

# Bird-Friendly Yards: A How-To Guide



Cedar Waxwing

## Birds Are Important

Birds connect people with their environment and the beauty of the natural world. Their colours and songs bring us joy. Birds also provide critical ecological functions: consuming billions of insects each day, pollinating plants, and spreading seeds.

## Houses and Yards Can Harm Birds

Countless birds are killed each year as a result of actions we take in our cities, yards, and homes. A leading cause of death for birds is collisions with glass. In Canada, more than 25 million birds die each year from window collisions. Because residential houses make up most of the buildings in a city, they cause about 90 percent of bird deaths.

It's not just windows. Other aspects of our homes and yards can endanger or protect birds: where we place feeders, how we landscape, whether we let cats roam, how we light our yards, even how we garden. How cities grow is also a critical factor: habitat loss is the greatest threat to birds and all wildlife.

Black-capped Chickadee  
Photo courtesy of FLAP Canada



American Robin

## Windows Can Kill

Birds often don't "see" glass. Instead, they see what is beyond the glass or reflected in it, so they think they're flying toward a tree or open sky. Windows facing each other on opposite sides of a building create additional risks—a tunnel effect that can tempt birds to try to fly through. Glass corners and balconies create similar hazards.

## Solutions For Glass

**To help prevent window strikes, make glass more visible:**

- For existing windows, adhesive decals—dots or bars—can create a visual barrier so birds don't attempt to fly through. Decals must be properly spaced over the entire window surface. Birds are used to flying among the branches of trees, so if you place decals too far apart birds may try to fly between the decals and hit your window. Recommended spacing is 2 inches (5 cms) for dots and 4 inches (10 cms) for vertical bars.
- Another option is to hang narrow ropes, or paracord, 4 inches (10 cms) apart outside your window. These "Zen wind curtains" or "Acopian birdsavers" can be made at home ([birdsavers.com](http://birdsavers.com)).
- For new construction or window replacements, look for bird-visible glass marked with permanent patterns. New technologies such as windows with patterns that reflect UV light remain unproven.

More information on making windows safe for birds can be found at [birdsafeca.com/homes-safe-for-birds](http://birdsafeca.com/homes-safe-for-birds).



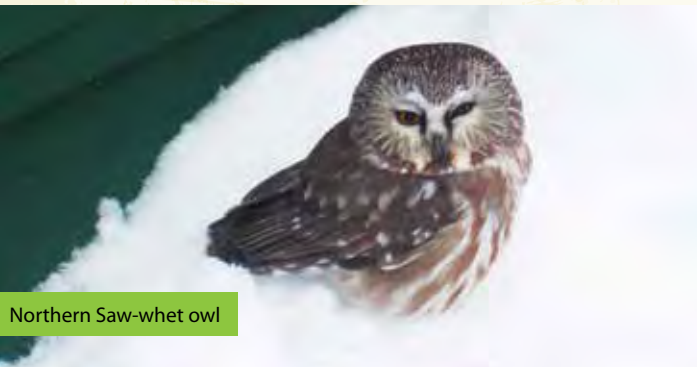
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## Other Solutions Related to Windows

- **Plants.** Birds may see indoor houseplants as perches or refuges. Reduce bird collisions by moving plants back from windows.
- **Feeders.** Place feeders close to windows (within half a meter) so that a bird that flies from the feeder into a window does not have enough speed to injure itself. Or place feeders far from windows (more than ten metres) so birds are less likely to fly into glass. Correct placement of feeders is most effective if you also apply decals or other treatments that increase the visibility of glass.
- **Landscaping.** Biodiverse yards, native plants, fruit trees, and berry bushes are great for birds, but avoid locating such plants near windows to ensure that birds are not lured to high-risk areas. Again, before taking steps that attract birds to your yard apply properly spaced window decals or other treatments that increase the visibility of glass.



