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Photographing Garden Birds/Setting Up A Garden Feeding Station By Wildlife Photographer Kevin Keatley.



Setting up a feeding station is good for all times of the year but especially so in the winter months when food is scarce. Regular feeding will attract birds from the local area. If you set up feeders, keep them going through the winter and into the spring as the birds will come to rely on the food supply, especially through any harsh weather. I use mixed birdseed feeders on poles. If you place them by bushes or a tree you can photograph the birds as they come in to feed.

Photographing them on the feeder is O.K. but the photos look more natural if the bird is on a branch. Sometimes the background can look a bit cluttered so I have screwed a clamp to the pole just below the feeder - or you can have a separate pole with a clamp for a small branch. Doing this gives you more options - a sprig of autumn berries or spring blossom. You have to be quick with the shutter as the birds land on the clamped branch for a split second before it goes onto the feeder. By using this method you can pick your background. If you can have 3 or 4 metres space behind, your photos will have a soft out of focus background making your subject stand out. You can use a hide or conservatory. I usually have the feeders about 3 - 4m away from my hide and use a 300mm lens.

The advantage of using a hide is that you can move the hide with the changing light. If you keep the sun to one side it gives a bit more depth to your photos. The ideal light is around early morning or late afternoon. A bright day with thin high cloud is the best and should give enough shutter speed, above 250th sec. is ideal for birds, 500th sec. if you can get it. Bright blue sky may give you more light and look good through the viewfinder but the results could be too harsh and shadowy. An aperture of f7.1-f11 should get most of the subject sharp (depending on lens). Focus on the eye's as they are what you are drawn to when you look at a picture.



I've had a feeding station and hide in a local orchard for a number of years. It's about 200m down the road so I can go down when the light is right. The hide is set up near a tree with the front window looking north. This direction is ideal for most times of the day but in the early morning or late afternoon I may move the hide or the feeder. It's O.K. to move the feeders about 4 or 5m as the birds soon get used to its new position.



At times I've used the dome hide in heavy snow. To the birds the feeders are a real oasis and need topping up every day. Over the last couple of years there has been a pair of pheasants which feed on the seed that drops from the feeders. Using a zoom lens I was able to get some pictures of the pheasants, but at times they were too close to photograph.

A feeding station is a great way to photograph and watch wildlife and at times I spend many hours in my hide, setup waiting for the perfect shot. A snow or frost covered dome hide is just like an igloo insulating you from the freezing wind. There was a time when my wellies froze to the ground, but it's all worth it when you get some good shots.

Wildlife photography is a great way to wind down and chill out literally.

Equipment I use:

[C30 Dome hide](#)

[C25 Chair](#)

[E5.1](#), [E5.2](#) large ground spike

[E13](#) with home-made clamp recycled from a desk lamp. Perfect to position a perch - small branch or a sprig of blossom.



Bird seed, feeders and poles:

<http://www.soarmillseeds.co.uk>

Tel: 0845 330 8908.

Good products, feeds and service. A Company and farm that cares about the environment, grows 40% of it's own seeds and is based in South Devon.

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