Our Feathered Friends - November 23, 2011

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I'm sure many of you have special bird seed treats you like to put out or make. And I know you have all battled squirrels at one time or another! I hope you are gleaming a little bit of useful information from recent articles. My neighbor, **Bill**, makes a special suet cake he puts out in the winter. It always draws a crowd. However, he does not enjoy the squirrels that make short work of his cakes…so he shoots blanks from his back porch to scare them off. My kids holler when they hear the shots, "Mr. Bill's got squirrels again!"

One type of bird is particularly fond of his suet cakes: the woodpeckers. Both of our yards are frequented by Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and Downy Woodpeckers. The Red-bellied and Downy are daily visitors especially in the winter when we put out suet and peanut butter! Bill has also seen Pileated on several occasions in our neighborhood. One time last year he spied one on an old stump in our yard and tried to call to let me know I needed to look out the window. Unfortunately, I missed his call but we had been wondering what was turning the stump into mulch and he solved the mystery.

Growing up I was never around mature trees, so woodpeckers were a bird I was not familiar with until my husband and I moved to Tennessee from Indiana. We bought a house with more than 30 mature trees, and I was immediately rewarded with woodpeckers. They not only enjoyed my regular feeders, but the Downys enjoyed my humming bird feeders and taught their cute youngsters to drink from them in the summer months. Woodpeckers are amazing creatures! They have elongated sticky tongues they use as a tool to remove insects from the holes they drill or to lick up sap. Unlike other birds that have three toes pointing forward and one back, most woodpeckers have two pointing forward and two pointing back to help them balance. They also have stiffer tail feathers which help support them on vertical services. However, what amazes me most is that they can hammer an estimated 8,000 to 12,000 times a day! Can you imagine the massive headache most of us would have if we slammed our heads into something hard that many times in a single day? Yet they are designed to handle this action with no side effects!