



Six Ways To Prepare Your Yard For Fall Migration

Wild Birds Unlimited's Brian Cunningham, Manager of Product & Hobby Education, shares tips to attract migrating birds to your backyard by setting up an environment that mimics how birds naturally forage.

Sharon Powills
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When it comes to bird migration, Brian Cunningham of [Wild Birds Unlimited](#) is an expert. “You want to captivate birds in your yard that may be passing through or looking for a place to spend the winter. To do so, you need to prepare your yard, landscape, and bird feeding stations with the right feeders and foods,” says Cunningham.

Here are six tips for attracting these birds during fall migration:

1. Understand fall migration.

When fall arrives, a bird's life transitions. Summer was nesting time, during which birds set up territories and raise babies. In fall, they are no longer raising families and these territories break down. Some birds flock up with their own kind and use the flock as a winter survival tactic, taking advantage of more eyes to search for food.

Other birds mix together with other bird species in a winter foraging flock. This loose foraging guild travels around, learning each other's alarm calls to protect from danger. They also learn food foraging techniques from each other, such as searching up or down trees.

2. Attract birds with low-lying landscapes.

Take a look at your landscape, and if possible, try to leave some of your landscape's natural roughage in place. Put out a few additional brush piles and leave some seed plants around. A lot of the ground-feeding birds like to feed on those seeds. Ground-feeding environments attract birds that avoid elevated food sources. Song sparrows like to feed this way and are just about everywhere in North America.

You also want millet-type blends. If possible, also leave weed-seed plants. Many birds love to work on them. Finally, when it snows, you want to have seeds available above the snow. Overall, a varied, dynamic landscape that is not cut completely down will help attract birds during the fall.

3. Start cleaning up bird feeding stations.

Fall is the perfect time to clean out bird feeding stations and put them back up. Some WBU stores provide this service or know of groups who will. Fall is a time when birds begin to seek seed rather than over food sources. Many birds are insect eaters but move to seeds in the winter as insects become dormant. That's when you can put specific types of food in your yard to attract birds. We recommend leaving out a variety of food types, and each WBU store has an array of food types selected based on season and region.

4. Have seed available to birds now to attract them later.

As birds come through and decide where to stay, they are likely more willing to stay if they note a regularly available food source. Even if they are not hitting the food source on a regular basis in the fall, once the weather turns cooler, they'll remember where that reliable source is. By keeping food fresh now, the birds will reward you once the weather turns.

5. There are more food sources beyond seed.

Make sure you have high-quality fresh food and high-energy, high-fat foods. WBU seed blends have these qualities. Spreadable Bark Butter or Bark Butter Bits in pellet form is a great source. It's a magnet for birds, and there are over 140 species confirmed that enjoy them. Once they try it, birds are all over it. This food is one of the best to help captivate migrating birds. Live or dried mealworms are another option. They can be hard to find, but many WBU stores carry them.

6. Provide a moving water source.

A moving water source is a magnet for birds. If a bird is passing through and looking for stopover points and they see or hear moving water, they will almost always stop to check it out. Birds who stop to feed will attract other birds that are also looking for a food source. Birds may stay for one–three days, depending on how much they need to refuel.

Brian Cunningham has been working for Wild Birds Unlimited for 21 years in the franchise support center. He is the product and hobby education manager and supports all stores by making sure they have the resources they need to be their community's local expert.