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bird-scaping

If the birds could design your yard...

bird-scaping If the native birds that fly over your neighborhood could direct your landscaping, what might it look like? by David Stump, San Dlego Audubon President

Whether you are starting with a simple hummingbird feeder and bird bath or are planning a major conversion of your yard to native habitat, this simple compendium of the major elements you need to consider will be of help to you. As undeveloped, high-quality habitat continues to shrink, the small urban and suburban pockets of micro-habitat we can create in our yards, gardens, and even patios will become increasingly important to many of our native bird species. If we design them well, as part of a concerted effort, we will make a real difference. These brief articles are written to whet your interest—please take the time to consider the resources referenced, or explore on your own.

A Bird-Friendly Garden Is a Nature-Friendly Garden

The things that wild birds need are predictably the same things other wild creatures seek: clean, flowing water; healthy, nourishing food sources throughout the year; pockets of refuge for propagating and raising their young; a little breathing space open to the sky; and a sanctuary where they have a way, at least in part, to evade the threats, toxins, and stresses of our urban environment. If you can think through all of these things with imagination and good science, and your surrounding neighborhood is at least moderately inviting to birds, you may see an exciting transformation.



Know Your Native Plant Communities; the Birds Certainly Will

Although a nursery tag may say "native," the plant could originate from a region with a mix and balance of species inconsistent with your area. If there are canyons or undeveloped habitats in proximity to your home, study their floral communities and learn what the birds, both permanent and migratory species, are drawn to.

Butterfly and moth caterpillars are essential food sources that sustain migratory songbirds demanding abundant food sources during the nesting season. "Grow bugs" is a mantra of sorts for native habitat gardeners. In this time of climate shifts that are seriously affecting migrators, mitigating the changes by micro-managing the food sources you can offer may well make a difference.

Biodiversity translates to the long-term health of a plant community. Southern California's sage and chaparral plant communities are



amazingly diverse, much more so than most people realize. Stay in the zone, and build a level of biodiversity into your plan.

Plant in Layers: The Vertical Dimension Is Critical

Any good birder knows you will find some species perched on the highest branches and others will seldom be seen more than a few feet off the ground, if they can avoid it. Some will be hidden in the foliage; others will seek the open sunlight. Most need both. Consider a native plant garden to be three-dimensional, built from the ground up. Native trees such as oaks, pines, and sycamores should be considered first. Filtered sunlight is important for good bird habitat. Taller shrubs such as Laurel Sumac or Toyon can fill in the mid-tier layer, while many native annuals, grasses, and succulents can make needed ground cover for many bird species.

Flowers, Seeds, and Fruit Should Be Seasonal Events

Consider the whole calendar when planting for flowers (sources of nectar, pollen, and seed—vital to keeping important insect species around). Again, think like a bird: When will they be in most need of extra high-quality nutrition? What will catch their eye and draw them into your yard? What will bring them back year after year? I remember as a child waiting each January to see, for a few minutes, a flock of Cedar Waxwings swoop in to feed on the Cotoneaster berries from a mature bush growing against my neighbor's garage. Hummingbirds may love artificial feeders, but the right species of native plants, such as Monkey Flowers, will also keep them close.

You Are Not Alone

One of the underlying goals of this issue is to challenge us to think outside of the box of our own property lines and imagine an urban landscape dotted with similar pockets of habitat. (See the "Mosaic Habitat Networking" sidebar on the facing page.) This is an exciting movement San Diego Audubon hopes to partner with over the coming years. As stated at the beginning, birdscaping isn't just about individual efforts. It is about, at least in concept, partially reclaiming urbanized land as viable habitat for wild birds. That can best happen, perhaps only happen, if it becomes a collective effort. Imagine the bird's view from the sky, and the interlaced patterns of green, pockets of shade, and glistening pools of water that, for them, mean life itself.

Native Plants: The Foundation of Good Habitat

by Susan Krzywicki, California Native Plant Society, Ocean Friendly Gardens

When gardeners establish healthy native landscapes, people spot more birds, appreciate the increased wildlife, and provide more for the needs of birds and other wildlife. Neighbors notice the positive effects and join in the fun, creating ever-increasing sanctuaries for wildlife. From the birders' perspective, this spiral is mirrored: You fall in love with birds, want to learn more about them, and want to know how to provide for the birds within your own spaces.

