



IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Wildlife Diversity News

Conservation and Recreation

May 11, 2024

May 11th 2024 is World Migratory Bird Day!

PROTECT INSECTS



PROTECT BIRDS

Since 1993, World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) has been educating the public about the importance of migratory bird conservation. Over 100 species of birds that nest in the Midwest, and many more that fly through during migration, are considered Neotropical migrants, meaning they breed in North America and spend the winter in Mexico, Central America, South America, or the Caribbean. WMBD is

a chance to celebrate our shared migratory birds across countries and continents. The WMBD theme this year is "Protect Insects, Protect Birds".

Why Insects Matter!

Whether they are migrating from Missouri to Iowa, or from South America to Canada, birds need food to fuel their journey. Insects are one of the main sources of energy for migratory birds as they travel, as they provide a lot of protein for migrants. Birds actively seek out insects in fields, forests, wetlands, and in various other habitats during stopovers. The timing of bird migration often coincides with high insect abundance at stopover locations, supplying nourishment for birds to replenish their energy reserves before continuing their journeys.

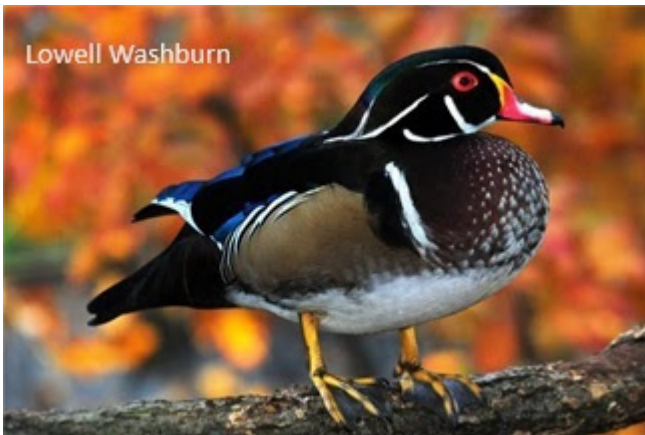
Many migratory birds that fly through and breed in Iowa benefit from eating insects. Bobolinks are one amazing example of this. Bobolinks migrate from South America to North American grasslands every year to raise their young. These small birds have a big appetite: The Bobolink feeds their young insects such as grubs and beetles every two minutes! Their young can end up eating 1,500 insects a day!



Cliff Swallows are another species that benefits from insects as well. These birds, which famously nest at Ledge's State Park, eat on the wing, preying on grasshoppers, beetles, flies, midges, and other bugs. They are a beneficial species for controlling pest insect populations such as mosquitoes.



Many other songbirds benefit from insects as well, especially warblers, flycatchers, and swifts! Larger species such as shorebirds, ducks, and even some raptors also rely on insect prey! Up to 78% of an American Kestrel's diet can consist of insects, especially in rural areas!



Wood Ducks and their young depend on insects such as beetles and flies for their survival. They will actively search for aquatic insects in wetlands, marshes, wooded ponds, and swamps, using their beaks to filter them from the water. 70% of a duckling's diet consists of insects, as their high protein and nutrients allow the ducklings to grow.

Insects are not only important to birds, but to us too! Up to 85% of our flowering plants need pollination to reproduce, most of which is done by insects. We need insects to help pollinate our food crops and to keep our local ecosystems healthy and thriving. Here are a few things that we can do as citizens to help insects and birds thrive!

1. **Limit Pesticide and Fertilizer Use:** Using pesticides and fertilizers harms the insects that birds rely on for food. 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, try to support farm and landscaping practices that actively reduce and avoid pesticide use.
2. **Maintain Native Habitat:** Many birds and insects still use small pockets of native habitat for food and shelter. Maintaining and connecting these small pockets helps both groups survive, especially in agricultural landscapes. A good example of small but important habitats would be prairie strips! To learn more, visit [Iowa State University's STRIPS website](#).
3. **Plant a Native Garden:** Lawns might look nice to some, but they are not a natural part of our landscape and require more water and chemicals to maintain than native plants that are adapted to grow in Iowa. Instead, plant native Iowa flowers, grasses, and shrubs, which will require less water and will provide food and shelter for Iowa's birds and other wildlife. To learn more about native Iowa plants for birds, visit [Bird Friendly Iowa's Landscaping Resources](#) or try planting these [7 easy to grow natives](#).
4. **Don't Rake:** Create a thriving ecosystem for insects and birds by leaving leaves in your garden or yard, especially over winter. 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 and removing leaves, you contribute to a healthier and more sustainable environment for both insects and birds.

5. **Plant an oak:** Oak trees support a higher number and diversity of caterpillars than any other type of tree. Many birds feed their young a caterpillar-rich diet to help them grow. Planting an oak tree provides caterpillars and acorns for birds and other wildlife.

This year (2024), World Migratory Bird Day takes place in the U.S. and Canada on May 11th during the peak of spring migration and is celebrated in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean on October 12th during fall migration. To learn more about World Migratory Bird Day and associated events visit <https://www.migratorybirdday.org>

WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY
2024

Protect Insects Protect Birds



Wildlife illustrations by Anna Rose

