

# Love Birds

The Benefits of Bird



# Call Me a Birdbrain

bird·brain /'bɜrd ,brān/

*noun* INFORMAL

Mildly insulting phrase denotes silly behavior or actions, usually attributed to an immature person.

# Bird Brains

- Pigeons have better eyesight than humans do and have been trained by the US Coast Guard to spot orange life jackets of people lost at sea.
- Birds have the ability to navigate migration safely, despite changing landmarks and hazards
- Birds show emotions through courtship, caring for nestlings, etc.

**Cardinals could be called a romantic bird species. They mate for life and stay together year-round, they sing together before nesting, and their courtship behavior includes the male gathering food and feeding it to the female beak-to-beak.**



*Image: linda yvonne*

[mind-blowingfacts.com](http://mind-blowingfacts.com)

# Benefits of Birds

- Indicators of a healthy backyard environment
- Natural and cheep 😊 pest control
- Entertainment, education, and socialization for children and adults
- What we can do

Birds are  
indicators of a  
healthy  
environment



The more diverse the garden, the healthier it generally is.

And a diverse bird population in a garden is a sign of a garden's health.

Ashburn Village's revitalized Tippecanoe Lake

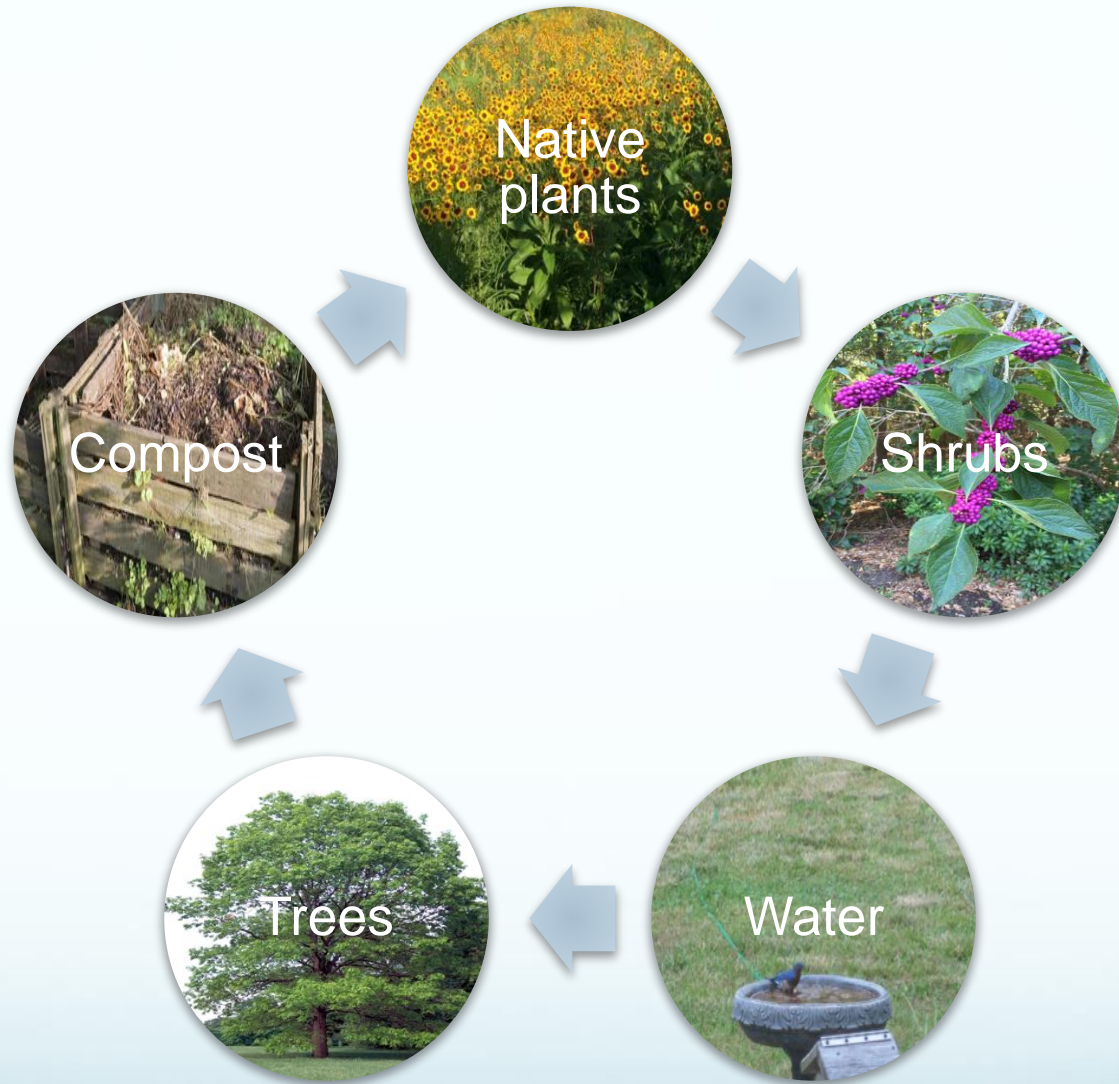






A manicured lawn has little value  
in the bird landscape.





Birds play vital roles in their natural communities and have evolved over millions of years to fill unique niches.

- Graceful hummingbirds co-evolved with flowers to pollinate them in highly specialized relationships
- Insectivorous birds like flycatchers help keep bug levels in check; and
- Opportunistic scavengers like vultures keep ecosystems free of excessive carrion and recycle nutrients from dead animals.

Native plants are better for native birds than introduced flora.

Native trees and shrubs

- have evolved with the local wildlife,
- they harbor more insects than non-native plants,
- they provide greater amounts of food for certain critters.





## RESTORING NATIVES TO SUBURBIA



A



B



C



D

Alien plants like Bradford pear (A) and autumn olive (B) are avoided by native insects, while native plant species like black cherry (C) and red maple (D) are good food sources for native insect species.



"If you have a backyard, this book is for you."

—Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods*

# Bringing Nature Home

UPDATED AND EXPANDED

How You Can  
