

## **Segment for Week of 15 March 2021**

This is Steve Rulison bringing you information on Shore Friendly living and gardening from the Eastern Shore Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists and Virginia Cooperative Extension.

From my perch near the mouth of Occohannock Creek, I recorded \_\_\_\_\_ of rain last week.

Last week's warm weather has brought the birds out of hiding. My bird feeders are being emptied as fast as I can put feed in them and there is an interesting assortment of species every day. Blue Jays, Cardinals, red bellied woodpeckers, tufted titmice, Carolina chickadees, nuthatches, juncos, sparrows and lots of goldfinches. To the responsible person, the decision to feed wild birds is not a casual one. The dedicated bird feeder buys hundreds of pounds of feed each winter and at least a bird book and binoculars to identify and study the birds. Additionally, several times each week the food needs to be replenished, which over several months and years amounts to a substantial investment of time. Such a commitment carries with it the expectation of attracting a handsome, interesting variety of birds. Furthermore, most of us want to get the most for our time and money.

There are many kinds of feeds available to attract birds. You can buy mixes or single types of feeds at supermarkets, livestock feed stores, garden supply stores, or through catalogs. The particular type of mix you put out influences the number and variety of birds that will use feeding places. Until recently, there has been little scientific information to guide the selection of bird feeds. Now we know much better what feeds attract or fail to attract different kinds of birds to feeders.

Sunflower seeds attract most seed-eating birds. The most attractive sunflower seed is the black, oil-type. Another outstanding food is a type of millet, known as white prove or white millet. White millet attracts house sparrows and brown-headed cowbirds. However, when there are small sparrow-like birds around, such as juncos and song sparrows, white prove millet is needed. The common cereal grains - sorghum, wheat, cracked corn, oats, and rice - rate significantly below black oil-type sunflower seed or white prove millet in feeding tests. Other relatively unattractive seeds are flax, canary, and rape. A common ingredient in mixes, peanut hearts, strongly attracts starlings. You can discourage house sparrows, brown-headed cowbirds, blue jays, and grackles while at the same time offering a moderately attractive food to cardinals and mourning doves by feeding safflower seeds. Safflower is of little interest to other bird species, however.

Rather than buying mixes, the bird feeder will spend his money more effectively by buying black, oil-type sunflower and white prove millet separately, in bulk from seed or animal feed dealers. Depending on the kinds of birds present, the amounts of these two best foods can be varied to attract the birds you want to see.

Along with a variety of seed, there is also multiple varieties of feeders. Some feeders advertise themselves as being squirrel-proof. I can testify that they are indeed NOT squirrel proof. You might be able to describe it as somewhat squirrel resistant, but it definitely is not squirrel proof. Squirrels are inquisitive, persistent, acrobatic and love a challenge. I often find myself having to chase them away from my feeders but once I return back inside, they are back at it again!

For answers to Gardening questions call your local Accomack or Northampton County Extension Office. Here on the Shore call either 678-7946 or 787-1361