



Arkansas Audubon Society

BIRD-FRIENDLY YARD CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Appendix A: Rationale for the Criteria

Plant Natives and Remove Invasives

Native plants are those that occur naturally in an area. They have adapted to survive in a particular geographic area's climate, soils, rainfall, and with the available pollinators and seed dispersers. Because they are indigenous to our region, Arkansas's native plants usually tolerate natural cycles of drought and rain and are welcomed by wildlife, serving an important role in the local ecosystem.

Our native birds and other wildlife have adapted to the resources provided by Arkansas's native plants. They provide the leaves, nectar, pollen, berries, seeds, and nuts that wildlife require to survive and thrive. Crucially, native plants host the insects that birds need. Ninety percent of all insects are specialized, meaning they share an evolutionary history with native plants and rely on them to survive. Think Monarchs and milkweeds. Almost all land birds require insects to feed their young. Even seed-eating birds, such as Northern Cardinals, feed their babies insects to ensure their survival. Many insects cannot adapt to eating non-native plants. Fewer native plants means fewer insects, which in turn means fewer baby birds growing to adulthood.

In contrast, lawns are made of only one or a few types of plants that most animals do not consume, so they do not provide much value for wildlife. Lawns require a lot of water, chemicals, and mowing to maintain. Replacing lawns with native wildflowers, bushes, and trees provides the food, shelter, and cover that help maintain healthy, natural ecosystems.

Not all non-native, ornamental plants are bad for wildlife. Some even provide valuable resources. However, others are highly invasive, vigorously growing and spreading, escaping from gardens, and displacing native plants in both urban and natural areas. These should be removed and kept at bay to the best of your ability. Chinese privet, Japanese honeysuckle, Chinese wisteria, nandina/sacred bamboo, Bradford pear, and Johnsongrass are among the worst. Herbicides are a valuable tool when used properly.

Remove Hazards

Each year in the U.S. up to 1 billion birds die in collisions with glass. Windows reflect the environment around them, so the trees and shrubs in your yard will be what a bird sees in your windows. Many birds that fly off after hitting a window later die of internal injuries. A variety of window treatments are available that will make your windows more visible to birds and prevent them from smashing into them. Strings and decals should be placed no further than four inches apart to prevent birds from attempting to fly between them.

Lights at night can confuse migrating birds. Turning off outdoor lights or directing them downward, and shading indoor upper story windows during migration helps birds and reduces energy use.

Pesticides kill more than pests. Birds can be poisoned when they eat insects and rodents that have ingested pesticides. Beneficial insects such as native bees can also become unintentional victims. Use chemicals sparingly, in a targeted fashion, and according to manufacturers' labels. Consider alternative pest controls such as horticultural oils and soaps. Check plant labels in retail stores for use of neonicotinoids.

House cats are popular pets and an integral part of many households. However, cats are not native wildlife, and they are efficient predators. Each year in the U.S. outdoor cats kill 2.4 billion birds. Indoor cats live longer, healthier lives. Keeping cats indoors protects both your cat and wildlife.

Supply Basic Needs

Birds need places to hide to feel safe from people, predators, and inclement weather. Native vegetation is the perfect cover for wildlife. Shrubs, thickets, and brush piles provide great hiding places within their bushy leaves and thorns. Evergreens give year round cover. Even dead trees work, as they are home to insects that birds eat, and offer cavities for nesting and branches for perching. If natural options aren't available for you, install a birdhouse designed for the types of birds you wish to attract. Protect boxes using predator guards, evict House Sparrows and European Starlings, and clean out boxes before and after the nesting season. Build a brush pile to provide shelter for a variety of small animals.

All birds need clean water year-round for drinking and bathing. If you are not lucky enough to have a natural water source on your property offer a bird bath or build a pond. Small birds require shallow water, only an inch or so. Keep your bird bath filled and clean; in hot weather especially the water will dry up or grow algae. Use a scrub brush and an environmentally safe cleaner such as vinegar. Do not use bleach.

We feed birds for our enjoyment and to make them easier to watch. They do not require our feeders for survival, except perhaps in times of severe weather. It is critical that you keep bird feeders clean to reduce disease-causing bacteria. Clean feeders at least every two weeks, or

more if seed is moldy or you see sick birds. Use hot soapy water or a weak vinegar solution. The same goes for hummingbird feeders; the hotter the weather, the more frequently the solution should be changed. Always use a solution of 1 part white table sugar to 4 parts water.

Personal Actions

Conservation starts at home. Nutrient recycling through composting, and water capture with rain barrels are just two of many personal actions you can take to reduce waste and conserve natural resources.

There is much to learn about birds and providing safe, healthy habitat for them in your yard. Appendix B offers additional resources. We encourage you to also learn from experts in the classroom and in the field. Attend programs and field trips offered by organizations such as Audubon chapters, Arkansas Native Plant Society, and Arkansas Audubon Society. To join Arkansas Audubon Society visit arbirds.org/join.html. Become part of our statewide birding community.

Make your birding count for the birds. Long-running, nationwide citizen science programs such as Audubon's Christmas Bird Count and the Great Backyard Bird Count help researchers understand how bird populations are changing.

Help us spread the bird-friendly yard message. Whether you're already gold certified or still working to become certified, you can be a model for others to take similar actions. Each of our individual actions in our own yards will add up to a large-scale positive impact for birds. Imagine how many more birds there would be if millions of yards across the country offered a safe, healthy environment.

Contact the AAS Bird-friendly Yard Committee if you need resources for formal presentations.