

SETTING UP A BIRDBATH

Editor's note: This article, by Benjamin P. Burt, appeared in the July/August 1995 issue of *Bird Watcher's Digest*.

Birds that might otherwise never enter your yard will be attracted to the sound of dripping water.

One of the best ways to attract birds in the summer is to provide a supply of water.

Whether birds use a birdbath will depend somewhat on how it is constructed and where it is placed.

The bath should be shallow at the edges — not more than 1/2 inch deep and sloped gradually to the center to a maximum depth of about two inches. To accommodate more than one bird at a time, the diameter should be at least two feet.



Whether the birdbath is on a pedestal or on the ground, it should be roughly 10 to 12 feet from the shelter of nearby shrubbery. Safety is the main consideration. Birds with wet feathers fly poorly and can be caught easily by cats. Consequently, the open location gives the birds a better chance to spot an approaching predator.

However, the bath should not be too far from the bushes, or the birds will be timid about using it. They seem to prefer to approach through the shrubs and then fly to the bath when the coast is clear. After bathing, they need a nearby spot to preen and dry off. Hence, the distance of 10 to 12 feet works best.

The actual design of the bath is immaterial if it meets the above specifications. The pedestal type sold commercially is quite good. A similar bath could be made by mounting a trash can lid on a piece of tile pipe. A rock suspended from the handle and hanging down inside the pipe holds the lid in place. These look quite nice once they have been painted to disguise the materials.

Water is more obvious to the birds if the inside of the bath is a dark color. Probably the only disadvantage of the commercial concrete models is their nearly white color. Tests have shown water in a dark container is used more often. Reflections from the water are much more noticeable in this type of bath. If the bird does not see the water, it will not use it.

A homemade bath can be constructed from concrete by digging a shallow hole in the ground and using the hole for a mold. Follow the specifications for the size given above. Be sure the cement is at least 1-1/2 inches thick.

If you do not wish to use concrete, the hole can be lined with a piece of thin plastic and weighed down with stones or dirt along the edges. The water presses the plastic against the dirt beneath it. This, together with the wrinkles in the plastic, gives a pretty good footing for the bathers.


Motion and Noise Help. Birds are strongly attracted by the motion and noise of dripping water. Let water fall into the bath at about one drop per second, and you will attract flycatchers, warblers, thrushes, and many birds that otherwise will not come to a bath or to a feeder.

Several arrangements are possible. The simplest is a plastic bucket with a tiny hole. The container is suspended about two feet above the pool.

Or you can arrange a garden hose to slowly drip water into the bath or pool. There is now on the market a simple unit that can be set to do this quite conveniently. It is equipped with a small petcock on the side, to which a 50-foot length of miniature hose (1/4-inch plastic tubing) is fastened. The end of the miniature hose is fastened above the birdbath, or it can be connected to a piece of copper tubing that is mounted over the water. Also available is a little crockery pedestal that sits in the birdbath and contains the copper tubing going up, over, and down, dripping water into the bath.

With this arrangement, the regular faucet on the outside of the house is turned on. The little petcock is opened just a bit to allow water to drip from the end of tubing into the birdbath. The main valve on the special faucet is turned off unless you wish to connect the garden hose. Thus, the faucet is available for all its customary uses.

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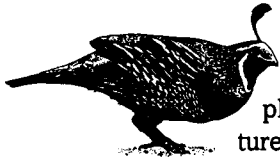
BATHING BIRDS

Editor's note: The following article, by David M. Bird, is reprinted from the July/August 1996 issue of *Bird Watcher's Digest*. The clip art on pp. 3-5 is mine.

Watching an American robin wade breast-deep into a standing pool of water on a hot summer's day and then vigorously douse itself over and over is almost as refreshing to me as hopping into a clear mountain lake after a long, arduous hike. I said, almost.

Millions, perhaps billions, of dollars are spent each year in North America on several varieties of birdseed to attract birds to the yard, but less attention is paid to the provision of that other life-giving commodity necessary to a bird's well-being — water. To my mind, it is much more fun to watch a bird bathe itself than to watch it sit on a feeder and stuff its face.

In addition to food, vitamins, and minerals, water is essential to a bird's health. The daily needs of a given bird species depend on a wide range of environmental and physiological variables. To begin with, the smaller a bird is, the more water is lost daily through evaporation from the respiratory system and the skin. For example, a house wren weighing about 1/2 ounce can lose daily 37 percent of its body weight in water in this manner, while the larger bobwhite only loses 4 percent! Age can also be a factor. One-week-old ducklings drink more than three times as much water as 16-day-old ones. In some species, like California quail (pictured), males can withstand water loss much better than females. Obviously, the temperature and humidity of the surrounding air play a role. A rise in air temperature from 30 to 40 degrees Centigrade (86 to 104 degrees Fahrenheit) can increase water consumption by threefold. Higher air humidity means less water lost through respiration. Finally, birds can promote water conservation simply by reducing their physical activity.



