



Think Spring: Gardening for Wildlife

Sandra Vistine-Amdor, Wildlife Biologist, Idaho Power Company

Gardening for wildlife can be a very rewarding experience, and winter is the perfect time to start including wildlife habitat into your spring landscaping plan. Spring seed catalogs and local nurseries are a great place to get ideas and brainstorming potential projects. The Idaho Native Plant Society's website (<http://www.idahonativeplants.org>) is also a wonderful local resource for information on landscaping with native plants to attract wildlife.

Whether you have an apartment balcony or a 20-acre farm, you can create a garden that attracts wildlife and helps restore habitat in commercial and residential areas. Choosing plants native to the geographic area where you live almost always guarantees success. Natives are well adapted to survive in a particular geographic area according to the climate, soils, rainfall and availability of pollinators and seed

dispersers. Because they are indigenous to a specific region, native plants usually require little maintenance. They prevent the spread of weedy species, and are welcomed by wildlife, serving an important role in the local ecosystem. Wildlife will benefit greatly from this type of gardening.

Habitat is defined as the proper food, water and cover that an animal needs to exist and reproduce; whether it lives in woods, in the country or a backyard in the shrubs. When you consider attracting wildlife to your backyard, there are several basic habitat concepts to remember. The richer the habitat (the more food, water and cover in an area), the more likely you are to attract wildlife to your property and get them to stick around for you to observe and enjoy. Also the more diverse the habitat is--the more types of vegetation in an

area--the more diverse the wildlife species tend to be. Ideally, a diverse backyard would contain a mixture of native trees, shrubs, vines and other greenery that produces different kinds of food and cover, for the different seasons. The more diverse a backyard community, the more resistant it will be against plant diseases and pests, thus reducing the need to use pesticides.

Vegetation is the natural architecture that most wildlife species use for protection from predators and weather and for a place to rest and raise young. Planting a variety of species, (especially fruit and nut bearing shrubs and trees) can also provide food for wildlife throughout the year in addition to, or to replace the use of feeders. Compact-growing shrubs

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Adult butterflies searching for nectar are attracted to brightly colored plants;
© Sandra Vistine-Amdor.

FEATURES

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*Sandra Vistine-Amdor,
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It's never too early to start thinking about including wildlife in your spring landscaping plans...

3 Celebrating 20 Years at the MK Nature Center!

20 years of habitat, wildlife, education, and community in Boise.

6 Do you Enjoy the WildLife of Idaho?

Support the Watchable Wildlife Program and bid on incredible Idaho adventures online.



A bird bath is an easy addition to your backyard habitat;
© Sara Focht.

such as antelope bitterbrush, golden currant or some of the sagebrush varieties can provide protection from predators and excellent thermal cover during colder months. Ground cover of ferns, flowers and grasses along with lawn clippings or wood chip mulches offer cover to ground-dwelling small mammals, reptiles and amphibians. Non-living vegetation in the form of brush piles and snags (dead or dying trees) is used as cover, as well as roosting and nesting sites. If you do not have any backyard snags, you may want to construct nest boxes. These should be built for specific wildlife species.

Landscaping your backyard for wildlife is not complete without water. It is an essential habitat component. If you want to furnish water only to birds, traditional birdbaths work well because they are up off the ground. To offer water to a broader array of animals, take the dish portion of your birdbath (or substitute a garbage can lid), balance it upon a clay pot, and fill in underneath and around it with decorative large rocks and driftwood. The clay pot gives it a little height to help keep the debris out, and the rocks allow access for ground-dwellers. To offer perches to stand on, place clean pebbles in the water container. Misters, dripping hoses and other sources of moving water are especially attractive to wildlife, though in more arid environments conserving water is key. A small pond can be a delightful addition to your backyard. Concrete, fiberglass or plastic-lined ponds offer cover and breeding areas for many types of amphibians. Flat stones can stabilize the edge of the pond; vegetation, rocks and driftwood can offer a natural backdrop. Submerged potted plants can be added for accent. There are several devices available commercially that will keep the water from freezing in the winter. No matter which type of water source you choose, you will need to clean or fill it with fresh water from time to time to prevent the buildup of algae or mosquito larvae.

