

Wings Over Georgia

A Newsletter about Birds and Butterflies for the Members of
The Garden Club of Georgia, Inc.

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Issue 2

I recently attended the Azalea District Meeting in Watkinsville. The speaker was Terry Johnson who has been at the DNR Non-game Office at Rum Creek for many years. If you have been to a CWP Workshop there, you have no doubt met him. He has been very helpful with that GCG project! He is a master hummingbird bander. He always shows the group how he puts the tiny bands on even tinier legs at some point during the workshop. His program was about nesting boxes – which I understand will be the next focus of the CWP. He said that he would welcome the opportunity to give programs to garden clubs. I'm sure that many of you are already thinking about programs for next year and the program that he gives is excellent. The contact information for Terry Johnson is 478-994-1438 (office), 478-994-2568 (home), and email address tjwoodduck@aol.com.

Please don't forget about the Christmas Bird Count. The dates are Sunday, December 14, 2008, through Monday, January 5, 2009. The primary objective of the Christmas Bird Count is to monitor the status and distribution of bird populations across the Western Hemisphere. It is citizen science in action. For more information go to www.audubon.org/Bird/cbc.

Have a safe and happy holiday season.

Suzanne

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Beth Smith, President of the Tybee Island Garden Club sent the following four pictures that she took on September 14, 2008. They show the four stages of the life of a gulf fritillary.



EGG



CATERPILLAR



CHRYSALIS



ADULT

GULF FRITALLARY ON LANTANA

Bird Trivia by John Riutta

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Did you know?

Did you know that the reason birds' necks are so flexible is because they have more bones there than you or I do? The number of bones in the neck that hold up the skull and protect the spinal cord, called *vertebra* (plural: *vertebrae*) as well as how they move in relation to one another, determine how much flexibility any vertebrate – animals with backbones - has in its neck.

Most mammals, including humans, have a seven vertebrae in their necks (called *cervical vertebrae*); birds may have as few as 12 to as many as 25, depending upon the particular species. In addition to this larger number of bones, the vertebrae of birds sit one atop the other like a horseback rider on a saddle, allowing each vertebrae to not only rotate on a horizontal axis but slightly sideways to this axis as well. The shape of each vertebra, as well as the higher total number of them, results in a neck that can flex and twist to a considerable degree. In fact, most birds can turn their heads a full 180 degrees in either direction.

This extreme flexibility has an important use to birds. Although the number of vertebrae in their necks are numerous and flexible, the vertebrae in their backs are variously fused and immobile in order to facilitate flight. Thus the flexibility of the neck compensates for the lack of mobility in the back. Preening feathers to insure their optimal condition at all times is essential to the very survival of birds, and having a highly flexible neck provides the ability for a bird to reach around and use its bill to preen feathers that would otherwise be inaccessible to it.

Of course, a quick observation of some bird species would not lead one to assume – or even believe – this higher number of cervical vertebrae. Some bird

species, such as chickadees, seem barely able to have any necks at all. Once again the flexibility of the neck is the secret. Rather than being held continuously more-or-less straight, as in mammals, the cervical column of birds is often held folded down into an “S” shape. Because the feathers hide the true shape of the neck, it can sometimes appear as if their heads sit directly on their shoulders. However, spending a little time watching a bird preen will quickly reveal the truth.



A ruby throated hummingbird preening



A rare Northern Spotted Owl with its head turned around

FACT OR FICTION by Kevin Cook

The Backyard Birds Newsletter – Vol.11, No. 5, Fall, October 2008, page 11

Claiming that bird feeders interfere with migration presents three particular challenges.

- No investigation using science protocols has addressed the subject long-term over a broad geographic area concerning a diverse sampling of feeder-visiting species with a research design that rules out climate vagaries, land-use changes, and other factors. Studying one species in low numbers at a single location cannot be credibly applied to other species in other places.
- Anecdotal information – some derived through citizen science projects – has been accumulating to a significant degree and clearly suggests some birds do become “feeder-bound.”
- The behavior of an individual is less reflective of its species than the collective behavior of a species reflects the behavior of the individual. For example, just because some people dance well does not mean all people dance well. Ergo, a feeder-bound individual does not indicate a feeder-bound species.

