

## Putting up a feeder leads to lifetime of birding

by Lynne Carpenter

It started 26 years ago when a neighbor dropped by and noticed our very first, lonely bird feeder on our deck. I lamented that all I ever got to come to the feeder was sparrows, whereupon she said, "I don't think that's a sparrow. Look, it's black and white, not brown." I agreed that, indeed, it might be a new variety and went to the library to check it out. I found a bird identification book that had colored pictures of all the North American birds, and by diligent research I discovered that the black and white sparrow was actually something called a Black-capped Chickadee.

With that revelation, I decided to make a list of all the birds I saw in my backyard. I used the best watercolor paper I could find and hung a long, narrow piece of it next to the kitchen window with a large heading at the top, "Birds We Have Seen: Summer of '70." That first summer I saw 13 species of birds. I thought I was terribly clever to have noticed them sneaking about. No matter that my new field guide said they were common in this area. In my backyard, they were furtive.

Imagine the amazement on the faces of the officials of the local bird club when I proudly announced the next winter I alone had seen 20 species of birds outside my kitchen window. I thought I was doing them a great favor by bringing such an observant new member into their ranks. Little did I know that these same officials had just helped identify 85 species of birds on one cold December day in one 15-mile diameter

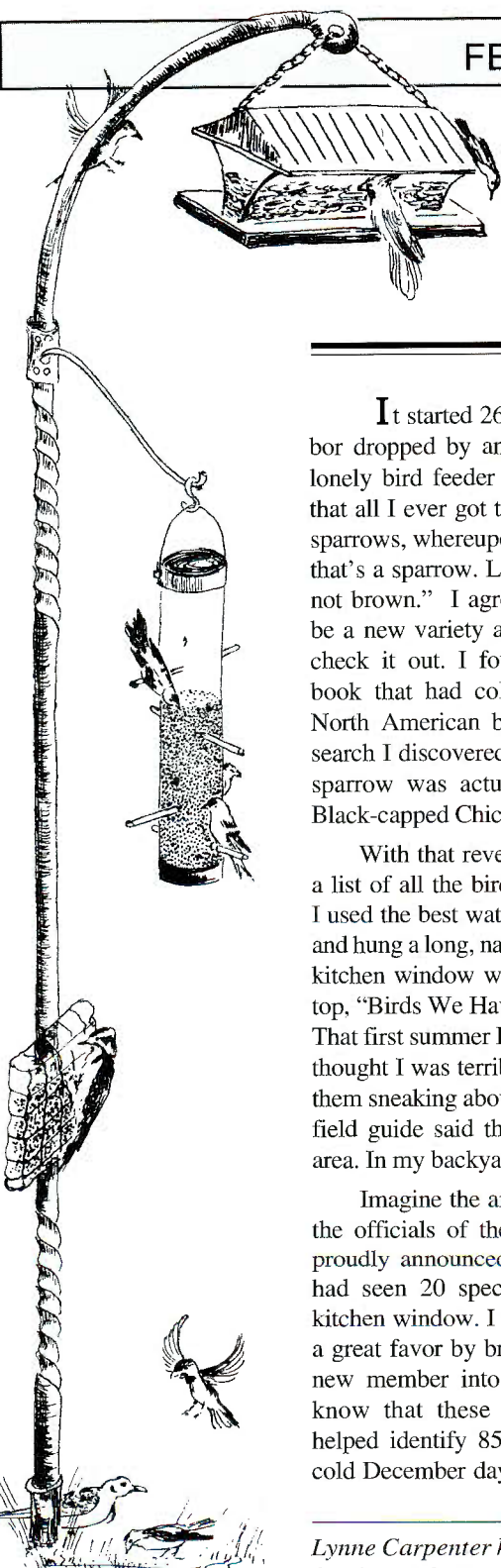
circle centered at the Chicago Botanic Garden for the annual Christmas Bird Count. Nor did I have the faintest idea that more than 300 kinds of birds have been seen in the Chicago area - or that I needed binoculars to see them.

I protested that my feeder was 10 feet from my house and that I could see what visited it very well. I couldn't believe there would be little birds in the tops of the trees in May and that I would need binoculars to see them, but I did borrow a pair from a friend. By kneeling at a second floor window, I identified nine species of warblers and two species of vireos in a few days. I bought a pair of binoculars for \$24.95 and by the end of the summer had identified 50 species in my yard.

By joining the Evanston North Shore Bird Club, I soon became friends with expert birders willing to take me to good bird spots past my backyard and call me if a rare bird was in the area. Since then I've peered at prairies, scoped the marshes, slogged through sloughs, mucked about in mudflats, shivered in blinds, defied the dumps and settling ponds, canoed the rivers and lagoons, and sailed Lake Michigan in November - all in the quest of birds. I've put up with sandflies, mosquitoes, and ticks. Anyone can do it. You just put up a bird feeder and . . .

—Lynne Carpenter  
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*Lynne Carpenter kept her backyard list until she moved in 1986; she had 95 species total for the yard. From her humble beginnings as a backyard bird feeder, she has gone on to be publicity chairman and president of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club, as well as Christmas Bird Count compiler, and a well-known bird leader in the Chicagoland area.*



Feeder station drawing by Denis Kania.