

FOR THE  
**BIRDS**

**Shirley Devan**

Attracts a Variety of Birds to Her Winter Garden

*by Greg Lilly, Lifestyle Editor*



**G**ray, cold, windy - the days of winter can use a splash of color and life. Shirley Devan draws birds to her yard on these chilly days to watch them, to learn from them, and to be entertained by them. That's a tall order to put on birds in exchange

for some food and water, but they have lots of friends to help and seem happy with the deal. "Really, feeding the birds is more for us," Shirley says. "It makes us feel good, it's entertaining. We like watching the birds and learning their behavior."

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Shirley's interest in birding is relatively recent. "I was not a part of the outdoor world," she explains, "until I was turned on to birding. Now I spend as much time as I can outside. When you're outside learning about birds, you're also learning about the trees the birds live in, the fruit the birds eat, what they build their nests from - the environment, the web of nature that's all connected."

This education started for Shirley when a friend introduced her to bird watching about fifteen years ago. She didn't have a science background, but found the variety of birds and their behaviors fascinating. "Everything I'm learning is brand new," she says. "I hooked up with the Williamsburg Bird Club and the people there are so easy to bird with, they're willing to share and to teach."

Her interest is sparked by the individual birds and what they contribute to the community. "Every bird is beautiful in its own way," Shirley says. "Everyone sees cardinals and blue jays in their yard, but if you stop to look at them through a pair of binoculars, they are absolutely beautiful, their colors are striking. Nature has created a perfect little package for that niche that they serve in the environment, the role they serve in the yard."

According to Shirley, Williamsburg is well situated for viewing a diverse assortment of birds. "Virginia, here in the mid-Atlantic and because of the variety of habitats and topography, is the southern



portion of the migration for the northeast birds," she explains, "and in other cases, the northern edge for the southeastern birds." Our area is part of the Atlantic flyway for migrating birds, so birds that breed in the arctic and Canada migrate through here to their wintering grounds in Florida, Central and South America.

"We also have birds that don't migrate that far," she adds. "Some go shorter distances like from Pennsylvania to South Carolina." Williamsburg's location rewards the birding enthusiast with a variety of

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(See our list of Themes on Page 2.)

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migrating birds.

Even with a large mixture of species in the area, Shirley has some favorites that thrill her to see. "Bald eagles," she states. "We're fortunate that we have a lot of bald eagles in the area. I still get excited when I see one. You can see them along the Colonial Parkway, see them flying over the James River and Jamestown Island. Also York River State Park has quite a few nesting there. Bald eagles are a success story because of the early 1970s' ban on DDT."

When she's out birding and encounters visitors at Jamestown, at Yorktown or on the Colonial Parkway, she will point out a bald eagle if she gets the chance. "The visitors get so excited," she says, "since they usually come from places where bald eagles aren't seen."

Both male and female bald eagles sport the distinctive white head and tail. "The trick is," Shirley explains, "they don't get that

white head and white tail until they're about four years old. A lot of immature bald eagles fly around here, usually accompanied by an adult. They're brown with some motley streaks, the same size and wingspan as the adults, but haven't achieved the coloring"



Other exciting species

for Shirley are the peregrine falcon and the red-tailed and red-shouldered hawks. "The American kestrel is my favorite," she says. "It's a falcon, a smaller version of the peregrine falcon. The American kestrel is an exquisite bird, a beautiful, fierce hunter of insects."

Whether searching for a bald eagle along the Parkway or an American kestrel in the fields along Greensprings Nature Trail, Shirley knows that water and food attract birds, and that is what is needed in a backyard environment. "That's really what brings them to your yard," Shirley says.

"Fresh water is needed," she explains. "Lots of times your birdbath will freeze overnight. It's important to dump out the ice and add fresh water."

Birds love moving water, and moving water won't freeze as easily. Ponds with waterfalls or fountains attract more birds according to Shirley. Also, water should be at different levels in your yard. With a traditional birdbath at shrub level, it's a good idea to supplement that with a shallow dish of water on the ground.

"You'll find different birds go to different sources of water." She adds a warning that some birdbaths are too deep to encourage birds to drink or bathe. If the depth of the birdbath is more than an inch or two, add a flat rock for the birds to perch on.

You can spend as much money as you want on a bird feeder. "The bird doesn't care," Shirley says with a laugh. "If they can get to the feed, they aren't concerned about color or construction." Keep in mind that different birds eat different things. "Most birds will eat sunflower seeds, and woodpeckers will come to a suet feeder," she says. "If you have a suet feeder, along with a couple of feeders with different mixes of bird seed and fresh water, you'll attract a lot of birds."

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# Q&A

## An Interview with Kathy Chambers

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Email Kathy at [info@waarealtor.com](mailto:info@waarealtor.com)

**Kathy, I understand the Home Buyer Tax Bill has been extended beyond first time home buyers. Can you give us an update on what has changed since November 7th?**

### CHAMBERS:

That is correct. The Bill now makes tax credits available to not only first-time home buyers but also current homeowners.

On a national basis, according to economists at the National Association of Realtors, anywhere from 300,000 to 350,000 additional sales of houses will be stimulated this year by the newly extended and expanded home buyer tax credit. This will contribute approximately \$22 billion to the general economy. It has been estimated that on average each home sale generates about \$63,000 in our economy. Therefore, not only will this tax incentive help stabilize the housing market, it will create new jobs

for builders, electricians, painters, movers, landscapers, and a myriad of other housing related workers. The sales of furnishings, appliances,

lawn mowers, landscaping supplies and renovation materials, will boost our local, state and national economy.

Current homeowners purchasing a new or existing home are eligible for up to a \$6,500 credit, provided they have lived in the home they are selling, or have sold, as principal residence for five consecutive years in the past eight years. The expansion of the tax credit to include repeat buyers will help boost the middle-market sales.

First-time home buyers who are eligible can continue to receive a tax credit of up to \$8,000.

The Extended Home Buyer Tax Credit may be applied to primary residences, including: single-family homes, condos, townhomes, and co-ops. In order to qualify for the credit, all contracts must be in effect no later than April 30th, 2010 and close no later than July 1st, 2010. The purchase price of the home can-

not exceed \$800,000.

Income limits for eligible home buyers have been expanded allowing more people to take advantage of the current lower interest rates and invest in their future through homeownership!

Two special provisions in the present tax credit bill assist members of the military, intelligence and foreign services in taking advantage of the homebuyer tax credit. One provision allows personnel who are on active duty and out of the U.S. for 90 days during any part of 2009 to get an additional year (to May 1, 2011) to buy their homes. Another benefit is a limited waiver on the time of occupancy of the home purchased with the tax credit.

If you are a Buyer "sitting on the fence" NOW is the time to purchase a home. If you are a Seller, this affects you as well! If you are waiting to put your house on the market in the spring, you will miss out on months of tax incentives which may help sell your home.

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# Next Door Neighbors Home

your yard, plant natural food.

“There’s a lot of natural food around this year so you don’t see as many birds at the feeders,” Shirley says. “The birds are eating berries from hollies, dogwoods and wax myrtles. They’re eating natural food which is good.” Birds go where the food is. So a yard of natural food from berry and seed-producing trees and shrubs or a well-stocked feeder will create an all-you-can-eat buffet for the bird population.

“The key to birds in the backyard is water and a variety of food,” Shirley advises. “You’ll be surprised at the number of birds that will come.” NDN

## Bird Watching Field Guides

Shirley says there are several informative birding guides available. She recommends: *Peterson Field Guide to Birds of North America* (ISBN 9780618966141) which you can find at your favorite local book store.

## Williamsburg Bird Club

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