

BIRD'S BREATH

Brrrrr.... It's really cold outside! So how come you can't see a bird's breath? It's because of a bird's fast breathing (40 times faster than humans). With these quick, short breaths, such a small volume of air is taken in that the vapor in their breath usually is gone before you can see it. However, if it is below zero, the air is still and you are within 6 feet of the bird, it is possible to see small puffs of air coming from birds' beaks.

Winter is a very hard time for the birds. Shorter days mean less time for birds to forage. Tasty insects are off the menu, many seed-bearing plants have been consumed or cleaned up or are covered in snow. Fruits and berries have dwindled and there is little left on deciduous trees and shrubs for shelter. Birds must consume a lot of calories derived from fat in winter to help them maintain the body temperature need for their survival. Birds can lose seven to fifteen percent of their body weight just trying to keep warm on cold winter nights. Larger birds not only store more body fat but have lower metabolic rates and thereby need less food than smaller birds. So how can you help them out? Provide a brush pile of twigs, old natural Christmas trees, etc. in your yard for protection now and for nesting material in the spring. Provide bird feeders and heated bird baths for them. An all time favorite is to gather up some pine cones, spread lard or peanut butter on them and roll them in bird seed (corn meal can also be added) and hang them around your yard and house in a spot that is a good view from your window so you can watch them. However, don't be disappointed if the entire pine cone disappears (squirrels, raccoons, etc. also enjoy them). There are two good sources for more winter bird fun: The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) and Project FeederWatch. For more information visit www.birdsource and www.feederwatch.org.