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with the Littleton Garden Club

Winter birds

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Littleton Garden Club

Do you feed the birds in winter? I have the usual suspects at my feeders. I thought I had fewer birds than in previous winters. However, NH Audubon's 2023 Backyard Winter Bird Survey just arrived and has good news. Dr. Pamela Hunt, a Senior Conservation Biologist who prepared the survey and reviewed the data for many years, says, "...we are not seeing dramatic declines in most of our winter birds."

I have chickadees, many blue jays, red and white-breasted nut hatches, and hairy and downy woodpeckers. In recent years, titmice have come as well.

Two wild turkeys moved into our yard this winter and are ever-present, serving as the clean-up crew for spilled seed. My friends who feed birds report having good numbers of the usual species. I recently switched from black oilers to hulled sunflower seeds and saw an increase in chickadees at the feeder.

I purchased a new suet cage; it's double-wide and holds two suet cakes. Each compartment is deep enough that I can add a few peanuts in the shell in addition to a suet cake. The woodpeckers especially enjoy the peanuts.

I have a neat trick for

servicing peanut butter to the birds. Small grapevine or straw wreaths, about ten inches in diameter, are a great way to offer peanut butter. I hang the wreath (on a shepherd's hook pole equipped with a squirrel guard) and spread peanut butter on parts of

the wreath. The peanut butter gets incorporated into the nooks and crannies of the wreath, and the birds love it. This method works best when temperatures stay below freezing so the peanut butter doesn't get soggy.

I enjoy birds year-

round, but many people know my passion is the ruby-throated hummingbird. No, it's not a winter bird. They've been wintering in places like Mexico and Central American countries, and by mid-February, they're getting ready to begin their northward migration. They follow migration routes through Mexico.

Remarkably, some will migrate by flying over the Gulf of Mexico, a distance of about 500 miles. They arrive in the Gulf states in March.

In future columns, I'll elaborate on the incredible migration of these tiny birds and how you can track the progress of their migration. It won't be long until they're on their way. They return to their same summer neighborhoods more on that in future columns. Please stay tuned!