So, yes, it is true that some individual migrant birds loiter at bird feeders; but, no, we do not have enough credible information to make any claim that bird feeders are adversely affecting the migration of entire species.

THE ANSWER BOX by Kevin Cook

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Q For years I bought the grocery store birdseed. Once I finally started paying attention, I realized the birds left most of it uneaten, especially the red millet. Why do they keep making the stuff if birds don't eat it?

A I call it the "dog biscuit effect." Why do we color-code treats for dogs that are largely color blind? Obviously, the folks who manufacture dog biscuits design their product to appeal to the person doing the buying, not the dog doing the eating.

Birds eat the birdseed but people do the buying. Ergo, manufacturers blend different fruits and seeds to achieve a low-cost birdseed product that presents an aesthetically pleasing mix of color and texture that appeals to the buyer, not the eater.

The inappropriate birdseed blends will be made and sold so long as people continue to buy them

FOOD PREFERENCES OF COMMON FEEDER BIRDS

CORNELL LAB OF ORNTHOLOGY

CHICKADEES, TITMICE, AND NUTHATCHES

SUNFLOWER, SAFFLOWER, SUET

FINCHES

SUNFLOWER, SAFFLOWER, MILLET, NYJER

CARDINALS, GROSBEAKS

SUNFLOWER, SAFFLOWER

SPARROWS, BLACKBIRDS

SUNFLOWER, CORN, MILLET

JAYS

SUNFLOWER, CORN, MILO, SUET

WOODPECKERS

SUNFLOWER, SUET

**ORIOLES, TANAGERS
SUET**

**PIGEONS, DOVES
CORN, MILLET, MILO**

**INDIGO BUNTINGS
SUNFLOWER, MILLET, NYJER**

AN EXPLANATION OF SEED TYPES

Corn:

Dried whole kernel corn is a favorite food of jays, pigeons, doves, turkeys, pheasants, and quail. Cracked corn is easier for smaller birds to eat, and will attract blackbirds, finches, and sparrows as well as the birds mentioned earlier.

Millet:

There are two types of millet: red and white. Most birds find white proso millet more attractive than the red variety. Millet appeals to many ground-feeding birds, such as doves, juncos, and sparrows. However, it also attracts undesirable non-native species such as European Starlings and House Sparrows.

Milo:

The large reddish, round seeds of milo (or sorghum) are often used as filler in birdseed mixes. Most birds will only eat it if there is nothing better. Be aware that it also may attract undesirable aggressive birds such as cowbirds, starlinjgs, and grackles.

Safflower:

A particular favorite of cardinals, safflower is often more expensive than sunflower seeds. Grosbeaks, sparrows, and doves also like it. It's sometimes suggested for dissuading undesirable species because it may have less appeal to starlings, House Sparrows, and squirrels.

Nyjer: (sometimes spelled niger)

This is commonly known as a thistle seed, although it is unrelated to native thistles. Its tiny seeds attract small finches such as goldfinches, siskins, and redpolls. Nyjer is expensive, so its best offered in specially designed thistle seed feeders which have tiny feeding ports that prevent spilling and dissuade large birds.

Sunflower:

Black-oil sunflower seed is the all-round favorite for bird feeders and is particularly attractive to tree-dwelling birds. It has a high meat-to-shell ratio and is high in fat. Small size and thin shell make it easy for small birds such as the Black-capped chickadee to handle and crack. Stripped sunflower seeds are larger and have thicker seed coats, making them more difficult for small birds to process.

Peanuts:

Titmice, chickadees, nuthatches, woodpeckers, cardinals, jays, many sparrows and even Carolina Wrens are attracted to peanuts. They can be offered shelled or whole. Peanut feeders are specially designed wire cages, often cylindrical.

Mixed seed:

This is best sprinkled on the ground or onto platform feeders. Mixed seed typically contains high quantities of millet, preferred by ground feeding birds. Many feeder birds will not eat millet. Likewise, ground-feeding birds that favor millet will not have access to it if it is in a feeder. Try filling hanging feeders with sunflower seeds and spreading mixed seeds for ground-feeding birds.

