



GREAT BIRDING PROJECTS



An approach to bird-related editing, education, tourism, and marketing

20 October 2015

What to Expect in the Bird-feeding Future



An Iron Silo Feeder by Beeblebrox

Bird feeding in America has [a rich history](#) that goes back over 120 years, and there are many experiences to value and lessons to understand. At the same time, the question sometimes arises in bird-feeding circles over what might be new in the way of feeders and feeder-watching.

It is in understanding the past that we get insight into the possibilities for the future, and that goes for bird feeding, too.

Will there be new designs for feeders such as this "Iron Silo Feeder" shown on the left? Will there be new and creative ways to offer Nyjer with less waste and more economy? How about new ways to present suet? Or different kinds of "fruit pellets"?

These are all possibilities. But there are also three possible, if not likely, developments in future bird feeding that deserve careful consideration:

1 Hummingbird-focused Citizen Science

Gone are the days when one could say with certainty: "If you see a hummingbird east of the Mississippi, it's bound to be a Ruby-throated Hummingbird." Today we know it could possibly be a Rufous Hummingbird or another hummer, especially in late summer or in the fall. Along the Gulf Coast it might be a Black-chinned Hummingbird, or a Buff-bellied Hummingbird, or an Anna's Hummingbird. Rufous Hummingbirds in southeast Alaska are becoming increasingly common, and the northern spread of Anna's Hummingbird in the Pacific Northwest persists. A Mexican hummer - such as a Green Violetear or Green-breasted Mango - could show up almost anywhere. Much of what we know on the subject comes from the data collected by dedicated hummingbird banders and also through the observations of legions of feeder-hosts. What may be required next is a U.S.-Canadian citizen-science element, perhaps partially modeled on a combination of eBird and Project FeederWatch, sustained by a broad educational feature on hummer ID and the best ways to maintain hummingbird feeding-stations. Besides, the public simply loves hummers!

2 Latin American and Caribbean Developments

The bird-feeding experience in this hemisphere is dominated by U.S. and Canadian practitioners. But that's not the entire picture. People in Latin America and the Caribbean are increasingly discovering the joys of bird feeding. Much of this trend has been led by major eco-tourism lodges in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Venezuela, Trinidad, Brazil, and Peru. There, one witnesses a situation whereby patios, balconies, or verandas are enhanced with feeders to attract colorful tropical birds. Most of these many feeders are hummingbird feeders, but not all of them. There are feeders with local foods, often fruits (e.g., papayas, watermelons, bananas) but sometimes parboiled rice, jellies, and cracked corn. The spread attracts an array of doves, tanagers, warblers, saltators, bananaquits, euphonias, toucanets, tanagers, finches, and orioles, for example. The additional good news is that some of the feeder-visitors can be our own Neotropical migrants spending our winter in Latin America and the Caribbean. But more activity is in the wings. The practice may soon spread to B&Bs, outdoor restaurants, and, most importantly, to individual homes. The next phase could start on Caribbean Islands (including newer Cuba opportunities) and activities adjacent to eco-lodges already engaged in Latin America in the feeding practice.

3 Hemp Seed Reemergence

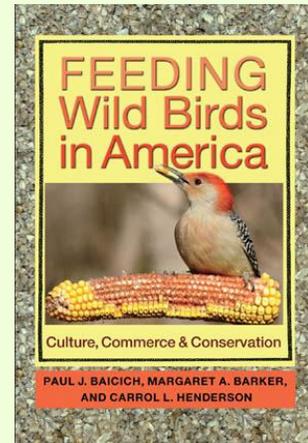
One hundred years ago, hemp was a common and extremely popular bird seed. Yes, this is *Cannabis sativa*, the same plant that can also be used as a recreational or medicinal drug: marijuana. The old hemp bird seed - based on "industrial hemp" used in cordage, cloth, building material, and nutritional products - had almost no psychoactive ingredients, with less than 0.3 to 1.0 percent THC (delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol). Birds simply loved it. In the 1941 book, *Audubon Guide to Attracting Birds*, Roger Tory Peterson called hemp, a favorite with seed-eaters, "In a mixture of cracked corn and smaller seeds, hemp always goes first." The problem was that the federal Marijuana Tax Act of 1937 complicated things, and the Controlled Substances Act of 1970 virtually shut the door on hemp as a bird seed grown in the U.S. Fortunately, organized business groups and even local government agencies and lawmakers are currently considering ways to revive the production of marijuana's non-potent cousin, industrial hemp, in the U.S. In some states in the South, hemp is starting to fill in [some gaps left by declining tobacco](#). This way, Hemp could soon become [the birdseed of the future](#), and millions of Americans who feed wild birds may once again be able to buy bags of hemp seed marked, "grown in the USA."

Does this mean that these three developments in bird feeding are inevitable? Probably not, but they are certainly trends to consider and to follow.