Start with local native plants. Though our plant ecosystem is vast and complex, creating native plant gardens brings insects, birds, and other wildlife back to our local areas.

Begin with species that support the insect life that birds need—worms and beetles. Doug Tallamy has pointed out three significant species for Californians:

- 1. **Native oaks** offer dappled shade that may take years to create, so get started now!
- 2. Hollyleaf Cherry rapidly delivers open shade and fruits.
- 3. **Local currants** and **gooseberries** (especially the evergreen **Catalina Currant**) are shade plants that feed a variety of insects and other animal life.

To complement these three species, use this fun and fascinating resource: Go to **www.calscape.org** and type in your home address. Bingo, you will be presented with a list of plants that are specific to your exact location. You can pick from categories such as ground covers, annuals, or trees. They will be sorted by popularity (based on experts, nurseries, and other sources), so just pick a handful from the top of the list and start your garden. Simple.

For more ideas, hike into San Diego's wild canyons. You've probably seen the following, which also work well in a bird-friendly garden:

- Coyote Bush, an excellent low groundcover, leaves space for shelter and for nesting.
- **Buckwheat** offers seeds for birds, and it attracts butterflies such as the Acmon Blue.
- Quails, towhees, and many other birds love groundcover sages,

such as **Black Sage**, for their plentiful seeds.

- **Toyon** flowers attract bees, and Toyon berries appeal to birds.
- Lemonade Berry shrubs are easy to grow, quickly becoming large.

Start with a sunny spot to establish your garden. Space your plants widely—some of these shrubs grow more than 8 feet across. Forgo the soil amendments, fertilizer, and compost. Instead, just use leaf litter, a mulch such as "gorilla hair" (shredded redwood), or even decomposed granite. We are coming up on the hottest, driest time of our gardening calendar so if you plant now, water each new plant with copious amounts, then give them a good soaking weekly. In winter, keep hand watering weekly unless rain provides ample water. Continue weekly waterings until the following fall. By then your plants should be established unless there is a drought, which will mean continued artificial irrigation. Keep the leaf litter in place. Prune only lightly. Your wildlife will come to trust your space and visit you frequently.



Mosaic Habitat Networking to create wild bird corridors

Birds have no sense of property lines. They range high and wide looking for what they need. As ground-based creatures, we can help them spot resources over a wider territory by creating our little oases with water, shelter, food, and more.

It may not seem to be enough simply to create one small patch of inviting space for birds to visit in this vast acreage of grass lawns, concrete, and asphalt. Don't despair: Birds, scanning the territory from above, will connect even a modest splash of native shrubs to a vast undisturbed habitat. Our canyons meander through all parts of San Diego County—from the urban density of North Park to the beautiful

acreage of Mission Trails and out to the back country farther east. This proximity creates opportunity.

The graphic shown here is an example of how a mosaic habitat works: Each small patch connects to the larger system (a canyon or other open space) and extends a bird's range even if everything else in that path of developed land fails to support the basics of food and shelter. Adding even one disconnected garden, however small, is a great

opportunity to knit together a rich landscape for birds. Often, once one habitat garden is installed, other neighbors will follow, creating exponential results.

Clayton Tschudy, the Executive Director San Diego Canyonlands, explains, "The widespread and undeveloped canyons of San Diego

are repositories of nature, habitat patches that house sensitive plant and animal species and attract migratory birds. These canyon habitats, fragmented by development on the mesa tops, can be reconnected by creating habitat gardens at home. Every habitat garden not only brings birds and butterflies to you, but also creates connections between nearby nature fragments. As habitat increases between canyons, wildlife corridors are created, chains of life extending

across suburbs and through parklands. Ecosystems flourish through connectivity. Every garden can become part of the chain of life."

The San Diego Natural History Museum, San Diego Canyonlands, and other organizations are working to make this a viable approach to rewilding our county. You can contribute by creating your own pieces to add to the mosaic. *Susan Krzywicki*



Fresh Water: The Irreplaceable Magnet for Wildlife

You can create a bird bath from a small shallow bowl, or you can design a multilevel recirculating river with pools, misters, and fast-flowing streams.

