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Winged Waifs of Winter...  
By J. E. Guthrie, Zool. and Ent.

Who are they, these soft-clothed folk of the winter fields and woods? Every one of us is interested in them, but how few are acquainted. Why did they stay here where it is cold while other birds—myriads of kinds went south-ing to a kinder climate.

But wait. Kinder? How do we know? Perhaps some of those birds flying south to where the winter bird population is dense, must struggle for a living, too. True, bird food is less plentiful here in snow-time, but if Mother Nature sets a guest list, she also invites fewer guests.

"The little brook...built a root. Neatly which he might house him, winter-proof," and so the kingfisher had to go south where minnows swam free in open waters. Green leaves dried, browned, blew away; and juicy fruits withered. Earthworms hid under the frost-locked soil, insects died or crawled under cover for a winter nap. Surely Nature's menu for the feathered ones is scantly now. Is anything left for a bill to peck at? Go to one of last summer's weed patches and look for seed. Yes, Nature is storing it there for birds or for the spring sowing.

Of course we always keep our own weeds cut, it is those of our postulant, thriftless neighbor that keeps up the daily grind of the gizzard-stones of winter's seed-seekers: the dark-bibbed juncos, the spriggy Canada Thrush, the white coat and little scarlet head of the white-breasted Nuthatch, too, little Quaker Covey's sly back comb. They both find our feeding trays half empty; they digest rapidly and are soon hungry; without fuel for their fires they chill and die.

From Northern Minnesota or Manitoba flock the slate-colored Juncos, and the Tree Sparrows from Arctic regions join them in our gardens as they prospect for any seeds we might have overlooked in out-of-the-way corners. Sometimes they both find our feeding trays when seeds have been billed bird-fare. And insect eaters, what can we offer them? Most of them are happy when suet abounds.

You know them as they appear at your feeding shelf. Down forsakes his tree-drilling to visit us and his black-and-white coat and little scarlet head patch are just like those of his larger cousin, the Hairy Woodpecker. Both their wives luck the scarlet back comb. They don't sing, of course, but their chirp is cheerful and their table manners fascinating. You are almost sure to have the White-breasted Nuthatch, too, little Quaker Covey's sly back comb. With head down or in any other direction he swarms around your 'Christmas bird candle' of suet. And the Black-capped Chickadees come too, happy little aerobats of the twig ends, warm-hearted cheersmirth. Blue Jay comes with a lordly mein, audacity in his middle name. He's a thief and his nerve, no doubt, but what a magnificent Beau Brummel for all that. Perhaps you are favored by the bright red-and-black of the Cardinal accepting your sunflower seeds and dried fruit.

Any platform will do to feed them on. Shelter one or two sides from wind so the seeds won't blow off and the birds won't have to turn their collars up when they eat. And to make the candles, get six-inch squares of half-inch mesh hardware cloth. Roll each into a two-inch cylinder and flatten together one end for the bottom. By turning back a few wire tips the cylinder will retain its shape and the bottom will remain closed. Now fill from the top with fresh suet, then hang it up by a wire passed thru the top, above the shelf. Hang your Christmas candles on trees where you can see them from the windows. On your feeding shelf millet seed and sunflower seed, cracked nuts, prunes and raisins will look inviting. What window can be more attractive to children than the one with bird food outside on shelf or tree?