

COASTAL BIRDS OF THE OUTER BANKS



KEEPING BIRD FEEDERS CLEAN FOR HEALTHY BIRDS

Protecting Birds. Protecting Our Coast.



SCIENCE IN ACTION

Clean feeders
prevent disease
and support
healthy bird
populations.

WHY IT MATTERS



Dirty feeders spread
disease and harm birds.



Regular cleaning keeps
birds and ecosystems
safe.



Healthy birds help
maintain balanced
coastal habitats.



SIMPLE STEPS

Easy cleaning
guidelines.



SEASONAL TIPS

For year-round
bird health.



DISEASE PREVENTION

Stop the spread
before it starts.



ECO-FRIENDLY SOLUTIONS

Better for birds
and the planet.

HEALTHY BIRDS.
HEALTHY COASTS.

TOGETHER,
WE PROTECT.

Coastal Birds of the Outer Banks: Keeping Bird Feeders Clean for Healthy Birds

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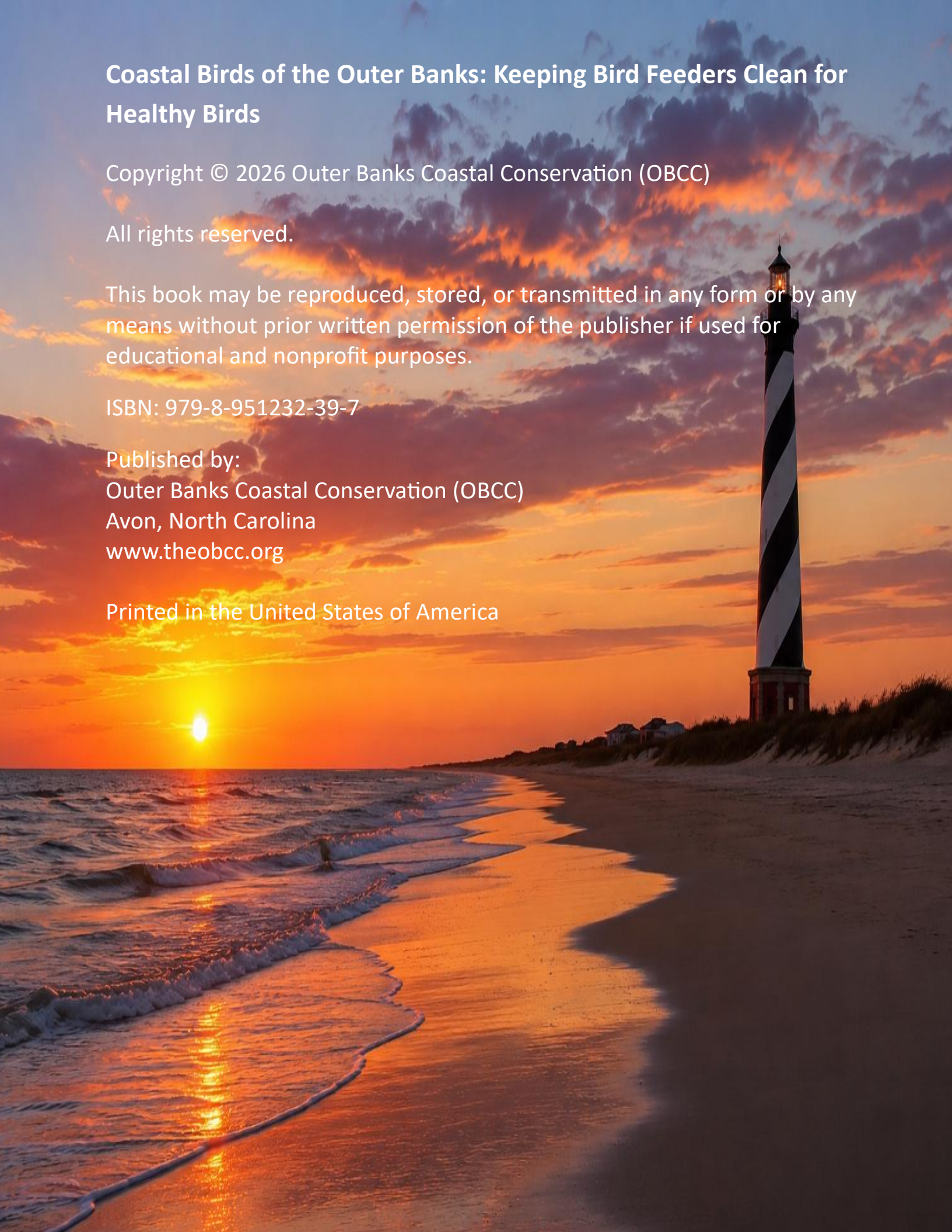
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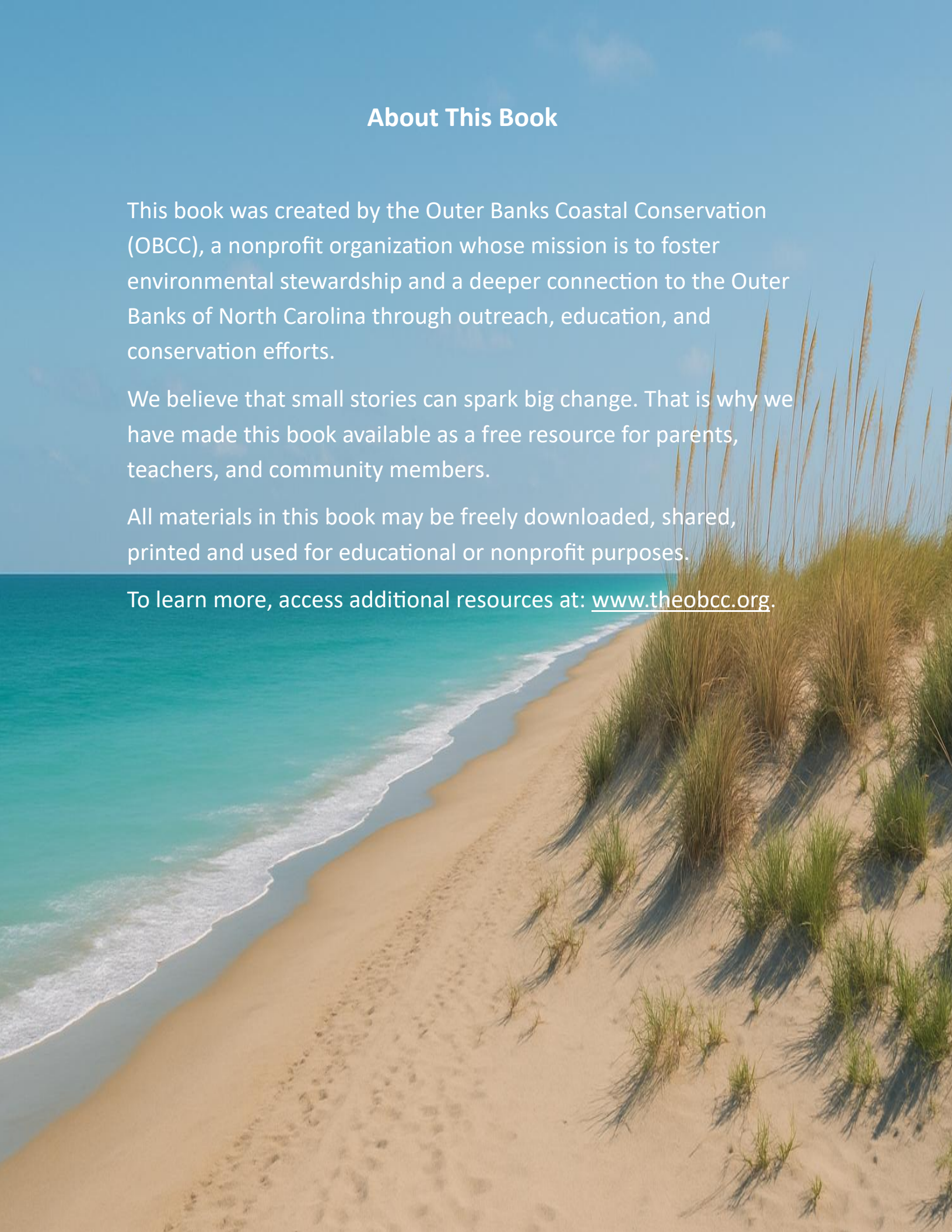
About This Book

This book was created by the Outer Banks Coastal Conservation (OBCC), a nonprofit organization whose mission is to foster environmental stewardship and a deeper connection to the Outer Banks of North Carolina through outreach, education, and conservation efforts.

