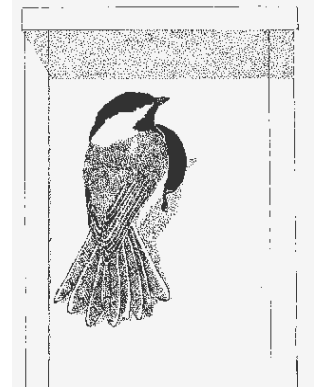


# GIVE BACKYARD BIRDS SOMETHING TO SING ABOUT

**by creating a safe garden for birds**

## Why Garden for Birds?

Habitat loss is one of the most significant reasons for population declines in birds. While urban gardens cannot replace natural habitats, they can provide needed food and resting spots for many migratory species and offer safe nest sites for others. Gardening with wildlife in mind *will* make a difference. And not only to birds, for a bird-friendly garden will be inviting to butterflies, bees, and other creatures.



With its thickets, hedgerows and vine-covered fences, shade trees and flourishing mix of wildflowers and grasses, gardens for birds are definitely winners with people too! Big or small, your garden can be a place of hidden corners, shady nooks, sunny open glades, a small pond or bird bath or two, some nest boxes, a bird feeder, and a rustic bench on which to sit and watch the birds enjoying the bounty you have provided.

## What do Birds Need?

Like us, birds and other wildlife need **food, shelter, water** and **a safe place** to bring up their young. Whether your garden is big or small, the following ideas are low-cost and easy to implement and will make it a sanctuary for birds and other small creatures.

## Getting Started

### Make sure your garden is safe for birds:

- Don't use chemicals.
- Keep cats inside or control when outside.
- Locate feeders and baths near shelter but not near enough for cats to hide and attack.
- Help prevent birds from hitting windows by hanging ribbons, CD's, or mobiles, or by using one of the many other means of deterring window kills (see Resources).

### Thickets, Edges and More ...

- Use both seed and berry producing shrubs and trees when planting the following:
- *Hedgerows* planted with a mixture of shrubs provide food, shelter and nest sites. If your garden is big enough, intersperse shrubs with a few trees.
- *Thickets* are groups of densely planted shrubs and/or small trees.
- *Edges* are where two types of habitat meet and are

### A Bird's Eye View of Conservation

**Date:** Thursday, 6<sup>th</sup> May, 2004

**Location:** 3<sup>rd</sup> floor salon,  
Canadian Museum of Nature.

**Time:** 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

**Admission:** Free

A panel of speakers will present a compelling discussion of the status of bird conservation in North America, with particular reference to Canada and Ontario. Come and discover what is being done to preserve our bird populations and how you can help. There will be information tables, displays, handouts, and free refreshments.

very attractive to birds. You can emulate this 'edge effect' in your garden by alternating thickets and hedgerows with open areas.

- *Layers* offer "vertical diversity". They can be created by allowing vines to climb up into trees, planting shrubs around the trees, and flowers in front of the shrubs.

### **Key points:**

- Map your garden and decide where to locate flowerbeds, thickets, bird feeders, etc.
- Determine soil and light conditions and choose plants accordingly.
- Use native plants as much as possible.
- Get two for one and choose shrubs and trees which provide both food and nest sites.
- Vary the height of your plants - mix various sized trees and shrubs, vines and flowers to create layers. Different birds feed and nest at different heights.
- Plant in groups of uneven numbers, three, five, seven etc. rather than in straight lines.
- Plant densely. This provides safer, warmer shelter and nesting sites.
- Use groundcovers in place of lawn; consider vines for this purpose in parts of the garden.
- Embrace untidiness! Nature is disorderly - emulate! Don't deadhead until spring; mulch well with leaves, stack fallen and cut branches to create a brush pile.

### **Food:**

- Grow a variety of native seed and berry producing plants.
- Choose species that produce food at different times of the year. Don't forget to plant nectar sources for hummingbirds.
- Plant grasses such as Panic Grass in masses and let go to seed.
- Gather some dead logs and make a log pile in a corner of your garden, or leave a standing dead tree (snag) if safe to do so. Birds will appreciate the insects found in them.
- Many birds eat insects. Plant flowers attractive to insects, such as Sweet Cicely and you will add more diversity to your garden. You may lose a few plants to insects but if your garden is flourishing a small loss won't matter, and the birds will thank you!
- Supplement the natural food source with bird feeders. You may choose to feed all year or only in the winter. Provide a variety of seed, suet, and fruit.
- During summer maintain a hummingbird feeder (make sure you clean it frequently and well). House finches and other birds also enjoy sipping at this 'nectar'.