What's essential for your bird bath? It must have places for birds to stand in water no more than 1" deep, encouraging small birds to

splash vigorously without slipping into deep water. If your bath has sloping sides, add smooth pebbles or wide flat rocks for the deeper areas, so that no area is deeper than 2". The bath must be far enough from low vegetation to ensure that cats can't ambush birds when their wet feathers make them more vulnerable. It must be easy to clean and easy to refill. That's it.

To make your bird bath a little snazzier, elevate it to discourage cats (and other mammals) from using it, although some small birds prefer ground-level baths. To make the bath more attractive

to birds—and less attractive to mosquitoes, add movement to the water. A quick Internet search revealed that a quiet solar-powered fountain or pump for your bird bath costs about \$25 or more. Some fountains offer multiple heads, giving you a bubbler, a mister (appealing to hummingbirds), or a sprayer. Provide a nearby place

for birds to perch after bathing; there, they can thoroughly preen, fluff, dry, and oil their feathers. If possible, place bird baths in shade, to slow evaporation and keep water fresh longer. Make sure that protective cover is nearby, at flying height, not ground level.

Once you've set up your bird bath, either keep it clean and full, or

empty it altogether. Don't allow water to sit in the bath for more than a day if it's not moving, or for more than a few days if it's moving. By regularly changing the water, you avoid algae, mosquito larvae, disease-causing microbes, and other hazards that can endanger birds. If you've neglected your bath and you fear it's contaminated, soak it with a 10% bleach solution for a few hours, rinse it thoroughly, and start again.

Want to create your own bird bath? Check out these sites:

 www.birdsandblooms.com/ backyard-projects/diy-birdbath/, with links to several crafty

bird baths, including a hummingbird mister.

- For a simpler one: www.audubon.org/news/how-make-birdbath.
- If you have the resources to buy a magnificent paradise for birds, visit watershapes.com/other-waterfeatures-from-birdbaths-to-lakes/wings-on-the-water.



Bird Feeders Require a Little Research and Planning By Shari Dorantes Hatch, Sketches editor

Invite nature's wonder into your life for very little time or money: Attract fascinating birds to your window or yard. You could rush out, buy a cute or cheap feeder, fill it, put it up, and see what happens. That might work! Or it might not. If, instead, you find out how to entice the birds you want to attract to your feeder, you'll be rewarded with countless hours of delightful birdwatching.

Step 1. Observe. Sit outside or in a window and notice which birds fly by or stop to visit. Make note of which birds visit your area.

Step 2. Investigate. Look up which birds commonly visit your region by going to **ebird.org/explore** and typing in the name of your city. If you click on the map (top right corner), you can zoom in to find the birding hotspot nearest you. Click on that hotspot, then click on "Details," to list the species commonly seen near you.

Step 3. Choose. Which of these bird species do you want to attract? Hummingbirds? Finches, sparrows, or goldfinches? Orioles or mockingbirds? (If you wonder what foods particular birds eat, check the free Audubon app, "Audubon Bird Guide." Look for "Diet" and "Feeding Behavior" for the birds that interest you.) Choose food and a feeder that will attract the birds you seek. The following list of websites have information on choosing the right feeder for the birds you want to attract.

- feederwatch.org/learn/feeding-birds/ (has good information on types of seed and other foods)
- www.allaboutbirds.org/news/how-to-choose-the-right-kindof-bird-feeder/
- www.audubon.org/magazine/november-december-2010/ audubon-guide-winter-bird-feeding

For information on seed types, see also:

www.allaboutbirds.org/news/types-of-bird-seed-a-quick-guide/

Step 4. Buy or make a feeder and the food for the species you chose. Step 5. Place your feeder in the best location to attract and protect native birds:

- Shield food from sun and rain. High heat or moisture can cause food to foster mold or microbes that can harm birds.
- Avoid exposing birds to predators; position the feeders at least 10 feet from shrubbery that might hide ambush predators such as cats.

Step 6. Maintain your feeders. Frequently clean your feeders, discard (or compost) old food, and provide fresh food often, to keep from transmitting diseases.



