

## Birds for Natural Insect Control

During the winter months non-migrating birds that are insect feeders during the growing season switch their diets to seeds and suet. Bird metabolism is very high, so during the winter if birds cannot find a constant source of food they often perish. Providing a daily source of seeds and suet can ensure that the birds survive the winter months, and provide natural insect control during the spring and summer months,

Squirrels, raccoons, and opossums are often attracted to bird feeders. During the day if it were not the squirrels tearing the feeder apart, raccoons and opossums would destroy it at night. So, the problem is how to keep such animals from getting to the feeders. One method is to attach the bird feeders to an upright 4.5-inch (outside diameter) or larger PVC pipe. It is very simple to drill holes near the top end of the pipe (holes should be no closer than 2 inches from the pipe end so a PVC plug can be inserted into the pipe end) and then use screws and nuts to attach shelf brackets (horizontal length 12 inches) on which to hang the feeders. The bottom of any feeder should be at least 6 ft from the ground. The pipe comes in 10 ft. lengths, so it is best to saw off about 1 ft. from the bottom. Use a sledgehammer and drive a 6 ft. long steel fence post into the ground (be sure to use a level) until secure and then on a stepladder place the PVC pipe over the fence post, which serves as a support. If a larger diameter pipe is used, you might have to use two steel posts and larger diameter plug. The animals cannot get their claws into the pipe and the pipe diameter is large enough that they cannot wrap their legs around the pipe to climb it. Since using this method, I have had no problems with animals destroying my bird feeders. Of course, the feeders need to be far enough away from trees or buildings so that animals cannot jump onto the feeders.

To give the PVC pipe and shelf brackets a more professional look, I would suggest that you paint them with white latex paint. I made the mistake of painting the pole brown, but soon afterwards the animals scratched off all the paint from the bottom of the pole. If you use white paint there will not be much contrast.

It is extremely important to close the top end of the pipe so no bird can enter it. I was greatly saddened to find a screech owl skeleton inside the bottom end of one of my first PVC feeders, which did not have the top sealed. A 3.5 inch PVC plug or larger can be purchased that fits into the top end or use some hardware cloth to completely seal the top end.

By feeding birds in the winter months and providing birdhouses in the spring, they will repay you in kind by eating enormous numbers of insects during the growing season ensuring your property with natural insect control.

James E. Appleby Ph.D., Entomologist  
University of Illinois, Illinois Natural History Survey  
WILL TV, 300 N. Goodwin Ave., Urbana, IL 61801  
[jappleby@illinois.edu](mailto:jappleby@illinois.edu)