

Feeding Wild Birds This Winter

Submitted by: Robert Dyas

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The winter season here in the UK can be the toughest few months for our native birds. The greatest challenge for wild birds in cold temperatures is to find food and to ensure they eat enough of it to build up and maintain adequate fat supplies to store and use for energy. This feat becomes increasingly difficult during hard weather conditions when heavy frost, ice and snow hits home and disguises normally easily available natural food such as berries, acorns, seeds and worms.

Alongside the plummeting temperatures, shorter days can also prove difficult. For the majority of British birds who are diurnal, a decrease in daylight hours means later to rise and earlier to nest, therefore decreasing their periods of activity for finding food day-to-day.

It's apparent that populations of farmland, woodland and marine birds have fallen dramatically over the past 50 years. The numbers of birds associated with farmland have fallen by 55%, whilst woodland birds were down by 21% and seabirds by 20%*. Life can be tough on our avian species, so it's up to us to give them a helping hand, especially during their harshest months.

Leading high street retailer Robert Dyas (<https://www.robertdyas.co.uk/>) has a wonderful selection of feeders, bird feed and tables to ensure your outdoor space becomes a haven for all species of garden birds. We're sharing their top tips to help keep our feathered friends in fine fettle and guaranteeing that they winter well, ready for spring and new arrivals. So, whether you have acres of garden or simply a small window box, you can help the UK's birds spread their wings this winter.

Recognise Your Diners and Select the Correct Menu

Believe it or not, our birds can be fussy little things and different species prefer different varieties of food. Whilst sparrows and finches favour seeds, tits opt for fat balls or peanuts, whilst thrushes and robins love fruit and worms. Starlings on the other hand are exception to these rules and will feed on almost anything. It's vital to leave out an assortment of feeds to make sure nobody is left out.

Bird seed mixtures are great for an assortment of species, given the variation of kernels within. This Johnston & Jeff Wild Bird Seed Blend - 12.75kg (<https://www.robertdyas.co.uk/johnston-jeff-wild-bird-seed-blend-12-75kg>) (£7.99) is packed with nutrient-rich ingredients including natural groats, millet, cut maize and black sunflower seeds. The latter are an excellent year-round food and often favoured over peanuts. They provide a high oil content, key for winter months. Try to avoid mixtures which contain wheat and barley grains as they are suitable for larger birds such as pigeons, doves and pheasants. Because these birds feed from the ground, it can deter the smaller species which may need more help when it comes to feeding.

Birds require high levels of saturated fats, especially during the winter months and so fat balls are a fantastic way of helping our birds take on board the amount required during cold spells. Beef suet is a great food source to introduce to your garden, like these Johnston & Jeff 100g Suet Dumplings - 6 Pack (<https://www.robertdyas.co.uk/johnston-jeff-100g-suet-dumplings-6-pack>) (£1.99). And because suet is a pure fat, re-solidifying after being warmed, it detracts bacteria from breeding on it.

Relished by robins and tantalised by blue tits, mealworms are an excellent source of natural protein for birds. Large bags of worms such as this Johnston & Jeff Dried Mealworms – 1kg (<https://www.robertdyas.co.uk/johnston-jeff-dried-mealworms-1kg>) (£9.99) will make your garden's birds chirp with joy and any discarded worms which fall to the ground can be eaten up by hedgehogs. The benefits are two-fold.

Another effective way to provide a nutritious meal for our feathered friends is to consider peanuts such as this Johnston & Jeff Peanut Bird Feed - 4kg (<https://www.robertdyas.co.uk/4kg-peanuts-johnston-jeff-bird-feed>) (£7.49). High in oil and calories, peanuts are an excellent source of energy and can help fuel bramblings and sparrows and attract other birds to your outdoor space.

Any Leftovers?

Some of our own household food can do wonders for birds and it's a brilliant way to use up discarded leftovers that we might normally throw away. Fruit cake, unsalted nuts or chopped up fruits such as apples and pears can be left on a bird table or feeding station and inject some variety into your birds' menu. If you have pets such as cats and dogs though, do watch out for any fallen fruits as certain types such as raisins and grapes can be very poisonous for our household mammals.

Avoid any mouldy foods as pickings for birds, due to bacteria which can cause respiratory infections. Don't put too much leftover food out at one time, as anything not eaten will become rotten and could encourage unwanted visitors such as mice, rats and squirrels.

