

# Winter Birds Are Interesting Hobbies

By LYDIA KING FREHSE

Special Writer for The Birmingham Eccentric

Most of you who maintain feeding stations are now enjoying the winter birds.

There are those (beginners) who complain that unusual birds seldom appear on a city or even a suburban lot and that the English sparrows and starlings eat all the food.

Year after year the Audubon winter bird count bears out the fact that the above are our two most abundant species. However, we can never tell when an unusual bird will appear. In the end our feathered friends, like our human

friends, are each interesting in an individual way.

At our own feeding station our male cardinal reappeared early in autumn. Later he was joined by his mate. Recently we have seen a second male but he has been driven off by the first for cardinals are very specific about defending their territory and will not tolerate intruders. Now on the short winter days we do not always see the pair for it is their habit to feed early and late.

ALTHOUGH THEY are not uncommon as winter residents, we have had for the first time this year several white-throated sparrows. My husband can point out a single white-throat feeding among a flock of English sparrows. He says he can distinguish him by

his quick movements and his particular "hop". Your scribbles has to depend on his white throat (now badly soiled) and his longer, narrower tail. We hope these birds stay with us until May-time for then their song is high and wild and sweet.

Now the white-breasted nuthatch comes to eat the suet which my husband keeps wired high on the trunk of an oak well out of reach of predators. This bird hitched itsself upward on a tree trunk with a zigzag motion, peering under the bark, spotting insects, larvae and their eggs.

His most characteristic habit is eating as he descends, for from this vantage point he seems to see food which the creepers and woodpeckers miss.

THE NAME "nuthatch" comes from the bird's habit of wedging nuts into some tight crevice and then using his bill to "natch" them open. Sometimes he offers these all ready-to-eat to his lady love.

Nature has colored the nuthatch in an interesting fashion. His grey-blue back contrasts well with his black head, white breast and chestnut colored rump. His close relative, the red-breasted nuthatch sometimes appears in our vicinity. However, I have only seen him once and that on the grounds at

Frankbrook. Peterson lists six species of this family east of the Rockies—all valuable in insect control. One in westigator reports finding 1,629 eggs of cankerworm in the stom-

ach of a single white-breasted nuthatch.

WE LIVE IN an area densely wooded with oak where the bell-crowned blue jays dominate the scene summer and winter. This season we have seen only 11 other species at our feeding station but they have been ample reward for the food expended.

The annual Christmas bird census of the Audubon society is the best indicator of our winter bird population. This year members in the Detroit area counted 7,970 birds representing 44 species.

The area tabulated was within a 15 mile radius of Sylvan Lake west of Pontiac. The most unusual birds seen were a brown thrasher and a phoebe. Last year's census recorded 60 species and 10,217 individual birds.

SINCE THE first count on Christmas Day in 1909 this yearly census is a greatly anticipated field day for bird lovers all over the United States. As such it also generates much friendly rivalry.

This year's honors went to Coconino, Fla., where the strategic location was carefully mapped and studied in advance by veteran ornithologists. Allan C. Crickshank and 17 devoted followers. They sighted 167 species, a record which is a close second to the all-time high of 172 species made in 1950 in the area of Harlingen, Tex.

May I again remind those of you who are beginners to be faithful to your task once you have established a feeding station. The food supply in any area will determine the population. A bird needs to eat almost continuously to maintain its high rate of metabolism and we do not want to attract birds to our neighborhood only to see them freeze in severe weather.

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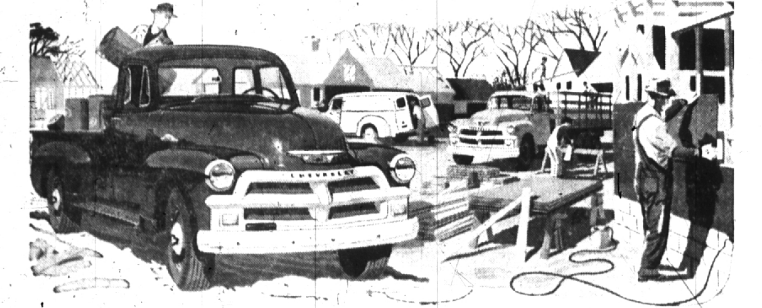


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