



A small pond with nearby cover will see lots of bird activity.

4. Water

Water is critical to having a great yard list. I use two sources. One is a small shallow pond with a fountain attachment, coupled with a small waterfall. This is located near the back of the yard, close to cover and well shaded. I made a shallow edge with stones so smaller birds can stand in the water to bathe and larger ones can use the area nearer the waterfall for cleaning. I don't stock it with fish, but numerous invertebrates somehow find their way here every year, and the birds love hunting these small prey. Sometimes a great blue heron is fooled and drops in for a meal but leaves disappointed. I also have a small birdbath that I place in a sunnier spot in the middle of the yard, for finches and sparrows.

5. Home Sweet Home

If a bird is going to live in your yard, it has to have a place to nest. I have placed several birdhouses around my property, without much success. The natural cavities and the occasional dead tree that I've left standing, however, are well used. The smaller trees are attractive to waxwings and goldfinches, and a cedar hedge on my neighbor's property attracts song sparrows, catbirds, and northern cardinals every year.

6. Cover

Cover is critical if birds are going to find your property desirable, so make sure there's plenty of it and that it's in the right place. Migrating birds need to find cover quickly because they are in unfamiliar territory and danger is everywhere. If you put out feeders, make sure there is somewhere to hide

nearby. Place feeders within six feet of cover, or better still, build a small brush pile below the feeders so the birds can dive in there if the need arises. Leave some plants standing in the garden if possible, so visiting wrens, sparrows, and warblers can skulk there.

7. Warn Your Neighbors

Because you might be outside for hours on end staring at the sky or perhaps toward (but not at) your neighbor's bedroom window, it might be advisable to make sure they know what you're doing. No one will be offended if they understand your passion, but failing to tell them can have unpleasant repercussions! Sometimes your neighbors may become interested themselves, and either help you by reporting birds they see or even trying to attract birds themselves. If you're lucky, your neighbors will have lots of feeders and will draw more birds to the area, some of which will spill over into your yard!

Now you've done all the hard stuff, so sit back, relax, and start tallying—wait, not quite yet. You have to make sure you can see and identify the birds if you're going to count them.

8. View

It is essential to have unobstructed views of the sky, forest, feeders, water sources, and garden edges if you are going to build a great yard list. This may require a bit of selec-

tive pruning, which is also good for most plants. But mostly it's about vantage points.

9. Make Time and Be Ready

Have your binoculars at your elbow or around your neck. Keep that scope on the tripod near the door or deck. You'd be amazed at how fast a "slow" flying bird can disappear. You might also want to have your field guide at the ready. I keep a pair of binoculars by my den window and another on a hook just inside the kitchen door by the deck. Somehow I've convinced my wife they are actually attractive wall decorations, so she tolerates their presence. (I'm kidding—she's way smarter than that!)

I've created two new activities to help me bird more—"chawking" is the artful craft of hawk watching and doing chores at the same time, and "chirring" is watching yard birds while doing chores.

How do you decide when to watch? Let nature give you cues. Spring and summer are the most productive seasons, but don't wait until May to start, and don't stop in September. Remember that birds start migrating in January and finish up in December. That's not to say you have to sit outside for 12 months a year, but be ready.

The best times of day to see migrating birds are early morning and near dusk. Rainy weather will slow migrants down and give you more time to view them, but