



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

# Iowa DNR News

Conservation and Recreation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 7, 2024

- [Six tips for helping Iowa's air quality and enjoying the outdoors](#)
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## Six tips for helping Iowa's air quality and enjoying the outdoors

Spending time outdoors is important for both mental health and physical fitness. With May 6-10 as National Air Quality Awareness Week, here are six tips for enjoying the outdoors with air quality in mind:

1. **Spark sustainable fires.** Most people enjoy a cozy campfire or fire pit on a starry night. Create a more efficient fire with less smoke by only burning dry wood, not wet wood. Avoid burning plastics and trash that could release toxic chemicals into the air.
2. **Reduce emissions from your car, boat, and camper.** One of the biggest contributors to air pollution is emissions that come from vehicles. Keep engines properly tuned, avoid excessive idling, and try to fuel in cooler morning or evening hours to reduce gas vapor from being released.
3. **Switch to electric or hand-powered lawn equipment.** Gas-powered engines on lawnmowers and outdoor yard equipment often lack pollution-control devices. An hour running a lawn mower can produce nearly the same amount of pollution as a 100-mile car trip. Use hand-powered or electric lawn care equipment instead.
4. **Choose safe alternatives for household cleaners and paints.** Many household materials contain toxic chemicals that can be released into the air. Choose "green" products when possible, and be sure to properly dispose of Household Hazardous Materials (HHMs) such as leftover herbicides and paints at [Regional Collection Centers](#) in Iowa.
5. **Adopt air-purifying indoor plants.** Healthy air quality is also important inside the home. Many houseplants have the same ability as trees to metabolize air pollutants by removing carbon dioxide and replenishing oxygen levels. Tropical plants with large leaves are especially effective. Some examples are spider plants, peace lilies, elephant ears, rubber plants and many more.

**6. Check air quality before going outside.** Reduce exposure to pollutants before spending extended time outdoors or exercising. People with pre-existing lung conditions, young children and the elderly can be especially susceptible to air pollution incidents like Iowa experienced in 2023 from Canadian wildfires. Pay attention to news alerts or check out the DNR's [Air Quality Index Forecast](#) to assess air quality conditions in your area.

Enjoy your time outdoors and do your part to keep Iowa's air safe and healthy. Just as importantly, protect your own health by being aware and making cleaner choices around your home and yard or when you are outdoors recreating. For more information, visit: <https://www.iowadnr.gov/Environmental-Protection/Air-Quality/In-Your-Neighborhood>

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**World Migratory Bird Day is May 11**

# PROTECT INSECTS



# PROTECT BIRDS

World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) has been raising awareness about the importance of migratory bird conservation since 1993. On May 11, WMBD is a chance to celebrate migratory birds across countries and continents. This year's theme is "Protect Insects, Protect Birds."

More than 100 species of birds that nest in the Midwest, and many more that migrate through, are considered neotropical migrants, meaning they breed in North America and spend the winter in Mexico, Central America, South America, or the Caribbean.

### **Why Insects Matter**

Whether migrating from Missouri to Iowa, or from South America to Canada, insects serve as one of the main sources of energy that fuel the long journey.

Birds actively seek out insects in fields, forests, wetlands, and other habitats during stopovers and the timing of the migration often coincides with peak insect abundance, supplying nourishment for birds to replenish their energy reserves before continuing their journeys.

Many migratory birds that fly through Iowa benefit from eating insects, and the small, but mighty, bobolink is a good example of this.

Bobolinks migrate from South America to North American grasslands every year to raise their young and these small birds have a big appetite. Bobolinks feed their young insects, like grubs and beetles, every two minutes, meaning their young can end up eating 1,500 insects a day.

Cliff swallows, which famously nest at Ledge's State Park, prey on grasshoppers, beetles, flies, midges and other bugs, and are a beneficial species for controlling pest insect populations, like mosquitoes.

Insects support other songbirds, like warblers, flycatchers, and swifts, as well as larger birds, such as shorebirds, ducks, and even some raptors, including the American kestrel. Up to 78 percent of their diet can consist of insects, especially in rural areas.

Wood ducks and their young depend on beetles and flies for survival, actively searching wetlands, marshes, wooded ponds and swamps. 70 percent of a duckling's diet consists of insects, as their high protein and nutrients allow them to grow.

Insects are not only important to birds, but to people too! Up to 85 percent of flowering plants need pollination to reproduce, most of which is done by insects. Insects help pollinate food crops and keep local ecosystems healthy and thriving.

There are a few things that can help insects thrive.

1. Limit Pesticide and Fertilizer Use: A scarcity of energy- and protein-rich insects can hinder bird migration and breeding, leading to weakened immune systems, reduced reproductive success, and increased mortality rates for both adult birds and their offspring. When possible, support farms and farming that avoids pesticide use.
2. Maintain Native Habitat: Small pockets of native habitat provide food and shelter to birds and insects. Maintaining and connecting these small pockets helps them thrive, especially in agricultural landscapes. An example of this would be placing prairie strips in row crop fields. For more information about prairie strips, visit Iowa State University's STRIPS website <https://www.nrem.iastate.edu/research/STRIPS/>
3. Plant a Native Garden: Dedicate part of the yard to native Iowa flowers, grasses, and shrubs, which will require less water to maintain than the lawn and will provide food and shelter for Iowa's birds and other wildlife. To learn more about native Iowa plants for birds, visit <https://birdfriendlyiowa.org/Landscaping.aspx> or try planting these seven easy to grow natives <https://www.iowadnr.gov/About-DNR/DNR-News-Releases/ArticleID/169/7-Native-Easy-to-Care-For-Plants-for-Your-Yard> .

4. Don't Rake: Create a thriving ecosystem for insects and birds by leaving leaves in your garden or yard. The leaf litter acts as a natural shelter, food source, and breeding ground for various insect species. The decaying leaves also attract insects that are essential for insectivorous birds' diets, promoting biodiversity and ecological balance. By refraining from raking leaves, you contribute to a healthier and more sustainable environment for both insects and birds.

5. Learn More: Visit <https://www.migratorybirdday.org/> to learn more.

While World Migratory Bird Day takes place in the U.S. and Canada during the peak of spring migration, it is celebrated in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean during fall migration, this year, on Oct. 12.

To learn more about World Migratory Bird Day and associated events visit <https://www.migratorybirdday.org>

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