



When to Feed Birds In Alaska

People who feed birds are trying to be helpful, but they may not realize that in some cases this activity can actually harm birds. Sometimes feeding causes birds to act in ways that are harmful to either the birds themselves or to people. In other cases, feeding birds creates situations that are harmful to birds or people. The best thing to do is to think before you feed - try to determine what effects the feeding could have on birds and people. The guidelines presented here should help.

When Feeding is Helpful

Millions of people across the country enjoy feeding birds during winter months. This is a wonderful way to watch small birds and supplement their food during cold weather. Make sure you use feeders correctly by cleaning them out at least once a month with a 10% bleach solution so birds can't pass diseases to each other through droppings.

Bears and Bird Feeding

In Alaska, where bears have learned to forage at feeders, stop feeding during the summer, preferably between mid-March and November 1. It is best to remove your feeders so that bears are not attracted to their smell, even if they are empty. One added benefit to stopping feeding in the summer is that outdoor cats are less likely to catch and kill birds at feeders.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Migratory Bird Management
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When Feeding is Harmful:

Please don't feed geese.

Feeding ducks and geese causes them to lose their natural fear of humans. These urban waterfowl are then more likely to be hit by cars on the roads or airplanes taking off from airports. In urban areas birds will congregate at feeding sites in parks near lakes and ponds, transmitting diseases to each other through droppings and ruining vegetation and water quality. Bread and other junk food are also simply not good for waterfowl, and can alter their digestive systems, making them less able to absorb nutrients from wild foods.

Please don't feed eagles.

Eagles are larger and much more dangerous than waterfowl. They can weigh up to fifteen pounds and have sharp talons and beaks. These large, predatory birds can present a hazard to adults, children and pets. Many of the same concerns about feeding waterfowl also apply to eagles. Eagles that congregate at artificial feeding sources near airports are much more likely to be hit by airplanes. Eagles in the habit of taking food from humans in urban areas have been electrocuted by gathering on power poles near feeding areas. As many as 100 eagles are electrocuted in Alaska every year!

For More Information

For the Birds, a publication by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is available at most Service offices or can be ordered by calling 1-800-344-WILD.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service web site <http://alaska.fws.gov> (Click on Migratory Birds, then on Urban Geese)



Steve Kendall/USFWS

Black-capped chickadee.

Cornell University sponsors the Feeder Watcher Program. The university web site is <http://birds.cornell.edu>.

The Alaska Department of Fish & Game web site has more detailed information on winter bird feeding <http://www.state.ak.us/adfg/wildlife/geninfo/birds/birdfeed.htm>

Anchorage Geese: Life in the City, a video for elementary school students, is available in Anchorage's elementary school libraries or on loan through the Alaska Resources Library and Information Services at 907-271-4579.