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## February is National Bird-Feeding Month

Plants and insects, which are the food sources of many birds, enter a state of dormancy, or inactivity, as temperatures drop and will remain in this state throughout the cold winter months reducing food resources for many birds. To ensure that there is enough food to survive winter many species will migrate traveling in search of a location with milder temperatures and a more plentiful food sources. Not all birds will fly long distances to ensure food availability. Some birds will only travel if it gets cold enough to trigger their migration instinct while others will migrate from northern areas of the United States and Canada to our comparatively warmer conditions in the Midwest. The birds that we find all year long in the United States are called resident birds.

Due to the reduced food resources during winter, resident birds still have to work hard to find enough food to survive. In 1994 Congressman John Porter, from Illinois, recognized the survival challenges resident birds faced and proposed a resolution proclaiming February as National Bird-Feeding Month. Congressman Porter's statement encouraged individuals to provide food, water, and shelter for wild birds. By providing one or more of these resources, it can make survival for resident birds easier in the harsh winter month of February.

In his speech, Congressman Porter also brought attention to the educational benefits of bird feeding for both children and adults. Inquisitive individuals watching feeders in their backyard will learn about the feeding and living habits of the different birds visiting the feeders. From this simple activity of watching a bird feeder people typically become inspired to attract new bird species to their yard through offering different feeders, food options, location of resources, and sheltering spots. By providing needed resources for survival, it not only benefits wildlife but inspires exploration, learning, and a deeper connection to nature.

Where you live and the exact environmental conditions of that year determine what resident birds you might attract to your backyard. Here in Garden City, you are guaranteed to have doves visiting your feeder which is a great opportunity to learn about the native doves of Kansas and invasive doves that were brought here and compete with our local species for resources. Other resident birds that you could attract include members of the finch, crow, sparrow, chickadee, and grosbeak families. What family of birds you are looking to entice to your yard will determine the type of feeder you will want to provide.

There are a wide variety of feeders to select from, but each will attract different birds by their position or the food they hold. Tray, or platform, feeders can be mounted on a post or down near the ground to attract seed-eating birds, like doves or sparrows. These birds prefer to feed on a flat surface. But this type of

feeder will also make food accessible to other local wildlife like squirrels and chipmunks. A house feeder, which has a roof to cover the food, can hold a few days' worth of seed but can be harder to clean. It's also not always easy to see if the seeds become wet and start to mold so this type requires a little more maintenance than a platform feeder. Suet feeders offer a high energy food to attract insect eating birds including woodpeckers and chickadees. You can purchase a suet feeder or buy the suet and then press it into the cracks of bark on a tree in your yard and let the birds feed from a more natural perch. You don't have to select just one type of feeder for your yard. You can always try different combinations of feeders and see how many different species of resident birds you can spot in your yard.

If you are interested in participating in National Bird-Feeding Month, it's really easy to become involved. Select a simple feeder to start with that works with your daily routine and that you can easily maintain. If you choose to, you can always invest in species-specific feeders and food to attract certain resident birds to your yard. If you already have a feeder and you want to do more, consider adding a water source or shelter, either in the form of an appropriate nest box for the birds you're trying to attract or by planting more shrubs to provide natural cover. Selecting additional wildlife resources to add to your yard is another great way to help out resident birds during National Bird-Feeding Month. No matter how you choose to become involved, I always recommend doing a little research first so you know how to provide the greatest help for our native wildlife with any resource you are providing for them.

Remember, participating in National Bird-Feeding Month is a great way to get your kids or grandkids involved with nature. Consider having your children help create feeders for your yard or if you already have bird feeders give your kids the responsibility of keeping the feeders full. A fun and inexpensive feeder your kids can create uses an empty toilet paper tube rolled in peanut butter and seeds which can be hung in your yard and from which the birds can feed from. No matter your knowledge of wildlife National Bird-Feeding Month is a great time of year to learn more and become involved with helping our resident birds.