



FOCUS ON DIVERSE SPECIES

Feed the Birds. By Chris Earley. 2019. Firefly Books. (ISBN: 9780228102014). 296 pp. Softcover, \$24.22.

Birds are unique animals. They can fly, sing, and flaunt a rainbow of vivid colors. No other animals can make that claim. It's not unusual for families to hang bird feeders around their property so that they can watch these feathered friends as they pause to check out the feasts being set out for them.

One of the aims of this book is to encourage readers to set up bird feeders. Watching birds in your yard allows you to observe how they are adapted to their environment. Birds that have access to feeders have better overall fitness and a better chance of survival during very cold weather. About 10% of the diet of feeder-using birds actually comes from the feeders.

Numerous suggestions are presented for types of seeds, as well as other foods such as

suet, fruits, jellies, and mealworms, to put in feeders. Different types of feeders used for specific foods, ranging from tube and platform feeders to suet and nectar feeders, are described with colorful pictures and explanations. Illustrated ideas for clever do-it-yourself feeders include blueprints and provide schemes for fashioning your own creations. There is much advice about setting up these feeding stations, knowing how to determine seed freshness, how to store seeds, and when to discard them. Tips for arranging the yard to attract birds include kinds of plants from which birds might profit, how to provide for birds' other needs (such as food, water, nesting materials, shelter, space), and how to deal with squirrels and cats.

Enjoyable features of birdwatching include bird behavior, appearances, and adaptations. Suggested actions to look for include aggression, feather maintenance, threat displays, feeding, detection and avoidance of predators, and courtship and care of offspring. Notable adaptations and appearances to look for are similarities and differences in beak, foot, and wing shapes and unusual appearances and deformities.

In addition to all of this valuable information, about half of the book is a dazzling section on the identification of birds that have been known to acquire meals at feeders. As the author points out, when you have a bird feeder, "you never know what species may show up." But there are many features that can help identify the feeder feasters. Some are more complicated than others, but Earley provides helpful instructions for establishing bird body sizes and shapes, beak and tail characteristics, and kinds of movement. Field marks are considered the best traits to explore when first trying to identify a bird. These marks include head, eye, and facial characteristics; patches, streaks, and bars on the body; and many other clues.

A convenient "Bird Quick-Find Guide" with 72 small pictures of birds is offered for use in

attempting to identify an unknown bird at a feeder. Each picture suggests bird groups and page numbers in which an unknown bird might be found among the more than 150 additional pages describing characteristics that can help with identification. Many of these handy avian profiles incorporate maps showing where the birds are found, as well as suggestions on what to feed them. Since every possible feeder visitor is not necessarily included in this book, it is suggested that a complete field guide of North American birds may also be needed to help identify some of the feathered friends found at the feeder.

Feed the Birds is a spectacular and lavishly illustrated volume that would be perfect for anyone who enjoys birds – their appearance, their behavior, and their presence on feeders. It is appropriate for middle school, high school, college, and adult readers. In addition to an index, *Feed the Birds* includes a fill-in chart for recording the reader's bird experiences, a list of references, and suggestions for further reading. As you enjoy this book, remember that "the Earley bird gets the worm."



Pelican. By Barbara Allen. 2019. Reaktion Books. (ISBN: 9781789140750). 208 pp. Softcover, \$17.59.

The remarkable and very popular birds called pelicans (genus *Pelecanus*) are believed to be descended from an ancient bird family, though some evidence indicates that the genus may have originated from more than one ancestral line. Fossils dating from 30–40 million years ago are similar to modern pelicans and have been found in many parts of the world, on all continents except Antarctica. New scientific advances are still fueling debates about pelican taxonomy. *Pelecanus* consists of eight living species, and there is great variety among these birds in