We believe that small stories can spark big change. That is why we have made this book available as a free resource for parents, teachers, and community members.

All materials in this book may be freely downloaded, shared, printed and used for educational or nonprofit purposes.

To learn more, access additional resources at: www.theobcc.org.



A Welcome to Feathered Visitors

The Outer Banks is home to a lively mix of year-round and migratory birds that visit backyard feeders throughout the seasons.

In coastal woodlands, maritime forests, and dune-side neighborhoods, you might spot:

- Northern Cardinals – brilliant red against the sea oats
- Carolina Chickadees and Tufted Titmice – tiny, curious songbirds.
- Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Grackles – bold visitors in marshy areas.
- American Goldfinches – flashing yellow among sunflowers.
- Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers – tapping on nearby pines
- Carolina Wrens, Blue Jays, Mourning Doves, and Eastern Towhees – common local residents.

During migration seasons, even warblers and orioles may stop for a quick snack of suet or fruit.

Providing clean, safe feeders helps these birds refuel and thrive — especially in the shifting coastal climate of the Outer Banks.

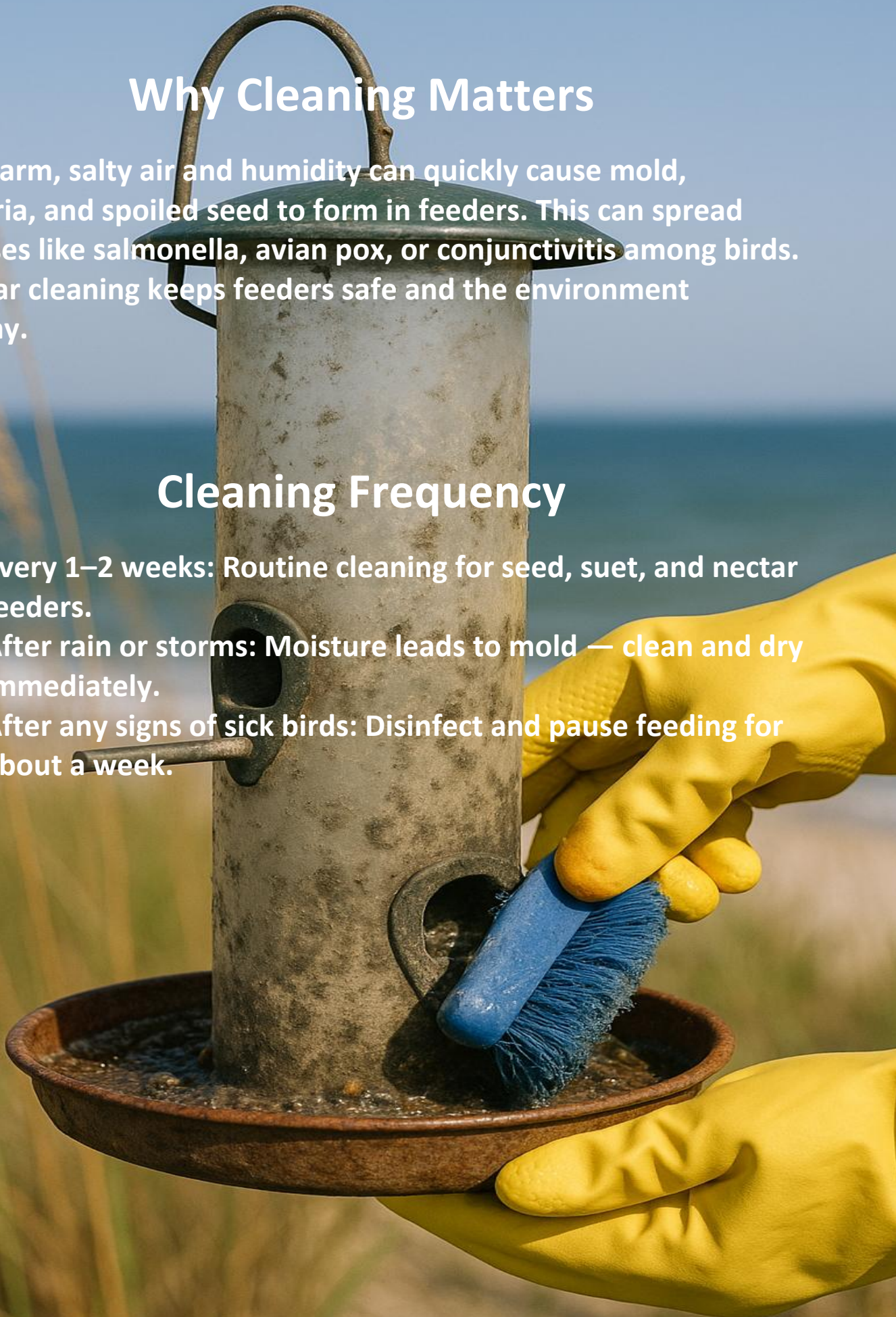


Why Cleaning Matters

The warm, salty air and humidity can quickly cause mold, bacteria, and spoiled seed to form in feeders. This can spread diseases like salmonella, avian pox, or conjunctivitis among birds. Regular cleaning keeps feeders safe and the environment healthy.

Cleaning Frequency

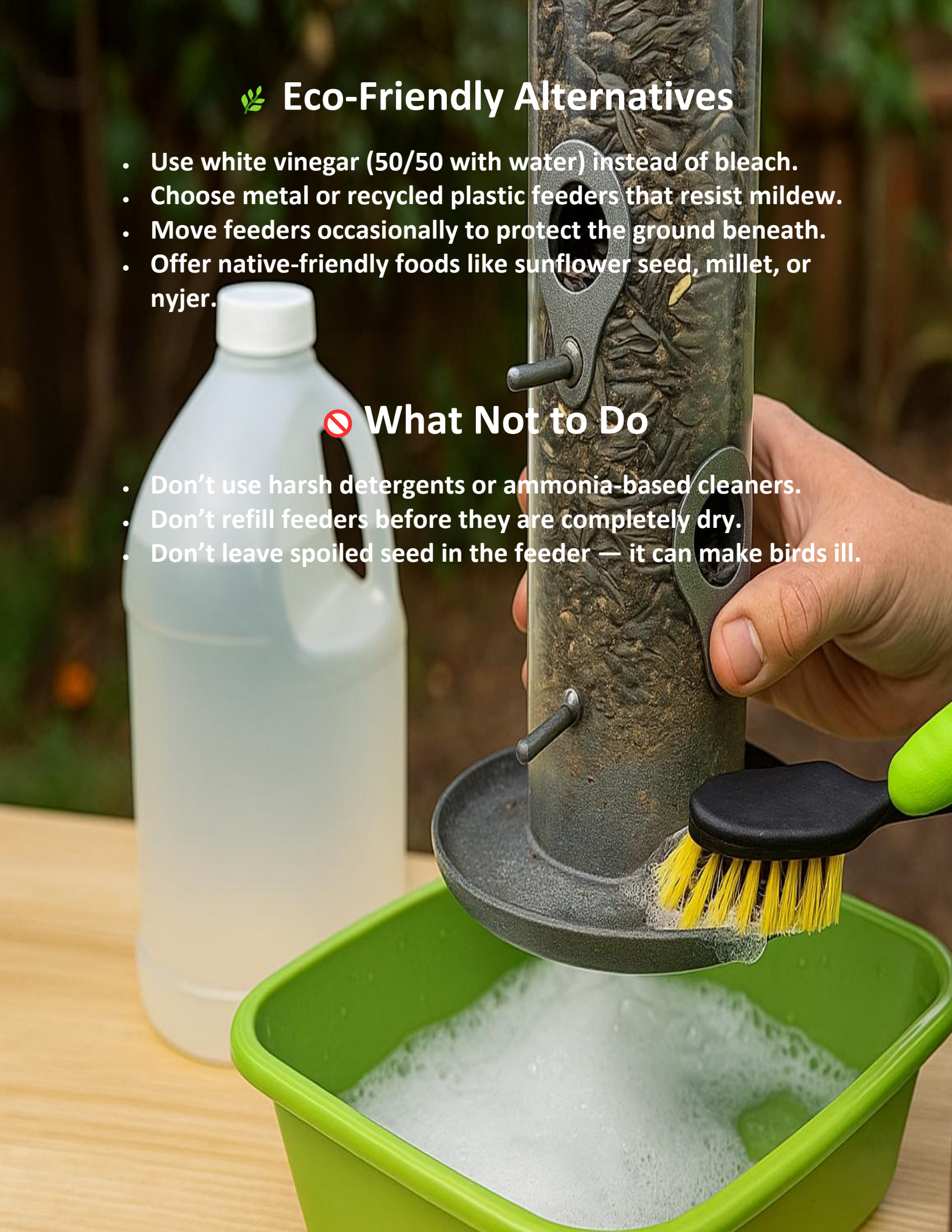
- Every 1–2 weeks: Routine cleaning for seed, suet, and nectar feeders.
- After rain or storms: Moisture leads to mold — clean and dry immediately.
- After any signs of sick birds: Disinfect and pause feeding for about a week.



