



Bird Sanctuaries

Most of us enjoy having birds around. We delight in feeding them at our feeders, listening to their unique songs, observing their curious behavior and being awed by their brilliant colors. Our lives are enriched by the presence of birds. Birds are a part of the balance of nature; they eat insects and, in turn, are themselves eaten by other animals. They contribute to the web-of-life that makes for a healthy environment.

You can encourage birds to remain on your property by providing areas with food, water, shelter and protected areas to raise young. Bird sanctuaries are another option for enhancing open space. The following sections provide guidance in choosing sites and establishing and maintaining bird-friendly habitats.

*“How much more
habitable a few birds make
the fields!”*

Henry David Thoreau

Suitable Sites

Bird species are extremely variable in their habitat preferences. Some like deep woods; others prefer open fields and meadow. Many are year round residents, while others are here only for nesting or are just passing through on migration.

Nearly every habitat in an open space will have some birds at some times. The key to a good bird sanctuary is to provide a variety of habitats. Start the planning process by looking at what is already present. Are there plant and animal food sources? Is there cover for nesting and escape from predators? And is there available water? What bird habitats are located in adjacent properties that could contribute to the bird populations?

Common habitats currently existing on your open space site are already providing food, shelter and water for some kinds of birds. Habitats can range from sunny grassy fields and wetlands through wet and dry shrubby areas to densely shaded woodlands. Other bird habitats might be brushy fence rows and roadsides, odd corners in a field or areas too wet or steep to plow. Such areas may be fit for a bird sanctuary “as is” and require nothing but a trail system to enjoy the birds. More likely, however, there is need for improvement.



Establishing the Sanctuary

Given the past human disturbance of the landscape in Southern Wisconsin, it is likely that the quality bird habitat on your site has declined. Many strategies are available for restoring or enhancing an open space to encourage birds.

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Strategies to Attract Birds

- Leave dead and dying trees for the food insects they attract and the nesting cavities they contain. Over two dozen local species use tree cavities for nesting.
- Leave leaf-litter and rotting logs for ground feeding birds. The litter harbors many food items like insects, spiders and worms.
- Create brush piles for shelter.
- Erect birdhouses.
- Create shallow pools when natural water sources are not available.
- Rather than providing food in the winter, let the birds find their own. If you have done a good job creating the sanctuary there should be sufficient food available. In fact certain birds never go to bird feeders, relying instead on natural sources.
- Expect to find butterflies, deer, rabbits, frogs and harmless snakes attracted to your sanctuary. These add to the diversity of the site and the enjoyment of visitors.

Establishing the Sanctuary Continued. . .

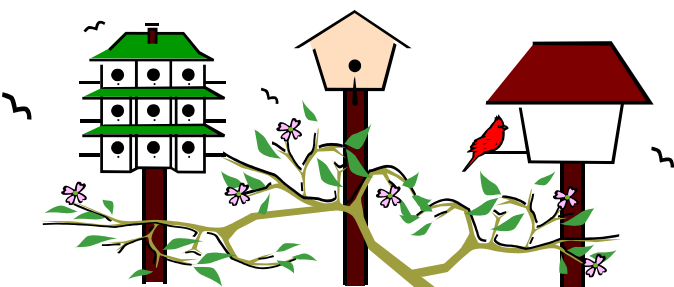
Sketch a map showing existing plants, buildings, roads, fence rows, etc. Select native trees and shrubs worth saving (those that have good value for birds) and highlight these on the map. Identify the areas where it may be desirable to enhance the habitat. You may also want to incorporate future trails into your plan.

Encourage native plants. Native plants are those that existed on the landscape before European settlement. They are in tune with local soils, climate, soil moisture, insects, diseases and herbivores. They fit into the environment with their own checks and balances so they seldom get out of control. Our native birds and plants have been living in harmony for thousands of years. For this reason many native plants provide more resources for birds than non-native species by attracting more insects and providing a steady, year round source of fruits and seeds.

Trees and shrubs are the backbone of a bird sanctuary. They provide layers of foliage, flowers, fruits, seeds and cover. A variety of habitats can be created by planting trees and shrubs in different sized clusters with intervening grassy areas. You may wish to add native Wisconsin pines, cedars and spruces to your planting list. These trees provide windbreaks and winter shelter. Shrubs can be planted in open areas in woodlands or directly under trees, if they can tolerate the shade. A good source for these plants is the DNR. Contact your local DNR forester and request their Tree and Shrub Application Form 2420-031. Do not forget that you can gather your own seed for planting directly on your site. Avoid invasive, non-native shrubs like buckthorn and honeysuckle. Study each species for their sunlight and soil preference and their desirability for attracting birds. An excellent list of native plants for our area is contained in the reference, "Beyond the Bird Feeder." (See the section on "Publications" on the last page.)