Once all of your habitat components are in place, you are ready to sit back and enjoy the many visitors that will frequent your backyard space; however, it is important to remember that transformation will take

time. In addition to benefiting wildlife and enhancing the beauty of your yard, backyard wildlife landscaping helps filter particulates out of the air, recycles oxygen, reduces noise pollution, provides privacy, increases property values up to 20 percent, and saves on cooling and heating costs for the home. And, possibly most important of all, it gives us all a better understanding of nature, instilling both a sense of oneness with other creatures of the Earth and a sense of stewardship for the land and its wildlife.



A backyard wildlife haven; © Sara Focht.

Backyards for Wildlife

Are you ready to share your yard with wildlife?

Check out "Backyards for Wildlife" at: http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/wildlife/nongame/publications/backyard_wildlife.pdf.

Learn about bird houses, bird feeders, butterfly gardens, water features, native plants, managing weeds, reptiles and amphibians and much...much...more!

MK Nature Center celebrates 20 years of fish viewing

The Morrison Knudsen (MK) Nature Center in Boise celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2010. The MK Nature Center is a conservation education center owned and operated by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. MK Nature Center has a mounted grizzly bear that towers 8 feet high, a beautiful hummingbird garden, and is frequently visited by great blue heron, mink, and mule deer. However, the most famous feature is the underwater viewing windows. In front of these windows, visitors can be face to face with huge rainbow trout, sparkly mountain whitefish and ghostly large-scale suckers. During the fall, 36-inch Chinook salmon and bright red Kokanee can be found swimming among the year-long residents.

Over 13,000 attended an MK Nature Center program or special event last year and over 100,000 came on their own. Nearly all of these people look through the viewing windows at Idaho Native fishes, peer over the bridges for a rare glimpse of the resident sturgeon, and browse the visitor center in awe of the animals and exhibits on display.

The MK Nature Center provides a rare opportunity to view wildlife in a natural habitat. In fact, HABITAT is what we make! From the beginning the 4.5 acres has been planted and pruned to create natural food, water, shelter, and space for native Boise River animals.

Come celebrate 20 years of habitat, wildlife, education, and community at the MK Nature Center! Learn more about MK Nature Center at: <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/CMS/education/mknc>.

JOIN THE GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT COUNT FOR FUN, COUNT FOR THE FUTURE



New York, NY and Ithaca, NY—Bird watchers coast to coast are invited to take part in the 13th annual Great Backyard Bird Count, Friday, February 12, through Monday, February 15, 2010. Participants in the free event will join tens of thousands of volunteers of all levels of birding experience to count birds in their own backyards, local parks or wildlife refuges.

A joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, this free event is an opportunity for families, students, and people of all ages to discover the wonders of nature in backyards, schoolyards, and local parks, and, at the same time, make an important contribution to conservation. Participants count birds and report their sightings online at www.birdcount.org.

Each checklist submitted by these “citizen scientists” helps researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society learn more about how the birds are doing—and how to protect them. Last year, participants turned in more than 93,600 checklists online, creating the continent’s largest instantaneous snapshot of bird populations ever recorded.

“Taking part in the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a great way to get outside with family and friends, have fun, and help birds—all at the same time. Anyone who can identify even a few species can provide important information that enables scientists to learn more about how the environment is changing and how that affects our conservation priorities,” said Audubon Education Vice President, Judy Braus.

Anyone can take part, from novice bird watchers to experts, by counting birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the event and reporting their sightings online at www.birdcount.org. The data these “citizen scientists” collect helps

researchers understand bird population trends, information that is critical for effective conservation. Their efforts enable everyone to see what would otherwise be impossible: a comprehensive picture of where birds are in late winter and how their numbers and distribution compare with previous years.

Bird populations are always shifting and changing. For example, 2009 GBBC data highlighted a huge southern invasion of Pine Siskins across much of the eastern United States. Participants counted 279,469 Pine Siskins on 18,528 checklists, as compared to the previous high of 38,977 birds on 4,069 checklists in 2005. Failure of seed crops farther north caused the siskins to move south to find their favorite food.

On the www.birdcount.org website, participants can explore real-time maps and charts that show what others are reporting during the count. The site has tips to help identify birds and special materials for educators. Participants may also enter the GBBC photo contest by uploading images taken during the count. Many images will be featured in the GBBC website’s photo gallery. All participants are entered in a drawing for prizes that include bird feeders, binoculars, books, CDs, and many other great birding products. For more information, visit www.birdcount.org

How to do the GBBC...IT'S AS EASY AS 1, 2, 3!