Sustain Wildlife  
with Native Plants

Douglas W. Tallamy

With a Foreword by Rick Darke

“Instead of a Ginkgo, plant an oak. Ginkgos support no caterpillar species — important bird food — while oaks support 557 species of caterpillars,” Tallamy said.

Instead of *Pieris Japonica*, which also supports zero caterpillars, plant a native viburnum that supports 105 caterpillar species.”

- <http://audubonva.org/audubon-at-home-1>
- Doug Tallamy’s 2 min. video on native plants



From Doug Tallmay's book:



There are no white oaks of reproductive age within a mile of our house. This white oak seedling germinated from an acorn that was likely carried to our yard by a blue jay.



Blue jays are excellent dispersers of large seeds.







John Peterson, Bob Potts, and John Seiler.

Free phone app or desktop website  
for tree identification and selection



\* Dendrology is the scientific study of trees.

Seed-eating birds such as finches and sparrows contribute to a healthy garden by keeping weeds from taking over.

These birds can consume great quantities of weed seeds, thus helping gardeners control unwanted plants.





Fruits of my labor



## Stress Relief –

Watching birds, interacting with them, listening to their songs and taking the time to work outdoors improving their habitat can help relieve stress and promote well-being.

Birds are a  
natural  
pest control

Birds are the least toxic method to managing pests.  
Birds consume thousands of insects, especially in the spring when they're feeding their young.

When birds are present, it eliminates the need for toxic insecticides and herbicides.



Photo: Doug Tallamy

Carolina Chickadees sure love their caterpillars and insects: Invertebrates comprise up to 90 percent of some birds' diets.

When it may take 6,000 to 9,000 caterpillars in a season to raise a brood of five chickadees, the presence of natives becomes even more apparent.

Coffee growers in Costa Rica bolster studied the effects of leaving patches of their plantations as untouched rainforest.

The birds were eating an aggressive coffee bean pest, the borer beetle, thereby improving coffee bean yields by hundreds of dollars per hectare.

Five species of birds contributed to cutting infestation rates in half, and these birds were more abundant on farms featuring more forests.





## Hedgerows in Kale Increase Pest Control

More Cabbage Looper caterpillars were consumed by birds near shrubby field margins than near other uncultivated areas.



