

# BirdTracks

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## **Bird Feeding - Good or Bad? How Does Bird Feeding Impact Our Birds**

In the spring of 2011 Millikin University started the first study of its kind, a four year study on the health effects of bird feeding on wild birds. The following is a synopsis of the method and results. The complete study with all of the details can be downloaded from this webpage *The Impact of Wild Bird Feeding*

### **The Study:**

- Data was collected from more than 1000 individual birds.
- The study data covered four years – spring 2011 to spring 2014.
- Six forested sites in Illinois, three sites with feeders and three matching sites without feeders as controls.
- Feeders were filled 2-3 times a week with a seed blend composed of 50% black-oil sunflower, 18% white proso millet, 10% safflower, 9% peanuts, 7% medium sunflower chips, and 6% red proso millet.
- Birds were captured with mist nets and banded with USGS aluminum bird bands.
- The impact of bird feeding on wild birds was evaluated using the health of individual birds based on their body condition, physiological stress, antioxidant levels, nutritional conditions, reproductive physiology, immune function and disease.
- 10 months after all feeders were removed the health of the birds was re-evaluated.
- Analysis was based on the following species: American Goldfinch, Black-capped Chickadee, Brown-headed Cowbird, Chipping Sparrow, Downy Woodpecker, Gray Catbird, House Finch, Indigo Bunting, Northern Cardinal, Tufted Titmouse, and White-breasted Nuthatch.

### **General Findings from the Study**

- The study showed a consistent pattern of greater overall health for the birds at the sites where supplemental feeders were present.
- Birds that had access to supplemental food were in better physiological condition than those that did not. This was demonstrated by increased antioxidant levels, reduced stress levels, higher quality feather growth, improved body condition index scores and a stronger immune defense system.
- The study re-confirmed that feeders provide only supplemental food and do not create a dependency among free-living wild birds.

## ***What does this study mean to someone who feeds wild birds?***

***“We conclude that birds that use feeders are typically healthier than birds without access to feeders...”\****

\* Effects of bird-feeding activities on the health of wild birds - Millikin University - November 12, 2015

Prior to the Millikin University study we could only assume we were doing good versus bad by feeding our birds. We enjoy the hobby and our backyard birds seemed to be thriving so why not feed our birds. But opinions can, and do, vary. Some people/organizations have suggested backyard bird feeding interferes with birds natural instincts to forage for natural foods or feeding birds just causes health issues. Now this four year study based on the scientific method gives us the facts and not the opinions. Feeding our birds is **GOOD!**

## We Recommend Responsible Bird Feeding

The Millikin study found an increase in disease prevalence at sites with feeders than at those sites without feeders. Disease transmission can occur at greater rates in denser populations due to a common food source. Although diseases might be more prevalent at feeder sites, birds at these sites appeared to be better equipped to handle the consequences of disease. They had lower physiological stress, greater antioxidant capacity, demonstrated greater nutritional condition, and in general, showed greater innate immune capacity. The study also demonstrated that any increased disease prevalence at feeders does not appear to create persistent, long-term altered disease dynamics in a population. The study suggests that while diseases might be more prevalent at feeder sites, this factor may be mitigated by hobbyists engaging in responsible bird-feeding practices.

It is always important to provide a safe feeding environment for the birds. Responsible bird feeding techniques play a crucial role in helping to prevent the spread of disease among bird populations. The following strategies will help you to improve the health and safety of your birds.

### Healthy Bird Feeding Techniques

- Birdfeeders with cracks and crevices are difficult to sanitize and should not be used. Replace them with new feeders.

- Focus on using only feeders that can be easily cleaned.
- Limit the amount of seed provided in feeders to only the amount your birds will consume in one or two days.
- Give the birds more space. The addition of more feeders, spread far apart from one another, will reduce the crowding of birds that is often found around a single feeder. This will reduce the bird's stress and the potential for disease transmission between healthy and sick birds.
- Periodically, move feeders to new locations in the yard to avoid the build-up of waste materials and feces.
- Clean feeders, birdbaths and all hardware every few weeks with a 10% bleach (one part bleach to nine parts water) solution. Rinse thoroughly and allow to completely dry before refilling feeders.
- Be sure to keep the ground below and around the feeders clean. Rake up and discard seed debris and bird droppings on a regular basis.
- Store all birdseed in rodent- and insect-proof containers to avoid contamination.
- Always discard any seed that has become wet, mouldy or foul smelling.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after filling bird feeders.

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## Responsible Bird Feeding - The Feeders & Accessories

We offer a full line of **EZ Clean** seed and nyjer feeders. The bottoms remove for **EZ cleaning**. Use a long handled tube feeder brush and feeder cleaning just got real **EZ!**



### Long Handled Tube Feeder Brush



**Feeder Fresh.** Place some of this product in your bird feeder. Feeder Fresh safely and effectively prevents the growth of disease causing mould to ensure your feeder stays clean and healthy for your birds.

**Feeder Fresh by Sapphire Labs**

## Responsible Bird Feeding - Tidy Bird Feeding

Our **tidy bird feeding** methods will reduce the amount of mess around the feeders and the feeders are very easy to clean. Our **Dinner Bell** feeder and **Tidy Cylinder** feeder reduce the mess on the ground and are simple to clean. Use a **No Mess** seed cylinder and your ground is neat and tidy!

