

That Chipmunk Bird

By Kim Smith

Come-to-me, come-to-me, come-to-me, repeated from sun up to sundown. Mellow and sweet—though loud enough to attract my attention—what was this new-to-my-ears birdsong coming from the thicket of shrubs? Occasionally we would catch a quicksilver glimpse of a petite sparrow-sized songbird singing energetically atop the fence wall or rapidly pecking at the chinks of bark on our aged pear tree. But this was definitely not a sparrow. His is a rounded little body with tail held upward. He has pale orangey-buff underparts and rich russet plumage, with white and black barred accents on the wings, and long white eye-stripes. Because his coloring is so similar to, my husband took to calling it “that chipmunk bird.”

After much running to the window and out the back door at his first few notes I was able to identify our resident Carolina Wren. All summer long and through the fall we were treated to his beautiful and sundry melodies. Here it is late winter and he is again calling me to the window. We can have a longer look, now that the trees and shrubs are bare. Much to our joy there is not one wren, but a pair!

The Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) is common throughout the southeast; so populous it is the state bird of South Carolina. When found on Cape Ann it is at its most northern edge of its territory. Gradually, as the climate has warmed over the past century, its range has expanded. They are sensitive to cold and will perish during severe weather. The Carolina Wren is a highly adaptable creature, dwelling in swamps, forests, farms, and tree-filled urban and suburban communities. They hop around leaf litter and dense brush, using their elongated bills to forage for food close to the ground. A pair may bond any time of the year and will stay together for life. It is the ardent male who sings the loud song and he is apt to anytime and anywhere. Carolina Wrens work together to construct their nests and feed their young. Their nesting sites are varied, built in both man-made and natural nooks and crannies; tree holes and stumps, and just as frequently, windowsills, mailboxes, tin cans, garage shelves, and holes found in porches, fence posts, and barns.

During the breeding season they have a voracious appetite for insects, supplemented with fruit, nuts and seeds. Hoping to keep our pair healthy and in residence, and worried that they would not have enough fat in their diet, I made a peanut butter feeder. It took under an hour and cost less than five dollars. I am experimenting with different recipes and will let you know which songbirds are attracted to what mixture and whether or not the squirrels become intolerable.

Peanut Butter Bird Feeder

Materials and tools needed: Portion of driftwood or fallen branch, approximately 4 to 6 inches in diameter; one dowel, approximately ¼ inch diameter; one 1-inch open S hook; one size 12 screw eye; approximately six feet of chain; saw; drill, with one large bit, and one small bit that is slightly larger than the dowel; sandpaper; wood glue.

It took several tries to find driftwood that was not soft, wet, and mushy inside. Look for wood from hardwood. The driftwood in the photograph was cut to eight inches in length, after determining where the center hole and holes for the perches should be drilled. Mark, with a pencil, a two- to three-inch diameter hole, depending on the diameter of the wood. Mark the two spots for the perches, about 1 and ½ inches below the hole. Drill the side holes for the perches

one inch deep. Drill the center hole, approximately two to three inches deep, again depending on the diameter of the log. Smooth the center hole with sandpaper. Cut two perches from the dowel, 4 inches in length, and glue into the drilled perch holes. Allow to dry overnight. Center and screw the screw eye into the top of the feeder and add the S-hook. Loop the chain around a tree limb so that it hangs five to six feet off the ground. Attach the S hook through the screw eye and chain. With pliers, close the upper end of the S-hook firmly around the chain and the opposite end just enough to hold the screw eye firmly in place, but not too tight that the feeder cannot be removed for easy filling and cleaning. Fill with peanut butter mixture.

Peanut Butter and Fruit Recipe ~

Basic recipe: Mix one or two tablespoons of peanut butter with an apple slice that has been finely diced. Add a teaspoon of raisins, coarsely chopped. This makes a perfectly appetizing and healthy mix. For variety, add dried cranberries, currants, chopped almonds, sunflower seeds, millet, and/or crumbled whole grain crackers.

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