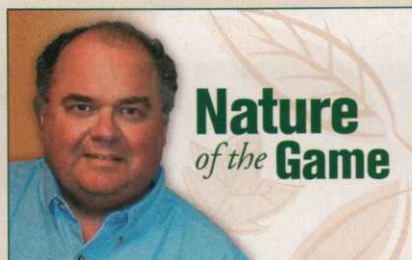


Here's How to Turn Golfers Into Bird Watchers

BY RON DODSON

Editor's Note: *This column will appear regularly in Golfdom. Dodson, the CEO of Audubon International, can be reached at rdodson@auduboninternational.org.*



It's winter, and it's cold and snowy here in the Northern climes, which is nothing new. In fact, the snow began flying early this winter. Of course, the snow birds have migrated to the warm South with their golf clubs in tow and superintendents there are back to their full-action mode for the next several months.

But with the changing of the seasons comes another opportunity for golf courses — and that is to start or restart a bird-feeding program on the course. In the North, the harsh winter weather puts considerable stress on birds, and a bird-feeding program can help birds' ability to survive the long winter months. Even in the South, supplementing natural occurring food sources can be beneficial to bird conservation.

Birds, just like us, have certain food preferences. Birds such as wrens eat insects. Birds of prey, such as owls and hawks, may prefer rodents. But many birds, such as finches, are seed eaters. So putting out a feeder with various seed products can attract and benefit a range of seed-eating bird species. Seeds provide protein and fat that give birds energy and help them stay warm, which is particularly im-

portant during the winter months in the North.

Bird feeding is basic and simple. A bird-feeding station can not only help birds survive but can also be an enjoyable activity for people who may be using the clubhouse facilities to obtain their own human version of food and drink. It gives golfers and others the opportunity to see all the different types of birds that benefit from the fact that they are on a golf course and are being provided food.

To have a successful bird feeding program you will need to choose the correct types of feeders. There are several different types of feeders including:

Hanging tube feeders are easy to fill and the food is clearly displayed to the birds. The feeders usually have metal reinforced perches to help deter squirrels from taking over the feeders.

House-style feeders are generally large and attractive and will hold larger quantities of seed so they don't have to be re-filled very often. House-style feeders are usually mounted on a pole, and some form of "baffle" should be fitted around the pole to keep squirrels from climbing up and helping themselves!

Ground feeders are simple and will attract birds like cardinals, mourning

doves, sparrows and many other birds that prefer to eat on the ground. A ground feeder can be as simple as just putting out one of those disposable aluminum baking pans and putting seed in it. The squirrels, however, will thank you for this, too.

Suet feeders are especially beneficial to woodpeckers, but nuthatches, chickadees and others will also frequent suet. Suet can be hung in wire cages or even small onion bags. Remember, in warmer climates, suet needs to be changed regularly.

Finally, make certain to choose the right types of seed. If you decide to start a bird-feeding program, don't be tempted to purchase those inexpensive brands often found in grocery stores. About 80 percent to 90 percent of the seeds in those bags are red millet. Birds won't eat red millet and simply scratch the seed off onto the ground. So you will be wasting your time and money. Look for quality seed products that list on the label the following seed types:

- ▶ sunflower seed (the top choice);
- ▶ cracked corn;
- ▶ white proso millet;
- ▶ thistle;
- ▶ safflower; and
- ▶ peanuts

If you haven't started feeding birds on your golf course, now would be a great time to begin. The birds will appreciate it, golfers will see and enjoy it, and you will be demonstrating your efforts to be wildlife friendly.



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