Safe Harbor: Predators and Other Urban Threats By Megan Flaherty, Habitat Restoration Manager

Wild birds face a litany of threats, ranging from the overly ambitious house cat, increasing populations of metropolitan species such as crows and raccoons, window strikes in developed areas, and natural predators such as snakes and birds of prey.

Fortunately, many of these threats can be alleviated with thoughtful placement of feeders, bird baths and nesting boxes, and by creating plenty of natural hiding places. Ideally, feeders should be placed 8 feet off of the ground, and 10 –12 feet away from any thick



"Catio", by Karen Straus.

vegetation, to allow birds to detect potential predators, while also enabling them to escape into the underbrush if they sense danger. Bird baths can be mounted onto pedestals for the same reason, but that might not be as alluring to some species of bird that prefer to obtain water at ground level. Species-specific recommendations for nest box placement can be found via Cornell Lab's Right Bird, Right House online tool kit.

Feeders can also be shielded by an awning, gazebo, or umbrella, to

create a visual block from any circling hawks. Birdseed should always be stored in airtight containers and the area below feeders should

be cleaned regularly, to avoid attracting rodents and the wildlife that prey upon them. The feeders themselves are also key—good feeders are made from plastic, metal, or glass, which are cleaned more easily than wood or clay. Small feeders prevent too many birds from congregating, a potential source of disease transmission. Make sure that feeders have holes for draining to prevent mold, and to avoid sharp edges that could hurt perched birds.

Outdoor cats kill an estimated 1.3 to 4 *billion* birds in the United States every year, so keeping pets indoors is a vital first step to creating a safe space for birds and other small animals. If that isn't an option, or if there is a neighborhood cat that patrols the area, you can discourage cats from entering your yard by stringing wire between fence posts, high enough to allow for perching of birds but low enough that cats can't comfortably walk. Want the best of both worlds? Try a "catio" (an enclosed cat-patio, shown to left).

Bird strikes can be prevented by placing feeders within 2–3 feet of windows, thereby preventing high-speed collisions (and giving you a closer view). Window decals or hanging vertical cords are good options. You can find resources for fun DIY projects online.

A good first step is to survey your yard and assess any potential threats—perching areas for predators, windows that may cause bird strikes, and the presence of any cats or other dangerous wildlife. From there, create a plan to eliminate or reduce these threats, and enjoy birding!

Catching the Winds of Change

Travis Kemnitz, San Diego Audubon Executive Director

Well, I am still here, and excited more than ever to take on the challenges of our time. Fortunately, we can ride these winds of change with our amazing board members, staff, volunteers, and supporters. We're developing a new perspective and adapting to our new environmental, social, and economic realities. Over the past months I have learned so much about how truly special San Diego Audubon Society is locally, in California, and even nationally. Chris Redfern, former Executive Director, helped us build a powerful chapter as leaders in the environmental movement. To reach our goals and achieve our vision, we must continue to embrace change.

Recently, exciting changes have happened among our staff. We have welcomed two beautiful babies into the San Diego Audubon family. Rebekah Angona and Chelsea Felbeck are enjoying cherished quality time with their newborns and are filled with joy in otherwise trying times. Jennifer Hajj, Bird Festival Coordinator, and overall superstar, is now on our staff!! She has begun her new role as Events and Membership Coordinator and is sure to make events, the membership experience, bird trips, workshops, and outreach better and birdier than ever. We have launched our search for a new Development Manager to help secure critical resources and steward our donors.

Our Board of Directors has responded to the challenge and formed a COVID-19 Task Force, led by our Executive Committee and other directors. We've established a phased response plan to reopen and adapt, worked to address potential income gaps, and guided our chapter communications. As part of these efforts we've reopened our offices and sanctuaries to staff, following required safety measures, and are beginning to ramp up our activities. We were awarded the Paycheck Protection Program loan and are working overtime to ensure it is forgiven. We are readying to activate volunteers for





Rebekah (Education Director) and Violet (left); Chelsea (Op/Vol Coordinator) and Tycho (right).

outdoor activities and other duties, because we need you! Silverwood, Anstine, education programs, and bird trips remain closed or on hold until the fall and we are discussing ways to adapt services to meet new safety requirements with the same level of effectiveness.

