

water they lose when it's really hot and dry. Even though right now they probably want to go sit in the shade during the heat of the day and do nothing (sounds like a plan for a hot day), they can't. Food has to be found and nestlings have to be fed. More searching, more flying generates more heat, requiring increased water intake for enhanced evaporative cooling. They also readily choose to bathe, as another method for lowering their body temperature.

When it's hot and dry, that bird-bath you keep filled, that dripper splashing on a rock in the shade, or the mister spraying droplets onto a leafy branch, is not just an issue of comfort, it's a matter of survival, for both the parents and their offspring. Healthy, well-hydrated adult birds are much better able to function and find food to bring to the nest. Virtually all species nesting in or near our back yards produce altricial young, born without feathers. The nestlings have essentially no ability to thermoregulate until they're a week or more old. The only moisture they receive is via

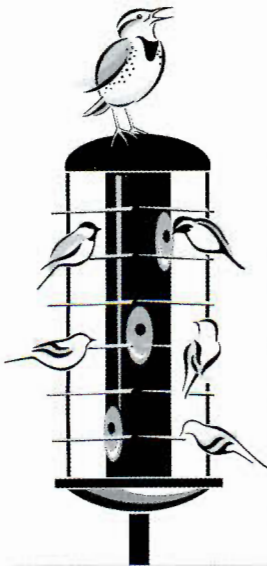
the prey insects stuffed into their mouth. They depend on their parents to keep them warm, or to keep them cool by shading them from the hot sun using the parent's body as the shade. Once they've fledged, they too must quickly learn to find and use water for drinking and bathing.

Just recently, Karen and I were onlookers to just how the adults teach that behavior, and how quickly the youngsters learn. We fill a small cup with water, and suspend our hummingbird feeder from a hook attached to the bottom of the cup. That's to prevent the ants from climbing the feeder pole and gaining direct access to the nectar feeder. Our resident adult Black-capped Chickadee learned several years ago to use that little red cup as its private drinking water stash. Several days ago we watched as begging youngsters followed the adults around. One of the adults flew to the cup and took a drink, with a fledgling close behind. You could almost see the young chickadee thinking, "What's this? Then he took a drink and flew off.

So here's to hot birds, both the kind we chase and the kind we provide a water drip or a birdbath or a mister, to help them cope and survive the summer heat stress right in our own back yard. As global warming increases, our local climate is predicted to get hotter and drier. Yard birders like us will perhaps become increasingly important as providers of small oases for the increasingly stressed bird community that uses our yards.

Should you wish to learn more about thermoregulation in birds, how their metabolisms work, and the behaviors birds use to regulate their body temperature in times of extreme heat and cold, here are three Web sites which provide a lot of information, at various levels of detail:

- [www.ornithology.com/lectures/Metabolism.html](http://www.ornithology.com/lectures/Metabolism.html)
- [www.stanford.edu/group/stanfordbirds/text/essays/Temperature\\_Regulation.html](http://www.stanford.edu/group/stanfordbirds/text/essays/Temperature_Regulation.html)
- <http://people.eku.edu/ritchison/birdmetabolism.html>



*Artwork by Jenny Vogt.*

## Yard Birds

I'd welcome your feedback on this column, as it may become a regular feature in the Meadowlark. I'd especially like your yard and feeder bird stories and observations, which we can build into future columns. The editor and I both hope we can make this column a place where IOS members who enjoy backyard birding can share their experiences. Send me your observations, interesting visitors and the like. That's why the column subtitle is: Reflections on backyard birding throughout Illinois.

You can reach me at: [bfisher928@aol.com](mailto:bfisher928@aol.com) or by phone at 630-985-2956. Tell me your story and I'll write it down. I look forward to hearing from you.