

Diversity is the Key to Attracting Wildlife

Soni Cochran
UNL Extension Associate

Whether you live on an acreage, farm or in the city, diversity is key to attracting wildlife. Here are some tips:

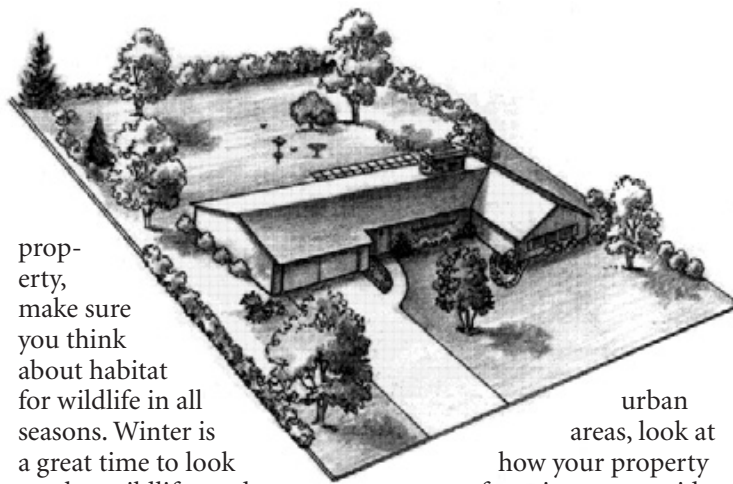
- Plant many different types of grasses, forbs, shrubs and trees. Try to include as many native plants as possible.
- Select a diverse range of varieties of each type of plant. Look for ways to include plants which would help provide year-round food and shelter for birds and animals.
- Include many sources of water. In rural areas, include ponds, streams and wetlands as sources of water for wildlife. Near homes and in urban areas, create a backyard pond or small water feature, add bird baths. In winter, you can keep water open by using small heaters especially designed for ponds and bird baths. Be sure to place water

sources in both open and hidden locations. Be creative — look for “natural” sources for water.

- Many animals prefer “the edge” where two different types of habitats meet. Learn about animals found in your area and what kinds of habitats they prefer. Use this information to create as much of an “edge effect” as you can on your property.

Getting Started — Make Your Plan

- Find out what species of wildlife are native to your area.
- Decide which of the native wildlife you’d like to encourage and learn as much as possible about the requirements those animals need to survive.
- Take a look at your property and make short- and long-term plans for improving your habitat for wildlife.
- When you examine your



property, make sure you think about habitat for wildlife in all seasons. Winter is a great time to look at what wildlife needs may be.

Design Guidelines

- Select native plants providing cover and food.
- Plant a variety of plant types and intersperse them.
- Plant to create protected areas to encourage nesting of desirable birds.
- In rural areas, plant in a way that forms corridors or connections between different larger habitat plantings. In

urban areas, look at how your property may form its own corridor between a neighbor’s yard, park or greenspace.

- Promote and plant woodland, grassland, riparian and wetland habitats. Even in urban areas, you can create smaller versions of these habitats with a little creativity.
- Remember the “Edge Effect.” When you create a habitat, put it right next to a different type of habitat to help form an “edge” which many wild animals prefer.

For Enjoyable Viewing

- Place bird feeders and bird baths or other water features near your home where wildlife can be easily viewed.
- After it snows, talk a walk outdoors and look for different tracks in the snow. These tracks will give you a clue to the types of animals visiting your property and the trails they are using.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension publications on Wildlife & Planting for Habitat are available at the extension office or on the Web <http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/pages>
- UNL Acreage Owners Guide online at <http://lancaster.unl.edu/acrageguide>
- The Cornell Lab of Ornithology Web site, “All About Birds” at <http://allaboutbirds.org>

Provide Basic Needs to Attract Birds



Ron Johnson
Former UNL Wildlife Specialist

Attracting birds to acreages or backyards can be a fun and educational experience for the whole family.

There are several steps to take in order to provide the needs of birds and attract them to homes. Birds need food, shelter, water and space. Food can be seeds, fruits or insects.

