



GREAT BIRDING PROJECTS



An approach to bird-related editing, education, tourism, and marketing 9 November 2011

Community Bird Feeding **Revisiting an Old Idea**

In the first few decades of the 20th century, there arose a number of modest, individual, and community-based localities set aside for birds, often called "sanctuaries" or "preserves" where birds and some other wildlife were protected, and where they were fed.

In the 1910s, for example, small bird sanctuaries and community feeding-stations - both for songbirds and for game birds - proliferated in some areas of the country. Often launched and sustained by local bird clubs, Junior Audubon Clubs, Boy Scouts, and sportsmen, depending on the locale, these feeding stations became very popular.

By the 1920s, feeding committees were even created to sustain town-oriented stations, especially when it was thought that the birds "needed" our help to survive cold winters. Sunday visits to feeders - often in local parks or even cemeteries - were promoted.

A U.S. Department of Agriculture Farmer's Bulletin (by W. L. McAtee in 1921) titled "Community Bird Refuges," covered small habitat management for birds along roadsides, rights-of-way, parks, cemeteries, school-grounds, and other such areas. Feeding stations were stressed.

About this same time, a very youthful Roger Tory Peterson, in the company of a neighborhood friend, maintained a chain of feeding stations around his hometown of Jamestown, New York.

By the 1930s, these community activities might be coordinated with state-based Forest or Park and Game Commissions, especially if they directly benefited game birds.

These sorts of efforts went on and off into the 1930s and even thereafter. Indeed, a number of these individual sanctuaries and preserves, complete with feeding stations, continue today.

In fact, today these social functions have been replaced by a variety of community, public, and near-public birding stations where visitors are invited to watch, to enjoy, and, most importantly, to learn. These are not in regular backyards; they may be at state parks, town nature centers, National Wildlife Refuge visitor centers, park lodges, restaurants, schools, nursing homes, ski lodges, B&Bs, cemeteries, birding specialty stores, tourist welcome centers, or highway rest areas.

Many of these locales are not openly "public," but they are certainly open to the public. They usually provide a transitional experience for all sorts of visitors. For those new to bird feeding, these locations provide a way to view and experience a quality feeding station and offer an example for their own backyards. For those already familiar with a backyard feeding station, some of the more "natural" locations, such as at parks and refuges, provide an opportunity to view species not regularly seen in backyards and a way to step out of the backyard. It can be a good way to draw people out of the indoors and have them pursue and appreciate birds beyond the regular backyard. It can serve

as way to help bring people to birds and not simply bring birds to people. This is a subject about which three of us -Paul Baicich, Margaret Barker, and Carrol Henderson- are writing. We are finishing a manuscript for a book on the varied and fascinating history of bird feeding in the United States. And community bird feeding is just part of the story.

There are many lessons involved in these community bird feeding experiences. For example, when a rarity shows up at one of these public or semi-public feeders, the entire experience is intensified: more people, more learning, more interaction.



If anything, we need to increase these sorts of public and semi-public feeding stations. They have a real future, providing a bird-educational opportunity and, at times, functional docents who can give great feeding tips for many visitors.

Here is a photo of the inside of the Sandia Crest House, the snack-and-souvenir shop in the mountains near Albuquerque, New Mexico, where visitors view three species of rosy-finches

and many other species in winter. This is an example of a highly successful community bird feeding station.

Viewing Last Month's Birding Diversity Meeting

You can watch the archived videos

As you may know, an innovative meeting, "Focus on Diversity: Changing the Face of American Birding," took place at the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge all day on Saturday, 22 October.

The intent of the meeting was to discuss real ways to reach new and diverse audiences interested in nature-based recreation in general and birding in particular. The premise of this event was that birding as a community and a pastime needs to make changes to reach diverse audiences, changes necessary if it wishes to be relevant to important issues facing us all.

You can view the archived video of the meeting [here](#). You can select the speakers of panels of most interest to you.

Words to Consider:



"If each individual could define his own role 'in' nature, we wouldn't have as many problems. It is when we see ourselves 'out' of nature that we court trouble."

- Roger Tory Peterson (1908 - 1996)

For Contact and More Information:

Besides using the material and the links provided in this issue of *GBP*, you can contact me on avitourism interests, community feeding stations, site and trail/byway evaluations, and group presentations. I can be reached at the e-mail and P.O. Box addresses below.