Cleaning Steps

1. Empty the feeder — discard old or wet seed.
2. Scrub with hot, soapy water* using a brush just for feeders.
3. Soak in disinfectant:
 - Mix 1 part bleach to 9 parts water (or $\frac{3}{4}$ cup bleach per gallon).
 - Soak 10 minutes.
4. Rinse well several times.
5. Air dry completely before refilling.
6. Clean the ground below to remove dropped seed and waste.

*What “Soapy Water” Means: Use hot water mixed with a mild, unscented dish soap—just a few drops per quart of water—to loosen seed residue and dirt. Choose a biodegradable or non-toxic soap that’s safe for wildlife, such as Dawn®, Seventh Generation®, or Ecover®. Avoid antibacterial or heavily scented cleaners, as these can leave harmful residues. After scrubbing, rinse the feeder thoroughly several times with clean water before disinfecting or refilling.)



🌿 Eco-Friendly Alternatives

- Use white vinegar (50/50 with water) instead of bleach.
- Choose metal or recycled plastic feeders that resist mildew.
- Move feeders occasionally to protect the ground beneath.
- Offer native-friendly foods like sunflower seed, millet, or nyjer.

🚫 What Not to Do

- Don't use harsh detergents or ammonia-based cleaners.
- Don't refill feeders before they are completely dry.
- Don't leave spoiled seed in the feeder — it can make birds ill.

Hummingbird Feeders

Outer Banks hummingbirds (mainly Ruby-throated Hummingbirds) love clean feeders filled with fresh 4:1 white sugar water — no dyes.

Rinse and refill every 2–3 days in summer heat to prevent fermentation or mold.



Facts About Feeding Birds on the Outer Banks

- Feeder visitors vary by season.

In spring and summer, look for colorful cardinals, goldfinches, blue jays, and hummingbirds. In fall and winter, sparrows, wrens, chickadees, and woodpeckers become more frequent guests.

- Hummingbirds can be year-round residents.

Though most Ruby-throated Hummingbirds migrate south, a few stay through winter — especially in sheltered coastal gardens. Occasionally, rare Rufous Hummingbirds from the western U.S. are seen feeding here in the cooler months.

- Clean feeders prevent disease.

Birds can catch illnesses like salmonella and avian pox from dirty feeders. A regular cleaning schedule — especially after rain or storms — keeps your visitors healthy.