Northern Saw-whet owl

## If You Find a Bird on the Ground

If you hear a thud, please investigate. Birds stunned by window collisions need to be kept safe from predators. If you find a bird that's still alive, place it in a paper bag or cardboard box and consult this online chart for additional steps: [livingskywildliferehabilitation.org/birds-windows](http://livingskywildliferehabilitation.org/birds-windows) or phone Living Sky Wildlife Rehabilitation at **306-281-0554**.

For all bird collisions with windows, please report them on the Global Bird Collision Mapper (and include an image of the bird if possible): [birdmapper.org/app](http://birdmapper.org/app).

## Other Steps to Protect and Foster Birds

- Garden pesticide-free. Pesticides can harm birds directly through contact and indirectly by affecting food sources. Avoid planting treated seeds as they may be harmful to birds when eaten. See [gardening.usask.ca](http://gardening.usask.ca) for pesticide-free ways to handle common gardening problems.
- Promote biodiversity. Most of the insects in a healthy yard are beneficial or irrelevant to your plants, and maintaining a diverse insect population makes it harder for damaging insects to find a home. The more insects in your yard, the more potential food for foraging birds. This is especially important in spring when hatchlings need feeding.
- Consider your garden from a bird's perspective. Choose plants that have different heights and consider garden-appropriate native species to attract a diverse range of birds. Learn more about fostering biodiversity at [saskatoon.ca/healthyyards](http://saskatoon.ca/healthyyards).
- Leave your fall clean up until early spring. Left in place, seed heads provide food all winter long and standing plants are important bird and insect habitat. Don't prune trees when nests might be disturbed.
- Consider birds when installing outdoor lights. Turn off outdoor lights when you go to sleep. Lights can disrupt birds' sleeping, feeding, and mating cycles.
- Don't let your cat roam free, either in your yard or elsewhere. Cats kill tens of millions of birds in Canada annually. Keep your cat indoors or consider building a "catio"—a screened enclosure that allows the cat to run, climb, and get fresh air but keeps the cat and birds safe. A leash is another alternative.
- Feral cats kill millions of birds each year. It's important to spay or neuter all cats.



Magpies, while often unappreciated, can provide valuable ecosystem services.

Black-billed magpie

The most important steps you can take to keep birds safe include:

- Apply markers to your windows to reduce bird collisions.
- Place feeders close to the house (less than half a metre) or far away (more than ten metres).
- Don't let cats roam.
- Think about protecting birds when landscaping and gardening.

**Thanks to our partners.** This pamphlet was written with the assistance and expertise of our Healthy Yards team as well as:

**Living Sky Wildlife Rehabilitation**  
[livingskywildliferehabilitation.org](http://livingskywildliferehabilitation.org)

**Meewasin Valley Authority** [meewasin.com](http://meewasin.com)

**FLAP Canada** [flap.org](http://flap.org) [birdmapper.org/app](http://birdmapper.org/app)

**Saskatoon Nature Society** [saskatoonnaturesociety.sk.ca](http://saskatoonnaturesociety.sk.ca)

### Gardening at USask

Visit [gardening.usask.ca](http://gardening.usask.ca) for hundreds of articles just like this to help you garden chemical-free on the Canadian prairies or follow us on our [Gardening at USask Facebook page](#) for timely information and local advice. We also offer free or low-cost workshops and events for the beginner gardener, all the way to certification, as well as many ways to connect with local gardeners and gardening communities.

### City of Saskatoon

Having a healthy yard and garden benefits you and your community. For tips on water conservation, backyard composting, pesticide reduction, and more, visit [saskatoon.ca/healthyyards](http://saskatoon.ca/healthyyards).

### Questions?

Get free, local gardening advice from the University of Saskatchewan's Gardenline at [gardenline.usask.ca](http://gardenline.usask.ca) year-round. During the growing season, contact a horticulturist for personalized advice at [gardenline@usask.ca](mailto:gardenline@usask.ca).

## Grow a Greener Saskatoon

Visit our Healthy Yards partners at [gardening.usask.ca/healthyyards](http://gardening.usask.ca/healthyyards)