1. Plan to count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count, February 12-15, 2010.
2. For each type of bird you see, count the most that you see at any one time.
3. Enter your results on the Great Backyard Bird Count web site!



Winter 2010 Wildlife Events

Bald Eagle Days

5657 Warm Springs Ave., Boise;
<http://baldeagledays.blogspot.com>

Jan. 30 - A FREE public celebration of bald eagles and all of Boise River's wildlife. Join the fun at the Idaho Shakespeare Facility with live bird presentations, lectures, wildlife viewing, and children's activities. A great opportunity to get outside this winter!

Boise Watershed

11818 West Joplin Rd., Boise;
(208) 489-1284 www.cityofboise.org/Bee/WaterShed/Home/index.aspx

The Boise WaterShed is open every 3rd Saturday of each month from 10 am - 2 pm as part of the Watershed Weekend series. Join us for an outdoor walking tour of the Wastewater Treatment Plant at 1 pm. FREE admission! No pre-registration required unless indicated.

Jan. 16 - Simple Steps for Sustainable Living

During the winter we spend more time indoors using energy to heat and light our homes. We also expose ourselves to poor indoor air quality. Learn home improvement ideas from Todd McGiverin from Eco-Home Solutions to make your home more sustainable while improving the health of your indoor environment. Find out hidden dangers that can affect your health and pick up resources for detecting and eliminating these dangers. Discover green plumbing innovations and take home tips on how to make your home more energy and water efficient. Kids can take the water conservation challenge, and the first 20 kids will win free water-saving devices!

Feb. 20 - Are you Diggin' it? Waterwise Landscaping

Grow your knowledge with a presentation from 10:30-11:15 by Michael Wiegand, owner of Habiscapes, on how to attract local wildlife into your garden and natural areas. Listen to a complimentary presentation from 11:15-noon by Ann DeBolt, natural communities specialist at Idaho Botanical Garden, on waterwise landscaping at home, its

benefits, techniques for success, gardening through the seasons, and some of the 43 plants in the Boise WaterShed's new Waterwise Demonstration Garden. Find out answers to your tree questions and learn about the benefits of trees and tree selection at the Boise City Community Forestry booth. Gather ideas to get your garden started at our community information booth. Families can press plants, make bird feeders and plant seeds in a cup to take home.

Mar. 20 - Spring Runoff Party

Spring is here! After a long winter it's time to put away those skis and pull out the raft or kayak. Idaho's rivers are recharged with spring runoff each year as temperatures warm and mountain snow packs melt. Celebrate the first day of spring at the Boise WaterShed with fun events. Learn how runoff from mountain snowpack influences Idaho's whitewater supplies and the ecosystems that depend on them. Hear from local experts about this year's water forecast while learning how best to protect Idaho precious rivers. To get warmed up for boating season, come watch locally made movies about whitewater rafting and kayaking that are sure to get you excited about the coming whitewater season.

Deer Flat NWR

13751 Upper Embankment Rd.
Nampa; (208) 467-9278;
www.fws.gov/deerflat

*Wild About Life Lecture Series;
2nd Tuesday of every month; free*

Jan. 12 - Salmon: Swimming an Upstream Battle

Gain insight into the amazing biology of salmon and their fight for survival. Learn how salmon play a key role in the economy, ecology, and culture of the local landscape. Dave Cannamela, MK Nature Center, Idaho Fish and Game.

Feb. 9 - Turn Kitchen & Yard Waste into "Black Gold"

Learn how to reduce waste and improve your garden's soil through

home composting. Even if you don't have a yard, learn how to compost with worms, a great option for apartment dwellers and non-gardeners alike! Master Composter from Foothills Learning Center, City of Boise Parks and Recreation.

Mar. 9- Local Geology & Volcanology

Did you know Lizard Butte in Marsing and Castle Rock in Boise are old volcanos? Southwestern Idaho was once a hotbed for volcanic activity. Join Craig White, Geosciences Professor, Boise State University for a presentation on local geology and volcanology.

Foothills Learning Center

3188 Sunset Peak Rd., Boise; (208) 514-3755; www.cityofboise.org/Bee/Foothills/index.aspx

Second Sat. Programs are from 10am to 2pm. All ages welcome! Free; no registration is required.