### **Shelter:**

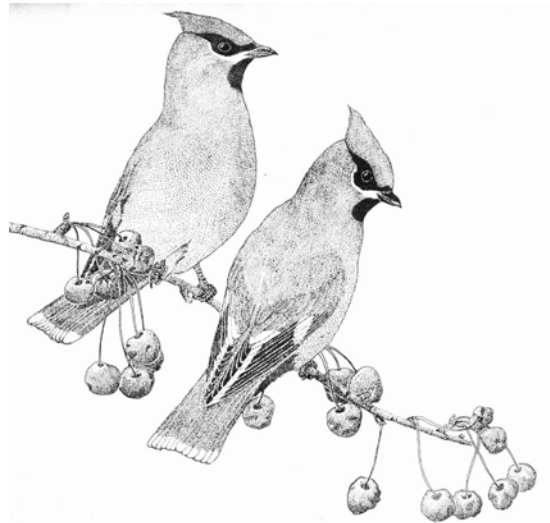
- Birds need safe shelter, whether from predators or inclement weather.
- Hedgerows and thickets well planted, in addition to food, provide great cover and nesting sites.
- Conifers such as cedar offer warmth, hiding places and nest sites.
- Instant shelter is created by making a brush pile. Gather pruned or fallen branches from your own trees or ask a neighbour for theirs, and layer them to a height of about 3 feet. Situate in a corner, against a fence or by a hedge.
- Thick tangles of vines trained over a fence, a brush pile or allowed to climb the side of a house also offer cover and roost sites for birds, and as a bonus, many provide food as well.
- Snags attract woodpeckers who, while probing for insects, create cavities that are used

for roosting and nest by many bird species. Snags offer warm, insulated winter cover.

- If snags are not practical, provide roosting boxes. These are similar to nest boxes but are airtight and contain two or three perches inside to accommodate several or more birds (many bird species huddle together in the coldest weather).
- Nest boxes left up all winter will offer some respite from the cold.

### **Water:**

- Water, particularly moving water, is a definite attraction for birds.
- Place a large clay saucer on a tree stump or on the ground near shrubbery, a safe distance from hiding predators.
- Whether a clay saucer or ready-made bird bath, look for one with a rough surface and shallow bowl.
- Make a small pond by digging a shallow sloping hole in the ground, about 60 cm in diameter, line with *heavy* plastic extended 30 cm from the pond edge and anchored with flat rocks. This is a fine temporary measure.
- Place a flat rock in the middle of the bath or pond to serve as a perch.
- Baths must be big enough to allow a bird to bathe as well as to drink.
- Slow dripping water acts like a magnet for birds - here are two ideas:
  - T Punch a few *tiny* holes in a bucket, fill with water and suspend over the pond or bath.
  - T Prop a garden hose on the rim of the bird bath and turn it on just enough to allow a very slight dribble of water to escape.
- Clean bird baths frequently and replace water every couple of days.



### **Nest sites:**

- Finding a safe place to nest can be tough. Birds may nest in inappropriate places for lack of anything better but success is precarious.
- Snags offer natural sites for cavity nesting birds such as chickadees, wrens, tree swallows and woodpeckers.
- Bird boxes offer an alternative if snags are not viable. Different species require different size boxes and entrance holes. Make sure they are well constructed and well-ventilated, and never use a perch under the entrance hole. This offers a place for predators such as jays to stand making it easier for them to grab eggs or young birds.
- Consider putting up nesting platforms for robins and eastern phoebes.
- Locate your bird houses in safe places not easily accessible to predators.
- Provide nesting material for birds. Use dog hair, *short* lengths of wool and thread, bits of fabric, lint from the dryer, and feathers. Stuff these into an empty wire suet holder and hang from a branch.

## **Selected List of Plants**

This list describes only a few of the many available plants. Check out the resources listed below, talk to your local nursery or visit the Fletcher wildlife Garden and its website. Notes for each plant are a guide only. Some plants will grow in less than ideal conditions, but fruit and seeds may be limited. Information after each plant indicates average height (not given

for herbaceous plants). light and soil requirements.

