

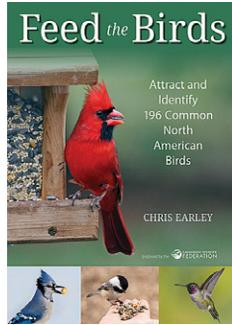
Feed the Birds: Attract and Identify 196 Common North American Birds

By Chris Earley. 2019. Firefly Books. 296 pages, 29.95 CAD / 24.95 USD, Paper.

Chris Earley's book, *Feed the Birds: Attract and Identify 196 Common North American Birds*, couldn't have come at a better time. In October 2019, a landmark paper was published documenting the catastrophic decline in North American avifauna. Rosenberg *et al.* (2019: 120) wrote that their analyses indicate "a net loss approaching 3 billion birds, or 29% of 1970 abundance". With an overall decline of avian species, even common species, we need to do everything we can to help our feathered friends.

Feed the Birds is an easy-to-use book geared toward aiding in bird observation and study. The book begins with a brief introduction, asking questions like "why feed birds?" and delving into possible answers, such as citizen science, involving kids in birding, and photography. After the introduction, the book is divided into two major sections: (1) attracting and feeding birds and (2) identifying birds. The first section has four chapters: "Feeding Wild Birds" (what and how to feed); "Creating a Bird Friendly Backyard" (natural foods, water, shelter, nesting boxes, predators, etc.); "Bird Feeder Building Plans"; and "Bird Behavior and Biology" (recognizing individual birds, nature's predators, predator detectors, adaptations). The second section (comprising half the book) is focussed on bird identification, from hummingbirds and woodpeckers to grosbeaks and orioles. The book ends with a blank "birds at my feeder list", works cited, further reading, photo credits, and an index.

The first section is a joy to read. The writing is not long-winded and gets to the point. The paragraphs are packed with information, and each page is loaded with colour photos to support the text. For example, feeding wild birds is much more than tossing out a simple hardware store seed mix. Certain birds require certain kinds of food; different types of seeds attract different species of birds and some bird food types aren't even seeds, like suet, fruits and jellies, nectar, and mealworms. What do you do with these foods? Toss them on the ground? Not always. There is a whole philosophy behind bird feeders and dispensers and, depending on what you want to attract to your yard, these feeders are critical. Creating a bird-friendly yard can also enhance the avian biodiversity in your area. Supplying a water source, nesting areas, shelters, and bird-attracting plants will no doubt in-



crease the number of birds in your yard. There are many things one needs to consider such as native versus non-native plants, berry-bearing shrubs and trees, plants that support invertebrates, and flowers that attract hummingbirds and other nectar feeders. Other must-read sections include how cats impact birds and the balance between enjoying the squirrels in your yard and when they become too much of a pest at the expense of your bird friends. Birds crashing into windows is another issue, and the book addresses this as well.

As you watch the birds in your yard, you will begin to take note of various behaviours that may seem baffling at first, but with careful study, the mysteries of bird interactions, aggressive displays, and courtship begin to tease out and demystify. Chapter 4, "Bird Behavior and Biology", is a fascinating and welcome addition to your reading adventure. Various topics are covered, including feather maintenance, feeding behaviour, threat displays, nestling care, and bird intelligence. It's always a joy to watch jays and crows figure out bird feeders as well as harass pesky squirrels.

Of course, the biggest draw to attracting birds to your yard is bird identification. It's an incredible thrill to keep a tally of bird species (life lists) and to add a rare bird from time to time. One huge reward is knowing that the bird likely arrived in your yard simply because of the extra effort made to convert a once barren space into a bird paradise. The book discusses tips on how to identify birds, from size and shape, to beak morphology, bird movement, and field marks. The book includes a bird quick-find guide that assists in figuring out bird species, even if you only see the bird for a few moments. The guide will then direct you to a general bird group that will help with further identification. The general groups make up the last half of the book. Each group has species accounts, typically a page each, that provide additional information about the bird. Account topics include a general introduction to the bird, what natural foods they prefer, what feeds should be available in your yard, size comparisons, field identification marks, and a range map. All accounts are supported by several full colour photos of the bird species and sometimes additional side-by-side photo comparisons of closely related or resembling species. Along the bottom of each account is a small call-out box with a photo and natural history tidbit or anecdote about the bird. For example, in the American Robin account, the author discusses his observation of a robin "anting", that is,

allowing ants to crawl on its feathers, crushing them, and rubbing the ants through the feathers. Anting is thought to be a form of chemical application to help repel external parasites.

Overall, *Feed the Birds* is a must-read for those interested in attracting birds to their yard. With the general decline in bird species in North America and elsewhere, now is the time to create as many bird friendly spaces as possible. Chris Earley's book is a one-stop shop for all you need to know to move forward with this wildlife enhancing concept. It's easy to do and, with minimal effort, we can enjoy bird watching without even leaving the house. Be sure to participate in citizen science projects, like iNatural-

ist or eBird, and let's do our part to conserve and preserve avian biodiversity.

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Literature Cited

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