Not all of a bird's daily water requirements are necessarily met by drinking. Some birds can supply up to 80 percent of their needs from metabolic water generated as a byproduct of chemical processes in their body. For many birds, such as raptors, the body fluids of their prey provide their second most important source of water. Similarly, insectivorous birds acquire much of their water from the juices of their insect prey. Swallows are an exception, though, often dipping down to drink surface water, because they lose water rapidly owing to the high metabolic cost of sustained flight. Seed-eaters, of course, have the greatest requirement for free water, and they actively seek it out from streams, ponds, water holes, dew, raindrops, puddles, and even snow.

Birds can fall into two categories of drinkers: gulpers and slurpers. The most common method used by land birds is to immerse the beak in water, tip the head up, and

allow the water to trickle into the throat, where it is swallowed. Pigeons and doves, in equine style, just hold their beaks in the water and suck it up through pumping motions in the throat. Pelicans do neither, simply opening their huge beaks during a rainfall. Water intake may also possibly be accomplished through wetting food before eating it. A number of shorebird species engage in this practice, but whether it is done to facilitate swallowing the food or simply to clean sand from it is not certain.

Besides using it to cool themselves off on a hot day, birds engage in water bathing (there are other kinds of bathing, e.g., sun, dust) to facilitate the waterproofing of the feathers through oiling and preening, and secondarily to clean the plumage. Bathing is almost always followed by preening and oiling. Despite its importance, the actual behavior of bathing by birds has not been well studied.

Contrary to what some might think, birds are not covered in feathers from head to legs. The feathers actually grow in tracts known as pterylae that generally cover only 30 percent of the body, at least for land birds. The spaces in between are referred to as apteria. Thus, when birds bathe, they open and close certain feather tracts to expose the bare parts to the water. The trapped water is forced into the apteria and then squeezed through the pterylae to rinse and bathe the base of the feathers. This activity generally results in a thorough soaking and a waterlogged bird, and so it must be performed under sufficiently safe conditions to allow the bird enough time to groom itself. In most baths, though, the idea is not to soak the plumage, but instead to evenly dampen it to help with the oiling and preening procedures.

Just about all songbirds (jays, titmice, blackbirds, finches, thrushes, warblers, sparrows, woodpeckers, etc.) and most large land birds (eagles, hawks, crows, owls, etc.), with the exception of some gallinaceous species that apparently never bathe, engage in the practice of "stand-in" bathing. This generally consists of wading into a body of water to a depth suitable to the bird's needs, anywhere from one to three inches. Like my 13-year-old daughter, the smaller songbirds do not waste a lot of time bathing, but they are constantly active. A typical "stand-in" bath for a robin might consist of repeatedly dipping the head and breast into the water, vigorously shaking the body from side to side, and flicking the wings upward and forward. What separates the "stand-in" bath from the "stand-out" version (sometimes called "splash-bathing") is the fact that the latter version does not actually call for the bather to step into the water, but instead to stay on shore. The "stand-in" bather eventually wallows in the water, the head raised and the rump submerged with the tail fanned out. The wings are used one at a time to flip water across the back.

In contrast, raptors and pigeons are more like my 21-year-old son, who cannot easily be coaxed out of a hot shower. These birds often just lie there in the water, partly submerged and motionless in between bouts of violent splashing. Interestingly, there is a hybrid form of the two

SUCCESSFUL DINNER

Therese Lucas

Guitar music by Toby Tobias, wafting through the Colonial Room at the Coral House during the cocktail hour, started the celebration of SSAS's 35th Annual Dinner.

Due to the generous donations of many businesses and individuals, the super raffle and Chinese auction were a rousing success. Many people partook in the 50-50 raffle. Continuing the tradition, the raffle for the Birdathon participants was held as well. It was a pleasure to present the Service Award to Christine Marzigliano. The finishing touch was the bird-nest favors handmade by Kathy Asmus.

We look forward to seeing all of you next year. I hope to see many new faces as well.

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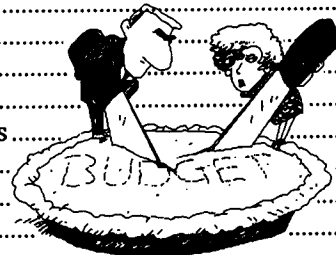
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FLEA MARKET THANKS

Our second annual flea market, organized by Maureen Rube and Betty Borowsky, followed its predecessor's footsteps by being postponed to its rain date, June 4. We thank everyone who contributed the items that enabled us to raise over \$350 and would like to give recognition to the members and friends who spent hours in the parking lot in Freeport: Ilse Goldsmith, Marian Hubbard, Jerry Ladden, Joe Landesburg, Therese Lucas, George & Marianne Peters, Jim Remsen, Maureen & Paul Rube, Chris Schmitt, Ed & Michael Sperling, and Nancy & Bill Youngfert. Thanks, also, to Kathy Asmus for drawing two of the signs that helped attract Sunrise Highway drivers' attention.

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