**Legend: Light: Sh = shade, Su = su;  
Soil: W = wet, M = moist, D = dry.**

### **Fruit bearing Shrubs and Trees**

**Black Cherry**, *Prunus serotina*, to 22m [Su-Sh, D,M]

**Chokecherry**, *Prunus virginiana*, 2-3 m (occ. to 12 m) [Su-part Sh, M,D]

**Common or Canadian Elder**, *Sambucus canadensis*, to 3 m [Su, M,D]

**Downy Serviceberry**, *Amelanchier arborea*, to 12m [Su-Sh, D, M]

**Flowering raspberry**, *Rubus odoratus*, 1-2 m [Su-Sh, M]

**Hawthorns**, *Crataegus* species, to 12m [Su, D,M]

**Pagoda Dogwood**, *Cornus alternifolia*, to 12 m [Sh, M,D]

**Red-berried Elder**, *Sambucus pubens*, to 4 m [Sh, D]

**Red Osier Dogwood**, *Cornus stolonifera*, 1-3m [Sh, M]

**Staghorn Sumac**, *Rhus typhina*, to 6 m [Su-Sh, M, D] (spreads quickly, keep in check by pruning)

**Pin Cherry**, *P. pensylvanica*, to 12 m [Su, D,M]

### **Vines**

**Bittersweet**, *Celastrus scandens* [Su-part Sh]. Need both male and female plants for fruit.

**Virginia Creeper**, *Parthenocissus vitacea* and *Parthenocissus quinquefolia* [Sh-Su, 5m +]

**Wild Grape**, *Vitis riparia*, [prefers sun, 5m +]

### **Seed and nut-bearing Shrubs and Trees**

**Birch, Paper**, *Betula papyrifera*, to 25m [Su, M, D]

**Eastern White Cedar**, *Thuja occidentalis*, to 15 m [Sh-Su, M,D]

**Hazelnut**, *Corylus cornuta*, 3-4 m [Sh-su, M,D]

**Jack Pine**, *Pinus banksiana*, to 30m [Su, D, M]

**Red Maple**, *Acer rubrum*, to 25m [Su-part Sh, M]

**Sugar Maple**, *Acer saccharum*, to 35m [Sh-Su, M]

**White Pine** *Pinus strobus*, to 20m [Su, D]

**Herbaceous plants** (unless noted, the following provide seeds for birds)

**Bergamot**, *Monarda fistulosa* [Su,Sh, D] Nectar

**Butterfly Weed**, *Asclepias tuberosa* [Su, D] Nectar

**Canada Goldenrod**, *Solidago canadensis* [Su, D, M]

**Common evening primrose**, *Oenothera biennis* [Su, D]

**Fireweed**, *Epilobium angustifolium* [Su, D, M] Nectar

**Gray-headed Coneflower**, *Ratibida pinnata* [Su, D]

**Jewelweed**, *Impatiens capensis* [Su-Sh, M] Nectar

**New England Aster**, *Aster novae-angliae* [Su, D, M]

**Panic Grass**, *Panicum* species. [Su, D]

**Phlox**, *Phlox* species [Su, M] Nectar

**Sunflowers**, *Helianthus* spp. [Su, D]

**Wild strawberry**, *Fragaria virginiana* [Su, D]

## **Resources**

*Backyard Habitat for Canada's Wildlife*. 1996. Canadian Wildlife Federation.

Martin, Alexander, et al.1951. *American Wildlife & Plants, A Guide to Wildlife Food Habits*.  
Dover Reprints.

Needham, Bobbe. 1995. *Beastly Abodes: Homes for Birds, Bats, Butterflies and Other Backyard Wildlife*. Sterling Publishing Co.  
Soper, James and M. Heimburger. 1982. *Shrubs of Ontario*. Royal Ontario Museum  
Terres, John K. 1994. *Songbirds in your garden*. Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill.  
Vriends, Matthew. 1990. *Feeding and Sheltering Backyard Birds*. Barron's.

Wildlife Gardens-information, [www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/howto/index.php](http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher/howto/index.php)  
Window Kills. [www.home.achilles.net/ofnc/fletcher/alphabet/windowkills.php](http://www.home.achilles.net/ofnc/fletcher/alphabet/windowkills.php)

Information about finding native plants: [www.home.achilles.net/ofnc/links.html#fletcher](http://www.home.achilles.net/ofnc/links.html#fletcher)  
2001-2002 Native Plant Resource Guide for Ontario. [www.serontario.org/publica.htm](http://www.serontario.org/publica.htm)

### **Visit the Fletcher Wildlife Garden!**

Located east side of Prince of Wales Drive, just south of the traffic circle on the Central Experimental Farm. Five hectares with walking trails, old field, woodlots, hedgerow, butterfly meadow, pond, backyard garden, and Interpretive Centre. Phone the FWG at 234-6767 for more information or visit the website above.

#### **Workshop sponsored by:**

The Ottawa Wildlife Festival [www.ncrwildlifefestival.org/](http://www.ncrwildlifefestival.org/)  
The Canadian Museum of Nature [www.nature.ca/nature\\_e.cfm](http://www.nature.ca/nature_e.cfm)  
The Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club [www.ofnc.ca/](http://www.ofnc.ca/)  
The Fletcher Wildlife Garden [www.ofnc.ca/fletcher.php](http://www.ofnc.ca/fletcher.php)

Text: Christine Hanrahan  
Illustrations: Ken Allison  
Illus: Black-capped Chickadee at nest box  
House Finch at bird bath  
Bohemian Waxwings