



**You may recognize this bandit  
from your feeders**



**This juvenile Cooper's Hawk was  
in my backyard. Cooper's are also known  
as "chicken hawks" due to occasional  
raids on chicken houses.**

## **Brunswick Wildlife Backyard Disasters**

If you have not already done so, it is time to hang your bird feeders for the winter. It is also time to start thinking about "backyard disasters" and the pinnacle of the winter birding season...the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC)...to be held in February 2010.

I keep my suet and hummingbird feeders out most of the year but it is time to add seeds to the buffet. I usually wait later than many folks because, once my seed feeders are available, I have to deal with blackbirds that fly out of the battleship/Eagles Island area each morning. It seems like I am the first and last stop on one flock's daily foraging circuit.

If you have not seen this spectacle, tens of thousands of blackbirds of several species roost nightly in the Eagles Island area and you can watch them leaving in the early morning or returning in the late afternoon from the battleship parking lot.

Possibly the most common disaster for most of you is a mammalian invasion. Baffles and other devices like cages may be used to keep raccoons, squirrels, and other mammals from your feeders. Cages are wire enclosures with holes large enough for songbirds to pass through but not large enough for mammals and large birds.

For more information on deterring squirrels, check out the GBBC's anti-squirrel page: <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/netcommunity/bbimages/gbbc-email/squirrels.pdf>.

An overwintering raptor preying on backyard birds is also a common disaster. Two overwintering bird predators are the Cooper's Hawk and its cousin the Sharp-shinned Hawk. A few Cooper's Hawks are year-round residents; however, they are much more numerous during migration and winter.

The Cooper's photo above was taken in my backyard. Needless to say, the little birds were not to be seen until hours after it left. Occasionally one of these hawks makes multiple appearances over several days.

They usually take a blackbird each visit. Blackbirds are vulnerable because they forage on the ground. Judging from the circles of feathers left behind, I lose four or five blackbirds per winter. Fortunately none of the little guys like chickadees have been lost.

There are several hawk solutions: ignore it and the hawk will eventually move on or remove your feeders for a few days. Also, minimizing the amount of seeds that accumulate under feeders by raking or vacuuming will minimize prey on the ground. This practice also has another major benefit since the accumulation of moldy seed under your feeder may kill birds that eat it.

Cat predation is a huge threat to birds (and other wildlife). Keeping cats indoors helps protect wildlife. How large is the problem? According to Audubon, of the estimated 65 million house cats, approximately 40 million are allowed to roam free plus the estimated feral cat population is between 40 to 60 million. Annual bird kills by cats may range up to 100 million nationally.

Feeders and birdbaths must be protected from cats. Cats hunt and kill instinctively regardless of how well they are fed. Cats should be kept inside or be heavily supervised when outdoors. Unfortunately, bell collars are not effective because birds do not associate the jingling of bells with danger.

Of course, there are many other backyard disasters, such as finding injured wildlife or nestlings that have fallen out of their nest; window strikes; and bully birds, so stay tuned for another installment of backyard disasters in the next month or so.

Finally, for all backyard birdwatchers, the 2010 GBBC will be held Friday, February 12 through Monday, February 15, 2010. It is sponsored by National Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. For more information go to: <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/>. This is your opportunity to assist as a citizen scientist.

John Ennis



**National Audubon estimates that house cats allowed outside and feral cats kill upwards to 100 million birds a year**