Beat the Blues with Backyard Birding

Spring migration is always an exciting time for birders. This year, many of our usual activities have been curtailed. Stay-at-home birding may not have been on our agenda for this Spring, but the slower pace of life now can offer some great opportunities to get to know our backyard birds more deeply. Watching them come into their breeding plumage, find mates and rear young can be quite interesting and calming. Spend some time on close observation, try some experiments, keep birding. Remember - we might not have backyards full of rare birds, but every bird is an interesting bird!

Create a checklist of birds in your backyard.
Many of you probably already do this, but if not, start now. You can compare your yard list with your birding friends. Do you have the same number and kinds of birds? What differences do you notice? What might account for those differences? While you can’t do them officially, you can do a Great Backyard Bird Count or a Big Sit in your own backyard. Perhaps challenge your friends to a Big Sit competition.
gbbc.birdcount.org/
birdwatchersdigest.com/bwsite/connect/bigsit.php

Food preference experiments
This may seem simple, but it’s a great way to get to know your backyard birds - and it couldn’t be simpler. Place small piles of different feeds (sunflower seeds, fruit, peanuts, millet, etc.) on platform feeders or simple pieces of cardboard around your yard. Record which birds prefer which foods. Do some foods create more competition? Do some birds only eat one food type? Do some birds get chased from one food and “settle” for another?

Map the territory of individual birds
This one takes a little more patience - but can turn up some interesting information. For instance, robins tend to have large ranges - sometime encompassing your whole yard, while house sparrows may defend only a few feet. Defining territory can be scientifically tricky; generally speaking, territory is defined by the area that a bird defends by chasing others away - it might be a single tree, a clump of shrubs, or a whole fenced in yard. It’s easier to define once nesting season starts. The link below will take you to a great article about Ohio’s very own Margaret Morse Nice who did incredible “backyard” ornithology research.
u.osu.edu/biomuseum/tag/margaret-morse-nice/

Identify nests and record nesting progression
Spend some time watching the behavior of your backyard birds and try to spot their nesting behaviors. Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s NestWatch program provides a great way to participate in citizen science while you are observing nests.
nestwatch.org/

Investigate bird activity patterns
Try recording bird activity - number of birds, how much they move, how often they feed. Some of these activity patterns you probably already know intuitively as a good birder - sunny days make a difference, birds are more active at certain time of the day, etc. Try collecting data to back up your intuition - you might find something new (or you might prove you are a bird genius!).

Stay Home
Stay Safe
Keep Birding