CREATING A HEALTHY COUNTRY HOME

A rural property offers open space and opportunities for enjoyment. It is important to remember that your land is also a home to wildlife. Urbanization and other factors have greatly reduced the number of woodlands, pastures, range-lands, and prairies, making rural land stewardship crucial to the conservation of birds and other wildlife. How you manage your acreage affects the survival of these species, as well as your own quality of life.

BIRDS ON THE RANGE

Birds are good indicators of the ecological health of your property. You can protect the value and productivity of your land while providing food, shelter, and nesting sites for local birds. Overgrazing and improper weed management can result in degraded vegetation systems and lands that no longer provide for birds. A diverse mix of native cover and forage plants, as well as healthy streamside vegetation, will support game birds, resident and migratory song-birds, and grassland bird species, which are especially at risk.

Bird feeders allow for up close observation of some rural bird species. Keep track of the birds coming to your feeders and learn to identify the birds using other parts of your property to determine if your management choices are increasing the number and types of birds on your land. Birdhouses provide nest sites for additional birds and those that require frequent watering. Preserve local soil conditions. Avoid using non-native plants and those that require frequent watering. Preserve native habitats whenever possible.

LIVING LIGHTLY ON THE LAND

Rotate crop fields and graze only as much livestock as the land will sustain. Resist the urge to create a traditional suburban landscape around your home. If a firebreak is needed, try to incorporate native plants and grasses into your design. Consult with your local NRCS office to identify native plants suited to the local soil conditions. Avoid using non-native plants and those that require frequent watering. Preserve native habitats whenever possible.

WILDLIFE SAFETY

Birds often drown in open livestock troughs if the water is too deep; provide a float or ramp that provides a way for them to climb out. Clean, fresh water is critical to your livestock, and frequent replacement of the water also prevents mosquito breeding. Consider minimizing fencing to allow native wildlife to move freely while containing your herd. Keep your domestic pets indoors or in a protected run to minimize their impact on native wildlife and to keep them safe from natural predators such as coyotes.

WORKING WITH NEIGHBORS

Your property is part of a larger landscape that birds and other wildlife need to survive. Invite your neighbors to join you in managing your adjoining properties for native species. Form a local wildlife association and make a plan to provide food, shelter, and nesting sites to those species that most need your help. Keep track of how the birds and other wildlife respond to your efforts. For more information, visit www.audubonathome.org/neighborhood.

BEFORE YOU BUILD

If you are still planning construction of your country home, choose a building design and location that protects as much of the property as possible, minimize the amount of land cleared for the building site, and protect trees and shrubs from damage during construction. It is easier to protect existing habitat than to create new habitat later.

HEALTHY YARD PLEDGE

Create and maintain a healthy environment for you, your family, and local wildlife by pledging to:
✓ Reduce pesticide use
✓ Conserve water
✓ Protect water quality
✓ Remove invasive exotic plants
✓ Plant native species
✓ Support wildlife on your property

Visit www.audubonathome.org/pledge to make the pledge online.

The Audubon At Home website contains information and downloadable resources to help you plan and develop your property in a wildlife-friendly way. You’ll find regional resources and information about the birds, other wildlife, and native plants in your area. Visit www.audubonathome.org

NRCS’s Backyard Conservation website also shows ways to help the environment and to make your yard more attractive and enjoyable. Visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/backyard.
Invite Birds, Bats, and Butterflies to YOUR COUNTRY HOME

1. Work with NEIGHBORS to encourage habitat protection across property lines.
2. Do not plant INVASIVE PLANTS. Deal with invasive weeds early and often, and restore grasslands with native forbs and wildflowers.
3. Screen FENCELINES with native shrubs to create additional habitat and wildlife corridors.
4. Monitor WETLANDS, including ponds and playa, for overall health, and manage runoff to prevent erosion and flooding.
5. Bats are common inhabitants of rural areas. A BAT HOUSE will provide a daytime roosting place for these aerial insect eaters.
6. Create a BUTTERFLY GARDEN by planting wildflowers and other plants to feed adult butterflies and caterpillars.
7. In the YARD, include items that will attract, protect, and support birds and other wildlife. Include bird feeders, a birdhouse, a source of clean water, and native plants for cover, food, and nesting. Keep cats indoors, and modify windows to prevent bird strikes.
8. Manage WOODLANDS for the conservation of forest birds. Unless there is a significant threat of wildfire, leave brush and dead snags in place as nesting and feeding places for birds and insects.
9. Protect trees and other vegetation along streams with fencing to prevent overgrazing and erosion. The health of these RIPARIAN AREAS is key to the overall health of the land, because so many animal species depend on this type of habitat.
10. If you have livestock, rotate GRAZING HERDS to different pastures to promote sustainable forage growth. Pay attention to stocking densities to maintain healthy vegetation. Explore herd types to determine which best suits your property.
11. Maintain native SHRUBLAND or shrubby pastures for quail, grouse, and other game birds. Native prairies or meadows should be preserved for nesting grassland birds, such as meadowlarks and sparrows, as well as for hunting birds, such as hawks, owls, and falcons.

BIRDS TO HELP ON YOUR PROPERTY

With a large-acreage property or ranchette, you have a great opportunity to help birds, bats, butterflies, and other wildlife. Consider managing your land to provide food and shelter for five or six bird species that need the most support in your area. Keep a close watch to see how the birds respond to your efforts. To determine which species near you need the most help, and to find ways to help support them on your property, visit www.audubonathome.org/birdstohelp.

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