

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROMOTING ALL-YEAR ROUND BIRD FEEDING

Offer customers high quality advice on wild bird food with help from the PFMA's **Nicole Paley**

With snow and freezing conditions following an unusually mild and wet start to winter, the

UK's wildlife is understandably confused – and under threat. Our feathered friends, in particular, have had a rocky ride. The drop in temperature, accompanied by floods and high winds, are hazardous for wild birds as they find it tougher to find natural supplies of food such as seeds, fruits and insects.

Nicole Paley, communications manager of the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association, which has a dedicated Bird Group, is keen that we respond to these unreliable weather patterns and adapt our outlook on feeding wild birds. In an ideal world, our wild birds will be meeting their nutritional needs through natural food sources, however supplementary feeding can help birds survive during periods of food shortages which can occur at any time.

SEASONALITY POSTER

At pfma.org.uk, bird food experts have created a bird feeding/seasonality poster, which encapsulates birds' feeding requirements throughout the seasons. It clearly depicts how and when to feed birds. This is ideal for downloading and displaying in retail establishments and garden centres as a guide for customers. The poster can be downloaded up to A2 in size with high-resolution quality. Customers can also be

directed to the website for further tips and advice.

TOP FEEDING TIPS – WINTER OR ANY COLD SNAP

- Ideal feeding times are dawn and dusk.
- Provide a varied menu for birds with different bills and focus on high fat foods to provide a welcome source of energy.
 - Fat balls and other fat-based food bars loved by the tit family (always remove the mesh bag).
 - Peanuts (never salted or dry) are rich in fat and a popular choice for tits, finches, sparrows.
 - Crushed or grated nuts attract robins, dunnocks and wrens.
 - Black sunflower seeds are an excellent year-round food and can be more popular than peanuts for some birds.
 - Desiccated coconut can be fatal to birds if not well soaked and is best avoided altogether.
 - Any mouldy or spoiled foods must be avoided.
 - Similarly, anything that could choke a bird shouldn't be provided; for example whole peanuts, lumps of hard fat and dried bread.
- Feeding stations should be carefully positioned. Certain species prefer hanging feeders (e.g. blue tit and the great spotted woodpecker), whilst others like to feed off the ground (e.g. robins and dunnocks).
- Make sure there is fresh water available all year round. This is for drinking and washing



feathers! Never give birds milk as they cannot digest it.

- Regularly clean the bird table. Mould can cause respiratory infections, stale food provides a breeding ground for salmonella bacteria and food scattered on the ground may attract unwanted rodents.

ADDITIONAL SEASONAL TIPS - SPRING, SUMMER AND AUTUMN

- The 'Feeding Gap' is a period of time, usually in spring, when natural food supplies are depleted following the winter. It is also a hectic time for the bird population who are busy feeding to satisfy the demands of their young. Supplementing their feed at this time can be particularly helpful.
- During summer, the ground begins to get hard and popular bird food, such as earthworms,

go deeper underground. It is useful to provide supplementary food high in protein.

- Extra food also helps birds prepare for their autumn moult – when they renew their feathers – and for the upcoming winter. In summary, whatever the season, you can be sure that birds will appreciate a little extra help. All your customers, whether they are surrounded by fields or have a small outside space, can get involved. Feeding the birds gives people a wonderful sense of companionship – particularly special for those unable to care for a larger pet. It can also teach children about wildlife and caring for their environment.

Pfma.org.uk has everything a retailer should need to educate customers on feeding birds and the website has links to all member manufacturers' websites with additional educational material. 🐾



Feeding wild birds is fun and rewarding. But this is not only limited to cold winter months as natural shortages of food can happen any time of the year. By providing the right food and clean fresh water all year round you