

Backyard Birding



This lesson will introduce you to backyard bird conservation, teach you how to build a bird feeder out of recycled materials, and get you outside looking for some birds in your own backyard!



Introduction: What is Backyard Bird Conservation?

Even though we think of wild animals as living far away from humans, there are many that live right in our backyards! Birds are one of the most frequent backyard visitors, and you can help them by making your yard a good habitat for birds and eliminating common threats facing birds.

What are some threats facing wild birds?

- **Habitat destruction.** Activities like deforestation, urban development, and resource extraction destroy bird habitats and nesting sites.
- **Light pollution.** Migrating birds use the night sky to navigate, but bright city lights can cause them to become lost and disoriented. The birds fly around in confusion, becoming exhausted and more vulnerable to other threats.
- **Invasive species.** Non-native animals hunt birds and disrupt natural ecosystems. Dogs and cats are two of the biggest threats to wild birds.
- **Glass collisions.** Birds often don't see glass windows and doors and will fly right into them, causing injury or death.

How can I help wild birds?

- **Plant native plants.** Do some research on what bird-friendly plants are native to your area and plant a few in your backyard! This provides food, shelter, nesting materials, and nesting sites for birds.
- **Provide nesting materials.** Twigs, leaves, straw, and grass clippings can all be used by birds to make nests. Avoid materials like yarn, human hair, and dryer lint.
- **Turn off lights during spring and fall migrations.** Close the blinds or curtains on your windows so the lights don't confuse birds at night. Turn off unnecessary outdoor lighting.
- **Keep your pets inside.** Cats and dogs can both be threats to birds, so keep them inside. If they do go outside, ensure that they are supervised or leashed.

What is Zoo Atlanta doing to help wild birds?

- Zoo Atlanta has added **bird tape** to several buildings, including Scaly Slimy Spectacular and the Conservation Action Resource Center (ARC). This tape allows birds to see glass and avoid window collisions.
- The Horticulture Team plants **native plants** around the Zoo and has created an example of a native bird garden next to the southern ground hornbill habitat.
- The Zoo hosted **World Migratory Bird Day** for the first time in 2019 and partnered with the Atlanta Audubon Society for demonstrations and conservation messaging.
- In 2019, Zoo Atlanta added a Motus station on grounds. This receiver station will pick up signals from birds that have been tagged with small radio transmitters and contribute to conservation by adding to the network of stations that allow researchers to **track bird movement**.

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Activity: Make a Recycled Bird Feeder

Materials

- Empty juice or milk carton
- Scissors or craft knife
- Long stick or wooden rod
- String (should be strong enough to hold the carton up while filled with seeds)
- Glue
- Markers or paint
- Natural decorations (like twigs and leaves)



Procedure

1. Wash out the juice or milk carton completely and let it dry.
2. Draw a large rectangle on the front and back of the box. The rectangle should be large enough for birds to get inside the box. Don't draw this too close to the bottom of the box or the bird seed will spill out!
3. With the help of an adult, use your scissors or craft knife to cut out the rectangle you outlined. Remove this section of cardboard from the box.
4. With the help of an adult, cut a small hole below each window, in roughly the same location on each side. The hole should be just large enough for the stick or rod to fit snugly. Put the stick through both holes so it sticks out on either end.
5. Decorate! Use markers, paint, and natural decorations like twigs and leaves to decorate your box. Try to make it look natural so that it will be appealing to birds.
6. With the help of an adult, cut a small hole in the top of the milk carton. Thread the string through the hole and tie a knot so that it forms a loop that can be used to hang the carton.
7. Fill the feeder with birdseed and hang outside for the birds to enjoy!

Important Notes about Feeding Birds

- The most important time to feed birds are during **migration seasons** (fall and spring), during **temperature extremes** (such as very hot summers), or when **natural food sources are depleted** (late winter-early spring).
- **Use this feeder only for one season**, then throw it away and make a new one next season. This way, you can help prevent the spread of disease between birds.
- **Place the feeder in a place that minimizes exposure to other risks.** Don't hang it near windows or in locations where cats might prey on visiting birds.
- Rather than using a generic birdseed, **select food that is specific to the species you want to attract.** This is important to avoid different bird species coming in close contact with each other and potentially spreading pathogens. See the table at the end of this packet for some suggested foods for common backyard bird species.

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Outdoor Exploration: Find Birds in Your Own Backyard

Materials

- Journal or paper
- Pencil or pen
- Common Georgia Birds checklist
- Binoculars



Activity

Head outside to see if you can spot some birds in your own backyard! If you have binoculars, bring them along so you can search the treetops. Check off how many birds you can spot in your backyard or neighborhood.

On your paper or journal pages, take some notes or sketches of the birds you see. To practice being scientific in your observations, consider the following:

- **Where** did you find the bird? Is it in a tree, on a fence, on the ground, flying? Is it near trees, water, cars, houses, bird feeders?
- **When** did you see the bird? Morning, afternoon, night?
- What is the **weather** like? Is it hot or cold? What is the temperature? What is the season?
- What were some **behaviors** you observed? Was the bird eating, drinking, flying, hopping, grooming, chirping, singing? Was it interacting with any other birds or animals?
- What did the bird **sound** like? How would you describe its song or chirps?
- What did the bird **look** like? Sketch a picture of the bird. If you have colored pencils or crayons, fill in the color patterns you notice.
- What **questions** do you have after watching the bird? Did it do something interesting? Do you wonder why its feathers are a specific color? Write down your questions and research the answers when you get home.

Recap: What did you learn?

- What is your favorite bird you saw outside? Why?
- Do you think you would see different birds if you went outside at a different time of day? A different time of year? A different location?
- What are some ways you can help birds in your own backyard?
- What are some questions you still have about birds? How are you going to find the answers?

Become a Citizen Scientist!

You can help bird researchers out by becoming a scientist in your own backyard! Join one of the following projects to help scientists learn about birds in your area. You observe birds in your own backyard or neighborhood and log the information into large online databases. This helps us get a more comprehensive picture of bird locations and behaviors around the country!

- The Great Backyard Bird Count - <https://gbbc.birdcount.org/>
- eBird - <https://ebird.org/home>

Foods for your favorite backyard bird species

Choose your favorite species and make a custom food blend to fill your recycled bird feeder!

	Millet	Cracked Corn	Sunflower Seeds	Nut Meat	Peanuts	Buckwheat	Raisins	Fruit	Suet	Meal Worms
<i>Pigeons</i>	X	X	X			X				
<i>Doves</i>	X	X	X			X				
<i>Sparrows</i>	X	X	X		X					
<i>Woodpeckers</i>	X	X	X		X			X	X	X
<i>Jays</i>		X	X		X		X	X	X	X
<i>Cardinals</i>	X	X	X					X		
<i>Finches</i>			X		X			X	X	
<i>Mockingbirds</i>	X		X	X			X	X	X	
<i>Thrashers</i>	X		X	X			X	X	X	
<i>Catbirds</i>	X		X	X			X	X	X	



Common Georgia Birds

See how many local birds you can find in your own backyard or neighborhood!

Brown Thrasher



Gray Catbird



Red-Tailed Hawk



American Robin



Northern Mockingbird



Northern Cardinal



Common Grackle



Red-Bellied Woodpecker



Blue Jay

