

Seven Falls Ranch Birding Activities for 2010

General Information:

Feeders:

Droll Yankees Bird Feeders (20 inch Model B-7F)

At HEB – Best - Hummingbird feeders made in Poteet Texas

Perky-Pet Hummingbird feeders

Thistle Sack Finch feeder

Seed:

A new metal trash can with a tight fitting lid is best for storing bird seed. The trash can needs to be stored in a dry garage. This method prevents rodents. When filling up a feeder from the seed bag, be careful to cleanup any spilt seeds.

The most common type of seed offered at feeders in North America is black-oil sunflower seed. This small sunflower seed is high in energy, has a high percentage of meat and is a very nutritious source of high quality protein. It has thin shells, making it the preferred food item for a wide variety of birds. Black-oil sunflower is among the favorite feeder foods of cardinals, chickadees, titmice, house finches, goldfinches, pine siskins, and sparrows. Scrub Jay and woodpeckers even consume these seeds at feeders on occasion.

Striped sunflower seeds are larger and thicker-shelled than black-oil sunflower. Frequently found in seed mixes, striped sunflower is a food item for large-billed birds capable of cracking the shells.

Often called "thistle" seed, nyjer (niger) is not related to North American thistle plants. This imported seed attracts Lesser Goldfinches and other finches. This very small seed needs a special thistle sack. Finches can easily cling to the sack and pluck seeds from the specially designed opening in the sack fabric. The seed is sterile.

A small, round grain, millet is commonly found in seed mixes. Millet is a favored food of many smaller, ground foraging birds. A handful of millet sprinkled on the ground will keep your juncos and sparrows happy. However, house finches will spill enough seed from your feeder to keep the ground birds happy also.

Feeding Hummingbirds:

The best commercial hummingbird feeders are sturdy, easy to clean and hang, and with a minimum number of parts that can get lost or broken. Glass is long-lasting and can be sterilized easily, but it is heavier and can shatter when dropped. Buy a bottle brush that will fit inside the neck of the bottle and an old tooth brush for cleaning. Only fill a one quart size feeder half full. Change every two to three days. Add more sugar water and

feeders when you start to have more hummingbirds. Sugar water is 4 parts water to one part sugar. Do not use red dye. You can make up the sugar water ahead of time and put it in the refrigerator, it will keep for a week. Tap or well water is preferred. Do not use distilled water as it takes out too many naturally occurring minerals. Water softeners are to be avoided. They add too many minerals and salts to the water.

Water:

Birdbaths sold in garden shops make a nice lawn ornament but many are often too deep. Look for a saucer-type birdbath. You can use anything that is shallow. Put a bath at ground level. Birdbaths are generally two or three feet of the ground.

Keep the water level at 1/2 to 1 inch deep at the edges, sloping to a maximum of 2 inches deep in the middle of the bath.

If the bath is on the ground, arrange a few branches or stones in the water so that birds can stand on them and drink without getting wet (this is particularly important in winter).

Place your birdbath in the shade, under a tree. The shade keeps the water from evaporating quickly and keeps it fresher. Birds wet from bathing don't fly well, so they're more vulnerable to predators. Shrubbery nearby gives them a safe place to hide while they preen and dry off.

One of the best ways to make your birdbath even more attractive is to provide dripping water. Many birds find the sight and sound of moving water irresistible. You can buy a commercial dripper or sprayer. Or make your own by recycling an old bucket or plastic container by punching a tiny hole in the bottom, filling it with water, and hanging it above the birdbath so the water drips out.

Purchase a small scrubbing brush to clean out the birdbath basin. Use a little bleach water and let set for 30 minutes then flush out good and fill with clean water.

In the hot summer, place a water sprinkler under a tree where the water will spray into the lower limbs for an hour and wait and watch. The birds will flock to the area to take a bath and preen in the tree limbs.

Books:

Birds of North America, Revised and Updated: A Guide To Field Identification (Golden Field Guide from St. Martin's Press) (Paperback)
by Chandler S. Robbins (Author), Bertel Bruun (Author), Herbert S. Zim (Author), Arthur Singer (Illustrator).

“Birds of the Texas Hill Country,” Mark W. Lockwood, 2001, University of Texas Press.