Finally, we have changed our sense of urgency and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The times demand it. Environmental justice is social justice. Being able to access nature without fear of being harmed, harassed, or simply treated differently because of the color of your skin is a basic human right. We must fight for this; we must work to diversify our community; we must strive to build the next generation of bird lovers and conservation leaders. We need to do this, and we are ready to deliver.

As the winds of change blow, we will feel uncomfortable and exhilarated, we will be pushed to the limits as we ready for action, we will doubt and surprise ourselves, and we will shed tears of sadness and joy. San Diego Audubon Society is on this journey with you, and together we will stand against injustice and fight even harder for change. The time is now.

Silverwood Scene Observing nature in all its glory: Mastering the recipe for a vibrant ecosystem Phillip Lambert, Silverwood Resident Manager

For many years, the Silverwood Wildlife Sanctuary has served as a prime example of what is needed to create a welcoming haven for local wildlife. Evidenced by our Certified Wildlife Habitat designation from the National Wildlife Foundation, Silverwood's observation area provides all the essentials to attract a wide array of species for viewing, photographing, and, most importantly, nature education. Here, I'll look more closely at what each of these important elements entails.

Food: Nourishing Nature

To help attract the many species of birds residing within the riparian oak woodland and surrounding chaparral, we provide specific types of feeders and food. Hummingbird feeders with sugar water offer a supplemental energy source that attracts not only Anna's Hummingbirds, Black-Chinned Hummingbirds, Costa's Hummingbirds, Allen's Hummingbirds, and Rufous Hummingbirds, but also Acorn Woodpeckers and multiple species of orioles. During the spring, Silverwood's observation area fills with the vibrant colors

of these species.

Thistle feeders are designed for attracting finches. At Silverwood, these feeders mostly attract Lesser Goldfinches, House Finches, and occasionally



Lawrence's Goldfinches and Cassin's Finches, though other species, such as Bewick's Wrens, sometimes visit, too.

The Magnum screened sunflower-seed feeders attract resident populations of Oak Titmice, Scrub Jays, White-breasted Nuthatches, and Acorn Woodpeckers. During spring, this feeder also attracts Black-headed Grosbeaks. By mixing millet seed with sunflower seeds, small amounts of millet are tossed out onto the ground by the sunflower-seed-eating birds, providing seed for ground feeders such as Dark-eyed Juncos, Spotted and California Towhees, and many species of sparrows. If the millet seed is tossed out on the ground all at once, it will be gone within a half hour, collected in the cheek

pouches of the resident ground squirrels. Therefore, if you have California Ground Squirrels, this is the way to go.

Similarly, tube feeders filled with millet and sunflower seeds are placed within the observation area. By attaching a platform at the base of the feeder, the sunflowerseed-eating birds separate the sunflower seed from the millet, which is also tossed out onto the ground. The millet on the ground attracts California Quail, Whitecrowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows, Spotted and California Towhees, and, every now and then, a California Thrasher. The feeders hang from poles that tee off from a 6-foot post in the ground. The 4×4-foot Douglas fir wooden posts are inserted into a trex vinyl sleeve that restricts critters such as ground squirrels from climbing up the post to the seed feeders.

Water: Attracting **Diverse Species**

Silverwood has two main bird baths in the observation area. They not only provide a place for drinking, splashing, and preening for the birds attracted to the



Acorn Woopecker by Phil Lambert

feeders, but also entice birds such as Wrentits and many species of warblers. During a warm summer day you may even see a Red-tailed Hawk or a Cooper's Hawk soaking in the water to cool off.

The more natural vegetation cover surrounds the bath, the better it will attract birds. These sources of water also attract other types of wildlife, such as Gray Foxes, Bobcats, and Coyotes. It's thrilling to be birding in the observation area with a group of children and to have a Mule Deer wander out of the chaparral to the lower bird bath to get a cool drink.

Cover: Creating Shelter and Safety

Silverwood's riparian oak woodland and surrounding chaparral habitat provide the cover needed by all of these wildlife species in order to feel safe from people, predators, and harsh weather. Under the cover of these habitats, a variety of animals have a place to hide and to raise their families among trees and shrubs.

