



howard county
BIRD CLUB
50th ANNIVERSARY • 1972 – 2022

MEMBERS' MEMORIES

Rosamond Munro

There are a number of ways by which birds can be persuaded to take food from one's hands. If a "scarecrow's" hand is loaded with food, birds eventually will come in to feed from it. The fake is then replaced by a real person in similar or identical clothing. I have had no experience with such sneaky enticements, but I have had birds feed from my hands.

When feeders are kept well stocked on a regular basis, birds learn where and when food is due to appear. Some years ago I devised feeders at two windows which I could fill from an adjacent center window without going outdoors. One snowy day when feeders were empty, I held my sunflower seed-filled hands out of the center window.

Generations of Carolina Chickadees and Tufted Titmice have been neighbors during the years I have lived in Howard County so it was no surprise when these species began to flutter close. Within two or three minutes the first seed was snatched. Soon the birds were alighting on my fingers. After a few days, I moved the program outside to the same feeder area. Because it was familiar to them, there was little delay before they again began to feed, first snatching, then alighting. Later they perched on my hands for some seconds, hopping from finger to finger with delicate tickly toes watching me closely with bright eyes.

Chickadees and titmice were the only local species I ever succeeded in coaxing to me. A female cardinal came close, but I could not overcome her timidity.

One year, however, a flock of Evening Grosbeaks descended upon full feeders. Before they had a chance to take more than a seed or two, I opened the center window and held out sunflower seeds. They took them immediately, appearing not to mind my being there.

My advice to those of you wanting to lure birds to hand is to let them become used to you. Offer their favorite food, be very quiet, be patient—and persevere.

One January several years ago, I counted 34 Cedar Waxwings and 20 American Robins in a large persimmon tree in our yard. At that time of year persimmon fruit is black and withered; inside, however, it is still golden and moist. The birds were sampling the fruit without any squabbling between individuals or species. Waxwings are sociable birds and often have been observed to pass fruit along from one bird to another. I have watched them do this and have also seen them transfer black locust blossoms.

On this January day I was amazed and amused to see one of the waxwings pick a morsel of fruit and attempt to pass it to its neighbor, a robin. The robin ignored the tidbit which fell between them to the ground the attempt of the waxwing to offer a treasure to a bird of another species is something I had never seen or heard reported.

After 40 minutes in the persimmon tree the combined flock left. Three of the waxwings flew directly to the top of a nearby sycamore tree. The time was 3:35 p.m.; the temperature was about 30°F and falling with a cold wind blowing. From 45 feet below the birds resembled the sycamore seed balls around them. On one side of the tree two birds sat close together, but not touching; the third bird was about two feet away. Tucked away between two sycamore balls the third bird seemed to be wearing them like the waterwings used by non-swimmers years ago.

Curious to know how long they would stay, I checked the birds from time to time. Duck arrived, they remained. After dark a full moon rose behind them; the temperature dropped to 20 ° F. I checked the birds in the beam of a flashlight at 11:00 p.m. and again at 2:00 a.m.

It was another member of the family, however, who saw the waxwings take flight at 7:35 a.m. they had perched in the same place for exactly 16 hours.