

# How young environmentalists can help birds

A guide for scouts, environmental clubs and any young people who want to help protect birds

## Included in this guide



Learn about local birds and go birding



Do a bird-safety audit of your school or home's neighborhood



Help protect birds from collisions with buildings



Learn about the habitat your local birds need



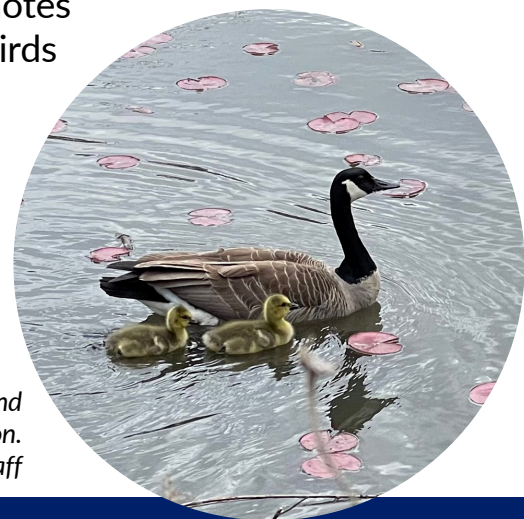
Make your community more bird friendly

Whether they tweet, chirp or caw, birds have the ability to fascinate and inspire. Use this guide to explore the fascinating world of birds and learn more about some of the feathered wildlife that we share the planet with.

## Part 1: Learn about local birds and go birding

Different places provide habitat to different birds. Start by learning about birds in your own community and go birding with your friends or family. Research birds native to your area by visiting a local nature center, talking to a local bird expert or searching the internet.

As you learn, keep notes of common native birds to look out for and their characteristics like size, color, wing shape or beak shape.



Right: A Canada Goose and goslings swimming on a lagoon.  
Photo credit: Staff

## Part 1: Continued

Once you are familiar with some common species, pick a nearby natural area to go birding. Ideal spots for birding have trees or shrubs for shelter, a food source and water nearby. A park with a pond is a great place to start.

### Tips for birding

#### #1 **Be quiet and listen.**

If you talk to a seasoned birder they will probably tell you that they usually hear the bird before they see it. Even in a busy city with the noise of cars, trains and people, bird calls might be the first indication that a bird is nearby, but you have to really listen. Sometimes the noise indicating a bird is nearby isn't even its call, instead it is the rustle of leaves or the tapping of a tree.

#### #2 **Get help with bird identification.**

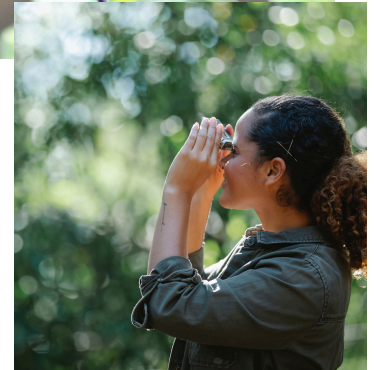
You can find helpful field guides online or download a bird identification app to learn more about the species you are seeing. Your local natural history museum or ornithological society may have field guides available on their website. Lots of birders use the Merlin Bird ID app, which helps narrow down potential bird species based on characteristics that you input. That app even has a sound identification feature if you are able to record the bird call. Of course, an old fashioned bird book that is specific to your region can also be a handy resource, especially when you are out of cell phone range. Check out your local library or nature center to see if they have bird books or field guides you can borrow.

#### #3 **Give birds space.**

Always give wildlife plenty of space. You don't want your birding to cause harm, and these are wild animals who will protect themselves and their territory if you get too close. Although there is a lot of birding that you can do with the naked eye, binoculars can help you see birds better while maintaining your distance.

### **Share what you learn**

Keep a log of birds you identify and any interesting behaviors or characteristics so you can report your observations back to friends and family.



Above: A hummingbird at a flower.  
Photo credit: Staff

Below: Person looking through binoculars.  
Photo credit: Uriel Mont from Pexels

### **Did you know?**

*Hummingbirds help to pollinate plants like bees and butterflies.*



## Part 2: Do a bird-safety audit of your community

Lots of North American birds migrate which means that they spend summers in the north part of the continent and winters in the south. On their travels, birds travel through cities and towns that we have built with our needs in mind, but many features of the buildings in our cities can be hazardous to birds in flight. Windows and other reflective surfaces, especially those on upper floors of buildings can confuse birds and cause collisions. Artificial lights can also be disorienting at night when many birds are flying.

Make a list of building features in your neighborhood that might contribute to confusion or disorientation of birds including: windows especially on 2nd or higher floors of buildings, other reflective surfaces that aren't natural and bright outdoor lights that are always on.



