



An American Goldfinch visits the bubbler for a drink and a bath. We have seen about 20 species of birds using our bubbler in the five months following installation.

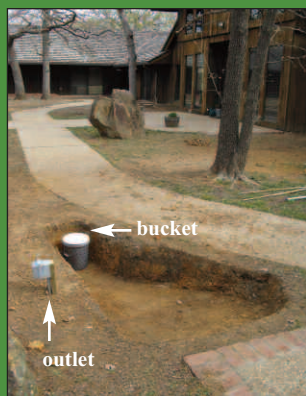
Hands-on project: Building a “bubbler rock” water feature to attract birds

Story and Photography by Dan L. Reinking

A “bubbler rock” is a water feature in which water is pumped through a hole drilled in a rock and bubbles out of the top, creating an attractive sound and, when designed well, offering drinking and bathing opportunities for birds. Our new bubbler rock water feature at the Sutton Center came about through the generosity of many people. Amateur bird photographer Brenda

Carroll of Bixby, OK, would from time to time send us beautiful bird photos from her yard, and we eventually learned part of her secret...a bubbler rock to attract the birds. She and her husband Steve invited us to their home to see their bubbler rock and other water features, and offered helpful advice on construction. Sutton Center volunteers Mark, Rhonda, and Noah Cannady readily agreed to provide labor, and did the hard work of digging the hole and scouring our property for rocks. Another friend of the Sutton Center, Greg Stipp, has installed water features for a living and provided valuable advice as well as leadership for our volunteers and staff on installation day. With the donation of a submersible pump and pond liner material from Pond Pro Shop in Shawnee, OK, we were off and running. The accompanying photographs provide an outline of the installation process. The project can easily be scaled to something smaller and simpler, or expanded to include a simulated riverbed and waterfall, something we are now inspired to attempt on the other side of our building!

While many people enjoy bubbler rocks simply for the gurgling sound they produce, we naturally had bird attraction as a primary goal for our project. When selecting a bubbler rock, either look for one with a shallow basin suitable for bathing, or design your feature to include such a basin below the flow of water from the bubbling rock. Depending on the size of your pump, hose, and hole in the rock, the output from the top of the rock may be a little too vigorous and could frighten rather than attract



After deciding on the location for our rock bubbler at the front of our administration building, a hole was dug to accommodate the water and the perforated bucket we used to house our submersible pump. Also note the electrical outlet recently installed next to the hole.



This rock on our property has two natural, shallow basins on one side. A hole has been drilled through the rock using a long carbide drill bit to allow the water to be pumped through the rock. Suitable rocks in various sizes are available pre-drilled at pond supply businesses.



Rubber pond liner was placed in the hole and trimmed to size, leaving enough overlap around the edges to accommodate some rocks and hold it in place.



Cinder blocks formed a stable support for the bubbler rock within the hole. PVC fittings and flexible hose were used to connect the submersible pump to the hole in the bottom of our bubbler rock.

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birds. We have placed a rock over the opening of ours to moderate the flow and deflect the water into the two separate basins of our bubbler rock. The materials for a project like this are readily available at large home centers, although pond and landscaping stores (such as Hardscape Materials in Bixby, OK and Pond Pro Shop in Shawnee, OK) may have a larger selection of pumps, rocks, and liners, and often have functioning outdoor displays to provide inspiration. They can also do the installation for you.

Our project has been a great success. In just five months we have seen about 20 species of birds on our bubbler, and not a day goes by without drinking or bathing activity. On one day in May, a Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Black-and-white Warbler, American Goldfinch, and Summer Tanager were all seen on our bubbler at the same time! The winter months and the middle of summer in Oklahoma are often challenging times for birds to find adequate water for their daily needs. We have already been through our first summer, and have been told to expect our bubbler to keep flowing during Oklahoma’s relatively mild winters, so our local bird population should be taking advantage of this helping hand for many months to come. The staff of the Sutton Center thanks the helping hands of the volunteers and donors who contributed to our latest landscaping improvement project.



After the bucket that contains the pump was settled into place, much of the hole was filled with cinder blocks and large rocks collected from our property.



The pond liner edges were covered with large rocks, and decorative river rock was used to fill in the gaps. A garden hose soon filled the hole with water once this step was finished.



Here is the finished water feature in operation.