



ATTRACTING BIRDS

INTO

YOUR GARDEN

WHAT DO BIRDS DO FOR MY GARDEN?

- ◆ Pollinate plants and trees
- ◆ Disperse seeds
- ◆ Insect control (flycatchers and other insectivores)
- ◆ Rodent control (owls and hawks)
- ◆ Personal enjoyment & great education for our children

WATER!

A water source is the best way to attract birds, especially in the dry season. It is amazing what will visit to drink or bathe. Cement bird baths are great, but you can use any shallow container directly on the ground or attached to a tree or tree stump, or just dig a shallow depression and line it with a strong plastic and rocks. The important thing is to renew the water daily and keep the container clean.

SHOULD I FEED THE BIRDS?

WILL TOO MANY BIRDS AT A FEEDER SPREAD DISEASE?

Birds often feed in flocks in the wild, although they don't usually stand in their food! Set up your table to create different areas like a series of stepped shelves or perches and always keep your feeders clean.

DO FEEDERS ATTRACT THE WEAK AND SICK INCREASING THE SPREAD OF DISEASE?

All animals and birds are opportunists, and weaker birds will go for the easiest meal. However, the image of a table full of weaklings is unrealistic, especially in Belize with its rich predatory species.

DOES FEEDING CREATE AN UNNATURAL DEPENDENCY ON HUMANS?

With the abundance of year-round natural foods in Belize, this is unlikely. Birds have a territory and are used to travelling to find food. If your feeder 'tree' suddenly stops fruiting, they'll move on. Hummingbird feeders could be an exception to this rule.

ARE POPULATION ARTIFICIALLY INFLATED BY UNNATURAL FEEDING?

Giving nature a helping hand is perfectly acceptable when so many are intent on destroying nature. Make sure your feeders are diverse in design and supply so as not favour one species. Really, we are just moving the food closer to us so that we can observe the birds.

WILL A CONCENTRATION OF PREY SPECIES AT A FEEDER ATTRACT A CONCENTRATION OF PREDATOR SPECIES?

This is unlikely. Birds are good at spotting predators. If there's a hawk around and they feel vulnerable, they will stop coming to the table. Once they stop coming, the hawk will probably move on.





ATTRACT THE BIRDS TO YOUR GARDEN NATURALLY

Use natural food-source plants. Here are a few suggestions, most of which work even in small gardens:

- ◆ Papaya, banana, plantain, guava, okra, mango, kinep, craboo, citrus, hibiscus, gumbo limbo, trumpet trees, cashew, cocoplum, sapodilla, molly apple, wax apple, governor plum, wild grape. Basically anything that has a fruit, seed or nut.
- ◆ Heliconias, gingers, hibiscus and, jasmines other low-growing flowering bushes attract hummingbirds for food and for nest sites, not to mention being attractive plants.
- ◆ Leave an area of natural grasses to attract seed-eaters
- ◆ You could try installing nesting boxes although watch out for bees using those.

With perseverance you can attract a loyal population of birds that will stay for generations to come.

DOES ARTIFICIAL FEEDING CAUSE HEALTH ISSUES FOR BIRDS?

Only if you offer the wrong foods! In Belize we have so many natural fruits. Stick to natural diets and the birds will be fine.

ARE MIGRANTS AFFECTED BY ARTIFICIAL FOOD SUPPLIES?

In Belize, triggers for migration are linked not only to food supply, but also hormones and weather. Your feeder won't change their natural instinct to migrate, and maybe this extra boost of easy food will help them through a tough migration.

DO FEEDERS ATTRACT RATS AND OTHER UNDESIRABLES?

Dropped food will be consumed by creatures like insects, lizards and ground birds, and with Belize's diverse predators most undesirables are taken care of. Don't overload your feeder and you'll have a mini-ecosystem right there.

WHAT TO PUT ON YOUR BIRD TABLE

Fresh fruits, especially soft fruits like papaya, banana, plums, sapodilla, craboo,

Seeds, parakeet seed and grass seeds

High Protein cat kibble and parrot pellets. Always supply a water-source with these.

Hanging corn cobs orange, papaya, banana or a half coconut

Experiment with natural foods, but provide several areas, heights and methods of feeding to suit every species

IN BRIEF:

1. Keep the feeding areas clean and change food daily
2. Provide fresh, clean water
3. Provide only natural, local foods. Never processed food like bread, cake, cookies or chips
4. Leave natural plants for coverage, or the birds feel too exposed to visit
5. Locate the table at least 30 feet from windows to avoid collisions
6. Provide several areas for feeding to avoid over-crowding and out-competing
7. Provide several locations and heights for all species
8. Do NOT encourage birds into your garden if you have predatory cats or dogs