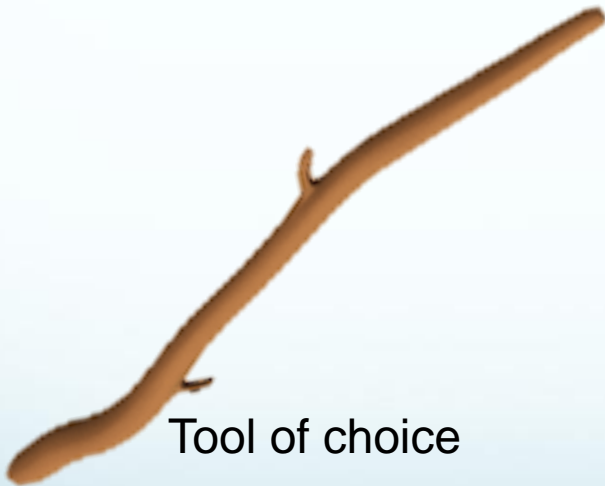
“Supporting Beneficial Birds and Managing Pest Birds”  
study by Wild Farm Alliance



Purple Martins can eat their weight in flying insects each day, including gnats, flies, and mosquitoes.



Eastern Tent Caterpillar



Tool of choice

Birds provide entertainment,  
education, and socialization  
for children and adults

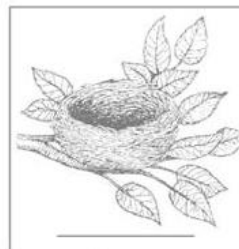


What do you get if you combine  
a peacock with a cell phone?  
A squawky talkie!

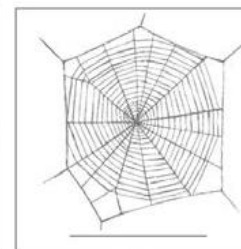
## Animal Homes Hike

WORKSHEET

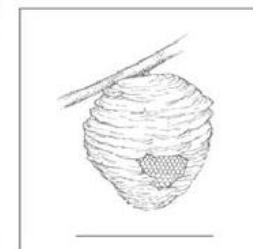
DIRECTIONS: Place a tally mark below the animal home each time you observe it on your hike.



Nest



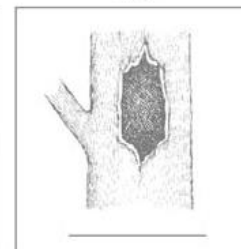
Web



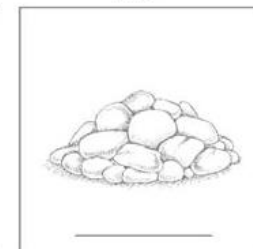
Hive



Brush Pile



Tree Hollow



Rock Pile



Mound, or Hole in Ground

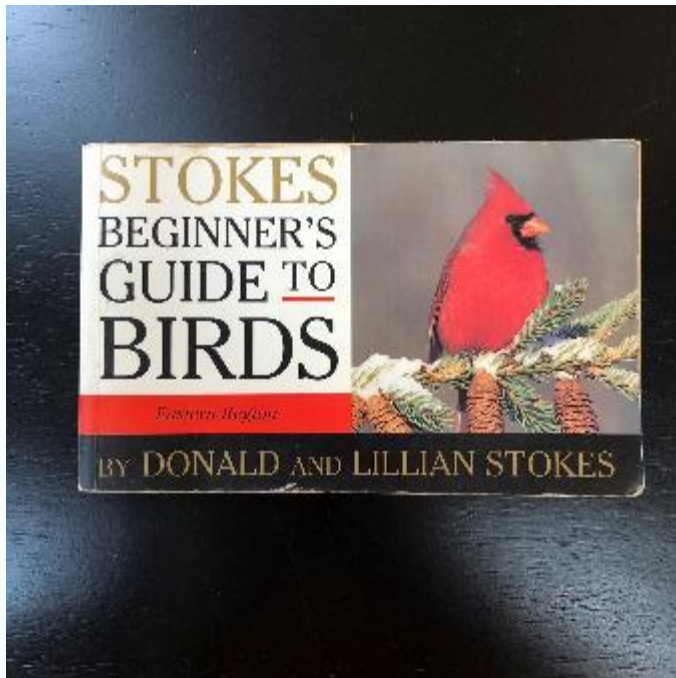


Crevice, or Cave



Pond, Stream, or Lake

Bird watching at home.