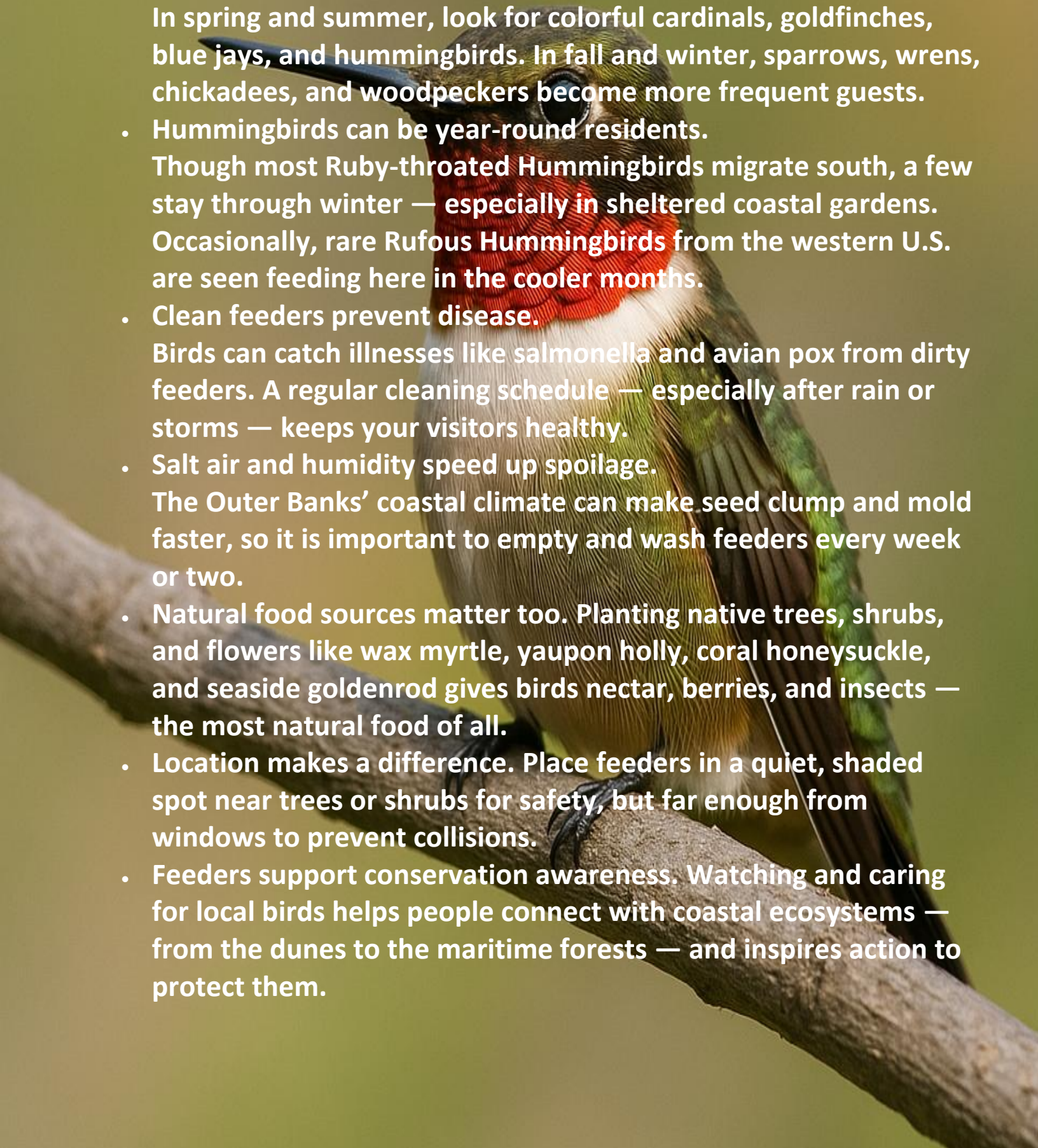
- Salt air and humidity speed up spoilage.

The Outer Banks' coastal climate can make seed clump and mold faster, so it is important to empty and wash feeders every week or two.

- Natural food sources matter too. Planting native trees, shrubs, and flowers like wax myrtle, yaupon holly, coral honeysuckle, and seaside goldenrod gives birds nectar, berries, and insects — the most natural food of all.

- Location makes a difference. Place feeders in a quiet, shaded spot near trees or shrubs for safety, but far enough from windows to prevent collisions.

- Feeders support conservation awareness. Watching and caring for local birds helps people connect with coastal ecosystems — from the dunes to the maritime forests — and inspires action to protect them.



Did You Know?

- Some hummingbirds now spend the winter on the Outer Banks! While most Ruby-throated Hummingbirds migrate south in fall, a few hardy individuals — and even rare western species like Rufous Hummingbirds — have been spotted overwintering along the coast, taking advantage of mild temperatures and nectar-rich native plants.
- The salty air and humid coastal climate can cause feeder food to spoil faster than in inland areas — so Outer Banks feeders need extra care and cleaning.
- Birds remember safe feeding spots. Keeping feeders clean and full encourages generations of the same feathered families to return year after year.
- Native landscaping — like wax myrtle, yaupon holly, and seaside goldenrod — provides natural food and shelter for local birds long after the feeders are empty.