Jan. 9 - Planning Native Landscapes

Turn your winter blues into spring greens as you plan your spring landscape. Join Steven Paulsen, General Manager and owner of Conservation Seeding and Restoration (CSR) as he shares his knowledge and passion for native plants. Steven's presentations at 10:15 and 12:15 will include tours of our native garden. (ADULT PROGRAM; Pre-registration required on or before January 6th) For more information or to register please call 493-2530.

Feb. 13 - Shake Wiggle and Rumble

Earthquakes occur all around the world. Learn about what causes the ground to shake, wiggle, and rumble. Join Jessica Sousa, our National Science Foundation Fellow and Geology graduate student as she teaches us about shifting plates, slipping faults and other rumbles beneath the earth. You'll be able to create your own mini-earthquakes among other fun activities.

Mar. 13 - Hike Smart! LOST...and Found

Have you ever been lost? You won't be after you learn the right way to

prepare yourself for grand adventures in the outdoors. Join our BSU National Science Foundation Fellows, Danielle Clay and Jessica Sousa, and discover some important tricks about staying safe while hiking and what to do if things should go wrong. Learn how to read the clouds and make a compass; recognize which plants are good to use as food or shelter. Gather helpful tips on what to do if you become lost and find out what to bring along in your knapsack to help you survive. Keeping these things in mind will make hiking fun and exciting for everyone! Hikes will take off at 11:00, noon, and 1:00 with other activities going on throughout the day.

MK Nature Center

600 S. Walnut St., Boise; (208) 334-2225; <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/cms/education/mknc/>

MK Nature Center's third Saturday programs are held from 2-3:30pm each month. No registration is required. Free for all ages; donations accepted.

Jan. 16- Wildlife in Winter

Join the MK Nature Center for an afternoon of learning all about winter adaptations that animals use to survive. A short educational session will be followed by an outside walk. A walk up activity for kids will be provided. A fun family day at the MK Nature Center. Dress for outdoor weather and don't forget to bring your camera.

Feb. 20- Winter Waterfowl

Join the MK Nature Center for an afternoon of learning all about winter waterfowl. A short educational session followed by an outside walk and walk up activity for the kids. A fun family afternoon!

Mar. 20- Waterwise Garden Planning

Are you doing some winter landscape planning? Come for an educational session covering the principles of xeriscaping. Water wise gardening creates gardens of color, texture, wildlife habitat, and water conservation. A walk up garden collage craft will be available for the kids.



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Do you drive a car? Do you pay taxes? If you answered yes to both of these questions, you have *two* opportunities to support nongame wildlife in Idaho! If you are reading this newsletter, you probably already have an Idaho Wildlife license plate! Thank you!



DO SOMETHING WILD!
Check off a gift for watchable wildlife on your Idaho income tax form. It's deductible!

The proceeds from your plate purchase help programs and projects directed toward species not hunted, fished or trapped (97% of Idaho's wildlife including plants!)

Another way you can make a difference in wildlife conservation in Idaho is on your 2009 tax form. This option is located on line 37 of Idaho Tax form 40. Donate any amount and feel great that you are supporting nongame fish, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and birds!

Thank You to All Contributors

The following people made direct donations, purchased or renewed a wildlife license plate, or let us know of a tax check-off donation between October through December 2009. This list represents those who marked the contributor box when they donated to the Conservation Sciences Program. However, many subscribers not listed here have contributed generously and Idaho's nongame wildlife thanks you ALL!

- Deniz Aygen
- Donna Bakman
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- Anne Bowler
- W. Dean + Alice A. Boyle
- Lionel + Brenda Compton
- Donald Dickerson
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Cedar waxwing © Michael Morrison

Support Idaho's
Watchable Wildlife!

Auction begins Feb. 19, 2010
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www.ifwfauktion.cmarket.com

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Trip details will be available at
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Proceeds from the auction will support
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The Idaho Fish and Wildlife Foundation Inc., is committed to bringing together and providing resources to:

- Promote conservation education about fishing, hunting, habitat and wildlife management
- Support projects dedicated to acquiring, preserving and enhancing fish and wildlife habitat and
- Create unique opportunities to experience Idaho's fish and wildlife.

To learn more about the Foundation visit our website:
<http://www.ifwf.org>

The Idaho Fish and Wildlife Foundation's 2010 On-Line Trip Auction is made possible by the generous support of



<http://www.ifwf.org>



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