

Take your best shot

Always have a pre-set camera ready

By Charlene Peck with photos by Ted Krug

Being prepared, patient, and willing to learn from mistakes, can help area bird feeders get great shots of their feathered visitors this winter.

Ted Krug, a digital photography instructor with Canadore College in Parry Sound, says he's learned a great deal from his mistakes, and even more, simply through observing the habits of the entertaining feathered characters frequenting the feeder outside his Carling home during the past ten years.

"I have probably photographed – right from my dining room window – almost 100 different species of birds," said Mr. Krug, who offers some helpful tips for those who want to learn to photograph birds. He also has suggestions for others who want to improve on the quality of the shots they've been taking of birds in their yard.

♦ *Learn to anticipate photo opportunities*

"Patience is an important factor when you're photographing wildlife in any way, shape or form," explained Mr. Krug, adding that observation is also helpful. "The more you watch birds and animals, the more you become aware of their patterns of behaviour and you can anticipate what they're going to do. So, you can sit in front of a window with your camera and read, while you're waiting for birds."

Bird feeders may discover different birds arrive at different times of the day, which can help in anticipating photo opportunities.

♦ *Be prepared*

Always have the camera ready. At the Krug home, a camera mounted on a tripod is poised in front of the dining room window most of the time.

"Birds that come are not there very long and if your camera isn't there and ready, by the time you get it out and set it up, they're gone," he says.

Secondly, photographing birds is easiest from a blind, with the automobile and home the most readily available examples. Remember however, that shy species respond to any quick movement in the home.

Pre-arranging settings on the camera saves time, and can always be altered to suit the photo opportunity that arises. Mr. Krug suggests starting with the action setting available on the newer cameras today. He also recommends using the auto focus feature, which is usually quite fast and accurate on a good quality camera.

♦ *Boosting your guest list*

Local food supplies available naturally in the area are basically what determines which birds might visit. The feeder

merely supplements what's out there, as birds will not live solely from a feeder.

Photographers, however, can employ innovative ideas to increase the number of birds coming to their feeders, and attract new species.

Most obvious is a variety of feeders.

Locally, feeders fall into three basic types: those that hang in or on a tree or attach to a window (including hummingbird feeders); the popular suet ball; and tray feeders.

Secured to a window ledge, the tray feeder is a welcome invitation for ground feeders to gather in front of a window, to be easily viewed and photographed.

"That gets the birds to you, and the closer you can get them to you, the less lens you really need to photograph them," said Mr. Krug.

A very simple type of feeder, easily made at home, involves taking a birch branch, about four or five inches around, and putting a couple of perches in it. Drill an inch-and-a-half hole above each perch and stuff these with a mixture of peanut butter and sunflower seeds.

Another way to attract new species to your yard is with bird call CDs. The Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas organization, for example, has produced a CD of Ontario bird calls, complete with birds, their photographs and their songs.

Offering an open source of water makes a yard attractive to birds, particularly in winter. While heating units for bird baths are available commercially, simple models can be made at home.

Mr. Krug made a bird bath using a large pot.

He ran an electrical cord through the hole in the bottom
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A thirsty albino grosbeak visits, above. A female downey woodpecker and a male hairy woodpecker are captured by the camera at the same suet feeder, centre. Top right, a window tray feeder brings this chickadee close to the lens. Bottom right, the lid of the home-made bath is lifted to show the inside heating set-up.