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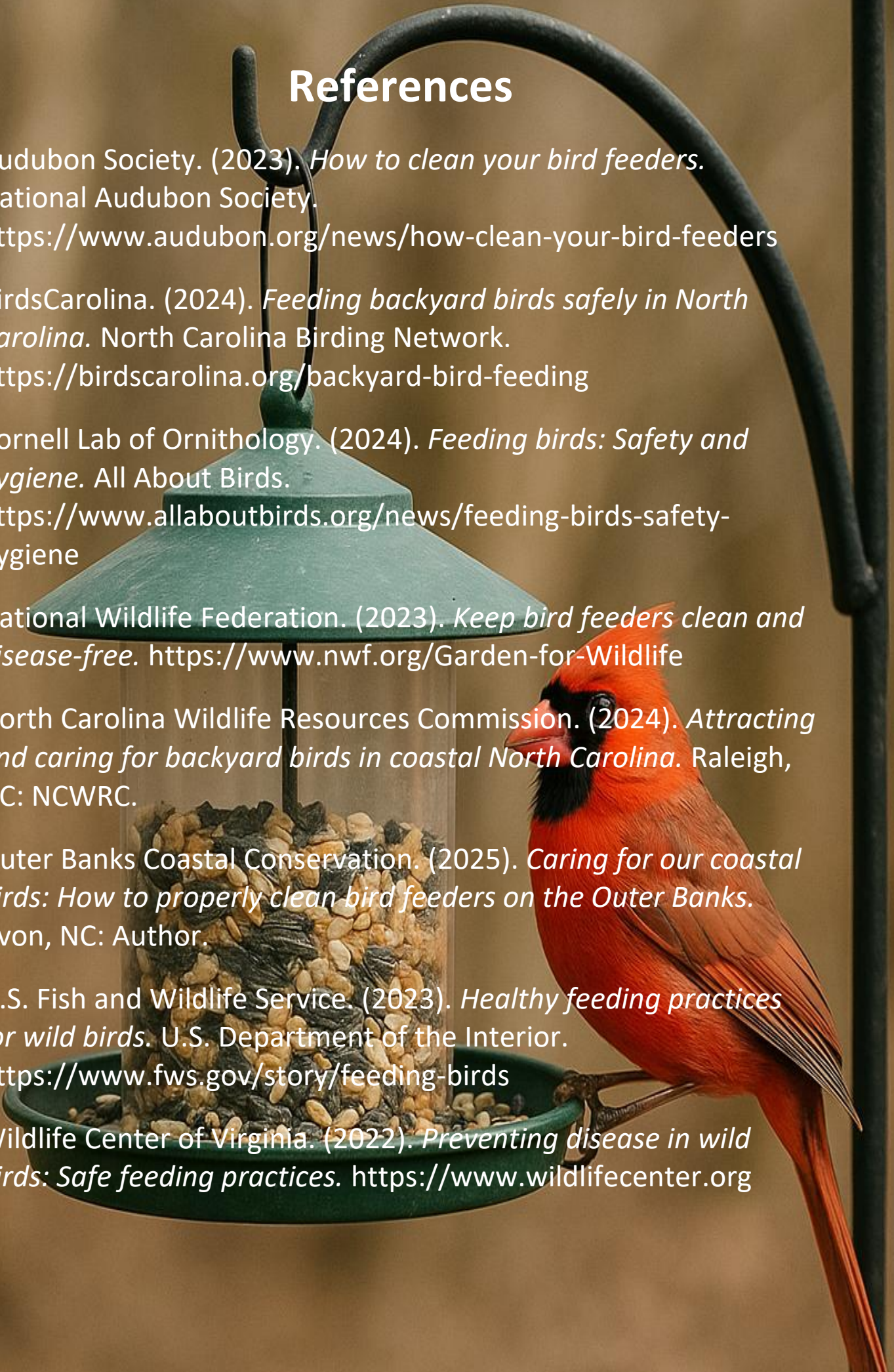
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Coastal Birds of the Outer Banks: Keeping Bird Feeders Clean for Healthy Birds

This book explains how proper bird feeder maintenance helps protect the Outer Banks' diverse bird populations from disease. It provides simple, science-based guidance for cleaning seed, suet, and hummingbird feeders, preventing mold and bacteria, choosing bird-friendly foods, and creating safe feeding areas. The book also highlights common coastal bird species, seasonal feeding tips, and practical conservation actions that support healthier birds and coastal ecosystems.

About the Publisher

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