The Sibley Guide to Birds by David Allen Sibley

A note on how to use these books. First carry the golden field guide with you and flip through its pages when trying to ID a bird. After a couple of years you may have to buy another book.

Sibley Guide to Bird is heavy and is better use in the house for a better look a bird and its' marking.

Mark Lockwood's book is an excellent book. It will give you when birds will be in the hill country and their habit. The front chapter also talks about the hill county in general. You will learn more from this book than from the identification guides.

Website: WWW. Whatbird.com This is an online web site for information about individual birds. The site includes bird sounds.

Binocular: Birding binoculars have superior optics and can be expensive. The best binoculars will disappear from your awareness while you're using them, so that your attention is on the bird, not the binoculars. The mark of good binoculars is that they make you feel as if you are simply seeing through your own eyes, only closer. You can look through good optics all day long with no sense of strain.

Jack and Kay use Swift Audubon 8.5x44 wide field birding binocular.

How to Start:

Look up the weather and when the sun will rise. About 15 minutes earlier take your coffee, bird book and binoculars out on your porch, and sit and listen. You will hear the birds first then they will start to hit your feeders. Hummingbirds will be the first to their feeders.

Common seed eating birds will be American Goldfinches in their winter coat; if they stay long enough in the spring that will turn bright yellow. Carolina Chickadees and Black-capped Titmice will general come in to the feeder together and in a group. House Finches (red) will try to sit on the feeder all day spilling seeds to the ground. Northern Cardinals, both males and females, have a black mask and large orange bill. Pyrrhuloxia has a yellow bill and is rare. An important ground bird is a Rufous-crowned Sparrow. Also on the ground and something on the feeder will be Bewick's wrens and also look for Carolina wrens. Other non-seed eating birds will also come in to the trees around your feeder. Birds flock together. Large birds will be the Mockingbird and Scrub Jay. Flickers and other woodpeckers will sometimes also come in to the feeders. Later in the summer you may get a Painted Bunting or a Summer Tanager.

These are just a few of the birds you will see. As you move away from the feeders you will see more flycatchers, barn swallows, bluebirds and lark sparrows. The summer will bring scissor-tail flycatcher and yellow billed cuckoos.

And we have not even started with hawks, caracara, sand hill cranes and black-bellied whistling ducks. There are lots of birds at Seven Falls Ranch and the surrounding ponds.

October 9, 2010 birding report for Seven Falls Ranch

First the weather this year has been great. Cool mornings and rain of an inch or two every two weeks. Seven Falls Ranch grasses are tall and green. August was hot but not hotter than usual. There was no rain in August but by Sept 6 Seven Falls received a 6 inch rain. Deer are abundant. Every doe seems to have two spotted fawns and several bucks in velvet with large racks have been seen.

Current birds that have been observed are:

Yellow-billed cuckoos
Blue Grosbeaks
Summer Tanagers
Lesser goldfinches
Great Crested Flycatchers
Eastern Blue birds
Rio Grande Turkeys
Lark sparrows
Painted Buntings
Rufous-crowned sparrows

And if you can get lucky; a Golden-cheeked Warbler was first sighted on lot 37 at Seven Falls Ranch, Sunday August 8, 2010. Jack had a good look at him then he was off. The Huffman rule is both Jack and Kay had to observe a bird before it is counted. By the time Jack got Kay the GCW was gone so Jack only has half a bird.

This bird is easy to identify. It is five inches with a black and white body. The golden cheeks are bright yellow and cover the face.

http://i.identify.whatbird.com/obj/301/_/Golden-cheeked_Warbler.aspx

The following is about the GCW:

The Golden-cheeked Warbler is considered of the highest overall priority in the hill country. "Birds of the Texas Hill County," Mark W. Lockwood. The GCW is a federally endangered species. The golden-cheeked warbler is a migratory songbird that nests in Central Texas and builds nests of older juniper or cedar bark then binds them with collected spider webs. They winter in Central America. GCWs feed almost entirely on insects and arachnids such as caterpillars, green lacewings, cicadas, katydids, walking sticks, flies, adult moths, small butterflies and spiders. The males arrive in central Texas around March 1 and begin to establish breeding territories, which they defend against other males by singing from visible perches within their territories. The females arrive a

few days later but are more difficult to detect in the dense woodland habitat. Usually three or four eggs are laid. The average nest height is 15 feet above the ground, ranging from 5 to 32 feet. Eggs are generally incubated in April and, unless there is a second nesting attempt, nestlings fledge in May to early June. By early August, GCWs begin their migration south.

