



HCTF Education Habitats at Home

Learn how to create habitats that bring nature into your own backyard!

Make a.. Bird-Friendly Backyard



Purpose

Birds are wonderful wildlife to encourage in your backyard. With so many shapes, sizes, colours, behaviours, and songs, you'll have endless opportunities for observation and appreciation. Some birds will stay all year round while others may be migratory visitors. Follow the list below to ensure that birds feel at home and safe in your yard. Then grab some binoculars and see if you can spot some of the birds listed on the back!

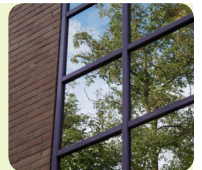
Build a nest box

Many bird species make their nest in tree cavities, but often there aren't enough tree holes to go around. You can help by providing a nest box with an entrance hole and cavity size designed to attract the birds you want to nest and discourage the birds you don't, such as invasive House sparrows and European starlings. Too large a hole will definitely invite starling occupancy. Smaller holes can be made oval or as horizontal slots to discourage House sparrows too chubby to fit through a narrow opening. Find dimensions for nest boxes in the Naturescape BC provincial guide (available for download [here](#))



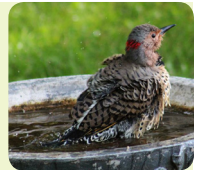
Avoid window collisions

Birds often hit windows because they can't distinguish the reflection of plants in the glass from the real thing. Other times they will try to fly through glassed-in areas if the outdoors is visible through it. The key is to make the window visible to birds. Visit [Safe Wings Canada](#) to learn more about what works (such as safety film and lengths of string) and what doesn't (such as hawk silhouettes and plastic owls).



Provide a bird bath

A reliable source of water is very valuable for wildlife. Many birds use water not only for drinking, but for grooming as well. After bathing, birds will preen, running their bills through their feathers to spread oil from a gland located at the base of the tail. These naturally-oiled feathers provide crucial insulation during cold and wet weather. Be sure to change the water often to keep things clean. More information on bird bath placement and maintenance is available [here](#).



Protect birds from pets

Environment Canada estimates that cats kill between 100 million and 350 million birds per year in Canada; 38% of those are by pet cats. Keeping cats indoors is the simplest solution but there are ways for cats to enjoy the outdoors safely as well. Learn more at [Cats and Birds](#). Dogs can harm birds by destroying the nests of ground-nesting birds, disturbing habitat, and killing birds. If you have a dog in your yard, considering fencing off a portion for wildlife. Walk dogs on a leash and keep them away from ecologically sensitive areas.



Naturescape for birds

Consider your garden with birds in mind. Planting native shrubs such as Saskatoon (*Amelanchier alnifolia*) and snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*) will provide shelter as well as berries for birds to eat. Red flowering currant (*Ribes sanguineum*) is a hummingbird favourite. See The Naturescape BC regional guides for a list of native plants suitable to your area (available for download [here](#)).



Provide food

Feeding birds is a great way to view wildlife. The best location for a feeder is a quiet sheltered spot with some dense shrubbery 2-3 metres away as a retreat from predators. Different types of feeders suit different types of birds. Note the kinds of birds nearby to help you choose what types of foods will attract the birds in your area. See the Naturescape BC provincial guide (available for download [here](#)) to learn which foods attract which birds. Bird feeders need to be cleaned frequently so birds don't get sick. Go to [Audubon](#) for more on how to safely feed birds.



Backyard Birds of the Central Interior



The Central Interior Ecoprovince lies east of the Coast Mountains between the Fraser Basin and the Thompson Plateau. Some of the ranges east of the coastal mountains are also included because they are much drier and have a more “interior type” of climate. The ecoprovince consists of the Chilcotin and Cariboo Plateaus, the southern Nechako Plateau, and the Bulkley, Thatsa, and Chilcotin Ranges west to the centre of the Pacific Ranges.

Canada jay *Perisoreus canadensis* (Year-round resident)

Also known as Whiskey Jack. The Canada jay is 25 to 33 cm. Both males and females have medium grey back feathers with a lighter grey underside. Its head is mostly white with a dark grey or black nape and hood, with a short black beak and dark eyes. The long tail is medium grey with lighter tips. Canada jays live year-round in coniferous forests, surviving in winter months on food cached throughout their territory in warmer periods. A variety of vocalizations are used and, like other corvids (members of the crow family), Canada jays may mimic other bird species, especially predators.



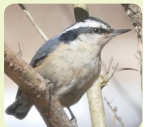
Red-breasted nuthatch *Sitta canadensis* (Year-round resident)

The adult is 11 cm and has blue-grey upperparts with cinnamon underparts, a white throat and face with a black stripe through the eyes, a straight grey bill and a black crown. Males have a rusty coloured breast while females have paler underparts. It forages on the trunks and large branches of trees, often descending head first. It eats mainly insects and seeds. It excavates its nest in dead wood, often close to the ground. Its call, which has been likened to a tin trumpet, is high-pitched and nasal.

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Cedar waxwing *Bombycilla cedrorum* (Breeding season resident)

Cedar waxwings are medium-sized birds approximately 15–18 cm long. Their plumage is a mixture of brown, gray, and yellow, with brilliant-red wax-like droplets on the wing feathers. Their heads are topped with a pointed crest and black mask with a thin white border around the eyes. The tail is typically yellow or orange depending on diet. Males and females look alike. Calls of these birds include very high-pitched whistles and buzzy trills. Preferred habitat consists of trees at the edge of wooded areas that provide access to berry sources as well as water. They are frequently seen in fruiting trees.



Pine siskin *Spinus pinus* (Year-round resident)

Adults of both sexes are brown on the upperparts and pale on the underparts, with heavy streaking throughout. They have yellow patches on their wings and on their short forked tails. Total length can range from 11–14 cm. Their bills are conical like most finches, but are more elongated and slender. While they favour feeding in open forest canopies where cone seeds are abundant, they’ll forage in habitats as diverse as deciduous forests, grasslands, roadsides, and backyard gardens and lawns. They flock to backyard feeders offering small seeds. Their call is a harsh, upsweeping “zreeeeeet”.



Common redpoll *Acanthis flammea* (Winter resident)

The Common redpoll is a small brownish-grey finch with dark streaks and a bright red patch on its forehead. Males also have red on their breasts. It has a black chin and two pale stripes on the wings. Adults measure between 11.5 and 14cm. Its typical habitat is boreal forests of pines, spruces and larches. It feeds mainly on seeds, principally birch and alder seeds in the winter. Common redpolls form vocal, chattering flocks characterized by three main calls: a chatter of several sharp, zapping notes; a nasal, rising whistle lasting nearly half a second, and a rattle or trill that lasts nearly a second.

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Mountain bluebird *Sialia currucoides* (Breeding season resident)

The Mountain bluebird has a length from 16–20 cm. They have light underbellies and black eyes. Adult males are bright turquoise-blue and somewhat lighter underneath. Adult females have duller blue wings and tail, grey breast, grey crown, throat and back. Their habitat is open, grassy country including mountainous areas. Diet includes spiders, grasshoppers, flies and other insects, and small fruits. Mountain Bluebirds will come to a platform feeder with live mealworms, berries, or peanuts. Their call is a thin “few”; while their song is warbled, high “chur chur”.

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Identify and learn more about the birds you see with the Merlin Bird ID app, from The Cornell Lab for free download at <https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/>