

GARDEN BIRDS

A great place to start photographing birds is in your own back garden. In this fact sheet we will show you the key techniques to help get you started.



Basic Fieldcraft

Gardens provide an essential refuge for birds, many of whom may spend their entire lives in and around your garden. Providing food to supplement their natural diet of worms, berries and seeds, not only helps to support their populations during the harsher weather, but provides some fascinating opportunities for creative photography. Although most birds take a variety of food, offering specific types of food can help you target particular species - see the 'Bird Menu' panel for ideas..



Setting the Stage for Photography

Typically garden bird photography is done using the 'bait and perch' technique. You provide the appropriate bait and set up a photogenic perch for the birds to use en-route to the food. Before deciding where to place the 'bait and perch' consider the lighting at the time of day you intend to photograph, the cover available for you and your camera (shed, porch, open window etc.) and the background. Set up a **small** feeding area, such as the peanut feeder shown in the image and attach an attractive perch leading down from it secured at one end to the feeder and at the other to a post stuck in the ground. Make sure the feeder and perch are far enough away from trees and other possible perching sites so the birds are forced to use your perch to get at the food. The target area for photography is shown outlined in the red square. You can obtain a smooth muted background by making sure the perch is as far away as possible from the background. Be as creative as you like with the perches - holly branches, frosted twigs, garden tools and the like can make a real difference to your images.



Changing your shot position

Small changes in camera position can make a huge difference to your images. In the example above a lower camera angle allowed the blue tit to be shot against out of focus green foliage rather than the high key snow covered ground, resulting in a much more pleasing image. Alternatively approaching birds can be shot in natural foliage surrounding the perch to give a completely different look and feel as shown in the image of the crested tit on the left.

Additional resources

Photographing Wild Birds by Chris Gomersall, David & Charles 2005, ISBN 0715321447
Go Wild with your Camera DVD - Birds section Disc 2

BIRD MENU IDEAS

- **Peanuts** - tits, starling, sparrows & greenfinch
- **Sunflower seeds** - greenfinches
- **Mealworms** - robins, wrens & thrushes
- **Niger Seeds** - goldfinches
- **Fat cake** - tits, blackcap
- **Mixed seed** - collared dove



TECH TALK

- **Choose a lens in the 100 - 400mm range**
- **Shutter speeds around 1/250sec will freeze head movement in small birds**
- **Keep aperture wide open around f4 or f5.6**

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info@gowildtv.com
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