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COLUMNS

Campbell Vaughn: Bird Buddy birdfeeder delights as a birdwatcher's dream Christmas present

Campbell Vaughn Columnist

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I have had a ton of fun with wild birds lately.

My wife gave me a Bird Buddy for Christmas, and now that UGA football is over, it sent me into high gear for bird watching.

If you don't know what a Bird Buddy is and you love your wild birds, you should check out this product. It is a bird feeder that has a camara built into the housing so when a bird comes to feast, it acts as a peeping Tom and shoots a picture of the visitor and sends it to an app on my cell phone.

The Bird Buddy uses some magic A.I. to identify the bird and then takes a short video of the little guy and a couple of snapshots to put into my online database. Once the bird is in my database, you can get some fun facts about each of the visitors. You can learn about its favorite foods, average size and native ranges. The app also will play a recording of the bird's song for help with identification.

When I first filled my new Bird Buddy with seeds, I added some dried meal worms and that was obviously a bird delicacy because the wrens and bluebirds arrived within a couple of hours and haven't left after three weeks.

The birds that I have seen on the camara include Eastern bluebird, Carolina wren, Northern mockingbird, chipping sparrows, tufted titmouse, house finch and the unfortunate visitation of the nefarious brown headed cowbird, which I dislike for a lot of reasons. Each evening, the Bird Buddy app on my phone sends me a daily recap of the birds that visited throughout the day. I enjoy saving some of these videos and photos and sending the good pictures to my other bird nerd friends.

With the snow apocalypse last week, I got a little stir-crazy sitting inside with all that was happening with the weather. The first chance I got to go outside, I immediately filled my two cargo-tanker sized bird feeders, the suet feeder and the Bird Buddy all up with food. I took about 3 cups of wild bird seed and threw it under and around the feeders on top of the icy snow mix. The food was so visible with the white ground, I bet you could see all the seeds from the international space station.

The birds and squirrels didn't have much issue finding the food either. From the time I put all the seeds out until dark, I bet there was not a minute that there were not 25 birds on and around the feeders.

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A flock of chipping sparrows roost in a sumac that I have growing wild near my feeders and would come down in mass to eat the food on the ground. These sparrows are such funny little birds. They will rest a while and then 20 of them will be on the ground busily eating and talking to each other.

My buddy John said he got a Bird Buddy for Christmas and felt like he needed some IT help to set it up. I will admit it takes some work to get it connected to your home wifi, but the good news is that I didn't smash it into a million pieces out of frustration before the setup was done.

The camera has a little magnet to attach to the feeder itself, so it is easy to take on and off to charge the battery that lasts about two weeks on a charge. Bird Buddy does offer a solar charger that fits on the roof of the feeder that will keep your camera charged in perpetuity so you don't have to spend time charging on a cord that I will lose within the next month. I might invest in the solar roof in the next few weeks.

My big Christmas gift has been a lot of fun. I wish you all happy birdwatching.

