Feeding wild birds in gardens and backyards is one of the most popular forms of interaction between humans and wild animals. Yet despite the enormous scale of this activity and the millions of people involved throughout the world, remarkably little is known about the practice or the potential implications associated with the provisioning of vast amounts of food, all of which is additional to the bird’s natural diet. Many questions arise: Does bird feeding change wildlife communities? Does it aid the spread of disease? Is it essential for the conservation of many struggling species, especially in urban areas? And why are so many people passionately engaged, and willing to spend considerable sums on this practice? This is the first book to attempt to address these and many other questions associated with this global activity, exploring many complex issues through both science and the personal experience of bird feeders themselves.

The importance and influence of food in the lives of animals has been studied in great detail in a vast number of species. This chapter outlines the many findings of this critical research that are directly relevant to understanding how the provisioning of food for garden birds may be affecting their lives.
Feeding for a Purpose
Darryl Jones

in The Birds at My Table: Why We Feed Wild Birds and Why It Matters

Published in print: 2018 Published Online: September 2018
Item type: chapter

The use of supplementary foods is a widely employed technique in wildlife management and conservation biology. Here, many well-studied examples are described as a further way to understand the possible implications of feeding birds in gardens.

The Feeder Effect
Darryl Jones

in The Birds at My Table: Why We Feed Wild Birds and Why It Matters

Published in print: 2018 Published Online: September 2018
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The popularity of wild bird feeding has introduced enormous amounts of additional food into the ecosystem, especially in urban areas. Significantly, all of this food is supplementary to the natural diet of the birds consuming it. For this reason, bird feeding has been likened to a supplementary feeding experiment on a global scale yet with no clear expectations of possible outcomes. This chapter investigated the likely consequences of this situation.