



## ***NEWS RELEASE***

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### **Birds Implement Multiple Techniques to Survive Winter**

Carmel, Indiana – From food consumption to feather adjustments and shivering, birds use a variety of techniques to stay warm during winter.

Food is the most essential element, providing birds with the energy, stamina and nutrition they need. To stay warm, birds will expend energy very quickly, some losing up to 10% of their body weight on extremely cold nights. Research has shown that when the temperature falls below 10°F, the survival rate of chickadees almost doubled when they had access to feeders.

An ample supply of high-calorie foods, such as black oil sunflower seeds, peanuts and suet, can be crucial to a bird's survival. These high-calorie foods are most important to smaller birds because they must eat more frequently than larger birds to keep warm and active. Chickadees, titmice and nuthatches need to eat almost constantly in order to survive.

“We can play a vital role when feeding the birds becomes critical during extremely cold conditions,” said John Schaust, Chief Naturalist at Wild Birds Unlimited. “At these times, a supply of food can mean the difference between life and death for a bird.”

Most birds will also keep warm by adjusting their feathers to create air pockets.

“You will often notice that birds look fatter or ‘puffed up’ during cold weather,” explained Schaust. “This is because the birds are fluffing up their feathers; the more air space, the better the insulation.”

Staying warm is not all about food and feathers, though. Some birds perch on one leg at a time, drawing the free leg to their chest for warmth. Most birds will shiver for short-term adjustments to the cold. Shivering converts muscular energy into heat, but that energy must be replenished shortly thereafter.

While birds are equipped to withstand most winter weather, survival can be made easier by providing food, a heated, open source of water and protection from the elements with natural plant cover or a roosting box.

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