An avid nature photographer, gamer, and birdwatcher, Adam Dhalla is the recipient of the American Birding Association's 2018 Young Birder of the Year award.

“Find the Birds” video game is a 2D game about finding birds, and more importantly, learning about conservation and the issues that plague them in an interactive fashion aimed at kids and young teens, but it's intended to be fun for everyone. It'll be a brand-new way to inspire a whole generation of future conservationists.

Build birdhouses!

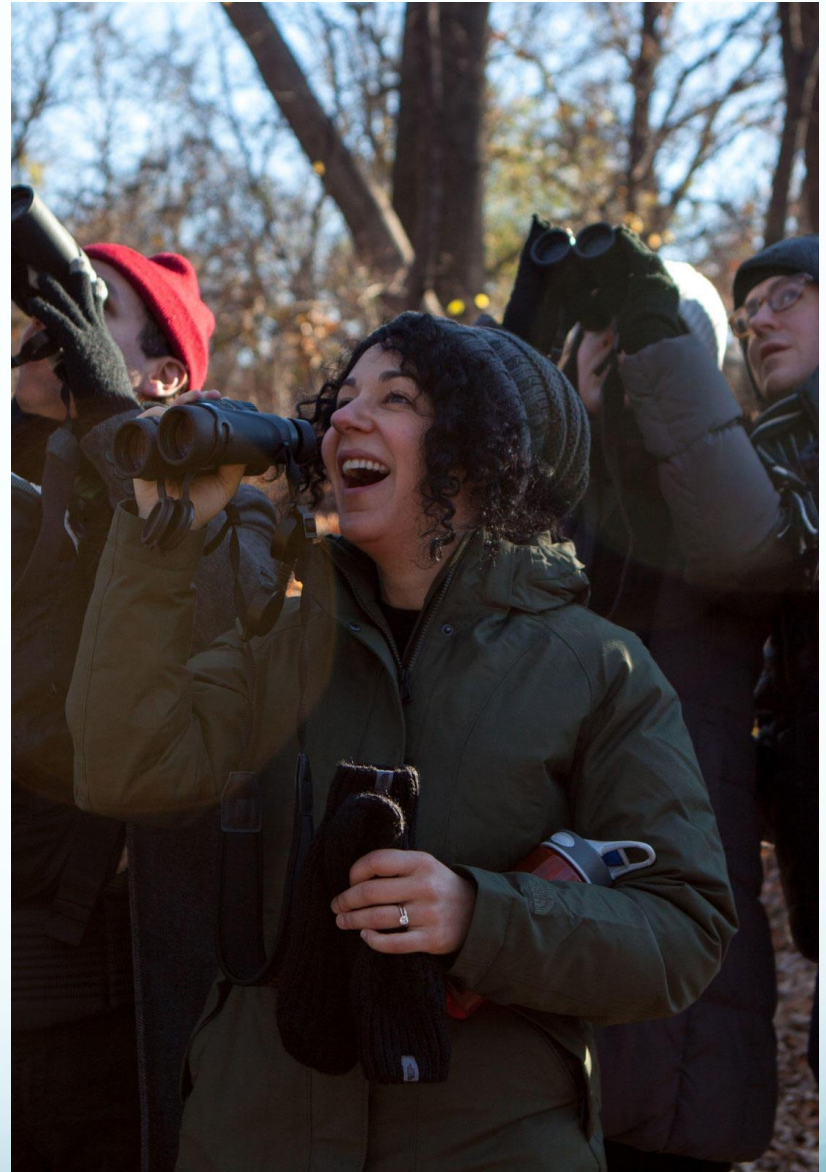


# Great Backyard Bird Count

February 14-17, 2020

[birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org)

- Count birds for 15 minutes
- Report online
- Real-time maps
- Photo contest



Birds are in  
decline



## Bird numbers on the decline across North America

A newly released comprehensive study estimates a 29 percent loss in overall wild bird counts since the 1970s.



SOURCE: *Journal Science*

AP



Habitat loss was the number one reason for bird loss, often due to logging and urban development.



