



Enhancing Riparian Habitat for Birds at Your Home or Ranch



Riparian habitat is characterized by vegetated areas along bodies of freshwater including streams, lakes and rivers. It has been identified as the most important habitat to landbirds in California. Dozens of bird species depend on riparian habitat not only for nesting, but also stop-over sites during migration and places to live during the winter. Riparian habitat that supports healthy bird populations will also support other wildlife, including fish. Habitat loss and degradation are probably the most important factors causing the decline of riparian bird populations. Fortunately, YOU can help preserve this threatened habitat by properly managing riparian habitat on your property.



Riparian Bird Species

- Swainson's Hawk
- Spotted Sandpiper
- Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo
- Willow Flycatcher
- Warbling Vireo
- Least Bell's Vireo
- Bank Swallow
- Tree Swallow
- Swainson's Thrush
- Yellow Warbler
- Common Yellowthroat
- Wilson's Warbler
- Yellow-breasted Chat
- Song Sparrow
- Black-headed Grosbeak
- Tricolored Blackbird

Creating or Enhancing Riparian Habitat

Maintaining the riparian vegetation on your property and planting a variety of native riparian plants will provide birds with the environment they need to survive and nest. Here's how you can maintain riparian habitat on your property, and create new habitat to support breeding birds:

1. **Plant native riparian plants in a mosaic.** Planting a variety of native plants in clusters will promote use of different parts of the habitat by different species of birds.
2. **Keep dead trees.** These are important habitat elements for birds! They find food and safety here. Try to leave AT LEAST one dead tree per acre.
3. **Eliminate, reduce, or closely manage grazing,** especially in spring and during the breeding season, to maximize the understory habitat value to wildlife.
4. **Maintain and restore riparian understory.** Keep native plants and shrubs that grow under trees.
5. **Remove non-native plants,** such as Cape Ivy, Arundo and Periwinkle. Non-native plants can overtake native plants, and many birds are not adapted to live with them.

Key Riparian Plants

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|-----------------|----------------|
| Aspen | Bigleaf Maple |
| Box Elder | California Bay |
| Cottonwood | Oregon Ash |
| Valley Oak | White Alder |
| Arroyo Willow | Dogwood |
| Sandbar Willow | Wild rose |
| CA Blackberry | Mugwort |
| Poison Oak | Rushes |
| Snowberry | Wild azalea |
| Blue Elderberry | Wild grape |



www.prbo.org/calpif
Read the California Partners in Flight Riparian Bird Conservation Plan for more recommendations!

Limit Predators

Native predators (raccoons, skunks, and jays) can negatively affect nesting songbirds when human activities inadvertently increase their populations. The domestic cat is also a potential predator of songbirds. You can help with these simple actions:

- **Keep cats indoors!** Especially during the breeding season when young birds are vulnerable. Bells don't work! See the Cats Indoors Program at www.abcbirds.org/cats/catsindoors.htm
- **Eliminate outdoor food sources** such as pet food dishes, uncovered garbage cans.
- **Cover compost piles** or use covered worm bins

Limit or Reduce Grazing

Many songbirds nest very close to or directly on the ground in grasses and low-growing plants. When possible, limit grazing in the riparian during the breeding and nesting season (February - August). Get to know your local area to determine more accurate information on plant regeneration needs.

- **Set aside “no grazing” areas** on your land: this will provide nest sites and shelter for birds, especially hummingbirds, warblers, grosbeaks, and towhees.
- **Allow regrowth of native plants** in the understory one to two months before the breeding season begins. Montane riparian and meadows may require more time for regrowth prior to the breeding season.
- **Avoid placing livestock facilities or feeding areas near riparian.** This will decrease foraging opportunities for Brown-headed Cowbirds (a nest parasite for songbirds).



Declare Your Land a Bird Sanctuary

Designate areas of your land “bird-friendly” with these actions:

- **Minimize human disturbance** during the breeding season (mid-March through August). Common disturbances include construction, spraying, and pet activity.
- **Create networks of suitable habitat.** Connecting habitat patches is valuable to all wildlife. Work with neighbors and local groups to create a network of “bird sanctuaries” in your community.
- **Do not use pesticides**, which can harm birds. Allow insect- and pest- eating birds, like swallows, woodpeckers, bluebirds and owls to eat the pests in your backyard!
- **Learn the birds on your land!** Study their behaviors, learn their names, and watch them build nests and return year after year.

Resources

Many resources are available to help you acquire native plants, make your land wildlife friendly, and provide more information on oaks and wildlife:

- California Partners in Flight Bird Conservation Plans ♦ <http://www.prbo.org/calpif>
- PRBO Conservation Science ♦ <http://www.prbo.org/birdinfo> ♦ (707) 781-2555
- National Audubon Society ♦ <http://www.audubon.org>
- California Native Plant Society ♦ <http://www.cnps.org>
- Riparian Habitat Joint Venture ♦ <http://www.prbo.org/calpif/rhvj>
- River Partners ♦ <http://www.riverpartners.org>