Nesting birds this year at the bird boxes that have been seen on Seven Falls Ranch include great crested fly catchers, eastern phoebes, eastern bluebirds, barn swallows, Bewick's wrens and Carolina wrens. There were a large numbers of juvenile birds of all types with mixed colors at the feeders. These include black crested titmices, Carolina chickadees, cardinals, and house finches. Mockingbirds and cedar waxwings have been observed at the pokeberry plant. This is a poisonous plant to mammals. However, the berries are eaten by birds, which are not affected by the toxin because the small seeds with very hard outer shells remain intact in the digestive system and are eliminated whole.

Lot 37 did have a new nesting of Blue Grosbeaks with four young. The nest was in the Texas mountain laurel beside the front porch. The mother grosbeak would fly up with a caterpillar and fuss until everyone left the porch before diving in to the mountain laurel to feed her young.

The black-chinned hummingbirds were gone by September. The highest count of black-chinned hummingbird seen at one time on Lot 37 this year was 30. The hummingbirds change over to ruby-throated from black-chinned in September. Lot 37 still has two ruby-throated hummingbirds hanging around. With the October bloom of the Salvia and Turks cap the hummingbird are not going to the feeders. Ever one should be on the lookout in October for the rufous hummingbird orange throat. Seven Falls always sees these late arrivals. Generally they will stay around for a few days.

October is butterfly month at Seven Falls. With the blooming fall forage comes an assortment of butterflies. One is the Tiger swallowtail. This is a large butterfly that can be seen on the Turks cap plant. Smaller butterflies as well as bees love the blue flowers of the rosemary plants. Queens will be on the blue mist plants. The white mist flower blooms in October and the fragrant white flowers attract a variety of butterflies. This is a favorite plant for viewing butterflies up close.

October is also the Texas fall watch for Monarch butterflies migration. The peak time for Seven Falls should be around October 12 through October 18.

Document Name – Bird Count 2010
Seven Falls Ranch Wildlife
Bird Count taken December 29 – 31, 2010

American Kestrel, 4
Northern Cardinal, 4

Black-crested Tufted Titmice, 6
Carolina Chickadee, 2
Yellow-shafted Flicker, 1
Northern Mockingbird, 6
Berwick's Wren, 1
American Goldfinch, 8
Field Sparrow, 6
Eastern Phoebe, 2
Loggerhead Shrike, 1
Ruby crowned Kinglet, 1
Rufous-crowned sparrow, 2
Great Blue Heron, 1
Common Egret, 4
American Widgeon, 15
Killdeer, 2
White-crowned Sparrow, 15
Chipping Sparrow, 12
Mourning Dove, 8
Meadowlarks, 20
Black Vulture, 2
Red-Tail Hawk, 4
Double Crest Cormorant, 21
Sandhill Crane, 16
Western Scrub Jay, 2
Common Crow, 1
Song Sparrow, 10
Green winged Teal, 3
Lesser Goldfinch, 8
Long-billed Dowitcher, 1
Ladder backed woodpecker, 1
Northern Pintail, 15
White winged dove, 11
Northern Shoveler, 8
Canvasback, 1
Carolina Wren, 2
Ring-necked Duck, 15
Eurasian collared Dove, 2
Wild Turkey, 16
Osprey, 1
Great Crested Flycatcher, 1

Texas Hummingbird Round Backyard Survey

Seven Falls Ranch participated in the Texas Parks and Wildlife's "Texas Hummingbird Round Backyard Survey." This is a weekly hummingbird observations survey.

Information about the survey can be found at
http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/learning/texas_nature_trackers/hummingbird_roundup/

General survey results for Seven Falls were as follows:

First Hummingbird of 2010 was a black-chinned on March 14.

Black-chinned hummingbirds were observed from March 14 through August 14.

Largest number observed at one time was 30.

Ruby-throated hummingbirds were observed to have a spring and fall migration.

Spring migration included first bird on April 17 and continued until April 30.

Fall migration started August 21 until October 16.

No Rufous Hummingbirds was observed this year which is generally not the case. They are seen in late October.