



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!

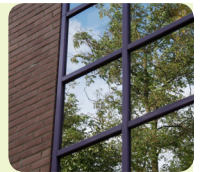
Build a nest box

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](#))



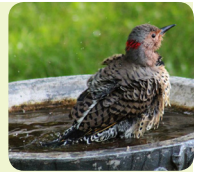
Avoid window collisions

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 Georgia Basin



The Georgia Depression Ecoprovince defines the area in and around the Strait of Georgia. It stretches west from Harrison Hot Springs and Chilliwack along the Fraser River Valley to Greater Vancouver. From there it extends northwest along the Sunshine Coast beyond Powell River and across the strait to the southeastern half of Vancouver Island from Kelsey Bay in the north to Port Alberni, Nanaimo, Victoria, and Sooke in the south.

House Finch *Haemorrhous mexicanus* (Year-round resident)

Adults have a long, square-tipped brown tail and are a brown or dull-brown color across the back with some shading into deep grey on the wing feathers. Breast and belly feathers may be streaked; the flanks usually are. In most cases, adult males' heads, necks and shoulders are reddish. Adult birds are 12.5 to 15 cm. House finches typically forage on the ground or in vegetation. They primarily eat grains, seeds, berries, and seeds, including dandelions. Their song is a rapid, cheery warble or a variety of chirps.

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Bushtit *Psaltiriparus minimus* (Year-round resident)

At 11 cm in length, the American bushtit is one of the smallest songbirds in North America. It is grey-brown overall, with a large head, a short neck, a long tail, and a short stubby bill. The male has dark eyes and the adult female, yellow. Bushtits are active and gregarious, foraging for small insects and spiders in mixed-species feeding flocks containing species such as chickadees and warblers, of 10 to over 40 individuals. Members of a group constantly make contact calls to each other that can be described as a short spit. Bushtits inhabit mixed open woodlands as well as parks and gardens.

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Anna's hummingbird *Calypte anna* (Year-round resident)

Anna's hummingbird is 9.9 to 10.9 cm long. It has an iridescent bronze-green back, a pale grey chest and belly, and green flanks. Its bill is long, straight, and slender. The adult male has an iridescent reddish-pink crown and gorget (which can look dull brown or gray without direct sunlight), and a dark, broad tail. Females also have iridescent red gorgets, though they are smaller and less brilliant than the males'. These birds feed on nectar from flowers using a long extendible tongue. They also consume small insects. Their song is thin and squeaky, interspersed with buzzes and chirps.

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Chestnut-backed chickadee *Poecile rufescens* (Year-round resident)

The Chestnut-backed chickadee is 11.5–12.5 cm. In both males and females the head is dark blackish-brown with white cheeks, the mantle is bright reddish-brown, the wing feathers are dark grey with paler fringes. The underparts are pale grayish-white, with reddish-brown or pale grey flanks. Its habitat is low elevation coniferous forests. It is a cavity-nester, usually utilizing an abandoned woodpecker holes or nest boxes. Its diet is largely insects, but also includes some seeds, especially those of conifers, and fruit. The main call of the Chestnut-backed chickadee is a high, thin, scratchy "chick-a-dee-dee".



Bewick's wren *Thryomanes bewickii* (Year-round resident)

At about 14 cm long, both male and females are grey-brown above, white below, with a long white eyebrow and a long tail that is barred with black and tipped with white spots. Bewick's wren lives in thickets, brush piles and hedgerows, open woodlands and scrubby areas, often near streams. It eats insects and spiders, which it gleans from vegetation or finds on the ground. Nest site is in any kind of cavity, including natural hollows in trees, old woodpecker holes; also in man made sites, including nest boxes. The song is loud and melodious.



Downy woodpecker *Dryobates pubescens* (Year-round resident)

The Downy woodpecker is mainly black on the upper parts and wings, with a white back, throat and belly and white spotting on the wings. There is a white bar above and below the eye. Tail is black with white outer feathers barred with black. Adult males have a red patch on the back of the head. Length of the species ranges from 14 to 18 cm. The Downy woodpecker looks very similar to the larger Hairy woodpecker, but it can be distinguished by the length of its bill. The Downy woodpecker's bill is shorter than its head, whereas the Hairy woodpecker's bill is approximately equal to head length.

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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/>