[abcbirds.org](http://abcbirds.org)

**Goldenrod** is a mecca for wildlife; bees, butterflies, and other beneficial insects drink nectar and take shelter, songbirds eat the seeds, and rabbits and other small mammals browse the leaves.

**Ironweed** and **Joe-pye weed** are butterfly magnets and provide seeds to songbirds.

There are more than 150 native species of **asters**, they attract butterflies, song birds, and native bees as well as host plants for several butterflies.

A 2015 study said cats kill 2.6 billion birds each year in the United States and Canada.

## Keep your cats indoors



Put a bell on their collar to make it less likely to sneak up on birds if they get out of the house.



Keep your cats entertained

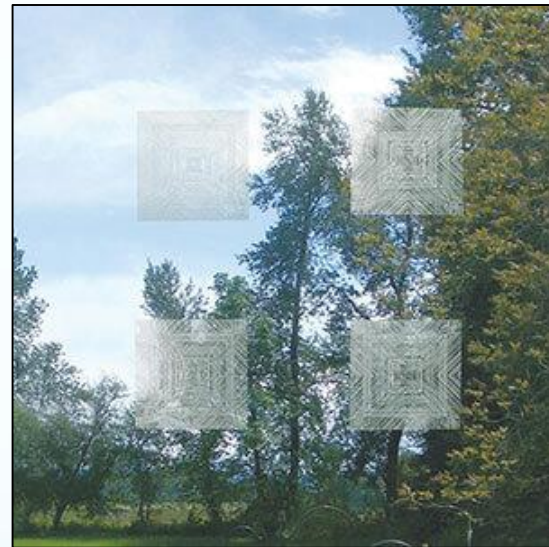
**Window collisions** kill another 624 million and cars another 214 million.



## Prevent window strikes



Tempera paint



Pattern, removable, decals

American Bird Conservancy

Most birds will avoid patterns on glass with vertical stripes four inches apart or less, or horizontal stripes spaced 2" or less apart.

Stripes should be at least 1/4" wide and readily visible.



Shiny beads at door  
prevents bird strikes.





A guard on the front of your bluebird house will protect them from cats and snakes.

## Predators & Pests

**Wasps** – Scrape out nest, rub bar of soap on inside of roof and/or sides of box to discourage them. Keep boxes away from pine trees.

**Snakes** – Eggs of young disappear but the nest remains intact. Predator guards eliminate most snakes but they can drop off trees. Position boxes away from trees or overhanging branches.

**Squirrels, raccoons, opossums** – Nest is destroyed and eggs and/or young are gone. Use Noel guard over the hole to discourage these predators.





A baffle on the pole of  
your bird feeder will  
thwart squirrels



What can we do  
for birds?



Create a Certified Wildlife Habitat through the National Wildlife Federation

- Food
- Water
- Cover
- Places to raise young
- Sustainable practices





## Ecotone:

*The zone of transition from one habitat to another.*

*The wider the zone and the greater the diversity of plant species and vertical structure, the more diversity there will be in the species of wildlife attracted to the site.*



Backyard Wildlife Habitats  
Virginia Tech Pub 426-070





Two kinds of water sources to provide birds for drinking and bathing





# Feed the Birds



Early migrating hummingbirds in central United States can start as early as mid- to late March and early April.

You can leave your feeders out for as long as you have hummingbirds around.

You can even continue to provide the feeder after your hummingbirds disappear—late migrants or out-of-range species can show up into early winter.



Directions for making safe **hummingbird** food:

Mix 1 cup of sugar with 4 cups of water until the sugar is dissolved.

Do not add red dye.

Extra sugar water can be stored in a refrigerator.



[nationalzoo.si.edu](http://nationalzoo.si.edu)

*\*\* If you make your own hummingbird nectar, be sure not to use honey, which can harbor bacteria that harm hummingbirds.*

The height at which you hanging bird feeders is critical. Since most squirrels can't reach or jump much beyond about 4', hang feeders at least 4' from the ground and any tree limbs.



You can also hang feeders from down rigger wire suspended from trees or your deck to thwart bears, squirrels, and raccoons.

Make sure to keep your bird seed out of reach from animals.

\*Tip: locking lid trash cans are no match for raccoons.

## **FRUITS AND NECTARS**

Not all birds are seed-eaters; some prefer fruits or nectar.

