

The Real Snowbirds – Dave deCalesta reprinted from 12-03 KLA Newsletter



The real snowbirds aren't the people (or birds) that flock south for the winter. No, the real snowbirds are the ones that tough it out and stay put during wintry blasts, blizzards, ice and freezing temperatures. Some of these hardy birds are pictured at the left, from top to bottom: black-capped chickadee; downy woodpecker; white breasted nuthatch; American goldfinch (the males put on a drab winter coat, losing their bright gold suit); dark-eyed junco; and tufted titmouse.

These birds have three basic survival needs during winter: food, shelter and water. Food we can provide in various ways – not all birds like all kinds of bird food – as detailed in the table below. Shelter is needed from weather extremes and predators, such as cats and sharp-shinned, cooper's and sparrow hawks. Placing bird feeders near thick shrubbery and low-growing conifers protects birds from predators. Bird stores sell "woven roosting pockets" that are wooden frames filled with moss/weeds – these can be hung near bird feeders for birds to roost in overnight and seek protection from hawks. Larger versions of the roosting pockets, called "convertibles" double as nesting structures in spring. Water is critical, especially with winters like last year. Bird baths made of resin hold water which can be heated with bird bath heaters and they won't melt. Don't use concrete bird baths as they will freeze and crack.

Much of this information came from a call to an old friend at Wild Bird Centers of America. This (and other bird specialty stores) is where to buy the best bird food, feeders and other accessories.

Types of Feeds Utilized by Different Snowbirds

	BOS*	SFSC**	Thistle	Peanut Pieces	Suet***	White Millet	Peanuts in shell****
Woodpeckers	-	-	-	X	X	-	X
Juncoes	-	-	-	X	-	X	-
Titmice	X	X	-	X	-	-	-
Chickadees	X	X	-	X	X	-	-
Blue jays	X	X	-	X	X	-	X
Nuthatches	X	X	-	X	X	-	-
Cardinals	X	X	-	-	-	-	-
Goldfinches	-	X	X	-	-	-	-

BOS = Black-oiled sunflower seeds; **SFSC = Sunflower seed chips; * Suet is best when it contains almonds, peanuts, fruits and/or berries; ****Peanuts in shells are best put out 15 at a time.**



Type of feeder is also important. Thistle/tube feeders (top feeder at left) are best for goldfinches. Hopper feeders (next one down) can be filled with black-oiled sunflower seeds, sunflower chips, peanut pieces and white millet – most birds feed from these, except cardinals and juncos. Platform feeders (third one down) are good for black-oiled sunflower seeds, sunflower seed chips, white millet and whole peanuts in the shell. Placing platform feeders within four inches of the ground insures they will be used by ground feeders (cardinals, juncos). Suet should be placed in wire cages (fourth one down) and hung from branches.