

Field Notes

Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre

March 2004

Backyards as Habitat

Birding is one of Canada's fastest growing pastimes. It is estimated that one in three Canadians enjoy bird watching.

If you create an appropriate habitat in your backyards then the birds will likely come to you. You will also attract a wide variety of other wildlife.

All wildlife needs shelter, water, and food to survive.



Shelter

Different animals need different kinds of shelter. By making sure you have a variety of plants in your backyard, you will attract more wildlife as well as add greenery to your neighbourhood.



Shelter gives animals a place to get out of cold, windy, hot, or wet weather. It also provides hiding places from predators, and nesting places.

Shelter can be trees, shrubs, flowers, and artificial structures such as nest boxes.



Planting native species of plants better simulates natural habitat and will likely attract more wildlife.



Trees

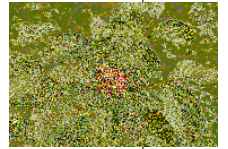
Choose trees that are easy to get at nurseries and are well liked by birds. Evergreen trees like spruce provide excellent cover and block the wind.

Any tree with seeds or berries also provide food for many birds.

Some good choices include: white spruce, mountain ash, white birch, and Manitoba maple.

Shrubs

Shrubs will bring wildlife closer to the ground, so you can spot them more easily. They also attract insects when flowering and provide food in the form of seeds and berries.



You can also use the dead branches of trees and shrubs to create a brush pile which many species use.

Some good choices include: red osier dogwood, white cedar, Saskatoon, plum, chokecherry, wild rose, and high bush cranberry.

Flowers

Flowers provide food too, especially when they have gone to seed. Many insects feeds on plant juices such as nectar. More importantly they house many insects that provide food and will attract many animals.



Some good choices include: sunflowers, goldenrods, joe-pye weed, asters, milkweeds, coneflowers, and wild columbine.

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Artificial structures

Nest boxes, butterfly boxes, and bat boxes all provide different animals with shelter. They are an easy addition to a backyard and add cavities without needing large trees. Many species use cavities as shelter. Different size boxes with different sized holes are needed for different species.

Water

Water is essential to all animals. Bird baths are the easy to put up – the water should be changed every other day to prevent the bird bath from getting covered in algae and become a haven for mosquitoes.



Ponds are also a good choice but are a little more elaborate. Many different species will use your source of water. It should be placed close to shelter but easily accessible so that it can be changed.

Food

Food can be provided by the plants that give them shelter, by the insects that live in the plants, or by feeders.



Plants such as oak trees, mountain ashes, cranberries, thistle, goldenrods, and many others can all provide berries and seeds that animals just love to eat.

Insects are often attracted to plants and these in turn will attract animals. Dragonflies, ants, butterflies, and aphids are just a few that are apparently quite delicious.

Feeders

Feeders can be a great way to attract birds to your backyard. They come in a variety of different styles, and each style attracts a different group of birds.



Having several different kinds with several different types of food will attract the most birds.

The most common forms include: platform, tube, hopper, suet, thistle, hummingbird, and oriole.

Feeders should be placed less than 0.5m or more than 4.5m from windows and about 2m from the nearest vegetation. This will ensure that the birds don't hit windows and have enough time to escape from predators.

Feeders should be cleaned every few months with a bleach and water solution (1:9) and then rinsed thoroughly. Wooden feeders should be cleaned monthly. The seeds and droppings underneath the feeders should be cleaned up at least twice a year. Cleaning your feeder will prevent diseases from infecting birds that visit your feeder. As well, cleaning up underneath it will prevent rats and disease as well.

What might I attract?

- Birds such as wrens, warblers, sparrows, hummingbirds, woodpeckers, nuthatches, chickadees, finches, and jays.
- Many species of insects such as dragonflies, bees, butterflies, and many, many more.
- Mammals such as rabbits and squirrels will also come to your backyard.