Within the woodland, oaks provide the necessary habitat for woodpeckers such as Northern Flickers to excavate nest cavities.

These cavities later become nest sites for Oak Titmice and Nuthatches. Natural hollowedout trunk cavities become daily roosting sites and seasonal nest sites for our resident Screech Owls. High up in the oaks, Ravens have constructed many nests. These nests have later hosted Great Horned Owls and their owlets.

Along with natural nesting sites provided by the habitats surrounding the observation area, many types of bird nesting boxes have been placed within the area. The Bluebird boxes attract Western Bluebirds, along with House Wrens and occasionally



A man-made pool is a great asset to birds and other wildlife. By Phil Lambert

Oak Titmice. The Ash-throated Flycatchers have nested in these Bluebird boxes, but they now prefer an added Acorn Woodpecker nest box.

By researching the types of natural habitats and of the wildlife in your area, and by providing these three essential elements to make a healthy and natural sustainable wildlife habitat in your yard, you can join the thousands of wildlife enthusiasts across the country who have earned the distinction of being part of the National Wildlife Federation's Certified Wildlife Habitat.

Silverwood to Remain Closed for Summer

San Diego Audubon's concern for the well-being of the general public due to COVID-19 pandemic requires us to implement the closure and cancellations of all Silverwood programs until further notice. Please call (619) 443-2998 for updates and any questions.

When Silverwood reopens, we will have needs in trail maintenance and other tasks. Please consider how you can help when the gate swings open once again.





In May, while birding in a Central Park wildlife sanctuary, Christian Cooper (an African American board member of New York Audubon) saw a woman with her dog off-leash and politely asked her to leash it. The woman responded by calling the police, screaming that an African American man was threatening her. This outrageous incident should never have happened to him or to anyone else. Each of us should have the right to be in a public

place without fear. Wisely, Christian had recorded the confrontation and is now back out enjoying what he loves to do—birding.

For a decade, I have cherished being outdoors photographing birds. The one bird that started me down the road of birding was the Northern Flicker. I heard a pecking noise outside my bedroom window. After slowly opening the curtains I found it walking up the tree in our backyard.

I love the various personalities, shapes, sizes, and colors of birds. Some of my favorite places to go birding around San Diego are Ocean Beach, Tijuana Estuary,

Fiesta Island, Ramona, and other neighborhoods and parks.

While birding in San Diego, I have not experienced a confrontation similar to Christian's, but I am always wary. When not at home or at work, I am acutely aware of my surroundings, ever watchful. While out birding, I give people space; I smile, nod, try to make eye contact, and if the other person responds warmly, I greet them. While remaining vigilant, I thoroughly enjoy the times when I can live in the moment, when no one is approaching me, or when I'm with fellow photographers or birders.

We're grateful to Parrish for his willingness to share his personal experience. San Diego Audubon is committed to building a broadly inclusive conservation community, one that is reflected in a growing diversity of our board, staff, volunteers, and members, and ensuring that our programs are advancing the causes of both environmental and social justice.

However, we know we are far from that vision. We ask you, our supporters, whatever your identity, to share your experiences as well. We need to not only meet the conservation challenges of our time; we need your involvement to become a more diverse and inclusive organization. Thank you for being on this journey of betterment with us. *Travis Kemnitz, ED*









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- Subscription to *Sketches*, our member magazine (6 issues a year)
- Access to free local birding trips
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- Discounts on nature guidebooks and other merchandise, and access to our excellent library
- Access to a wide variety of volunteer opportunities
- Discounts on special workshops about birds, native plants, and more
- Invitations to special events such as our holiday party and volunteer celebration
- Email newsletter updates, including advance notice of events

While San Diego Audubon is a chapter of National Audubon Society, we are an independent not-for-profit organization. We encourage you—especially if you are already a National Audubon member—to become a Friend of San Diego Audubon to directly support our local conservation and education programs.



Sketches SAN DIEGO AUDUBON

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The office is now open for staff and board use, with some restrictions. If you wish to visit, please call to learn more. 4010 Morena Blvd. Ste. 100, San Diego, CA 92117

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