Some people choose to put out fruit on a tray for birds; dried fruit or oranges may attract woodpeckers, starlings, bluebirds, orioles, thrashers, cardinals and jays.





Bluebirds are increasing, mostly because people have worked hard to get their numbers up.

It's important to fill bird feeders with quality seed appropriate to local birds.

Cheap wild bird mixes contain seed that many birds kick onto the ground.

The fallen seed then attracts unwanted rodents and bears.

Millet is useful to winter birds, but local summer birds prefer other varieties and a lot of millet ends up on the ground during bear season.

## **GOLDEN MILLET, RED MILLET AND FLAX**

According to Cornell specialists, manufacturers of less-expensive pre-packaged birdseed mixes may use large amounts of golden millet, red millet and flax as fillers.

Some birds will eat red millet, but often these seed types tend to go uneaten. The uneaten seed may pile up around bird feeders and attract rodents. Look for mixes with a low percentage of these seeds.



Bird-planted sunflower

## SUNFLOWER SEEDS

Black-oil sunflower seeds, one of the most popular type of seed for bird feeders, have small, thin shells that make them easier for small birds, such as chickadees, to crack open and eat. They are also high in fat, which especially benefits birds in the winter.

Striped sunflower seeds have thicker shells and are better for heavy-billed birds such as cardinals. Compared with black-oil sunflower seeds, they are harder to crack open and may be a good choice if you don't wish to feed blackbirds or house sparrows.

## **SAFFLOWER SEEDS**

Safflower is a hard-shelled seed. Cardinals especially like safflower seeds, and they may be advantageous as a seed choice in that house sparrows, starlings and squirrels don't usually eat them.

Birds that enjoy safflower include:

- Cardinals
- Grosbeaks
- Doves
- Native sparrows
- Titmice
- Purple finches



## SHELLED AND CRACKED CORN

Cracked corn attracts a number of bird species. Note that cracked corn rots easily if it becomes wet; it's best to put it in a weatherproof feeder or only put out small amounts at a time.

Caution: Cracked corn may attract starlings, cowbirds and house sparrows, and it may also attract deer or squirrels.

University of Florida wildlife specialists warn that **seed coated with a red or pink dye may indicate that it has been treated with a fungicide**. Treated seed can be harmful to birds, so don't use it for feeding.



Cracked corn attracts:



- Pigeons
- Ducks
- Grosbeaks
- Grouse
- Quail
- Pheasants
- Jays



Provide food for wild birds in the winter.



 ALL ABOUT BIRDHOUSES 

 INTERACTIVE 

## Right Bird, Right House

FIND OUT WHICH BIRDS YOU CAN BUILD A NEST BOX OR NEST STRUCTURE FOR IN YOUR REGION AND HABITAT

Select your region of the country and the habitat in which you can place your nest box

I live in:

Select your region ▼

My primary habitat is:

Select your habitat ▼

See Results

[see all birds with nest plans](#)

www.birds.cornell.edu











Get  
involved

# Certify Your Habitat

- <https://www.nwf.org/CertifiedWildlifeHabitat>
- National Wildlife Federation
- When you certify your yard, you'll join over 235,000 gardeners across America who provide safe places for wildlife like birds to thrive. Creating a wildlife habitat garden not only helps wildlife, it gives you a beautiful place to experience nature every day.



One-year membership is only \$10



The Virginia Bluebird Society also offers four grants:

- Grants for New or Refurbished Bluebird Trails
- Youth and Scout Grants
- School Nestcam Grants
- Young Birder Scholarship





## Habitat for Home Booklet



Virginia Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries

In addition to our resources at VT.edu:

National Audubon Society

Richmond Audubon Society

National Wildlife Federation

Virginia Bluebird Society

The Cornell Lab “Merlin” Bird ID

\*Note handout available tonight with details.

# My Phoebe Birds















Snake trying to get to nest;  
applied double-sided tape to  
columns, and on porch ceiling.  
All 5 nestlings fledged.

Neighbor's cat knocked down nest.  
Secured it back up with duct tape;  
installed wire or handrail to keep cat  
off.





Fledged to shrubs below nest



Hung out in a crabapple tree



Brought to the birdbath



Yay!



Thank you,  
you are so tweet!



Phoebe nestlings