



Techniques attract desired bird species to barnyards and backyards

Wyoming may be thought of as a cold, windy, harsh environment, but this environment supports an enormous diversity of birds year-round and is part of two major migration pathways for millions of birds, the Pacific and Central flyways.

Wyoming barnyards and backyards are part of those migration paths, wintering grounds, and/or breeding habitat. Yards are thought of as private hide-a-ways, but they are pieces of larger landscapes and serve as habitat for birds and other wildlife. Converting open spaces to small-acreage lands divides and eliminates habitat for wildlife species that call the area home.

Landowners should consider making the landscape suitable for birds and other wildlife. Putting fragmented landscapes back together positively influences not only wildlife habitat but also the landowner's appreciation for the natural environment.

How to piece landscapes back together? Start by using the following formula: *food + water + cover + space = bird and wildlife habitat*. The different variables include seasonality, species, plant choices, etc.

Start with the birds. What bird species are desired (i.e. American goldfinch, mountain bluebird)? Then consider:

1. Does the area support these species? (Attracting flamingos to Wyoming is not feasible!);
2. When will the species use the property? (Migration, breeding, winter);
3. Location. Think about space and proximity to the development and urban interface.

Some species do not tolerate much human disturbance while others do quite well; and

4. What are the species' needs? Think of the formula! See the bird table that accompanies this article.

Species Needs:

Each bird species may have different food, water, cover, and space requirements. The needs of some birds may conflict with others. The list of birds a landowner wishes to attract may have to be adjusted based on the needs and compatibility of the species. To find out more about where and how to attract local birds, contact Audubon Wyoming at (307) 745-4848.

Once the list is completed, start thinking about landscaping. Food, cover, and shelter requirements can be addressed by using appropriate types of plants for the seasonality and bird species desired.

First, think about the plants desired to use as a food source: when will they be fruiting or bearing seed, and how does that correspond with the seasonality of the birds in the area?

Second, think about the form of the plant and what that means for cover



A northern flicker nest box in a cottonwood tree.



Native willows as well as sedges and rushes within riparian corridors provide cover, forage opportunities, and nesting sites for a variety of birds, including waterfowl and migrants from Central and South America and the West Indies. There are more than 27 different species of native willow in Wyoming.

and shelter. For example, consider spruce vs. pines. Spruce varieties offer a dense growth structure excellent for nesting and cover for birds in the summer and winter months. Conversely, pines such as lodgepole and ponderosa have a loose growth structure providing excellent perch sites.

Not all material needs to be living to be valuable – dead trees can serve as nest sites for cavity-nesting birds and as forage for others, such as woodpeckers.

When landscaping for birds and other wildlife, try to GO NATIVE! Native vegetation will not only attract and help sustain feathered friends but will also:

1. Lower maintenance costs and time;
2. Decrease water consumption – native grasses provide habitat for birds (if left to grow, and most can flourish with half the water of a traditional Kentucky bluegrass lawn);
3. Decrease pest control and fertilizing. Native plants usually don't need to be fertilized to look their best; and
4. Decrease or eliminate mowing.

Water availability and supplemental feeding should also be considered when landscaping. If there is a natural water source on a property, such as a stream or wetland, enhance its attractiveness

and wildlife value by protecting and restoring native plant species and allowing the vegetation along the banks to grow high creating a water source, forage, and potential nesting area. For recommendations, see the *Wyoming Wildscape* publication distributed through the Wyoming Game and Fish Department regional offices or by calling the state office at (307) 777-4600.

Supplemental feeding can boost fat reserves of birds during breeding or migration seasons, but keep in mind that feeder placement will influence the birds (i.e. feeder height and proximity to vegetation cover and a house). For recommendations, see http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/index.html

Birdbaths can be used as well. Keep them clean so they don't become a health hazard, such as a breeding site for mosquitoes, which can transmit West Nile virus.

Diversity is the key. The more diverse the landscape, the more diverse the bird species attracted. By increasing the array of foods available through native plant diversity and supplemental food sources, the diversity of birds attracted and supported will increase.



One more consideration – cats should be kept inside at all times. Cats can take heavy tolls on birds and other wildlife, and all cats, even very well-fed cats, have the instinct and means to be efficient predators. House cats are NOT part of the natural ecosystem. They compete with and affect prey and predators alike.

University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service wildlife and habitat bulletins are available free on-line at <http://www.uwyo.edu/CES/rangemgt.htm>.

They include *The Hummingbird: Attracting and Enjoying Wyoming's Most Fascinating Bird*, B-986; *Feeding Birds in Your Backyard: a Great Way to Attract Wildlife*, B-991; *Building and Locating Backyard Birdhouses*, B-995; and *Landscaping Guidelines to Attract Wildlife*, B-1001.



A great horned owl

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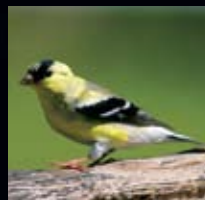
winged guests

Mountain bluebird



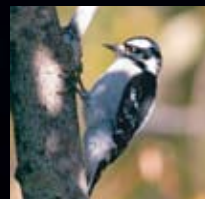
American goldfinch, *Carduelis tristis*

Distribution: Year-round resident
 Habitat: Riparian areas, cottonwood trees, and shrubs
 Natural diet: Forbs, seeds, black-eyed Susan seed
 Feeder notes: Likes Niger thistle and sunflower seeds
 Nest notes: Will build a cup out of plant fibers in deciduous trees.



Downy woodpecker, *Picoides pubescens*

Distribution: Year-round resident
 Habitat: Deciduous and coniferous forests
 Natural diet: Insects, seeds, fruit
 Feeder notes: Visits suet feeders
 Nest notes: Makes a cavity in a dead branch or tree, or nest box (Downy woodpeckers also tend to use nest boxes in the winter as roosts to escape the cold)



Western meadowlark, *Sturnella neglecta*

Distribution: Spring and summer resident
 Habitat: Open grassy areas, shrubs, meadows
 Natural diet: Insects, seeds
 Feeder notes: Ground feeder
 Nest notes: Builds a domed nest of grass on the ground with a side entrance.



Black-capped chickadee, *Poecile atricapilla*

Distribution: Year-round resident
 Habitat: Deciduous and coniferous forests, riparian areas
 Natural diet: Insects and seeds
 Feeder notes: Likes black oil sunflower seed and suet
 Nest notes: Uses a cavity in rotten wood, or nest boxes.



Mountain bluebird, *Sialia currucoides*

Distribution: Spring and summer resident
 Habitat: Meadows, prairie, shrub lands, forests, riparian areas
 Natural diet: Insects, fruits, berries
 Feeder notes: Feeds in the air or from a perch.
 Nest notes: Uses natural cavities, old woodpecker holes, or nest boxes.