

Bird Baths Attract Feathered Friends

The material on this page is furnished by the Coordinating Council on Nature Activities.

People are not aware of the fact that birds bathe frequently, especially in warm weather. In cities and towns and even in the country during the hot, dry weather, birds have trouble in finding water enough for drinking and bathing, for we must not forget that at the time of the breeding season, most of our songsters remain in the neighborhood of their nests.

Bird baths should be erected in the open where there are no places for prowling cats to hide and pounce upon the visitors. It is all the better if they can be located in full view from a window for many little incidents are pretty sure to take place—little happenings in bird life that we would not want to miss. I think I can truly say that the bird bath shown in the accompanying photograph, which was built by the writer, has given us more real pleasure and enjoyment than anything else about the lawn.

When I began to think about building a bird bath, the first thing was to look around for material. Not far away was a pile of glacial drift containing round smooth stones or pebbles of white and reddish quartzite, granite variously mottled, and quartz conglomerate or pudding stones—the best material in the world for such a structure. For many years I had been a collector of minerals, and had in my attic, duplicate specimens picked up in many States of the Union. These were of various hues from the bright blue and green ores of copper to pink pelspar and black hornblende. Many of these were worked into the bird bath with pleasing effect. A fossil now and then added interest to the structure.

The foundation, or that part beneath the surface of the ground should be as wide as the base itself and at least a foot deep. Any kind of broken stone will serve for this part of the structure. The material should be thoroughly mixed with cement, forming a concrete base. The mixture should contain about four parts of broken stone to two of sand and one of cement.

When the excavation is made, but before the foundation is put in, a slender, straight but rigid stick should be placed in the center, perpendicular, and almost as high as the



A HOME-MADE BIRD BATH

pedestal. The handle of a broom would be good, but a straight iron rod might be better. This gives strength during construction and a means of getting the pedestal perpendicular and uniform in width.

In the bird bath that I built, the pedestal is about 30 inches from the ground to the base of the bowl and about ten inches in diameter. It gets slightly narrower toward the tip. With a ruler, measuring out from the rod in the center, it was easy to keep the column uniform and circular. The brightly colored minerals were placed as to give the best effect. The base for the first few inches above the ground is wider to balance the bowl.

The making of the bowl is the most difficult task. At first I tried a wooden form which proved a partial failure. I then thought of the following plan and made a bowl that has given the best of service. A sheet of heavy paper was placed on a smooth surface and a circle drawn 14 inches in diameter. This, then, was the width of the inner surface of the bowl. From the same center I drew around this another circle 20 inches across, limiting the outer surface of the bowl. The ring between the two circles was three inches wide. Pieces of newspaper were soaked in water and rolled in tight balls, then placed in the inner circle, piling them up, forming the shape of the bowl. Between the circles I placed thin pieces of stone, minerals and fossils, best face down, and then covered them and the paper with the cement mixture—two parts of sand and one of cement. Numerous small pebbles were stuck in the soft cement to break the smooth surface. The bowl was probably not an

inch and a half thick anywhere. The moist paper within prevented too rapid evaporation and the outside was sprinkled and covered to keep it from drying out too rapidly. Two days later the bowl was turned over and the paper taken out. It was still soft enough for me to scrape off the uneven particles within. Fresh cement was placed on the pedestal, the bowl placed on it, leveled up and filled with water.

I worked, into this bird bath, rocks and minerals that recall many walks and visits. As the birds alight to drink or bathe, they stand on pieces of red and gray sandstone, picked up by John Burroughs, and given to me while we were walking over the fields of his old home farm at Woodchuck Lodge. The birds like it just as well for all that, and I like it better.

This structure has now stood for three years without a crack or flaw. When the ground is covered with snow it is often used as a feeding station. I have taken a hammer and broken the ice when it covered the surface half an inch thick and not two minutes later starlings and blue-jays waded in the icy water and took a bath.

Just now, June 21, I happened to look out of the window and discovered a mother robin and her three young at the bird bath. The young are easily told by their mottled breasts. All three got in the water at one time, while the mother watched on from the edge. When they finished, she got in and splashed about.

This bird bath is erected near the center of a residential section of a large town, yet nearly twenty-five species of birds came to drink or bathe. They include the oven-bird, flicker, wood thrush, hermit thrush, veery, olive-backed thrush, gray-cheeked thrush, field sparrow, song sparrow, white-throated sparrow, tree-sparrow, yellow-billed cuckoo, red-eyed vireo, catbird and parula warbler. How many others came when we were not looking would be interesting to know.

—OLIVER PERRY MEDSGER,
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Science News-Letter, July 9, 1927

An American expedition to remote sections of Persia hopes to bring back specimens of the Persian wild ass and other rare beasts common in Biblical times.