*Above: Hawk flying near a window.  
Photo credit: Staff*

## Part 3: Help protect birds from collisions with buildings

Come up with a plan to make your community safer for birds. Work with your household, school or local park to do one of the following:

- Create patterns on windows or reflective services 2-4 inches apart.
- Install external window coverings.
- Move indoor plants away from windows.
- Install bird feeders directly on windows.
- Turn off unneeded exterior lights or install timers/sensors to automatically turn off exterior lights when not in use.
- Change lightbulbs to warmer colors and point lights that can be pointed down rather than up.

If you aren't able to make a permanent change to a building or exterior lights, make a plan for temporary changes just for the months of migratory seasons when birds are passing through your area.

## Part 4: Learn about the habitat your local birds need

Interview a local bird expert to learn about native birds in your area and learn about what habitat they need. Reach out to your local ornithological society, nature center, birding club or park district to identify bird experts in your community.



### Sample interview questions:

1. What is the most common bird that you see locally?
2. Do you have any favorite local bird sightings?
3. What kinds of plants do our local bird species need?
4. Are there plants they like to eat?
5. Are there plants they use as shelter?
6. Do you have any plants at your home or business that birds frequently visit?
7. Any tips for someone interested in bird conservation?

*Above: An adult cedar waxwing bringing food back to its young.  
Photo credit: Staff*

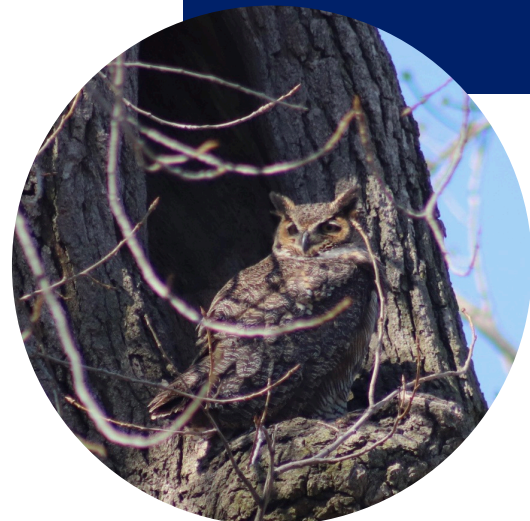
*Right: Great horned owl perched in the hollow of a tree.  
Photo credit: Staff*



*There is a lot to see right in our neighborhoods. According to the 2022 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife, -Associated Recreation from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service approximately 91 million people observed wild birds around their home, 95% of interviewed wildlife watchers..*

### What is habitat?

Habitat is the area where animals can access the food, water, shelter and space that the animal needs to survive. Each type of bird have specific diets and nesting behaviors that their habitat needs to provide.





## Part 5: Make your community more bird friendly

**Option 1: Work with your household, school or local park to create more bird habitat on the grounds.**

### **Step 1: Find a space.**

Decide what space is available for your bird habitat.

### **Step 2: Identify plants.**

Find out what types of native plants are used by local birds and decide what works best in your space. Going to a local plant nursery can help, they may have expertise and recommendations. Audubon also has a helpful plants for birds page on their website where you can find native plants in your area.

### **Step 3: Make a planting plan and get help!**

Optional: Integrate other bird-friendly features into your space like bird baths and feeders.

### **Step 4: Care for the bird garden.**

Tend to your bird habitat through the seasons and enjoy watching your feathered friends.



Above: A bluebird at a bird bath in a backyard garden.  
Photo credit: Staff

## Part 5: Continued

### Option 2: Advocate for the birds through your local or state government.

#### Step 1: Gather information.

Talk to local officials about what they are already doing to help make your community a better place for local birds.

#### Step 2: Make a plan.

With help from an adult, decide what you think your city or state could do that would help create more healthy habitat for birds. Some ideas:

- Plant more native trees and shrubs on city-owned property.
- Get park managers to build brush piles in the fall which provide shelter.
- Make windows bird friendly by updating the glass or creating patterns 2-4 inches apart.
- Turn off unneeded exterior lights or install timers/sensors to automatically turn off exterior lights when not in use.
- Change lightbulbs to warmer colors and point lights that can be pointed down rather than up.

*Right: Bird perched on a branch with an insect in its beak.  
Photo credit: Staff*

*Headers photo credit: Staff*

#### Step 3: Prepare your presentation.

Prepare a presentation to your local officials about the birds that live or migrate through your area and make a recommendation of what they can do to help further bird conservation efforts.

#### Step 4: Make your presentation.

Answer questions, ask if they need more information and who else you should be talking to.



Thanks for helping protect birds!

Have a story to share or want to connect?

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