



## 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!

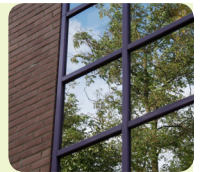
### Build a nest box

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](#))



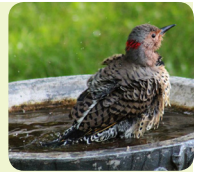
### Avoid window collisions

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 Southern Interior Mountains



This ecoprovince is shared with Washington, Idaho, Montana and Alberta with about 50% of it occurring in BC. It includes the southeastern part of the province, east of the Thompson-Okanagan plateaus. From north to south, some of the communities in the ecoprovince include McBride, Blue River, Golden, Revelstoke, Invermere, Sparwood, Kimberley, Cranbrook, Nelson, Castlegar, Trail and Creston.

## Lewis' woodpecker *Melanerpes lewis* (Breeding season resident)

One of the largest species of North American woodpeckers, Lewis's woodpecker can measure up to 25–28cm in length. Both males and females are reddish-breasted, blackish-green in colour with a black rump. It has a grey collar and upper breast, with a pinkish belly, and a red face. Lives mostly in open pine woodlands and other areas with scattered trees and snags. It catches insects on the wing as rather than digging into wood as many woodpecker species do. It also feeds on berries and nuts, and will store them in cracks and holes in wood until winter. It will also feed at flat, open bird feeders. Call is a series of short, chattery squeaks.



## Red-naped sapsucker *Sphyrapicus nuchalis* (Breeding season resident)

Adults measure 19–21 cm and have a black head with a red forehead, white stripes, and a red spot on the nape. They have a yellow breast and upper belly, and a white lower belly and rump. Back and wings are black with white bars and wing patches. Males have a red throat patch; on females, the lower part of the throat is red, the upper part white. Habitat is mixed forests in the Rocky Mountains. They drill holes in trees and eat the sap as well as insects attracted to it. Small, regular rows of holes in birch, aspen and willow are indications of sapsucker feeding. They also eat seeds and berries. Call is a harsh mewling "waah".

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## American goldfinch *Spinus tristis* (Breeding season resident)

A small finch, 11–14 cm. The male is lemon yellow with a black cap and white rump that is visible during flight. The female is mostly brown, lighter on the underside with a yellow bib. In autumn, both sexes become buff below and olive-brown above, with a pale yellow face and bib. The male retains yellow shoulder patches. They prefer open country such as meadows and gardens. Diet consists of the seeds from a wide variety of annual plants, often those of thistle and sunflower relatives and grasses. It will also eat at bird feeders. Call in flight is "ti-di-di-di".

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## Evening grosbeak *Coccothraustes vespertinus* (Year-round resident)

The adult measures 16 to 22 cm and has a short black tail, black wings and a large pale bill. The adult male has a bright yellow forehead and body; its head is brown and there is a large white patch in the wing. The adult female is mainly olive-brown, greyer on the underparts and with white patches in the wings. Habitat is coniferous and mixed forest. These birds forage in trees and bushes, sometimes on the ground. They mainly eat seeds, berries, and insects. Evening grosbeaks give sweet, piercing calls and burry chirps.

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## Spotted towhee *Pipilo maculatus* (Breeding season resident)

The Spotted towhee is between 17cm and 21cm long. It has a long, dark, fan-shaped tail with white corners. They have a round body with bright red eyes and dull pink legs. Adult males have a generally darker head, upper body and tail with a white belly, rufous sides, white spots on their back and white wing bars. Females look similar but are dark brown and grey instead of black. Habitat is dry upland forests. These birds forage on the ground or in low vegetation. They mainly eat insects, ground dwelling beetles, spiders and other arthropods found in the leaf litter. They make a catlike "mew" call.

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## Pygmy nuthatch *Sitta pygmaea* (Year-round resident)

The Pygmy nuthatch is about 10 cm long with similar plumage in males and females: warm grey cap, whitish spot on the nape, blue-grey upper-parts, and whitish underparts. It is usually found in pines (especially ponderosa pines), Douglas-firs, and other conifers. They climb through the foliage of these trees, feeding on insects and seeds. Pygmy nuthatches will also be attracted to suet and sunflower feeders. This species is highly gregarious. A nesting pair may have relatives as helpers. Over 100 birds have been seen roosting in a single tree cavity. Vocalizations are highly varied chirps, peeps, and chattering.



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/>