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## The Holidays Came Early

Thanks to the donations we received from our toy drive, we were able to buy some of the toys on our wish list. Cheena has fallen in love with her mirror that is strong enough we can put it in the cage with her so she can touch and push it around making the image she sees in the mirror all the more interesting. The other mirrored toy has been of great interest to Achilles, the Siberian Lynx. It is also loved by Cheena though once she tips it over she has a tough time getting it upright again. Zeke, our Serval, is very curious about the tire toy. We plan on hanging it from the top of their exercise yard. One of the toys we got that rocks and has handles is a favorite of Meekah, the raccoon. She can get into it and rock back and forth, dump it in her water bucket, and use it like a bowl. She is only just starting to discover its many uses such as a stepping stool. We will continue to purchase toys as we can afford to. We can also assess which designs are most entertaining.



Cheena with Rocky Lou, Meekah with Prima Rocker, Zeke with Tire, and Achilles with Rocky Lou



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# The Ubiquitous English (House) Sparrow

*Material for this article came from Wild Talk- North American Wildlife Health Care Center*



English sparrows also known as House Sparrows are special and unique in their own way. Also, they are another species transported to America. They did not choose to be here in a non-native environment. These hard working birds were once believed to be beneficial to control agricultural pests—so do a lot of native birds, and they were liked for their cheerful noises and cute markings. Unlike other birds, the English Sparrow—a member of the Weaver finch family—likes the company of other sparrows making him a social creature who is not territorial.

Sparrows love to feed, chase predators, take dust baths,

and hang out together in general. They do not sing. They chirp. Song is used in birds to announce territory and to attract a mate. Sparrows usually stay with one mate indefinitely, and since they are not territorial, a specific song is not needed. However, fledgling sparrows do sing for several weeks after they leave the nest. Soon the songs are forsaken for distinctive chirps. Researchers refer to the original singing as subsong because it does not develop into organized song. Sparrows are demonstrative birds. They never give up some of their fledgling moves--the crouch, lift the bill almost straight up, spread and lower the wings, and quiver them like a begging baby. They use these moves to entice fledglings out of the nest, to attract a mate or to attempt to get a female to try out a specific nesting spot. English sparrows do not travel far from home. They are comfortable around people, their houses, barns, and outbuildings. Nooks and crannies are quickly claimed as sparrow homes. Also, they remain in their home territories all year. From spring to fall English Sparrows will raise from four to six broods. Also, they keep the nest in good repair even after the chicks are gone. It isn't unusual to find them sleeping in the nest during the cold winter months. During the first fall and winter months, young sparrows spend a lot of time checking out potential home sites for their first breeding season. Whatever site claimed, the sparrow positions himself in the entrance and works at getting a female interested in taking a look inside. If she checks out the site and likes what she sees, she will not stay for just the season, but for her or his life. English Sparrows are sedentary birds because they are such home bodies. Once the nest site is claimed by a pair, they will return season-after-season to raise their young. About one half the English Sparrows die within a year's time of their hatching! Since they do not migrate, they do not travel far from their home site. Navigating by stars and the position of the stars and the sun are too much of a bother when the home site is a building. Researchers say that if you take a sparrow out of sight of his home, he may not be able to find his way back. A lot of true sparrow haters may want to try this maneuver.

# Fall into Winter: Help Backyard Wildlife Prepare for Cold Weather

*Material for this article came from the National Humane Society*

Take a break from the raking and fall yard cleanup to help wild animals survive the winter. Fallen leaves make a great mulch for your yard and garden. Leave them where they fall, or, better yet, shred and spread them in your garden. This easy (and totally free) mulch will help conserve water and improve soil fertility (for best results make your mulch layer about two to three inches deep.) You can also add leaves to your compost pile. Leave those dead stalks, leaves, and seed heads in your garden to help feed overwintering birds. Hold off nipping and tucking your garden beds or patio container plantings until springtime: those dead stalks, leaves, and seed heads provide food and protection to wildlife. Critters will go especially wild for large flowers like black-eyed Susans, sedums, purple coneflowers, joe-pyeweed, and sunflowers, as well as zinnias, marigolds, cosmos, phlox, and dianthus. The same goes for hardy ferns, which often remain green well into winter. Keep birds happy with plants like bayberries, juniper, cotton asters that produce berries all year. Animals will also forage the seeds of dead grasses, and next spring, birds will use old stalks and foliage for nest building material. Want an easy (and cheap) way to clear your yard of stray branches and twigs? Build a brush pile to provide a safe spot for ground-nesting birds, chipmunks, rabbits, and hibernating reptiles, amphibians, and insects. Put it in an out-of-the-way corner of your property, preferably close to food sources and away from buildings. Start with a layer of larger limbs and stack branches loosely, adding grasses and leaves to create nooks and grannies. Your firewood pile can also make a good shelter for wildlife, even if you'll be disturbing it occasionally throughout the winter. Pile your logs crisscross fashion in order to create internal spaces that offer small animals a little relief from the cold. As reliable watering holes dry up or ice over, water is one of the most important elements you can provide for wildlife. (Bonus: Anyone anywhere can do this, whether you have a big yard, or a small patio, or even an apartment balcony.) Providing water close to home can save animals from wasting valuable energy, which may mean the difference between life and death on the coldest days. Invest in a quality heater for your birdbath or artificial pond to keep water ice-free. In return, you'll find a steady stream of wildlife to watch in your backyard. But remember, if you find wildlife to be annoying, you need to avoid providing these helping hands.