Birdfeeders near homes bring the color and beauty of birds up close and personal. Use fresh seeds that birds like, such as a mixture of 50 percent of small, black oil-type sunflower seeds, 35 percent white proso millet and 15 percent finely cracked corn. Add suet, or hard beef fat, for winter energy and as a special treat for woodpeckers, chickadees, nuthatches and other insect eaters. Keep feeders clean to help keep birds healthy.

Water in a birdbath, small backyard pool or pond attracts birds where they can be seen and supplies water needed for drinking and bathing. As with bird feeders, keep the water fresh and the bath clean. Birdbaths can be especially important to birds during the winter months. Although some birds may at times get water from snow,

the snow is chilling and generally not the best. Birdbath heaters and heated birdbaths come in all varieties and have an element that is thermostatically controlled to keep the water temperature above freezing. Heated pedestal birdbaths have an extension cord running up out of sight through the center of the pedestal while mounted birdbaths have the cord tucked under the bowl.

Space needs vary among birds but usually more space means more birds will be attracted. Many birds observed in backyards do fairly well with the moderate amount of space provided in a backyard setting. Others need more wide-open spaces. Acreages can provide both. Large grasslands will attract grassland birds such as meadowlarks, dickcissels, grasshopper sparrows and others, especially if other grassland fields are nearby. If there are larger grassland or woodland areas on the acreage or nearby, be aware of the positive benefits for birds that associate with these habitat types. Wetland areas are special habitats that many interesting birds need. Ring-necked pheasants find protective cover in wetland vegetation, especially during cold winter snows.

Relocating Problem Wild Animals Not as Humane as Most People Think

Sometimes live trapping seems like the best alternative when dealing with a wildlife problem, especially if you’re inside the city limits. After the offending animal is captured, driving it outside the city limits and releasing it, seems more humane than other management practices. After all, the animal is still alive and it will survive just fine, even better, in a rural setting. But, according to wildlife experts, this type of wildlife relocation isn’t a good solution.

First, relocation is usually ineffective because a new animal of the same species will often replace the one which was relocated. This is a basic principle of ecology.

A second problem with relocation is most animals do not survive relocation. Animals that are relocated must fight for new territories and the new animals are often injured or killed in the process. They don’t know where the food or shelter is located and are likely to be preyed upon.

And finally, relocation of animals to new territories disrupts the wildlife already living there. It can also spread diseases among wildlife populations.

Those really concerned with preserving and protecting wildlife need to recognize that coexisting with wildlife is not always convenient.

It may require an alteration of habits or an investment of time, energy or perhaps even money. A good place to begin is by doing some proactive problem prevention. Feed pets indoors, tightly cover garbage cans and other unnatural food sources, seal-up potential denning sites within your home. Do not deliberately feed pest animals, like squirrels. For these efforts to be successful, you may need to convince your neighbors to do the same thing.

It is against Nebraska law to release an animal more than 100 yards from where it is trapped, unless you have written permission or a permit from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC). This law includes squirrels, opossums, raccoons, skunks, rabbits and even snakes. This 100 yards allows a homeowner trap a squirrel living in his attic, seal up the entry point and release the squirrel. Wildlife management professionals have obtained NGPC permits to allow them to legally trap and remove pest animals.

Sources: Sam Wilson, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. For more information about this law, contact him at 471-0641 or sam.wilson@nebraska.gov.

Audubon Society of Portland, OR.

UNL Researcher Seeks Alfalfa Fields to Study Pocket Gophers

Stephen Vantassel, UNL wildlife project coordinator, is finishing up a research project to determine the most efficient trapping method for controlling pocket gophers. He is looking for area farmers willing to give him permission to trap pocket gophers on their non-irrigated alfalfa fields.

To be included in the study, fields must have pocket gophers present and have had no pocket gopher control measures (of any kind) for at least one year. The study site must be accessible by a vehicle. Stephen is looking for fields (ten acres minimum) within a 1-1/2 hour drive of Lincoln. If you would be willing to help with this study, please contact him at 472-8961.