



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!

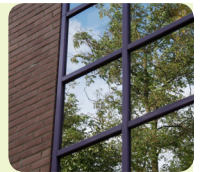
Build a nest box

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](#))



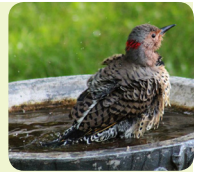
Avoid window collisions

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 Coast and Mountains



The Coast and Mountains Ecoprovince extends from southeastern Alaska to the northern Cascade Mountains in Washington. In British Columbia it includes the western side of the Coast Mountains and Vancouver Island, all of Haida Gwaii, and the islands of the Continental Shelf including Dixon Entrance, Hecate Strait, Queen Charlotte Strait and the Vancouver Island Shelf.

Song sparrow *Melospiza melodia* (Year-round resident)

Both males and females have brown upper-parts with dark streaks on the back and are white underneath with dark streaking and a dark brown spot in the middle of the breast. They have a brown cap and a long brown rounded tail. Their face is grey with a brown streak through each eye. The body length ranges from 11 to 18 cm. The Song sparrow favours brushland and marshes, but also thrives in human-dominated areas. These birds forage on the ground, in shrubs or in very shallow water. They mainly eat insects and seeds. Singing consists of a combination of repeated notes, quickly passing isolated notes, and trills.



Rufous hummingbird *Selasphorus rufus* (Breeding season resident)

The Rufous hummingbird is a small hummingbird, about 8 cm long. The male has an iridescent orange-red throat patch (known as a 'gorget'), a rust-coloured face, flanks and tail, and white breast. Some males have some green on back and/or crown. The female has green, white, some iridescent orange feathers in the center of the throat, and a dark tail with white tips and rufous (rust) base. They feed on nectar from flowers using a long extendible tongue or catch insects on the wing. These birds are known for their extraordinary flight skills, flying 3,200 km during their migratory transits from wintering grounds in Mexico.

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Northern flicker *Colaptes auratus* (Year-round resident)

Adults are brown with black bars on the back and wings. A Northern flicker measures 28–36 cm. A necklace-like black patch occupies the upper breast, while the lower breast and belly are beige with black spots. Males can be identified by a black or red "moustache" at the base of the beak. The tail is dark on top, transitioning to a white rump which is conspicuous in flight. Their primary food is insects, particularly ants, which they will forage for on the ground. Flickers may be observed in open habitats near trees, including woodland edges, yards, and parks. This bird's call is a sustained laugh, "ki ki ki ki".

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Steller's jay *Cyanocitta stelleri* (Year-round resident)

Steller's jay is about 30–34 cm. The head is dark blue with lighter streaks on the forehead and a pronounced black crest. This colouring gives way from the shoulders and lower breast to silvery blue, and is the same for males and females. Steller's jays are common in residential and agricultural areas with nearby forests. Steller's jay's diet includes a wide range of seeds, nuts, berries and other fruit. They also eat many types of invertebrates, small rodents, eggs, and nestlings. One common call is a harsh "SHACK-Sheck-sheck-sheck". They can also mimic other species of birds, other animals, and sounds of non-animal origin.



Dark-eyed junco *Junco hyemalis* (Year-round resident)

Adults generally have grey-black heads, necks, and breasts, grey or brown backs and wings, and a white belly. Males have darker, more conspicuous markings than the females. White tail edges flash when in flight. The dark-eyed junco is 13 to 17.5 cm. These medium-sized sparrows forage on the ground and eat mainly insects and seeds. Habitat is coniferous or mixed forest areas. Nests are usually cup-shaped depressions on the ground, well hidden by vegetation. Calls include "tick" sounds and very high-pitched tinkling chips.

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Red crossbill *Loxia curvirostra* (Year-round resident)

Crossbills are named for their distinctive beaks that are crossed at the tip. Using their crossed mandibles for leverage, Crossbills are able to separate the scales of conifer cones and extract the seeds. The Red crossbill lives in coniferous woodlands and forages on seeds in pine, hemlock, Douglas-fir, and spruce cones. Chattering flocks are often heard and seen in treetops. Adult males tend to be red or orange, and females green or yellow, but there is wide variation in colour. Length is 14 to 20 cm. The most often heard calls are those given in flight, which range from a short, dry "jip" to a lower, slower, richer "toop".

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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/>