

# Butterflies and Birds

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## Introduction

Landscaping to attract wildlife has become very popular in recent years. This activity has been encouraged by the rediscovery of using native plants in the landscape. Backyard butterfly and bird watching provides many hours of enjoyment and an invaluable connection with nature. The first step in transforming one's yard into a suitable wildlife refuge is to understand the habits and needs of these fascinating creatures.

## Birds

Birds can be divided into two groups – those that live in West Virginia during the summer and those that live here all year. The summer birds, known as “neotropical migrants,” spend the



winter in warmer climates south of the U.S. border, but nest here in the summer when food is abundant. Some families of summer birds are warblers, vireos, orioles, tanagers, thrushes, buntings, and swallows. Some resident birds that live

in West Virginia year-round are the woodpeckers, owls, northern cardinal, tufted titmouse, blue jay, chickadee, white-breasted nuthatch, and Carolina wren. Other birds also winter in West Virginia and summer elsewhere.

## Hummingbirds

There are 16 species of hummingbirds that nest in the United States, but only the ruby-throated hummingbird nests east of the Rockies. In the winter, ruby-throats migrate to Mexico and South America. In April, they return to West Virginia and stay until September, when they migrate again.

The male ruby-throat has the throat patch, or gorget, that flashes ruby red. Depending on the lighting, the throat may appear black. The female does not have the throat patch. Both male and female birds have metallic

green backs and white undersides. While the ruby-throats are the most common hummingbird in West Virginia, occasionally you may see the rufous hummingbird or another western species.



Hummingbirds eat nectar, but they also eat insects. They can also consume tree sap from holes drilled by

sapsuckers. Hummingbirds, which may feed five to eight times an hour, may consume half their weight in sugar each day.

## Butterflies

There are more than 120 species of butterflies in West Virginia. Butterflies are insects that go through four stages of development: egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, and adult. The adult female will search out a host plant (a plant that the caterpillar will feed on) on which to lay her eggs. After hatching, the caterpillar will feed on the host plant and increase in size after molting.



Many caterpillars are as colorful and interesting as their adult counterparts. Next, the caterpillar will pupate and form the chrysalis, which generally hangs from a leaf or stem. This is the stage in which a fascinating transformation takes place. After 12 to 14 days, the adult will

emerge from the chrysalis as a new creature. The life cycle of butterflies varies from species to species, but it is normally completed in a year or less.

## Basic Needs

To attract butterflies and birds, you must provide for their three basic needs – food, cover, and water.

### Food

A diversity of plant species will ensure a constant supply of food. Feeders can be used to supplement times when food from plants is insufficient.

**Table 1: Food Plants for Birds**

Blackgum	Maples
Blueberries	Oaks
Brambles	Purple Coneflower
Chokeberry	Red Cedar
Dogwood	Sassafras
Elderberry	Serviceberry
Hemlock	Spicebush
Hollies	Viburnums
Ironweed	Virginia Creeper
Joe Pye Weed	Willows

**Table 2: Food Plants for Hummingbirds**

Bee Balm	Honeysuckle
Butterfly Weed	Jewelweed
Cannas	Lantana
Cardinal Flower	Nasturtiums
Columbine	Petunias
Coral-bells	Scarlet Sage
Fuchsia	Trumpet Vine
Hawthorn	Tulip Poplar
Hibiscus	

For butterflies, it is important to remember that host plants for caterpillars can be used along with nectar plants for the adults.

**Table 3: Food Plants for Butterflies**

<i>Plants</i>	<i>Nectar</i>	<i>Host</i>	<i>Plants</i>	<i>Nectar</i>	<i>Host</i>
Asters	×	×	Milkweed	×	×
Bee Balm	×		Mints	×	
Blazing Star	×		Mock Orange	×	
Butterfly Bush	×		Mustards		×
Butterfly Weed	×	×	Nettle		×
Cardinal Flower	×		Phlox	×	
Carrots		×	Pussytoe	×	
Clovers	×	×	Sunflowers	×	×
Coneflower	×		Thistle	×	×
Daisies	×		Vetch	×	×
Goldenrod	×		Violets	×	×
Honeysuckle	×		Yarrow	×	
Lilac	×		Zinnias	×	
Marigolds	×				

## Cover

Butterflies and birds need cover for protection from predators, protection from the weather, places to rest or roost, and nesting sites. Most trees and shrubs provide needed cover.

Conifers and other evergreens, along with dense shrubs, are good cover during rain, wind, and snow. They offer excellent protection from predators. Table 4 lists some cover plants.



**Table 4: Cover Plants for Butterflies and Birds**

Arborvitae	Mulberry
Black Cherry	Oaks
Blackgum	Rhododendrons
Fir	Sassafras
Hackberry	Serviceberry
Hemlocks	Sourgum
Holly	Spruce
Magnolia	Sweetgum
Maple	White Pines
Mountain-ash	Yellow Poplar

## Water

Water is essential and can be provided easily. While most people use a birdbath, a shallow pan of water set in the yard will work. It's important to provide water during hot, dry summer days and cold winter periods. The quality of water should be maintained by emptying and cleaning the birdbath or container regularly (at least once a week).



## Making a Plan

1. Draw a map of your existing landscape – Show the location of existing plants, how different areas of the yard are used, sun exposure, etc.
2. Evaluate existing plants – What is their potential to provide food and cover; can you identify unknown plants; do you have sick or diseased plants that need to be replaced?
3. Identify problem areas – Do you have wide open areas of lawn; is a flower bed devoid of good nectar plants; does your yard lack a windbreak?
4. Research the plant species you want to add to your yard – Will the plant add cover and food; is it suited to your location; how will it fit into the existing landscape?
5. Don't plan on doing it overnight – Realize that it will take time and money, that it will increase your yard-maintenance time, and that taking shortcuts may lead to failure.

## References

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2004: 1M

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ES03-121