Maintenance

Once native vegetation and trails (if you choose to have trails) have been established, the bird sanctuary will require only periodic maintenance such as mowing paths, controlling non-native shrubs, repairing birdhouses and replacing dead plants. Do not 'over-groom' the sanctuary by removing dead trees or fallen branches or cutting grass. Dead and dying trees are especially important for cavity nesting birds such as woodpeckers, chickadees,



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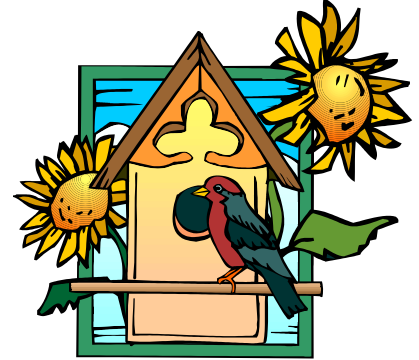
and screech owls. Rock piles, tangles of brush and vines should be encouraged. Except in restored prairies and oak savannas, do not burn the area. Urge neighbors to use bell-collars and to de-claw their cats, or better yet, keep them inside.

Since European settlement, many non-native plants have spread from people's yards into fields and woodlands. Introduced non-natives lack the checks and balances that would have been provided by diseases, insects and herbivores in their native land. Without these controls they have a tendency to out-compete our native species. The worst ones are common and glossy buckthorn and honeysuckle. It is desirable to control these invaders by cutting off the stem and applying herbicide to the stump to prevent re-sprouting. They can also be treated with basal bark herbicide, which will kill the plant without having to cut the stem. Garlic mustard is a non-native herbaceous plant, usually found in shady areas where it prevents native species from growing. It can be treated with herbicide but often covers very extensive areas and requires considerable effort to eliminate. (See *Invasive Plants* Chapter for a more complete description of control options.)

Bird sanctuaries will naturally change as trees grow, shade increases and new species move in. This will be good for some birds and not for others. Thinning of old plantings will create openings for new growth or for re-introduction of lost species. If space is available, new patches of trees and shrubs can be started to maintain a supply of early stages of forest succession and their associated birds. Grasslands can be created by cutting shrubby areas and planting prairie vegetation. A final option is to just let nature take its course and enjoy what you have as it evolves naturally.

Trails and Paths

People like to watch birds. Trails provide access for viewing and photographing birds, enjoying wildflowers or fall colors and for cross-country skiing. They can be as simple as a footpath through the woods or a winding mowed trail among the clusters of planted trees and shrubs. Trails should be set away from bird houses but within viewing distance. Benches and bird blinds may be added amenities for users. Except for maintenance purposes, vehicles of all kinds should be kept out of the sanctuary and noise kept to a minimum.



The Eastern Bluebird is an early spring arrival who's population could benefit from additional habitat.

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Contacts: for General Information

Local nature centers and bird clubs: Offer a wealth of knowledge and experience when it comes to attracting birds. Often provide or sell bird related publications and bird seed. See the list of nature centers in the section on contacts.

Wisconsin Society of Ornithology: The Badger State's premiere birding organization. Organized in 1939 to support the study and enjoyment of Wisconsin birdlife. On the web at:

<http://www.uwgb.edu/birds/wso>

Wild Ones Natural Landscapers: A national organization with local chapter devoted to encouraging the use of native plants in urban, suburban and rural landscapes. On the web at:

www.for-wild.com

University of Wisconsin-Extension (UWEX): Various publications about birds. Search publications on the web at: <http://cecommerce.uwex.edu/>

Contacts for Plants

DNR Bureau of Endangered Resources: Visit the following web site for a list of private native plant nurseries: www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/er/invasive/info/nurseries.htm.

DNR Bureau of Forestry: Sells individual tree and shrub seedlings plus wildlife packets containing a variety of woody plants. Contact your local DNR forester for their Spring Tree & Shrub Application Form 2420-031.

Publications and other sources of information:

Backyard Conservation: Bringing Conservation from the Country Side to Your Backyard, NRCS, <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/backyard>

Backyard Wildlife Habitat Program. National Wildlife Federation, <http://www.nwf.org/backyardwildlifehabitat/>

Beastly Abodes: Homes for Birds, Bats, Butterflies and other Backyard Wildlife, Bobbe Needham 1996, 144pp, Sterling Publishing Co. Inc.

Beyond the Bird Feeder: Creating a Bird-Friendly Yard with Native Wisconsin Plants, Mariette Nowak for the Wisconsin Society of Ornithology. Lists recommended fruit species. <http://www.uwgb.edu/birds/wso/birdscaping.pdf>

Critter Condos: Managing Dead Wood for Wildlife, Wisconsin DNR Publication WM-22 (Part of Wildlife and Your Land Series from the Bureau of Wildlife Management)

Improving Backyard Habitat for Birds, Scott Craven, Reprinted from the Passenger Pigeon, a publication of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology. No longer available. Included in the pocket folder for this section.

Landscape Plant That Attract Birds, Scott Craven and Robert Ellarson, UW-Extension Publication G1609

Restoring Wisconsin's Wildlife Habitat on Private Lands. US Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. www.partners.fws.gov

Wildlife Habitat: Make a home for birds, butterflies, and nature's other creatures, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's Backyard Conservation Series. <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/backyard>

Woody Cover for Wildlife, Wisconsin DNR Publication PUBL-FR-066 90RFV

Options for Open Space

A resource guide for private and public land owners and managers.

Produced by the Southeast Wisconsin Fox River Partnership Team to protect, restore and enhance the natural resources of the Fox River basin.

Major assistance from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension and Siepmann Realty Corporation.

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