

BIRD FEEDING STATIONS

Birds will be attracted to conservation areas by the insects, seeds and berries to be found there. They can then be enticed closer to the school where they can be viewed and studied. Bird hides are not really very useful in school grounds. They are expensive and unless approach paths are well screened the birds will be disturbed whenever groups visit the hide and it will be quite some time before they return. It is usually far more effective to attract birds close to classrooms where they can be observed regularly by whole classes.

A border overlooked by classrooms can be planted with shrubs and bushes which produce fruit to attract birds. As birds are exposed to danger when crossing open spaces it will be easier to attract birds closer if cover is provided to link the bird feeding area with natural habitats. Shrub beds and trees will help to provide this cover. Hedges, whether of native species or cultivated varieties, provide excellent wildlife cover. The birds will cross open spaces of up to 6 to 7 metres.

Table 1 – The following shrubs produce berries which birds will feed on in addition to providing some useful cover.

Pyracantha
Elder (mainly *Sambucus nigra*)
Hawthorn (mainly *Crataegus monogyna*)
Yew (*Taxus baccata*)
Blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.)
Cotoneaster simonsii
Cotoneaster horizontalis
Cotoneaster watereri
Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*)
Barberry (*Berberis darwinii*)
Firethorn (*Pyracantha coccinea*)
Holly (mainly *Ilex aquifolium*)
Crab Apple (mainly *Malus pumila*)
Flowering Currant (mainly *Ribes sanguineum*)
Privet (mainly *Ligustrum vulgare*)
Spindle Tree (*Euonymus europaeus*)
Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos rivularis*)
Wayfaring Tree (*Viburnum lantana*)
Honeysuckle (*Lonicera* sp.)

If some seed-heads can be left on plants through winter, they will provide seeds for birds.

Table 2 – The following plants provide seeds for birds:

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|------------------|-------------|
| Giant Sunflower | Thistle |
| Cosmos | Knapweed |
| China Aster | Teasel |
| Scabious | Ragwort |
| Evening Primrose | Nettle |
| Antirrhinum | Field Poppy |
| Michaelmas Daisy | |

Additional supplies of bird food should be provided in autumn and winter. Simple bird tables can be designed and constructed by pupils. A square of exterior grade plywood fixed to the top of a post will be as effective as the most elaborate Tudor Mansion style bird table.

Not all birds will use a bird table. Peanut bags and other feeders can be hung from trees, or from the underside of bird tables. Food can also be scattered on the ground for birds such as chaffinches which are ground feeders.

Try to position bird tables in sight of as many classrooms as possible. Classroom windows can be partially screened with card or paper leaving narrow slits to create bird watching hides. It should be possible to reach bird tables easily from paved areas in order to replenish food supplies. 'Stepping stone' slabs can be used to reach bird tables positioned in the centre of cultivated beds. If cats are unlikely to be present, cover close to the bird table may not be a problem.

If bird tables are vulnerable to vandalism, short lengths of plastic drainpipe can be stuck in the ground and the wooden posts dropped in. It is then a simple matter to bring the bird tables inside at weekends and even each evening. Bird tables will also last longer if taken into storage throughout spring and summer.

Fat balls and bird cakes can be bought or made by the pupils. Seed feeders can be made by inserting dowel perches through plastic pop bottles and drilling or melting larger holes just above the perches.

Studies of which birds visit the feeding station and of which foods they choose, will be a rich source of data for work in mathematics as well as science.