect them. In particular, mold and fungus can grow if seed gets old and wet.

So, store your seed in a dry place and only provide the birds with two or three days of seed at a time. Also, it is suggested that you periodically clean your feeders with a solution of warm water and vinegar.

Do I have to keep feeding all winter?

No, you can go on vacation. While birds will visit your feeder daily, they will also be finding food elsewhere. During extreme periods of cold or snow, the sudden disappearance of food might be a bit tough on the little guys.

On the other hand, since I did my first feeding program nearly twenty-five years ago, the winters have gotten milder.

Periods of extreme cold are fewer and farther between.

To put things in perspective, providing food at feeders seems to have little effect, either positive or negative, on bird populations. To the human population, though, the educational values of feeding birds is immeasurable.

Learning the birds' behaviors is what hooks you. Obviously, you could read about the behaviors or watch them on T.V., but it's not the same. As Howard Parkhurst wrote in 1894:

"It is entertaining to read others' accounts of bird-life, but this is mild satisfaction compared with seeing for one's self what is transpiring in the woods and fields all about. However instructive the experience of others, one *realizes* only his own experience. It is the difference between shadow and substance."

PROGRAMS

Program Basics: TO MAKE RESERVATIONS FOR PROGRAMS, PLEASE CALL OR FAX US AT 428-OWLS(6957), OR EMAIL STILLMAN AT: stillnc@flash.net. Remember to include your name, phone number, and the number of people that will be attending.

If less than 5 - 10 people (varying with the activity) have called two days prior to a program, the program could well be cancelled. So, don't forget to call the nature center in advance. If you discover that you are unable to attend, please call to cancel your reservations. This courtesy will be greatly appreciated.

NEW YEAR'S DAY WALK

Join the members of the Prairie-Woods Audubon Society (the local chapter of the National Audubon Society) for their annual New Year's Day walk along Stillman's trails. Over the years, we've seen everything from bluebirds and shrikes to the remains of multiple coyote kills. If you like winter, don't like football, or need to sober up; this is the walk for you.

Date: Sunday, Jan. 1
Time: 10:00AM
Age: 10 years and up

SNOWSHOE SUNDAYS

Fresh snow can add a peaceful hush to the landscape and a surface that glitters in the bright winter sun. In order to help you sample the winter scenery in a novel way, we have 20 pairs of snowshoes. So, bring your own snowshoes or use ours and join us on a winter walk. Please, don't forget to call (847)428-OWLS to make reservations. If there isn't a thick layer of snow, the activity will be cancelled. Of course, if you have your own equipment, cross-country skiers and snowshoers are welcome on any snow-covered Sunday.

Date: Sundays, Jan. 8, 15 & Feb. 5
Time: 2:00PM
Fee: None

OWL MOON WALK

Native Americans called January's full moon the "owl moon." In honor of the owl moon, Mark Spreyer will present an indoor presentation on owls. Afterwards, with the help of the full moon, we will walk the trails in search of Stillman's



Great Horned Owls. Space is limited so call (847) 428-OWLS to make reservations.

Date: Friday, Jan. 14
Time: 6:00PM
Age: 10 years and up
Member's Fee: Free
Non-member's Fee: \$2.00

MAKING TRACKS

Join Susan Allman as she shows you how to recognize the different types of tracks made by winter's active animals. After an indoor introduction, explore Stillman's trails for signs of rabbit, squirrel, deer and fox. If there is no snow on the 22nd, we'll try again on Jan. 29. Snowshoes are also an option on these days.

Remember to call (847) 428-OWLS to make reservations.

Date: Sundays Jan. 22 & 29
Time: 2:00PM
Fee: None

SPRUCE UP FOR (almost) VALENTINE'S DAY

Don't be a sap on Valentine's Day! Instead, learn how to identify cherry, maple, ash and other midwestern trees. Easy to remember tips and simple hand-outs will keep you from pining away on this (nearly) Valentine's Day! Come prepared for the weather and bring your questions. Hey, you can even bring a piece of your heart... wood!

Date: Sunday, Feb. 12
Time: 2:00PM
Age: 10 years and up
Fee: None

Please note that the Stillman Nature Center is also available during the week, by reservation, to school classes. For a brochure that describes the programs and fees, just call or check our website at: www.stillmannnc.org

REMEMBER TO RECYCLE!

The following recycling facts come from the State of Illinois' Bureau of Energy and Recycling.

- 1) It takes 75,000 trees each week to produce the Sunday edition of the New York Times.
- 2) In 1991, the Great Wall of China became the second largest man-made structure in the world. The largest is the Fresh Kills Landfill, serving New York City. It is now the highest point on the east coast.
- 3) Americans throw away 2.5 million plastic bottles every hour.
- 4) For every glass bottle recycled, we save enough energy to light a 100 watt light bulb for four hours.
- 5) It takes 95 percent less energy to make aluminum by recycling it than by producing it from its natural ore, bauxite. It costs less, too.

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

www.stillmann.org
Email: stillnc@flash.net
(847) 428-OWLS
33 West Penny Road
South Barrington, IL 60010

STILLMAN NATURE CENTER



Open Sundays 11:00 - 4:00

NONPROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
BARRINGTON, IL 60010
PERMIT 112

STILLMAN NATURE CENTER BOARD MEMBERS

Susan Allman, President • Jim Kaltsas, Vice President • Mike Levin, Treasurer
Rita Mueller, Secretary • Eva Combs, Legal Advisor • William Brough • Joy Sweet • Bill Mueller
Roger Laegeler • Carroll Jackman • George Sawicki • John Albanese

BOARD MEMBER EMERITUS: Frank Spreyer

Mark Spreyer, Director & Newsletter Editor
Jill Kohler, Newsletter Illustrator

If you aren't already a member, please consider joining us.

- Yes, I'd like to become a member of the Stillman Nature Center. I enclose my tax deductible contribution of \$_____.
- I'd like to help as a volunteer with programs or land management at the Stillman Nature Center, please call me.
- Please send a gift membership from _____ to the name and address listed below.

Name _____
 Address _____
 Telephone _____

Student/Senior	\$10.00
Member	25.00
Supporting Member	50.00
Contributing Member	100.00
Sustaining Member	500.00
Partner	1000.00

Please mail with your check to:
STILLMAN NATURE CENTER, 33 West Penny Road, South Barrington, IL 60010-9578