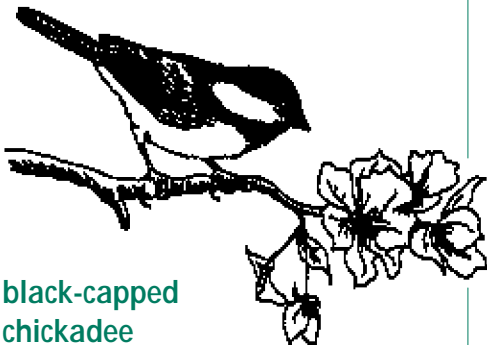


SONGBIRDS



Bird watching is among the most popular of all American recreational pursuits. Songbirds in particular offer much pleasure to landowners who attempt to attract them to habitats as small as backyard feeding stations and as large as sweeping grasslands, large wetlands or dense forests. Of the world's more than 8,000 species of birds, a total of 233 are known to breed in Michigan and more than 360 spend at least some time in the state. The list includes many songbirds ranging from the common American robin to the endangered Kirtland's warbler.

Songbirds use many different types of habitat including forests, grasslands, wetlands, and shrublands. Therefore, birds that visit your property reflect the habitat available in your area. For example, if you attract a bobolink, a grassland bird, to your property, we can assume that there is a grassland nearby. Birds, such as the black-capped chickadee, are widespread and use a variety of habitat types. This is one reason why it is common and does not need special protection. On the other hand,



black-capped
chickadee

some species are more particular about their habitat needs and tend to be rare. For example, the Kirtland's Warbler, which breeds exclusively in Michigan, nests only where there are large stands of 8 to 20 ft tall jack pines. With proper management, and a clear understanding of what your land and the surrounding landscape can do, you can create important habitat for songbirds.

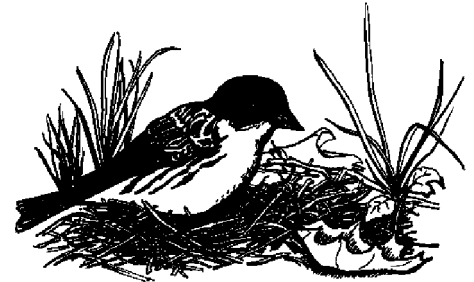
Habitat Components

Even though all species need the basic habitat components of water, food, cover, and space, the amount and kinds of each differs by individual species. Therefore, your landscape determines the opportunities you have for bird conservation. The following describes some of the basic habitat needs of songbirds.

Space

Space and territorial needs vary with each wildlife species. By understanding how much space is necessary for each species, you can learn what wildlife is attracted to your property. Bluebirds, for instance, are territorial and need about five acres per pair. In contrast, purple martins are not territorial, and need only small areas. You can create a larger area for those species that are territorial by working with neighbors.

Michigan's landscape has greatly changed since the early



Kirtland's warbler

1800's when the first European settlers arrived. No longer are there vast forests in southern Michigan, and we have lost over 35% of wetlands statewide. New home development continues to fragment the state. Fragmentation occurs when roads, homes, pipeline corridors, and other forms of development break up a landscape.

Many songbirds are sensitive to size and shape of their habitat. "Area sensitive" species, such as acadian flycatchers, wood thrushes, and ovenbirds have low tolerance to fragmented habitat. For this reason area sensitive species tend to seek out grasslands, forests, or wetlands hundreds of acres in size. Many of these species are declining in number as they no longer have these large areas. However, other species such as cardinals, chipping sparrows, and chickadees can tolerate fragmentation and smaller areas. These species are most often seen in urban areas, and are fairly common.

Water

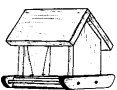


Most songbirds need open water of some kind. Luckily, Michigan is home to wetlands, lakes, rivers, streams, and ponds. However, providing a water source on your property can attract songbirds to your area. A small pool with stones in the shallow edges draws them to bathe, drink and help control their body temperatures. They will use the dry tops of the rocks as preening sites after bathing.

Providing a simple birdbath should meet their needs. You can buy them commercially, or create one by simply flipping over the lid to a garbage can. Remember to keep it shallow--an inch or so of water is plenty. In hot weather, especially, it is important to clean daily. Make sure the water is shaded and cool during the hottest part of the day, and place it near escape cover such as an evergreen shrub.

Birds are attracted to the noise of flowing water. Providing moving water through a fountain may increase songbird usage but is not mandatory. Mistlers and drippers are other means to move water and draw more birds. Songbirds will use water sources year round. In winter consider providing water in a heated dog bowl or buy a bird-bath heater.

Food



Natural foods, such as fruits, nuts and seeds provided by trees, shrubs, grasses, and flowers will attract a variety of songbirds. Planting highbush cranberry, dogwoods, or other fruiting shrubs on your property may draw migrants as well as resident birds.

These plants can also provide areas to sing, court, nest, rest and hide, as well as pleasing landscapes.

