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CREATING A HEALTHY SCHOOLYARD

Schoolyards in your community may already provide habitat for common local birds. However, by improving the quality of that habitat, your schoolyard can attract additional birds and wildlife while providing a healthier, more interactive learning environment for students. By documenting bird sightings and observing the behavior of birds and other wildlife, students can increase their appreciation for the natural world. A diverse schoolyard habitat offers countless opportunities to enrich classroom curriculum—from developing literacy and writing skills through nature journals, to strengthening math skills by monitoring bird populations.

SCHOOLYARD BIRDS

Schools can reduce landscape maintenance and maximize bird habitat by converting unused or underutilized areas into natural habitats for local birds. As indicators of environmental health, each species provides countless lessons that link students to their natural heritage, and contributes to creating a richer learning environment for students, educators, and school staff. For more information on how to create healthy schoolyard habitats, visit www.audubonathome.org/schoolyard. Consult with your local NRCS office to identify native plants suited to the local soil conditions.

BATS

Many of the 47 bat species found in the United States have an enormous appetite for flying insects. Emerging at dusk, bats patrol the skies and consume thousands of insects each night. Many bat species rely on trees for roosting and resting, so preserving large trees on or near school grounds is important to bat survival. Crevice-roosting bats will take to bat houses placed high on the side of a school building. For more information, visit www.audubonathome.org/bats.

BUTTERFLIES

The best way to introduce your students to impressive native butterflies is to create a schoolyard butterfly garden. By providing flowers for butterflies to eat from, as well as host plants for butterfly eggs

and caterpillars, a school habitat garden can support a healthy population of these important plant pollinators. As with birds, butterflies can be observed and documented in great detail. The life cycle of butterflies can be tracked from earliest flight in spring through the over-wintering chrysalis stage. For more information, visit www.audubonathome.org/butterflies.

THE OTHER “B”

Most of the bees that pollinate native plants do not live together in hives. Many of these native solitary bees are declining, but you may be able to help them by building a bee box. Simply drill small holes into an untreated block of wood, or tie a bundle of dried stems together and place them outdoors. Solitary bees will lay their eggs in the holes, which then serve as a nursery. For more information on how to help these beneficial insects, visit www.audubonathome.org/solitarybees.

SCHOOL GROUNDS AS COMMUNITY GARDEN

Schoolyards can model healthy landscapes for the entire community. Families inspired by what they see on school grounds can replicate similar efforts at or near their own homes—perhaps creating something as simple as a window box with native plants in an urban setting, or a more complete habitat in a suburban backyard. These efforts will create similar environments, linking the school to the larger community, and form a habitat corridor allowing for the safe movement of native birds and beneficial wildlife.

Parents, teachers, and administrators within a school district can work together to coordinate ideas and goals for their schoolyard habitat and provide year-round maintenance. With adult direction, students can take what they learn at school into the community to build a network of habitat gardens aimed at providing for native wildlife.

A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Imagine a class filled with students whose attention is suddenly attracted by a new kind of bird visiting their feeding station for the very first time—the students flock to the window to observe the bird, get out a

field guide and notebook, record the sighting, and return to their seats when the bird has moved on. These experiences can increase concentration, build problem-solving skills, and improve overall attitude.

Each February, students, teachers, and parents can join in counting the birds at the school and in their yards by participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count. For more information, visit www.audubon.org/gbbc/index.shtml.

AUDUBON ADVENTURES

Bring the class together on a regular basis to discuss what the students have observed and to identify research projects inspired by the students' observations and questions. Audubon Adventures can help facilitate this discussion. Since 1984, Audubon Adventures has provided resource kits to over 150,000 classrooms, reaching 7 million students. For more information, call 1-800-813-5037 or visit www.audubon.org/educate/aa.

HEALTHY YARD PLEDGE

Create and maintain a healthy environment for you, students, their families, and local wildlife by pledging your school 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.

AN INVITATION TO A HEALTHY SCHOOLYARD



Invite Birds, Bats, and Butterflies to YOUR SCHOOLYARD

- 1 With the clearing of hollow trees and the capping of chimneys, Chimney Swifts are losing traditional places to nest and roost. Attractive **CHIMNEY SWIFT TOWERS** can house these high-flying insect hunters and can offer hours of pleasure to students and faculty who watch the birds' aerial maneuvers.
- 2 The next time your school needs a new roof, why not turn the barren roof space into an attractive green hilltop? **ROOFTOP GARDENS** save energy and money by better insulating building interiors, last longer than conventional roofs, and can provide habitat for birds, butterflies, and other beneficial insects.
- 3 Cavity nesting birds can be welcomed and assisted with **BIRDHOUSES**. Place boxes where they won't be vandalized.
- 4 Insect-controlling bats may roost by day in a **BAT HOUSE** placed high on the side of the school.
- 5 A source of **WATER**, such as a shallow pond or a birdbath, will be a magnet to birds and will attract beneficial insects such as butterflies.
- 6 Create a **BUTTERFLY GARDEN** by planting wildflowers and other plants to feed adult butterflies and caterpillars.



For more information, visit www.audubonathome.org/schoolyard • For individual copies of this poster, call 1-888-LANDCARE.

- 7 **BIRD FEEDERS** bring nature right up to the classroom window, providing students a close encounter with many bird species in your area.
- 8 Millions of birds are killed each year when they fly into **WINDOWS**. Children can help birds to avoid these collisions by decorating the outside of school windows with paper cutouts or adhesive patterns.
- 9 Hummingbirds capture the imagination of children and adults alike. With red and yellow tubular flowers and a **HUMMINGBIRD FEEDER** or two, these living gems will be drawn to the school and will provide a thrilling opportunity for viewing and study.
- 10 **NATIVE PLANTS**, including trees, shrubs, and wildflowers, create attractive habitats for birds and beneficial insects. Look for ways to beautify underutilized areas of schoolyards or grounds with greenery, and to bring birds and butterflies closer to the students.

BIRDS TO HELP AT YOUR SCHOOL

If your school is in the city, or has a lot of paved land for sports and parking lots, your primary goal may be to provide additional habitat for common native birds—to create a small patch of green as an oasis for birds moving through your neighborhood. More open settings, or larger schoolyards, can attract a wider variety of birds. Consider providing food, shelter, and nesting sites for five or six local species. Then keep a close watch to see how the birds respond to your efforts. To determine some of the best species to attract, and to find ways to help support them at your school, visit www.audubonathome.org/birdstohelp.

My target species

Action points
