

Conservation Forum

for and by members of PGC – Sandy Menke, Conservation Chair



Welcome Birds Back to Your Yard

We are gardeners, so I believe it is fair to say that the majority of us love the sound of a bird singing, or the whirligig visual effect of a flying woodpecker. These lovely creatures do so much for us, keeping our eco-system in balance by pollinating plants, dispersing seeds, scavenging carcasses, and recycling nutrients back into the earth (although not always where we want them). Just as important is how they feed our spirits, announcing the beginning or end of a season, and inspiring us through art.

Migrations north are beginning and it is time to think about how we can make our yards more attractive to our little feathered friends. They are coming through a brutal winter across our country and deserve a warm and hearty welcome! What we can do for our birds:

- Provide their basic necessities; clean water, plants with flowers for nectar and insects for their young, fruit-bearing plants to provide fuel for migration, layers of plants for cover and thermal protection, and nesting habitat and materials. Native plants are key - their architecture, flowers, fruits, and scents are ideal for birds.
- Participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count or sign up for a local count. Track your sightings on eBird, a website developed by Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.
- Share your passion for birds with family and friends and expand your bird habitat into a larger urban oasis by working with neighbors and managers of nearby parks, golf courses, and farms. In this way you can help restore habitat in linked corridors, multiplying the effectiveness of each patch.
- Forgo pesticides. Roughly 8% of pesticides used in North America are applied to yards and gardens. It is estimated that agricultural use kills 67 million birds each year. There is a possible link between pesticide exposure and human food allergies.
- Buying grass-fed meat supports grassland birds, which, because of habitat loss, are showing the most sustained declines of any bird group in the U.S. Switch to shade-grown coffee. Each cup preserves roughly two square feet of rainforest.
- Save energy and cut emissions. Coal mining obliterates forests. The average American is responsible for 22 tons of carbon dioxide each year, more than six times that of the average person globally. Walk or bike whenever you can, gaining the health benefits at the same time!
- Control your cats. Keep them inside or in an outside controlled environment. I personally love birds, plants, and cats...in that order. When my neighbor's cat sits by my finch feeder waiting for a kill, it is the birds I defend. Eliminating bushes where the cat can hide before its pounce to kill would help greatly. I have seen it jump very, very high for just a couple bites of a bird.

It is my hope I have given you some inspiration to welcome birds back into your yard. My favorite time of the year is to fill my humming feeder and watch for the spring arrival, usually around May 1st. Oh, spring, please come soon.

Happy Birding,
Sandy Menke, Conservation Editor

Material used in this article from [Audubon Magazine](#), Mar/Apr 2013. We welcome contributions by members on any conservation subject.

*“Begin doing what you want to do now,
We are not living in Eternity, we have only this moment, sparkling like a star in our hand –
And melting like a snowflake.”*

Marie Beyon Ray, from [Gardener Magazine](#), 2003-04