

BRAS Bluebird Newsletter January 2021

December snows were beautiful this year and the sight of bluebirds against the backdrop of white were breathtaking! My husband and I are very fortunate to have bluebirds which come to our feeders and heated birdbath all winter. I have to admit that it is always a mood elevator to see them outside our windows! The big snow that fell on December 1st, 2020 piled up high around the edges of our heated birdbath but the water did not freeze so a light brushing of the birdbath edges was all that was needed to attract many species back to the warm water.

Our primary bluebird feeder has Plexiglas on two sides and the ends are wooden with 1 ½ inch round holes that are perfectly sized for bluebirds to enter while keeping out larger birds like starlings, etc. Our Carolina wrens and black capped chickadees also easily enter the end holes to feast on dried mealworms which are always readily available inside the feeder. The little red, blue and yellow hopper style feeder pictured below is usually filled with Bluebird suet nuggets we find at area garden or bird supply stores. These (slightly crushed) suet nuggets attract bluebirds and also downy woodpeckers and tufted titmouse. We have even seen red bellied woodpeckers attempt to eat from the little feeder. On days when the temperature is above freezing, we will put a few live mealworms in the yellow dish inside the primary larger feeder and also in the hanging blue glass dish. It seems that almost all the birds really LOVE live mealworms. Robins will clean out the open dish quickly though so beware if they are around!



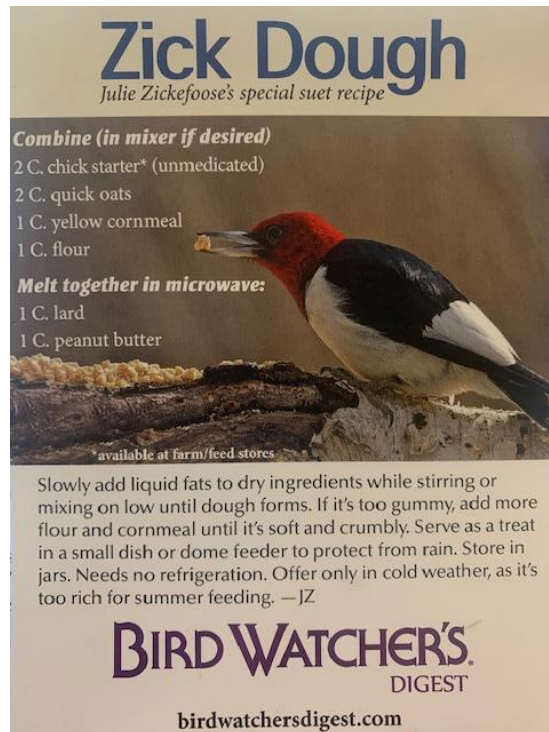
Another food we provide only during cold winter months is a homemade peanut & suet recipe created by Julie Zickafoose, well known artist, naturalist and Bird Watchers Digest contributor. It is too rich for summertime feeding though and will spoil easily in the heat of summer so take it down when spring arrives with warmer days. Julie's "Zick Dough" recipe is easy to make and is a real hit with woodpeckers, bluebirds and many other bird visitors. It can be pressed into suet block holders as pictured below or scattered on platform feeders for easy feeding. If it lands on the ground the birds will go after it there too! The recipe is on the last page.



Having food and water available are sure to attract many birds to your back yard feeders but making sure there is also shelter and protection during their visits is also important. Planting native plants, shrubs and trees on your property benefits birds and other native animal species year round. Go Native! 😊



In the previous photo a male bluebird and house finch enjoy a drink from a heated birdbath while a squirrel photo bombs and plans his turn at the drink bowl!



Zick Dough
Julie Zickefoose's special suet recipe

Combine (in mixer if desired)
2 C. chick starter* (unmedicated)
2 C. quick oats
1 C. yellow cornmeal
1 C. flour

Melt together in microwave:
1 C. lard
1 C. peanut butter

*available at farm/feed stores

Slowly add liquid fats to dry ingredients while stirring or mixing on low until dough forms. If it's too gummy, add more flour and cornmeal until it's soft and crumbly. Serve as a treat in a small dish or dome feeder to protect from rain. Store in jars. Needs no refrigeration. Offer only in cold weather, as it's too rich for summer feeding. —JZ

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Like many of you, during the winter we also provide black oil sunflower seeds, safflower seed and niger seed (thistle seed) in feeders for the many other bird species we enjoy observing and photographing. Offering cracked corn, bread, or cheap birdseed mixes containing millet are practices we strongly avoid and discourage since those foods are very attractive to non-native, destructive house sparrows and European starlings. If you feed them, they will come... Choose wisely!

Due to the Covid pandemic we are not able to hold large public group meetings in area libraries as we have for the past several years in early spring to teach about "Bluebird Basics". Our hope is that as vaccines become more readily available, we will be able to start resuming these informative gatherings. My next newsletter in March will have more updates about classes being planned for trail monitors, new volunteers to our bluebird program and for those who are just interested in learning more about bluebirding in their own back yards. In the meantime, please don't hesitate to contact me and my husband if you have specific questions or problems related to bluebirds. We LOVE to talk about bluebirds and have answered lots of phone calls and emails and made lots of home visits in years past to help newbie bluebird landlords make their property bluebird friendly.

During past years' orientation classes, we held for new bluebird trail monitors or landlords, part of the curriculum included learning how to research and access best practices information. I would like to include that handout with this newsletter so that any of you can find websites,

written material, organizations and videos to help you on this journey of becoming the best bluebird landlords or trail managers possible. The rewards of the time you spend learning about bluebirding will be multiplied many times over with the thrill of having bluebirds frequent your property or nest successfully in nestboxes you are responsibly managing.

Bluebirds will start nesting in March and April- only a few more weeks away- so let's take advantage of this quiet season of January and February to prepare and learn. Pick up a book, log onto recommended websites, call a bluebirding friend or take your binoculars and go for regular walks in nature. Covid has changed many aspects of our lives but God's seasonal rhythms continue and bluebirds will soon begin the age-old ritual of pairing up, claiming territory, nest building, egg laying and raising young. I hope you will experience the joy that comes from being a part of these beautiful birds' lives.



"A man's interest in a single bluebird is worth more than a complete but dry list of the fauna and flora of a town." Henry David Thoreau

"Hope is the thing with feathers

That perches in the soul

And sings the tune without the words

And never stops at all... Emily Dickinson

Keep observing, learning and hoping! Wishing you bluebirds!

Newsletter and photos by Penny Brandau pennybrandau@gmail.com 440-670-3684