Anything salty should be evaded too, as high levels of sodium can be poisonous for small birds. Try a bird table for bigger bits of food as they provide a large, flat surface area for rich pickings to rest upon and for birds to perch upon whilst they feed. This Rowlinson Lechlade Bird Table (<https://www.robertdyas.co.uk/rowlinson-lechlade-bird-table>) (£64.99) is made from beautiful soft wood and features a roof to help keep food protected from the elements.

Never give milk to birds. Their stomachs are not designed to digest such a food and thus it could result in fatality. Fermented dairy products such as cheese, however, are fine and much enjoyed. A mild cheese, grated and sprinkled onto your feeder or under bushes or hedgerows, are a great way to encourage robins, wrens and dunnocks to feed from your outdoor space.

And to Drink Sir?

Just like us, birds also need to drink and bathe every day - even when it's freezing outside. A pond or bird bath is a great source of water for them and can encourage more to visit your garden and your source of food. During chillier spells, it's a good idea to check your water sources each morning in case they have frozen overnight.

For a pop of colour and a drink station for your feathery friends, this Smart Garden Glass Peacock Birdbath (<https://www.robertdyas.co.uk/smart-solar-peacock-birdbath>) (£9.99) will provide an endless

source of drinking water and bathing place for birds to enjoy all year round.

Keep Your Restaurant Clean and Tidy and Locate it Correctly

Dirty bird feeders and bird tables not only look unattractive in your garden, but more to the point, can spread diseases. Leaving stale or mouldy food out provides a breeding ground for salmonella bacteria, which can cause food poisoning and at times, causes death among species such as greenfinches and house sparrows. Make sure you throw away any old and discarded food daily and clean your feeders and tables regularly (<http://www.rspb.org.uk/makeahomeforwildlife/advice/helpingbirds/feeding/hygiene.aspx>) to keep your visitors healthy and happy.

And as the saying goes, it's all about location, location, location. Poorly placed tables or feeders will put off your diners and they won't flock to your restaurant if its setting isn't quite to their liking. Keep them somewhere quiet, where the birds won't be disturbed. The further away from the house, the more likely they are to feed confidently. Next, ensure they are placed in a safe and open location, to help prevent feline ambushes and allow for a quick escape if needed. Feeders which hang from trees or branches are a good way to encourage birds as they can be nestled amongst natural foliage.

This Chapelwood Squirrel Proof Bird Seed Feeder

(<https://www.robertdyas.co.uk/smart-garden-squirell-proof-bird-seed-feeder-olive-green>) (£3.69) will allow avian friends to feed, without the interference of rodents. What's more, the green hue will blend perfectly into the natural colour of your garden. Finally, try to keep your feeding stations somewhere sheltered, where they will be protected from strong winds, rain or snow. This is more crucial in the winter when the weather becomes severe.

Sit Back and Relax

Enjoy your hard work and reap the rewards by having a thriving and bountiful outdoor space full of beautiful feathered friends. The early bird does after all, catch the worm.

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*Source – Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs: Wild Bird Populations in the UK, 1970 to 2017, 8th November 2018

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/754432/UK_Wild_birds_19

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About Robert Dyas:

Robert Dyas, a man of notable character and remarkable determination, founded the company in 1872. He had a vision to provide customers with the best products, service and advice possible – a tradition

that continues to be the focus of the company to this day. In 2012, successful businessman and star of BBC TV's Dragons' Den, Theo Paphitis, bought the company.

Theo Paphitis is one of the UK's most high-profile businessmen with an empire spanning retail, property and finance. Theo, through his staff at the Theo Paphitis Retail Group (TPRG), has continued the Robert Dyas tradition of excellent customer service.

Robert Dyas offers an extensive range of household products. The range includes smart home technology, DIY solutions, small and domestic appliances, homeware, bakeware and kitchenware, outdoor and garden, utility, gifts, textiles plus Christmas trees and gifts.

The company has 94 stores, ranging from 1,250 to 9,000 square feet (116 to 836 square meters) and operates online and in the South of England. The most western store is in Yeovil, the most eastern store in Colchester, the most northern store in Solihull and the store furthest south is in Eastbourne. The company's head office is in Wimbledon.

Website: <http://www.RobertDyas.co.uk/>

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