Providing bird feeders can also attract songbirds. There is no best time to start feeding birds. Once food is established, they will visit year round. When food supplies are scarce, such as in the very early spring or during bouts of severe weather, birds will rely on your feeders the most. However, if you have to stop feeding for a month or so, the birds will find alternate sources, even during the winter.

Locating feeding stations in several places reduces crowding and lessens the chance for avian diseases that can kill certain small songbirds such as house finches. Clean the feeders periodically, cleaning more often during humid summer months. If possible, protect the feeders from the wind and try to locate them in or near winter cover such as evergreen shrubs. For more information, refer to chapter on **Bird and Other Wildlife Feeders** in the Backyard Management section.

Cover



Songbirds use cover for shelter, nesting, and brood rearing. Dependent on the type of species, required cover types could vary from woodlands to grasslands to wetlands. After assessing what cover types are available on your property, you can determine what species you will be able to attract. By planting trees, shrubs, grasses, and flowers, you can enhance the cover and attract more species.

Management Considerations

Landowners interested in attracting songbirds should realize that any habitat manipulation will benefit certain species, while discouraging others. Even making a decision not to change a habitat will positively effect one group, while it negatively impacts another.

After assessing what types of birds might frequent your land, it is then possible to make your land more attractive to these species. The following suggestions will help you to increase songbirds on your property. For more information see the individual chapters on **Woodland Birds**, **Grassland Birds**, and **Wetland Birds** in this section.

Forests

Due to the increase in urbanization and rural estates in southern Lower Michigan, the variety of bird species that live there has drastically changed. This area has become highly fragmented. Thus it houses more edge-dependent species than edge-sensitive species such as the wood thrush, red-eyed vireo, cerulean warbler, American redstart, ovenbird, and scarlet tanager. Nest predators such as crows, bluejays, opossums and skunks, along with the brown-headed cowbird, a major nest parasite, are most active along the forest edge.

Therefore, the following are options to consider when managing forests in southern Michigan (south of Clare, Newaygo, and West Branch):

- Maintain and enhance large blocks of contiguous forests for

those species that are edge-sensitive. Woodlots can be enhanced by planting trees and shrubs along their perimeter to increase their size and reduce the harsh edge.

- Creating forest openings is discouraged as it fragments the forest. However, selective logging can be used, especially where a continuous canopy is maintained, and scattered mature trees of a variety of species are kept.

Northern Michigan residents have far fewer limitations when developing management plans. The landscape is less developed, therefore less fragmented, and supports more species of birds than southern Michigan. Therefore, the following are options to consider when managing forests in northern Michigan:

- Small clearings may be developed to benefit certain species. However, be careful to not create fragmented conditions by cutting too much.

- Maintain and enhance evergreens, especially white and black spruce, balsam fir, hemlock, white cedar, and white pine, as they are preferred by many species of birds. Such birds include the brown creeper, black-throated green warbler, Blackburnian warbler, and Canada warbler.

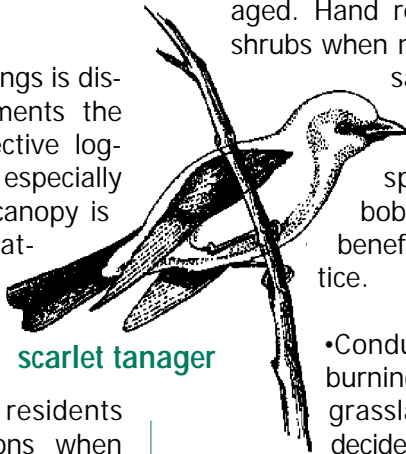
- As in southern Michigan, maintain a diversity of tree species and larger tracts of forest.

Grasslands

The following are options to con-

sider when managing grasslands:

- Large patches of grassland are recommended, and often trees within a grassland are discouraged. Hand remove trees and shrubs when necessary. Upland sandpiper, Henslow's sparrows, grasshopper sparrows, and bobolinks, especially benefit from this practice.



scarlet tanager

- Conduct prescribed burning to maintain the grasslands. If you decide to burn grasslands, do so only after seeking professional advice. Refer to the **Prescribed Burning** chapter in the Grassland Management section for more information.

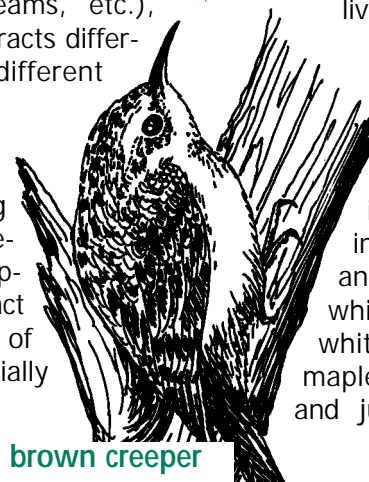
- Plant areas of both warm season grasses with forbs, and areas of cool season grasses with legumes to provide a diverse habitat.

