

News from the Watershed

Bring birds to your back yard

Wherever you live, you can bring comfort to wildlife and joy to your own life by offering a bit of habitat to nature's creatures. You can have a small wildlife sanctuary in your own backyard. With the right plants for food and shelter, you can attract spring and fall migrating birds as well as those that might stay year round. Add water and you can do wonders for birds, butterflies and your own disposition.

If you want to be successful at creating a welcome place for these creatures, think like a bird! For example, all birds need three things to survive; food, shelter and water. If a bird flies over your yard and sees a close-cropped lawn, sheared shrubs and flowering plants with no blooms; it may think of your yard as an unwelcoming desert like area. There is nothing to eat, nowhere to hide and no good nesting areas! Therefore, the landscaping choices you make, will be a deciding factor in the success of your backyard sanctuary!

Fruits, nuts, and seeds from trees, shrubs, flowers and grasses will attract a variety of birds. Plant plants that offer the type of food the birds you prefer enjoy. The same is true for feeding stations; the location, feeder style and food type will determine the birds that visit. If you want to provide year-round habitat for birds and butterflies, you will need to provide a year-round food supply.

To attract the greatest variety of birds, use a station with a variety of feeder types, such as gravity-fed cylinder tubes, hopper boxes, platforms and suet feeders. Position them at different levels. Offer millet for ground feeders; black oil sunflower and thistle for finches, and peanut and suet for woodpeckers. Locate the station feeders next to natural cover such as evergreen shrubs or trees. The feeders should be clean with fresh food or seed.

The same trees, shrubs, flowers and grasses that offer food to your backyard birds can offer them cover. The birds use that cover for escape, roosting, nesting and rearing their young. Another option is to build or purchase birdhouses designed for specific species of birds, with the opening size critical.

In addition, most birds need open water for bathing, drinking and controlling their temperatures. A small backyard pond or a birdbath will do the job. The sound of flowing water attracts birds, so a fountain or small waterfall will increase your chances to bring birds to your back yard.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service has a well illustrated, full color 28-page booklet available on backyard conservation available at no charge. It contains names of trees, shrubs, flowers and foods that attract birds. It is available by calling 888-LANDCARE. For more information, stop at our office at 4505 George Blvd. in Sebring or visit the NRCS Wildlife Habitat Management Institute's website at www.whmi.nrcs.usda.gov or the NRCS home web site at www.nrcs.usda.gov

Hummingbirds don't use a sense of smell to select food sources, but can taste the amount of sugar in solution. They prefer sweeter concentrates, like those possible in a sugar and water feeder.

Did you know....

Hummingbirds, the smallest birds in North America, are the only birds that can fly

backwards. Their wings are adapted to helicopter-like flight-- a circular whirl that allows them to hover, move ahead, sideways or backward.