

**Winter Wildlife Tips**, by, Dave Henkels, Sudbury Conservation Commission

*Winter will be upon as soon, and as such, we will spend more time looking out the window than we would care to. Many of us have year round feeding stations for the backyard birds. Sparrows, finches, waxwings, cardinals, juncos, flickers, woodpecker's alight to the feeders. As the temperature drops and the snow falls, the avian community has greater difficulty finding regular food supplies and those dense surroundings required for safety. Birds require diets rich in caloric content, primarily fat intensive foods. The metabolic rate of birds is significantly higher than humans, while their normal body temperature is 105 degrees Fahrenheit. The enormous amount of energy spent hourly, let alone daily, in search of food, can dramatically reduce the bird's metabolism. Hence the need to have a consistent food supply rich in fat content.*

*Food sources will not habituate birds. No doubt they will return to favored spots. Once again that includes food, shelter/roosting spots, and reduced predation areas. Overwintering birds are common in Sudbury. As their physical demands are truly significant, the capacity to adapt is to them is perhaps even more remarkable. Molting patterns in late fall insure that many birds have greater insulation in the feathers. Additionally, an oil is produced for protection from the elements. Legs and feet are scaled and have blood circulation in the lower extremities that produces greater and more rapid blood flow. Several other ways birds remain warm relative to the environment are through "shivering", differing postures, huddling as a group, head-tucking and rising a leg into **the** body. Many birds go into a torpor, or a reduction in body temperature and a consequential drop in respiration rates.*

*A number of foods attract a variety of species to feeders and your backyard. Again, fat consumption is critical. Nuts, which do not freeze, millet, sunflower seeds, nyjer (in a sock, riddled with small holes) cracked corn, suet and fruit. Apple, banana, and orange wedges are excellent sources of energy. A salt water solution crystalizes when poured over a log or stump. All animals require salt in their diet. Check out a bird gravel, which combines grit, calcium, from shells, and sand. Eggshells in a compost pile are an excellent source of calcium. Ever notice birds in your driveway pecking away? Road salt and vehicles are not a good mix. Also try a birdbath deicer. Short money, more activity.*

*Finally the need to regularly maintain the feeder stations. Keep them safe from bacteria with routine cleaning. This is critical to in order to reduce the possibility of avian illness and disease.*

*The feeders should be an ancillary and supplemental food function. Native trees and shrubs bear a variety of fruits year round. Overwintering insects are an additional source of protein. Try to reduce deadheading flowers to a minimum and maintain an area in the yard that has significant leaf litter, tree limbs, and perhaps a handful of logs. Generally a corner mess in the yard. Consider it a biome that attracts and protects those creatures you enjoy watching from the window! These small but vital dimensions in the yard provide additional food sources via insects, seeds, bark and any number of unmentioned resources.*

*Sudbury is rich with avian activity all year round. Yes, the town and other organizations own many beautiful properties rich in natural history. However, the winter can be monotonously slow. Access can be difficult. But, with thoughtful purpose, the feeder stations offer a rich*

*sanctuary for a variety of species right out the window! Perhaps an odd vagrant, or a new species never seen before, will find refuge in your yard!*