

Be Wild Aware! Fall to Winter Transition

December is a good month to begin feeding the birds!

Mass Audubon recommendations: Nuthatches, finches, and jays universally prefer black oil sunflower seed. Hulled sunflower is favored by chickadees, finches and juncos, birds that cannot open sunflower seeds. Birds that come to hanging feeders are usually looking for sunflower seed and will often push other seeds to the ground. White proso millet, which is a small, round, yellowish grass seed (found in most birdseed mixes) is preferred by ground-feeding birds, especially doves, sparrows, juncos, towhees, and cardinals. Seeds that are not generally well accepted by birds are milo, wheat, red millet, and hemp which are used as filler in less expensive bird seed mixes. The seed content, printed on the packaging, can help guide your purchases. Although it is expensive, Niger Seed (commonly referred to but mistakenly called thistle) will draw finches such as siskins, goldfinches, and house finches, wild turkeys and mourning doves when spread on the ground. Niger seed feeders with specially designed smaller holes need frequent tending to keep them clean and dry because the seed spoils easily when moist. Beef suet is the top choice of wintering birds such as woodpeckers, chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, and creepers. Suet cages hold chunks of raw suet. You can make your own suet cakes by slowly melting the suet into a liquid, then mix with ingredients such as peanut butter, peanut pieces, hulled sunflower seeds and cornmeal. Fruit eating birds include Orioles, house finches, woodpeckers, starlings, mockingbirds, catbirds, wintering thrashers and hermit thrush. Apples and oranges, halved and stuck onto branches or on spiked fruit feeders appeal to Orioles and sometimes woodpeckers, house finches and starlings. Soak raisins and currants to plump them before putting out on platform feeders. For more information about bird seed feeding, search Mass Audubon Bird Seed Basics or type in: <http://www.massaudubon.org/about-us/services-products/audubon-shop/buyer-s-guides/bird-seed-basics>.

At the Mass Audubon Drumlin Farm Wildlife Sanctuary in Lincoln, the on site shop is a good source for quality bird seed, a variety of feeders and nature guidebooks. While you're there you may wish to visit the barns and walk the trails. Take a nature class at Drumlin Farm to learn about birds and animals! You can shop locally in Acton at any of Acton's grain, hardware or pet businesses for feeders and high quality bird feeding products.

Christmas Bird Count-Be a Citizen Scientist!

Acton's bird counting circle, based in Concord, is open for registration! The count date is Sunday, January 3, 2016. For details, search: Christmas Bird Count or type:<http://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>.

Explore Acton's Conservation Lands

With deciduous tree leaves down, the terrain contours and features of the lands such as stone walls are visible, less obscured by ferns and small leafy plants than during the summer months. Do the "I Hiked Acton's Trails" challenge! Walk all of Acton's Conservation Lands on the list, and earn a sticker and a patch! Download the form from the town website: <http://www.acton-ma.gov/documentcenter/view/2666>. Winter walks in the woods, especially after a snowfall are fascinatingly different from summer walks! If you already have a favorite Acton Conservation Land to walk, by returning often to the same forests and wetlands, you get to observe and appreciate seasonal changes. For those who are just beginning to explore the trails, maps are available at the conservation land kiosks; or visit www.actontrails.org to print your own map, or download to your smartphone.

Facebook and Instagram

Check out our Acton WildAware Facebook page for wildlife photos and links that will inspire you to get outside for some unstructured time in nature. Bring your smartphone with you to capture late fall beauty in the forests, meadows and wetlands. Share your photos to Instagram or Facebook! Tell your friends and help us reach 100 Likes!

Wildlife Crossings

Later sunrises and earlier sunsets at rush hour can result in glare on windshields. Please drive carefully over roadway wildlife crossings.

Help Preserve Acton Open Space for Wildlife

Please support Acton Conservation Trust. Visit their Facebook page to learn more about their conservation work and special events!

Wear a WildAware button! Pledge to be Wild Aware! Get your **FREE** button at Acton Town Hall (472 Main Street). Tell your friends or a newcomer about local wildlife and WildAware!

Paula Goodwin is a member of the Acton Conservation Commission who introduced WildAware with Acton Natural Resource Assistant Bettina Abe. WildAware is a program sponsored by the Town of Acton Natural Resources Department that began in September and will continue through the summer of 2016. The purpose of WildAware is to educate the community about the existence and habits of wild creatures, and the goal is increased community awareness of shared habitats. For information, call 978-929-6634 or send email to nr@acton-ma.gov.