The History of Backyard Bird Feeding

The seemingly simple practice of bird feeding in America has been many things over the last 120 years. It has been a social cause, a trendy curiosity, an agricultural obligation, a serious hobby, a billion-dollar industry, a basis for scientific study, a pathway to conservation, and pure entertainment.

The story is described in *Feeding Wild Birds in America: Culture, Commerce, and Conservation* (Texas A & M University Press), by Paul J. Baicich, Margaret A. Barker, and Carrol L. Henderson. The book covers our pioneer bird-protection foremothers, the do-it-yourself origins of early feeding, the devices and appliances invented in the roaring '20s, hard times and bird feeding in the Depression, war rationing and feeding during WWII, the post-war suburban growth and the parallel role of feeding in the backyard, the experimentation with new seeds and products, the rise of all-year feeding, and 21st century experiences.



The multi-decade story is also a story of how we Americans have come to value the natural world. This is a story that has never been presented in book-form until now. The book puts *bird feeding in context*, and it tells an important tale.

If you want more details, if you want to order quantities of the book, or if you want individual copies, see [Texas A&M University Press](#). You can also order individual copies from other online sellers, such as [Buteo Books](#), [Bird Watcher's Nature Shop](#) (where you can also get a free autographed book-plate), or from [Amazon](#). The book can increasingly be found at many bookstores across the country, including bird-specialty stores and nature-centers.

The coauthors are very much looking for feedback and brainstorming assistance. This is very much an American story of how we in this country interact with nature close to us. And the story needs to be appreciated. Please consider the requests below, and understand that your opinions are certainly appreciated.

Three requests from the three co-authors:

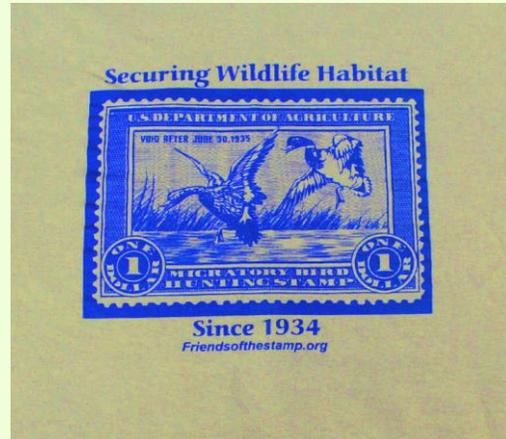
- 1) Stores/Reviews:** If you have some ideas about stores (and on-line shops) where the book might be sold, or magazines (and popular blogs) where the book should be reviewed, please consider contacting Paul J. Baicich (paul.baicich@verizon.net).
- 2) Talks:** If you are aware of places where a coauthor can be invited for a book-signing session, or meetings/festivals where one or more of the authors might be invited to give presentations, please inform Margaret A. Barker (mab27@cornell.edu).
- 3) Artwork:** If you have a need for some related artwork from the book (e.g., for a review or blog), please contact Carrol L. Henderson (carrolhenderson@prodigy.net).

A classic "Duck Stamp" T-shirt - with the original 1934 design

The Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp has created a stamp-supporting t-shirt with the original famous stamp image, created by Jay Norwood "Ding" Darling for the 1934-1935 "Duck Stamp." It comes in most standard sizes and is offered at a relatively inexpensive price of \$11.20 (plus shipping handling).

The wording on the t-shirt - shown here - is clear: "Securing Wildlife Habitat Since 1934" along with the address for the Friends website in a smaller type-face.

For more information and access to an order form from the Friends, [see here](#).



Show Support for Birds and Rice - and buy a t-shirt



Shade-grown coffee may be [the prime bird-compatible crop with ecological benefits](#) in Latin America and the Caribbean, but in the United States today, there is one vital "bird-friendly" crop grown on a large scale. *It's rice.*

Our six largest rice-producing states are Arkansas, California, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Texas. These are places where waterfowl, shorebirds, long-legged waders, rails, raptors, and wetland-favoring songbirds co-exist with agriculture. American ricelands account for about three million acres of land which otherwise might be virtually devoid of birds. It's just that simple.

If you want to literally wear your support for bird-friendly rice, consider this t-shirt. It delivers a simple message: "Buy American RICE - Preserve Bird Habitat." The shirts are available in most sizes (S, M, L, XL, 2XL). These shirts are 100% cotton.

The first shirt costs \$20, and any additional shirts sent to the same address will cost \$15 each. (Maryland residents should add \$0.90 tax per shirt.)



You can order shirts directly from (and make a check out to):

Paul J. Baicich
P.O. Box 404
Oxon Hill, MD 20750

Words to Consider:

"Like the resource it seeks to protect, wildlife conservation must by dynamic, changing as conditions change, seeking always to become more effective."

~ Rachel Carson (1907 - 1964)

GBP Bulletin Archives

Great Birding Projects is a vehicle to promote a creative approach to bird-related editing, education, tourism, and marketing. GBP functions as a bridge to an innovative engagement between people and birds. You can access all previous issues of the *GBP* bulletin on the GBP website [here](#).

