CREATING BIRD HABITAT ON SCHOOL GROUNDS

By Donna Schmitz

Birds are the most visible wildlife in urban areas, which makes them ideal subjects for scientific inquiry and other class projects. Birds require four critical elements: food, shelter, water and nesting materials. Provide these elements on your school grounds to ensure birds will visit.

SHELTER: The most important thing you can do to encourage bird use of the school yard is to protect and maintain undisturbed wild areas, such as wetlands, unmowed grassy areas or vegetated areas that include snags or dead trees. If wild areas are not present, you can provide shelter by planting a variety of native trees, shrubs and ground cover in layers. Owls and hawks like to perch on tall trees to rest and look for prey. If your schoolyard does not have any tall trees, a tall pole with a cross piece can serve the same purpose. Tall shrubs with leafy branches give birds a place to roost and preen. Songbirds need a perch near the water or feeder. A dead branch attached to a fence post allows birds to assess their surroundings before travelling to water. Brush piles create a shelter against winds and predators. Visit SWG’s Native Plant Sale webpage for a sample wildlife garden design.

FOOD: Over 100 North American bird species supplement their natural diets with birdseed and suet obtained from feeders. These foods are available at local feed stores. Consider growing native plants that produce small fruits such as elderberries, serviceberry, Indian plum, and huckleberry. If possible, keep some areas unraked because leaf litter is a source of food for ground-foraging birds, such as thrushes.

WATER: Clean water in a shallow bird bath or a pond with a gently sloped edge will attract many species of birds. Common water depth ranges from ½ to 2 inches. Optimally, a bird bath will be cleaned every 2-4 days.

NESTING MATERIALS: Grass, small twigs and yarn (no longer than 3 inches) placed near feeders will be used by birds to build their nests. Robins, phoebes, thrushes and swallows use mud to construct their nests. You can help them find the material they need by filling an inverted garbage can lid with mud. You can also install bird boxes to encourage birds to raise their young on the property. Cavity-nesters like bluebirds, swallows and chickadees are likely to use bird houses in the Willamette Valley. Bird houses should not have perches below the entrance hole, and the entrance hole should be 1 ¼ to 1 ½ inches in diameter. If the bird house is being used by house sparrows or starlings, discontinue its use. These are invasive birds that have a detrimental impact on the native birds of the Willamette Valley.

If you are interested in attracting a specific species of bird, it’s important to research their life requirements. And always keep cats away from the property. According to a new study by Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, American cats kill over 1 billion birds/year (www.sciencenews.org).


Oregon By Nature Exhibit at Benton Oregon By Nature Exhibit at Benton Oregon By Nature Exhibit at Benton Oregon By Nature Exhibit at Benton County has three key ingredients that make it an ideal location to teach about birds: 1) Varied and Accessible Bird Habitats including rare oak savannas and wet prairies; 2) Non-formal Partners-to work with you and your students in and out of the classroom; 3) Access to curriculum and materials. This newsletter will point you to the resources available to help you bring bird education to your students.

Wild Goose Tales Newsletter for Oregon’s Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex. friendswvnwrc.org/ newsletter_and_other_resources

BIRDS: A POPULAR TOPIC WITH TEACHERS AND STUDENTS!

In a recent survey of Benton County teachers, birds were clearly indicated as a popular classroom topic. 38% of respondents include bird education already. Of those who don’t, 60% would like to include bird education.

It’s easy to see why—with their great diversity and omnipresence, birds are a fun and fascinating way to introduce important concepts from classification to natural selection, and to use the local environment for scientific inquiry.

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Want to spend some time learning from an expert birder? Don Boucher of Neighborhood Naturalist offers free birding classes from the back of his bicycle. Bicycle Biriding is offered on the 4th Sunday of each month. Neighborhood Naturalist offers an information-rich quarterly newsletter. Visit the website to subscribe and you’ll also find a library of local bird sounds, and an excellent YouTube channel with nicely edited footage of birds and other animal species including foxes, butterflies, beavers and squirrels. Check out the nighttime showdown between a nutria and a beaver! www.neighborhood- naturalist.com.
Did you know that the Willamette Valley has a newly completed birding trail? The Willamette Valley Birding Trail is one of the nine trails planned for the state of Oregon, and is composed of 12 smaller loops that take you to over 138 birding hotspots between Cottage Grove to the south and Clatskanie in the Oregon panhandle. These trail loops near the Corvallis/Albany area are spangled with great sightseeing destinations:

- Luckiamute Loop – includes Peavy Arboretum, Fort Hoskins and Jackson-Frazier Wetlands;
- Asea Loop – includes Asea Falls, Finley National Wildlife Refuge and Tyee Winery;
- Willamette Loop – includes Silver Falls State Park and Oregon Gardens;
- Santiam Loop – includes Albany Willamette Riverfront and Foster Dam Reservoir.

Tour the oak savannas, riparian forests and wetland prairies that characterize the Willamette Valley and enjoy the great abundance of birds that can be witnessed throughout these unique habitats. Visit www.oregonbirdingtrails.org for a complete guide and list of Oregon birding trails. For a print version contact Molly Monroe at Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex (541) 757-7236.

Chintimini Wildlife Center

The Chintimini Wildlife Center is a wildlife rehabilitation and environmental education center located in Corvallis, Oregon. Chintimini offers a variety of educational programs designed to educate the public about the wonders of wildlife. “Raptors: Hunters of the Sky”, their live birds of prey program, is a one-hour program that can be offered year-round, on or off-site, for any age group. This program includes visits with non-releasable education birds and supplemental hands-on activities. Chintimini is also offering two “Raptor Rhapsody Summer Camps” this year when they will devote an entire week to the study of birds of prey. Camp sessions are from July 15th to 19th, for ages 8 to 12, and August 13th to 17th, for ages 12 and over. For more information and to schedule programs, visit Chintimini’s website at www.chintiminiwildlife.org.

Avery House Nature Center

Avery House Nature Center (AHNC), a program of Corvallis Environmental Center, has provided nature education programs for 18 years. They offer bird-themed summer camps, class field trips, nature classes and a bird kit. Programs can also be created or tailored to meet your educational goals and classroom focus.

- Bird Kit: Includes all the materials needed for a variety of fun and engaging bird activities. Kit use is limited, please contact AHNC.
- Bird Field Trip: Meet grade level Oregon Science and Core Knowledge Standards, and bring Foss kit learning to life! For third graders, AHNC offers a 2-hour field trip focused on birds, migration and binocular use. The trip can be held at Finley Wildlife Refuge or another wetland bird habitat of your choice.
- Home School Class: On Wednesday afternoons homeschooilers are exposed to many different topics including birds and bird habitats. Full day group programs are available on Fridays for a low cost.
- Nature Summer Camps are week-long day programs with a thematic focus. Bird Bonanza will run from July 8th-12th. Soar into the world of local birds and their adaptations for flight.
- Bicycle Birding for ages 9-12: Youth spend afternoons on their bikes bird watching all around Corvallis. Check AHNC’s website for more information on any of these programs. www.corvallisenvironmentalcenter.org/avery-house-nature-center/