

EASTERN PHOEBE EATING SUNFLOWER SEED

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Five and 6 April 1997, brought 70 degree temperatures to central New York on strong south winds. Many species of birds took advantage of what looked like spring and migrated into or through the area. Among them were many Eastern Phoebes (*Sayornis phoebe*).

Then, as is typical for central New York, the wind shifted and the temperatures dropped drastically. Snow came down from the north over Lake Ontario. For several nights, the temperatures almost hit record lows.

On 9 April, I observed an Eastern Phoebe that landed in an inch of snow on my porch deck in the Town of Pompey, Onondaga County. Then it dropped to the ground feeding area and selected a black oil sunflower seed. It flew to a low, deciduous branch and proceeded to open the seed in its bill. It did not use its feet or a crevice. The husks dropped to the ground and the bird ate the seed. The phoebe then wiped its bill several times on the branch and flew off. Arthur Cleveland Bent states that the food of the phoebe consists of "89.23 per cent of animal matter to 10.77 of vegetable... The vegetable part is made up of small fruits or berries, with a few seeds, all of them probably of wild species."

I have fed birds in this same location for 30 years, but have never observed an Eastern Phoebe eating sunflower seeds.

LITERATURE CITED

Bent AC, (Beal FEL, in part). 1963. Eastern Phoebe. In: *Life Histories of North American Flycatchers, Larks, Swallows, and their Allies*. New York: Dover. p 145.