**Dinner Bell Bird Feeder**



**No Mess Seed Cylinder**



**Tidy Cylinder Feeder**



**Dinner Bell Bird Feeder**



## Responsible Bird Feeding - The Seed

Offer bird seed that the birds want to eat. All of our Wild Birds Unlimited **regionally formulated** blends include only the seeds eastern birds want to eat. Wild Birds Unlimited blends are based on:

- black oil sunflower seed (in-shell or hulled)
- striped sunflower seed
- white proso millet (in-shell or hulled)
- roasted no-shell peanuts (halves or chopped)
- safflower

Do not feed **waste seeds** such as wheat, milo, canola and oats.

Use corn in extreme moderation.

### No Mess Blends

Wild Birds Unlimited exclusive **No Mess** Blends have **NO WASTE** seed and **NO SHELLS**.

**No Mess LM** - hulled sunflower seed, no-shell roasted peanuts and hulled millet

**NEW!** **No Mess NM** - hulled sunflower seed, no-shell roasted chopped peanuts and added calcium

No waste seed to collect under your feeders and no shells. A fantastic and safe way to feed your birds.



**NEW!**

## Responsible Bird Feeding - The Waste Seed

Waste seed such as, milo, wheat, oats and canola are not eaten by eastern region songbirds (we are part of the eastern region). Our birds will scatter these uneaten seeds to the ground foraging for the seeds they do need for their diet. Large amounts of waste are added to small amounts of sunflower seed, millet, peanuts and safflower to create a low cost product. Stores that do not specialize in bird feeding are not concerned with the quality of the product they sell but the cheap price point. As a responsible backyard bird feeder it is important for the health of your birds to recognize the difference.

### FACT

Bird seed blends sold at a low cost through big box, discount, pet food, home reno and grocery stores include up to 73% waste seed. These waste seeds pile up under your feeders and can get mouldy and cause disease in bird populations.

**The “make it CHEAP” four.  
From the top left going clockwise:  
oats, milo, canola, wheat**

### MILO, WHEAT, OATS

*“These agricultural products are frequently mixed into low-priced birdseed blends. Most birds discard the uneaten seed” in favor of other food, which leaves it to accumulate under feeders, where they may attract rodents.”*

- The Audubon Guide to Birdseed

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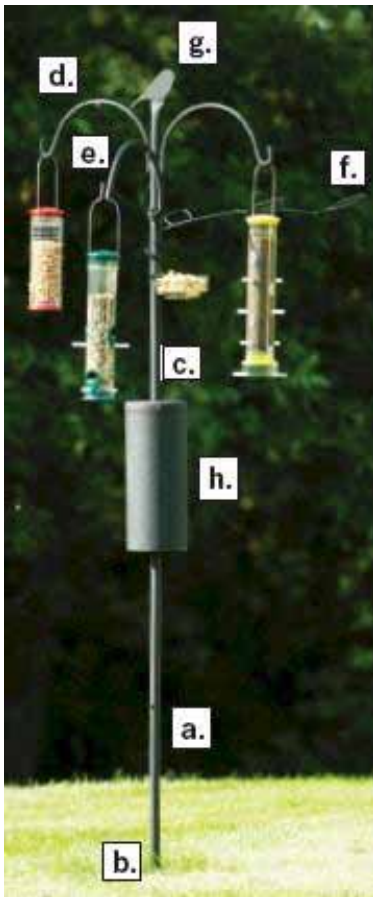
## Responsible Bird Feeding - Feeder Poles to Give More Space

The Wild Birds Unlimited Advanced Pole System (APS) was originally designed by people who feed birds and continues to be improved based on feedback from people who feed birds. The APS was the first modular bird feeder pole system and is still by far the best on the market.

The APS hardware will allow you to place a feeder/feeders anywhere you want in your yard. This allows you to spread your feeders out and reduce any bird over crowding



## Advanced Pole System How To



Your backyard is your safe haven. It's your place to relax, a place to get away from it all. With our exclusive, patented Advanced Pole System® (APS), you can create the ultimate station that will attract birds to your backyard.

Be sure to place your feeding station in a location that helps prevent window strikes and/or keeps squirrels off your feeders.

**Window Strike Zone:** To see birds up close, place your setup three feet or closer to your window. This will decrease the likelihood of birds injuring themselves if they do hit your window. Otherwise, place your setup ten feet away or further. This will allow the birds time to avoid a potential window strike.

**Squirrel-proof Zone:** Place your baffled station at least ten feet away from other objects that squirrels can jump from to make it unreachable.

Creating a backyard bird feeding station takes no time at all. In fact, it's as easy as 1, 2, 3.

### 1. Plant It

Start your custom APS bird feeding station by twisting the 4-foot Base Pole (denoted as (a) in the picture) into the ground. Then slide the Stabilizer (b) onto the Base Pole and secure it into the ground to keep your station looking great and standing straight.

### 2. Extend It

Next, place an APS Extension Pole (c) on the Base Pole. Then simply add a Double Crook Arm (d), an EZ-Attach™ Crook Arm (e) and an EZ-Attach Decorative Branch Perch (f). Our EZ-Attach design makes adding accessories to an APS setup a snap. Just slip the EZ-Attach unit on an extension pole and pull down to secure.

### 3. Accessorize It

Top your feeding station with one of our many finials (g). If you have squirrels or raccoons that would become a nuisance at your new feeding station, be sure to add a squirrel or raccoon baffle (h). Finally, fill and add your feeders.

## In conclusion

The feeding of backyard birds is a fun, relaxing and exciting hobby. It helps all of us, adults and children alike, to easily connect with nature. Feeding our birds responsibly will ensure it is a positive experience for us and our birds.



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