



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!

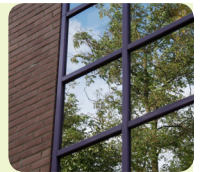
Build a nest box

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](#))



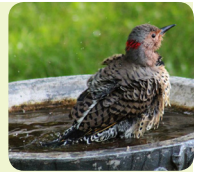
Avoid window collisions

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



This Ecoprovince stretches between BC and Washington, with about 60% of it in BC. It includes the Thompson Plateau, the Pavilion Ranges, the Cascade Ranges from Bridge River to Lake Chelan, the western margin of the Shuswap and Okanagan Highlands. It also includes the eastern side of the Coast Mountains and the drier portion of the Columbia Highlands. It extends southward across the border to the northern edge of the dry Columbia Basin.

California quail *Callipepla californica* (Year-round resident)

These birds have a curving crest or plume, that droops forward: black in males and brown in females; the flanks are brown with white streaks. Males have a dark brown cap and a black face with a brown back, a grey-blue chest and a light brown belly. Females are mainly grey-brown with a light-coloured belly. Adults grow to be 25 cm. Their diet consists mainly of seeds and leaves, but they also eat berries and insects. Found in dry, patchy, low vegetation. Quail are usually seen walking, running, and foraging on the ground. They are sociable birds and often gather in small flocks. Call is a stiffly accented “*Chi-ca-go*”.



Mourning dove *Zenaida macroura* (Year-round resident)

Approximately 31 cm in length. Plumage is light grey-brown and lighter below. The wings have black spotting, and the outer tail feathers are white, with the black inners. Below the eye is a crescent-shaped area of dark feathers. The mourning dove occupies a wide variety of open habitats, such as urban areas, grassland, and lightly wooded areas. It is often seen foraging for seeds on the ground or perched on telephone wires or tree limbs. On takeoff, their wings make a whistly, whirring sound. Call is a “*cooOOoo-woo-woo-woooo*”.



Calliope hummingbird *Selasphorus calliope* (Breeding season resident)

The Calliope is the smallest breeding bird found in Canada. An adult can measure 7–10 cm. Calliope hummingbirds have glossy green on the back and crown with white underparts. The adult male has wine-red streaks on the gorget, green flanks and a dark tail. Females and immatures have a pinkish wash on the flanks, dark streaks on the throat and a dark tail with white tips. Breeding habitat includes mountain meadows and streamside thickets at higher elevations in the Rocky Mountains. These birds feed on nectar from flowers, drink sap from holes created by sapsuckers, and catch insects.



Clark's nutcracker *Nucifraga columbiana* (Year-round resident)

Clark's nutcracker can reach an average length of 28.8 cm. Both males and females have an ashy-grey back, head, and breast. The wings and tail are black and white. The central tail feathers are black and the outer ones white and are conspicuous in flight. The black bill is long, stout, and cone-shaped. It is mainly found in mountains at altitudes of 900–3,900 metres in conifer forest. The most important food resources for this species are the seeds of pines, which it stores in the ground for later consumption. This bird travels in flocks and its loud calls can be heard from a distance. The call is commonly described as “*khraaaah-khraaaah*”.



White-crowned sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys* (Breeding season resident)

Males and females are 18 cm long and have black and white stripes on their head, while head stripes on juveniles are brown. The brown back is streaked and the tail is long. The breast is grey and not streaked. The small bill is pink or yellow. These birds forage while hopping on the ground or in low vegetation, sometimes making short flights to catch flying insects. They mainly eat seeds, other plant parts, and insects. Song is a sweet, whistling introduction, a succession of jumbled whistles, and a buzz or trill near the end.



Mountain chickadee *Poecile gambeli* (Year-round resident)

Adults of both sexes have a black cap joining a black stripe behind distinctive white eyebrows, which distinguishes them from other types of chickadees found in the province. Their backs and flanks are grey and they have paler grey underparts; they have a short black bill, and a black bib. Overall length is 13–15 cm. Habitat is mountain forests of pine, spruce, fir, or Douglas-fir, also groves of aspen in coniferous zones. Diet consists of insects, berries, small fruits, conifer seeds, and other plant seeds. Their call is a throaty “*chick-adee-dee-dee*”. Their song sounds like it is whistling the word “*Cheeseburger*”.



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/>