



# Wild About Birds

Backyard birdfeeding experts!

1133 Main Street  
Milford, OH 45150  
513-248-2044  
www.birdchat.com

## BirdChat: Late Summer

August 2010 - Newsletter - Volume XXII, Issue 4

### Understanding Bird Behavior: Flocking

Some bird species live in flocks year round and some birds don't flock at all.

Most of the birds in our backyards are territorial during the spring and summer nesting season: they defend their area against others of their own species. Then in the fall, most of these nesting pairs and family groups start flocking.

Some species flock together, like goldfinches; others, like chickadees, titmice and nuthatches form mixed flocks—made up of several compatible species.

Swallows and swifts start flocking in late summer in

anticipation of their long migration south in the fall. Flocking helps young birds learn to migrate and it teaches them social structure.

In some species, males, females and juveniles migrate in separate flocks.

*"...in the fall...nesting pairs and family groups start flocking."*

In the fall, resident birds are searching for winter feeding grounds and the more eyes devoted to this task the better. Birds assembled in flocks are safer, too: multiple eyes and ears improve preda-

tor awareness.

One interesting aspect of flocking is each bird's maintenance of its own individual space. Just drive along the interstate and look for starling flocks on the wires; you'll see that the birds are usually evenly spaced along the wire and as one bird approaches another, a scuffle ensues and one bird will be forced to move.

In the late winter you'll notice males become less tolerant of each other at the feeder, a sure sign that flocks are breaking down into nesting pairs for the breeding season.

In this issue:

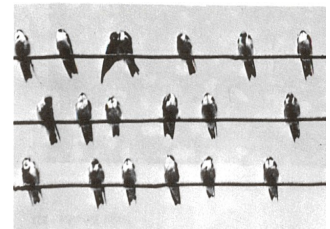
Understanding Bird Behavior:

Flocking

All About Safflower

Bird Anatomy: Bills and Feet

Birdseed Bugs



### All About Safflower

Do you have trouble with grackles and blackbirds monopolizing your sunflower seed feeders? How about squirrels that can empty a feeder in an afternoon? The solution to both of these bird feeding problems is safflower.

Safflower is an oil crop like sunflower and the oil has been used for years by humans for cooking. It is also used for coloring (dye) and for medicinal purposes

around the world. It's only been popular as a seed for bird feeding for the past 20 years. Safflower is a western seed, grown in Arizona, Montana, western North Dakota and Utah; a lot is exported to Japan from California.

It is estimated that 55 million pounds of safflower go to market each year which is 3 times more than five years ago. It is expected that its use as bird feed will double in the next 5 to 10 years.

Most backyard birds like

safflower, especially cardinals and titmice. Because of its rather bitter taste, most squirrels will avoid the feeders filled with safflower. The best news is that grackles, which take over sunflower feeders during the summer months, don't like safflower either.

Safflower is a seed that has a real place in any backyard bird feeding program, especially if you have squirrel and blackbird problems!



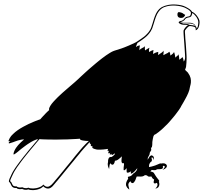
## Bird Anatomy: Bills and Feet

**B**irds' bills (beaks) and feet are highly specialized largely due to the birds' lack of arms and hands. Bills and feet perform many functions other animals do with their forelimbs—reach, grasp, pick-up, manipulate food, climb, carry. You could probably figure out what niche in the environment a particular bird occupies and what type of food it eats simply by observing its bill and feet.

### BILLS

Birds' bills have different shapes to help them reach for, pick up, and manipulate things, especially food, as the need arises. Consider the bill shape and food source of a few well known birds—eagle, hummingbird, cardinal, woodpecker, nuthatch. Eagles, like most raptors, have large, hooked bills adapted for tearing apart their prey, which in the case of the bald eagle is

usually fish. Hummingbirds have a long, narrow, straw-like bill for sipping nectar



from trumpet shaped flowers and hummingbird feeders.

The cardinal's heavy, conical bill is perfectly shaped for cracking open large seeds.

The woodpecker's long, heavy bill allows it to excavate cavities for nesting and probe



into tree bark crevices looking for insect prey. Nuthatches also



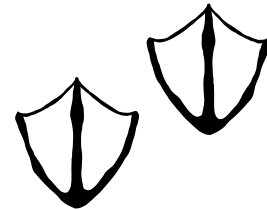
use their slightly upturned bill to search for insects in the

bark of trees as they climb down the tree headfirst!

### FEET

The feet, especially the toes, can tell you a lot about birds. If ducks and geese didn't have webbed toes how would they propel themselves through the water? The talons of birds of prey, like the eagle, help them catch their prey and hold on to it while they eat it. Check out the feet of the birds at your feeders—most backyard birds have three toes facing forwards and one toe facing back. But look at the woodpeckers' feet, why do you suppose they have two toes facing front and two facing back? This toe configuration allows the woodpecker to balance and climb up and down the bark of trees.

The next time you get a close-up look at a bird in your backyard, see if you can figure out where it lives and what it eats just by the shape of its bill and feet!



*"...feet, especially the toes, can tell you a lot about birds."*



## Birdseed Bugs

**L**et's face it, all birdseed has bugs in it! Birdseed isn't processed like human food and isn't subject to the same guidelines. The seeds are harvested, lightly cleaned of debris and then packaged. Insects have laid eggs in/on the seeds in the field and some of those eggs end up in the bags. When the weather warms up in the summer those eggs are going to hatch.

The biggest problem of all is the grain moth (goes by

several proper names). It starts out "webby" and worm-like (larvae) then morphs into the moth. If the



moths get into your house they will make a bee-line for your pantry and invade all your grain based dry products (cereal, pasta, flour), lay eggs and start the cycle all over.

So, buy smaller amounts of seed more frequently. We receive weekly seed shipments so you'll always get fresh, bug-free seed from us. When you get it home, store your birdseed in the garage or in a shed in a container with a tight fitting lid. Keep the birdseed out of the house to keep the bugs out of the house. If you do notice seed moths flying around inside, we do carry Birdseed Moth Traps - you might want to keep a few traps around the house just in case, like I do!

Wild About Birds is owned and operated in Milford, Ohio by Peggie Flierl. BirdChat is a periodic newsletter written by Peggie for customers of Wild About Birds. Material appearing in BirdChat may not be reprinted without permission. Any comments should be directed to Peggie at:

1133 Main Street, Milford OH 45150  
(513) 248-2044 www.birdchat.com