



# GREAT BIRDING PROJECTS



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

1 June 2017

## **HEMP AGAIN - FROM ODDITY TO COMMODITY** **Hemp History Week Coming Up**

In the winter of 1895-96, bird-feeding pioneer, Elizabeth B. Davenport of Brattleboro, Vermont, fed the birds at her window a unique high-oil seed: hemp. Full of fat, protein, and carbohydrates, hemp seed was widely available at the time at feed and grain stores. Hemp was quickly adopted by early wild bird feeding proponents, and it became a main ingredient in their birdseed mixes.



Of course, hemp, *Cannabis sativa*, is also used as a recreational or medical drug, marijuana. But there are enormous differences between "industrial hemp" and "psychoactive hemp." Some strains of the plant can have almost none of the psychoactive chemical; others may possess an abundance of it. Industrial hemp usually has less than 0.3 to 1.0 percent THC (delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol).

While the praise for hemp as birdseed may have started over 120 years ago, the enthusiasm for the highly nutritional seed continued for decades. Discussing "satisfactory foods" for wild birds 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."

However, the passage of the federal Marijuana Tax Act in 1937 complicated things. And except for the short-lived USDA-promoted "Hemp for Victory" campaign of WWII - to provide cordage, rope, and cloth for the war effort - hemp slipped away as a birdseed of consequence in the U.S. The Controlled Substances Act of 1970 didn't make things any easier.

Today, organized business groups and even state and federal agencies and lawmakers have been working on ways to revive industrial hemp production in the U.S. (Industrial hemp can play a role in health food and body care products, as well as ecofriendly textiles, clothing, auto parts, building materials, and, of course, birdseed. Hemp also shows some promise for regenerating depleted soils, sequestering carbon dioxide, and preventing erosion.) In fact, there are also some sections of the most recent Farm Bill that make hemp exploration - even including bird seed use - possible.

In any case, Vote Hemp, the organization working to change state and federal laws to allow commercial hemp farming, has followed 2016's growth of hemp crops (planted in 15 states), universities conducting research on hemp cultivation (30), and increases in state hemp licenses issued across the country (817). Industrial hemp cultivation is now legal in 32 states, which have lifted restrictions on hemp farming and may license farmers to grow hemp in accordance with Sec. 7606 of the Farm Bill.

In light of these developments, there will be a number of on-line and in-place physical events to celebrate the [Eighth Annual Hemp History Week](#), 5-11 June. These activities will focus on hemp as a fiber and oil-seed crop with deep roots in American history, exploring ways to embrace the innovative and sustainable potential of non-drug, industrial hemp.



If this pace keeps up, hemp might still become, once again, a standard in bird feeding. Millions of Americans who feed wild birds may again be able to visit local stores to pick up bags of hemp seed marked "grown in the USA."

## 1917 Feeder-poster Copy Available

In 1917, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, through the Bureau of Biological Survey, produced a winter bird-feeding poster, making the case for what were considered "useful birds" that "more than pay for their keep." This poster showed methods of attraction, foods, and results of feeding birds in winter. Instructions were included, in the words of an announcement in the magazine *Bird-Lore* at the time, "to enable anyone to establish feeding stations." *The Feed the Birds this Winter* poster, shown in the small image to the left, was to be the first in a long line of federally sponsored poster promotions to advocate bird feeding.

The story of the poster is further explained in *Feeding Wild Birds in America: Culture, Commerce & Conservation*, a book described below.

You can get a reproduction of this poster (12" X 18") on quality stock and suitable for framing for \$7. Send a check to:

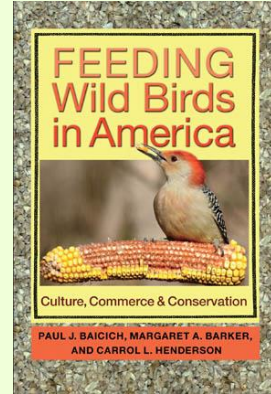
Paul J. Baicich  
P.O. Box 404  
Oxon Hill, MD 20750



The price also covers postage and handling, but please add \$0.35 for taxes if you live in Maryland.

## *The History of Backyard Bird Feeding*

The authors of *Feeding Wild Birds in America: Culture, Commerce & Conservation* (Paul Baicich, Margaret Barker, and Carrol Henderson) continue to line up talks, interviews, and book-signings with bird and garden clubs, nature centers, festivals, parks and refuges, and stores. For these activities and more information, please contact [Margaret Barker](#).



The presentations cover a wide range of bird-feeding history topics, linked with practical lessons for today. For example, they often address the following:

- Why extremely popular **hemp seed** lost favor as a birdseed. (And the possibility of it being on the verge of a comeback.)
- The origins of **black-oil sunflower seed**. (And the involvement of what could be considered Cold War agricultural espionage.)
- How **hummingbird nectar and feeders** came to be. (And the efforts to devise "just the right sugar-formula.")
- How the plastic **tube-feeder** was invented. (And its connection to modern-art design.)
- Why **coconuts** became the foundation for many feeder designs in the past. (And how the source goes back to the end of the 19th century.)
- How **nyjer seed**

came to America as a backyard birdseed. (And how it has been used in south Asia.)

### A FEW CONTACTS AND SUGGESTIONS

- If you want to order a supply of the book for your own store, nature center, or organization, contact [Kathryn Krol](#) at Texas A&M University Press: 979-458-3988
- For talks, book signings, festivals, interviews, etc. please contact [Margaret Barker](#).
- To order an individual copy of the book, use this [order-form](#).

### **Words to Consider:**

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

- Rachel Carson

## 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](#).

