

7 Tips *for* Backyard Bird Photography

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1 Keep a journal.

Log which feathered friends come and go –and when. This helps you learn not only when you can photograph the subjects you seek and when they engage in their most action-packed behaviors, but also what type(s) of food to serve (*see Tip #2*).

2 Feed them right.

Avoid seed mixes containing high amounts of red millet. Most birds spurn it; however, House Sparrows, which you probably don't want to attract, readily chomp on it. Instead, offer those eats favored most by the subjects you seek. For example, here at my central-Texas based Red Belly Ranch, Painted Buntings get white millet (which I have to special order, but it's worth it!). Black-oil sunflower seeds and raw peanuts also tend to attract wonderful winged subjects.

3 Water them well.

Attract a larger variety of birds by providing three distinct water sources: a bird bath, a hanging waterer, and a drip system. When selecting a bird bath veer away from fancy, image-cluttering models (*see Tip #4*). The movement and sound created by a drip system grabs the attention of migrants that might not have otherwise noticed your tweet-retreat.

4 Mind that background!

Since you're in charge of where feeders and water sources are placed, think in terms of images with solid, smooth backgrounds. Position feeders far enough away from foliage to create a nice background blur, while also keeping an eye out for eye-attracting bright spots (*e.g. sunshine through leaves*) or other distracting elements. IMPORTANT! Place feeders at least 25-feet from windows to avoid strikes, and 12-feet from trees or structures that provide pouncing places for predators (*see Tip #6*).

5 Put in a pretty perch.

When picking a piece of wood for a perch choose one that compliments the size of the bird you want to photograph. Make it photo-worthy by adding lichen, native foliage, or berries. Birds appreciate perches near feeders because they provide places to pause and check out the scene before digging in for a meal. And perches provide you with great chances to get keepers—*sans* feeder.

6 Put some light on the subject.

Position feeders and water sources so that you get front light on the birds (*rather than side or back lighting*). Also, watch for nearby objects that cast unwanted shadows during your sweetest light (*early-morning and dusk*). If you can, set up two areas—one for morning shooting and another for evening.

7 Keep Kitty indoors.

Indoor cats average 15-17 years of life, significantly longer than the 1-5 years that kitties that get to go outside typically get. And, not only are indoors-only cats healthier, but studies show that when kept properly stimulated, they're happier, too. That's good news for cat and bird lovers both! Even when Kitty wears a bell, birds don't always get enough notice before she pounces. In addition, social dynamics tend to distract birds when they collect at feeders, which makes escaping predators even more problematic (*see Tip #4*)

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Award-winning naturalist photographer, Jeff Parker, leads friendly & informative photo tours & workshops focused on the flora & fauna of North, Central, & South America.

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