

FEEDER STATION

Makeshift trees help photographer get natural shots of woodpeckers in his backyard

by Kevin Wright

As an avid photographer and backyard bird feeder, I have often pondered the difficulties of photographing one of my favorite backyard birds - the woodpecker. When a family member told me that an extremely large tree limb had fallen to the ground, I devised a way to get great shots of woodpeckers in my backyard. After at first wondering how I was going to get rid of this huge, cumbersome limb, I decided instead to plant it in my backyard. I could actually get three nice limbs from this tree.

I soon had the limbs home and strategically placed throughout the yard. These "trees" were placed in the ground much like you would place a bird feeder. I basically dug a hole and "planted" the trees.

For the best photos, I decided the trees had to be set up so that the birds would feed off of them yet at the same time the setting would need to be as natural looking as possible. So, I drilled holes into the sides of the trees, then stuffed each with a small piece of beef suet. Then I could get some natural looking shots. As long as I positioned myself in front of the tree so the holes could not be seen, everything appeared in its natural state. What a great way to feed and photograph birds. Your backyard habitat is also a great photography studio. Use it to its fullest.

—Wright

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Wood Thrush Feeds Nesting Material to Fledgling

Wood Thrushes (*Hylocichla mustelina*) breed in deciduous and mixed deciduous-coniferous forests throughout Illinois. The morning of 26 June 1993, I found a nearly completed Wood Thrush nest after I had tracked a singing and calling male for about 15 minutes. The nest was approximately 1.5 m high in a 2.4 m sapling on a study site of mixed coniferous and deciduous forest 3 km north of the Mississippi Palisades State Park, Carroll County, Illinois.

After standing at the nest for about 1 minute, I noticed two Wood Thrush fledglings calling from a 6 m high branch about 10 m away. An adult, presumably a female because the male was still singing, began churring nearby. She then landed on the same branch as the fledglings with

her bill full of straw and dead leaves. I thought this was nesting material. But immediately after she saw me standing at the nest, she stuffed the closest begging fledgling's mouth with straw and dead leaves, and flew away.

The fledgling first tried to swallow the material, but soon began choking up pieces of straw and dead leaves. The nest contained eggs when checked two weeks later. A literature search found no published observations of this behavior in any bird species.

—Robb T. Brumfield

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