



Love Birds? Here's Why You Should Love Insects Too



Photo by: Jessica Goldstrohm

A Fan Favorite Food. 89% of all birds rely on insects as a food source at some point in their lives.¹ This means that without insects, the diet of almost all birds will be affected in some way. Even birds that we normally think about as non-insect eaters, such as the nectar-loving hummingbird, regularly incorporate them into their diet. In fact, up to 80% of a hummingbird's diet is insects and spiders!²

Pollination power. Through the power of pollination, insects help plants produce seeds and fruits – a favorite snack of many birds. Even plants that can produce seeds and fruit by themselves will often produce better yields with the help of insect pollination – that means more food for the birds! Birds even eat the pollinators themselves. Birds eat pollinator larvae (baby pollinators) such as caterpillars, grubs, and maggots.



Photo by: Madeline Barr



Photo by: Jessica Goldstrohm

Food for the road. Many migratory birds rely on insects as a nutritious and energy-rich food source throughout their long journeys. Resting locations along a migratory route will often line up nicely with spikes in insect abundance. These resting locations are like bird gas stations except instead of refueling with a soda and candy, it's an all-you-can-eat buggy buffet. Without enough insects to fuel birds' long journeys, migratory success takes a huge hit.

Baby bird food. 96% of all bird species in North America feed their young with insects.² Those ravenous chicks need a lot of insects to grow up strong and healthy – in the case of the chickadee, that's 6,000-9,000 caterpillars per brood to be exact.³ Without enough insects to feed the new generation, many baby birds won't make it.



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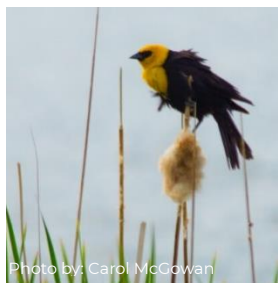


Photo by: Carol McGowan

Bioindicators. Since almost all birds rely on insects in some way, observing insects can give us a lot of information about how local birds are doing. Knowing how many of which insects are in an area can tell us what kinds of birds they might support. This information allows scientists and land managers to make informed decisions when managing wildlife habitat.



What You Can Do

Participate in community science at Butterfly Pavilion

Protect habitat for birds, insects, and more through a community science program at Butterfly Pavilion



Urban Prairies Project: Be a steward of open space in your community by becoming a Restoration Master Volunteer through Urban Prairies Project. Participate in hands on restoration efforts, wildlife monitoring, and community outreach to improve the health of local open spaces for wildlife and humans.

Colorado Butterfly Monitoring Network: Conserve Colorado's butterflies by volunteering for the Colorado Butterfly Monitoring Network. Observe and record butterflies on a monitoring route near you to collect important data about Colorado's butterflies!



Create a habitat garden

See below for some habitat gardening tips to invite birds and insects into your space!



Photo by: Anne Barr

Host plants. Many butterflies and moths are choosy about the plants they lay their eggs on and eat as caterpillars. Incorporating these 'hostplants' in your garden provides habitat for caterpillars which will in turn feed the birds! Chokecherry, asters, and lupines are all landscape friendly plants that host dozens of butterflies and moths.

Embrace the wild. Many insects will survive the winter months in garden debris such as dead leaves, hollowed stems, soil, and grasses. Fostering some wild in your habitat garden will allow overwintering insects such as beetles, butterflies, moths, flies, and bees to safely emerge in the spring. These critters will in turn provide food for birds and pollinate your garden!

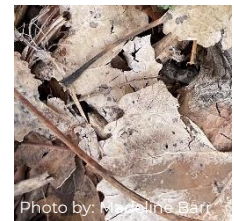


Photo by: Maelinne Barr



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Seeds & berries. In addition to insects, many birds eat berries and seeds. Many native plants provide these resources! Plants such as common sunflower, prairie coneflower, golden currant, Wood's rose, chokecherry, and snowberry provide berries and seeds for birds in your garden.

1. Vaughn, M. (2023). A day without invertebrates. *Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation*.
2. Tallamy, D. (2020) *Nature's best hope: A new approach to conservation that starts in your yard*. Hachette Book Group.