



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!

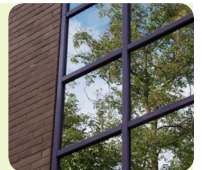
Build a nest box

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](#))



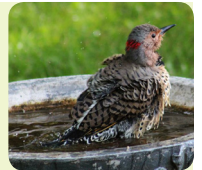
Avoid window collisions

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 Northern Region



The complex area from Prince George north is considered northern British Columbia. It is fully one half the area of the province and covers parts of numerous Ecoprovinces including: the Sub-Boreal Interior, Northern Boreal Mountains, Boreal Plains and Taiga Plains. The northern interior of British Columbia falls within two Ecodomains; the Humid Temperate Ecodomain near the coast and the Polar Ecodomain in the interior.

Black-capped chickadee *Poecile atricapillus* (Year-round resident)

Black-capped chickadees are tiny, round birds with long tails. Males and females look alike, with a black cap and “bib”, white cheeks, and a grey back and tail. Body length is 12–15 cm. They live anywhere with trees and commonly feed and travel in noisy and energetic flocks. Insects (especially caterpillars) form a large part of their diet, along with seeds and berries in winter. Black oil sunflower seeds are readily taken from bird feeders. Black-capped chickadees commonly cache (store for later) seeds and sometimes insects. The most familiar call is the “chick-a-dee-dee-dee”.



Black-billed Magpie *Pica hudsonia* (Year-round resident)

The adult bird is 45–60cm long and unmistakable with its long, iridescent dark blue-green tail that comprises half its length. It has a black head, breast, and back, and white wing patches that clearly flash in flight. Habitat is open country with thickets and scattered trees. They can be found near farms and within cities and suburbs. An opportunistic omnivore, their diet includes insects, carrion, seeds, rodents, berries, nuts, eggs, and also garbage and pet food. A social and vocal bird, its calls are a nasal, inquisitive “mag mag mag” or “yak yak yak”.



White-breasted nuthatch *Sitta carolinensis* (Year-round resident)

Adults are 13–14 cm long with a stocky body, large head, short tail, powerful bill, and strong feet. It has a black cap, white face, chest, and flanks, blue-grey upper parts, and a chestnut lower belly. It forages for insects on trunks and branches and is able to move head-first down trees. Seeds form a substantial part of its winter diet, as do acorns and hickory nuts stored in the fall. It is readily attracted to bird feeders for sunflower seeds or suet. Mature deciduous forest is preferred habitat, including orchards, parks, and suburban gardens. Its call is a loud, nasal “yank yank”.



Bohemian waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus* (Year-round resident)

This robin-sized (19–23 cm in length) bird is named for the shiny red, yellow, and white markings on its wing tips and tail that look as though it was dipped in wax. It is greyish overall, with a prominent crest, a black face mask surrounded by cinnamon-coloured areas. Its grey belly and chestnut colour under its tail distinguish it from its relative, the Cedar waxwing. Flocks of Bohemian waxwings wander unpredictably in a wide range of habitats seeking fruits of trees and shrubs, such as mountain ash. Flocks can be heard calling collectively, a high trill, “sirrrr”.



Pine Grosbeak *Pinicola enucleator* (Year-round resident)

This species is one of the largest species in the finch family and measures from 20 to 25.5cm in length. Adults have a long, forked, black tail, black wings with white wing bars, and a large bill. Adult males have a rose-red head, back, and rump. Adult females are olive-yellow on the head and rump and grey on the back and underparts. The Pine grosbeak forages in coniferous forests. They slowly hop between tree branches or on the ground as they feed on buds, seeds, berries, and insects. They drink water or eat snow daily and are a frequent visitor to feeders with sunflower seeds. Call is a whistled “pui pui pui”.

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White-throated Sparrow *Zonotrichia albicollis* (Breeding season resident)

Measures 15 to 19cm in length. There are two adult plumage variations, regardless of sex. White-striped form (1): crown is black with a white central stripe. Tan form (2): crown is dark brown with a tan central stripe. Both variations feature a white throat and yellow above the eyes. The breast and flanks have grey/tan streaks, the belly is light grey. Wings are rufous with two white wing bars. These birds almost always pair with the opposite colour morph for breeding. They forage on the ground and in low vegetation. They mainly eat seeds, insects and berries. Song has the cadence of “O-oh sweet Canada, Canada, Canada”

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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/>