Wetlands

The following are options to consider when managing wetlands:

- If possible, keep a variety of wetlands (marshes, swamps, bogs, fens, streams, etc.), because each attracts different birds at different times of year.

- Avoid building over or draining any wetlands present on your property, as they attract a wide variety of songbirds. Especially avoid constructing roads



brown creeper

in wet areas, even those areas that are wet only temporarily.

- If possible, restore degraded or drained wetlands.

Backyard Areas

Many kinds of songbirds are attracted to balconies, decks, lawns, and ornamental shrubs and trees in both rural and urban settings. You do not even need to own property to enjoy songbirds as they may visit your condominium or apartment complex. For example, robins, house wrens, song sparrows, mourning doves and eastern kingbirds are among at least 14 species that nest in urban

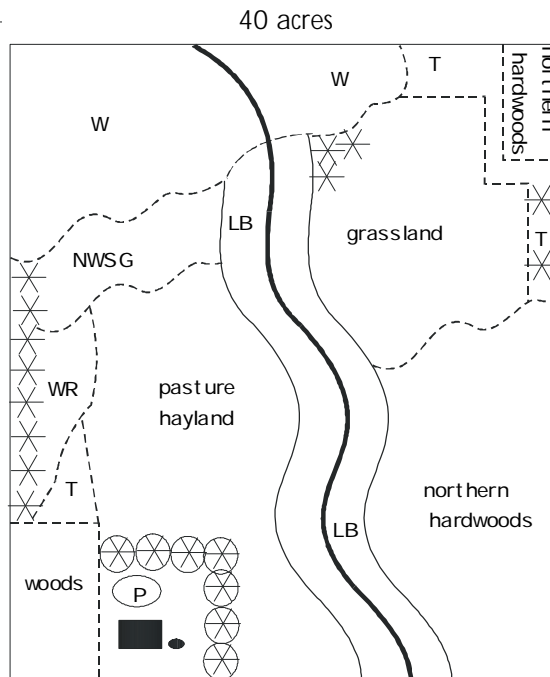
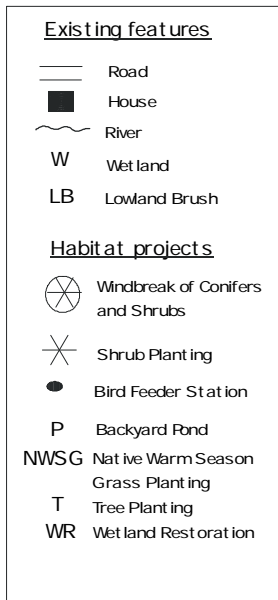


bobolinks

habitats. In urban and suburban areas, you may wish to focus on attracting spring and fall migrating birds along with the more familiar birds. However, rural dwellers have more options, especially if the surrounding area is largely grassland, wetland or forest, as there are more breeding species that require this type of landscape to survive.

Regardless of where you live, it is helpful to maintain a diverse yard with an abundance of trees and shrubs, as well as areas with leaf cover for ground-feeding birds. Consider planting a variety of native tree and shrub species such as white spruce, hemlock, white pine, oaks, sugar maple, flowering dogwood, and junberry. Cardinals will

SONGBIRDS



This map is an example that demonstrates the many management options discussed throughout this chapter. The option(s) you choose should depend not only on your goals, but the location, condition, and present use of your land.

nest in dense shrubbery, chipping sparrows in pines and spruces, and house wrens in cavities of trees or nest boxes. Even wood ducks and screech owls will nest in town if tree cavities are present. Rufous-sided towhees and white-throated sparrows will use leaf-covered areas under trees and shrubs (and you won't have to mow these areas either). In winter, you may find pine siskins feeding on cones of your evergreens, especially in northern Michigan.

Other Considerations

- Use native plant species for plantings whenever possible.

Alien species, such as purple loosestrife, garlic mustard, autumn olive, and glossy buckthorn, should be avoided and actively removed as they displace native species used by birds as food sources and sheltered sites.

- House cats can be a major predator of songbirds, especially in southern Michigan. Keeping cats indoors is the best way to stop this problem. If this is not possible, securing bells to their collars when outdoors can help warn birds and small mammals of their presence,

thus reducing their impact as a predator.

Feeding songbirds can be educational and fun. To enjoy the full benefit of songbirds, get a good field identification guide that contains color pictures or paintings and buy a quality pair of binoculars. You may even wish to keep a checklist of birds that visit your land in order to determine the variety of birds that you have attracted to your area.

FOR ADDITIONAL CHAPTERS CONTACT:

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Private Land Partnerships: This partnership was formed between both private and public organizations in order to address private lands wildlife issues. Individuals share resources, information and expertise. This landowner's guide has been a combined effort between these groups working towards one goal: Natural Resources Education. We hope this guide provides you with the knowledge and the motivation to make positive changes for our environment.

FOR ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE: CONTACT YOUR LOCAL CONSERVATION DISTRICT