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CREATING A HEALTHY COUNTRY HOME

A rural property offers open space and opportunities for enjoyment. It is important to remember that your land is also a home to wildlife. Urbanization and other factors have greatly reduced the number of woodlands, pastures, rangelands, and prairies, making rural land stewardship crucial to the conservation of birds and other wildlife. How you manage your acreage affects the survival of these species, as well as your own quality of life.

BIRDS ON THE RANGE

Birds are good indicators of the ecological health of your property. You can protect the value and productivity of your land while providing food, shelter, and nesting sites for local birds. Overgrazing and improper weed management can result in degraded vegetation systems and lands that no longer provide for birds. A diverse mix of native cover and forage plants, as well as healthy streamside vegetation, will support game birds, resident and migratory songbirds, and grassland bird species, which are especially at risk.

Bird feeders allow for up close observation of some rural bird species. Keep track of the birds coming to your feeders and learn to identify the birds using other parts of your property to determine if your management choices are increasing the number and types of birds on your land. Birdhouses provide nest sites for additional birds that might inhabit your land, including birds of prey that can help keep the rodent population in check. For more information, visit www.audubonathome.org/countryhome.

BATS IN THE BARN

Bats are key to maintaining a healthy landscape, as they control insect populations with their nightly hunting for food. Some bats can eat up to 600 mosquitoes in an hour. You can entice a variety of bats to “hang around” by putting up a bat house on or around your home and retaining that old barn. For more information, visit www.audubonathome.org/bats.

BIG SKY BUTTERFLIES

Over 700 butterfly species help pollinate native plants in the United States. Since flowering plants are a key element of the broader landscape, why not establish a butterfly garden? Butterflies can be attracted by nectar-producing flowers, host plants for eggs and caterpillars, and a shallow dish of pebbles with water for drinking. For information about the common butterflies in your area and their favored plants, 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.

LIVING LIGHTLY ON THE LAND

Rotate crop fields and graze only as much livestock as the land will sustain. Resist the urge to create a traditional suburban landscape around your home. If a firebreak is needed, try to incorporate native plants and grasses into your design. Consult with your local NRCS office to identify native plants suited to the local soil conditions. Avoid using non-native plants and those that require frequent watering. Preserve native habitats whenever possible.

WILDLIFE SAFETY

Birds often drown in open livestock troughs if the water is too deep; provide a float or ramp that provides a way for them to climb out. Clean, fresh water is critical to your livestock, and frequent replacement of the water also prevents mosquito breeding. Consider minimizing fencing to allow native wildlife to move freely while containing your herd. Keep your domestic pets indoors or in a protected run to minimize their impact on native

wildlife and to keep them safe from natural predators such as coyotes.

WORKING WITH NEIGHBORS

Your property is part of a larger landscape that birds and other wildlife need to survive. Invite your neighbors to join you in managing your adjoining properties for native species. Form a local wildlife association and make a plan to provide food, shelter, and nesting sites to those species that most need your help. Keep track of how the birds and other wildlife respond to your efforts. For more information, visit www.audubonathome.org/neighborhood.

BEFORE YOU BUILD

If you are still planning construction of your country home, choose a building design and location that protects as much of the property as possible, minimize the amount of land cleared for the building site, and protect trees and shrubs from damage during construction. It is easier to protect existing habitat than to create new habitat later.

HEALTHY YARD PLEDGE

Create and maintain a healthy environment for you, your family, and local wildlife by pledging to:

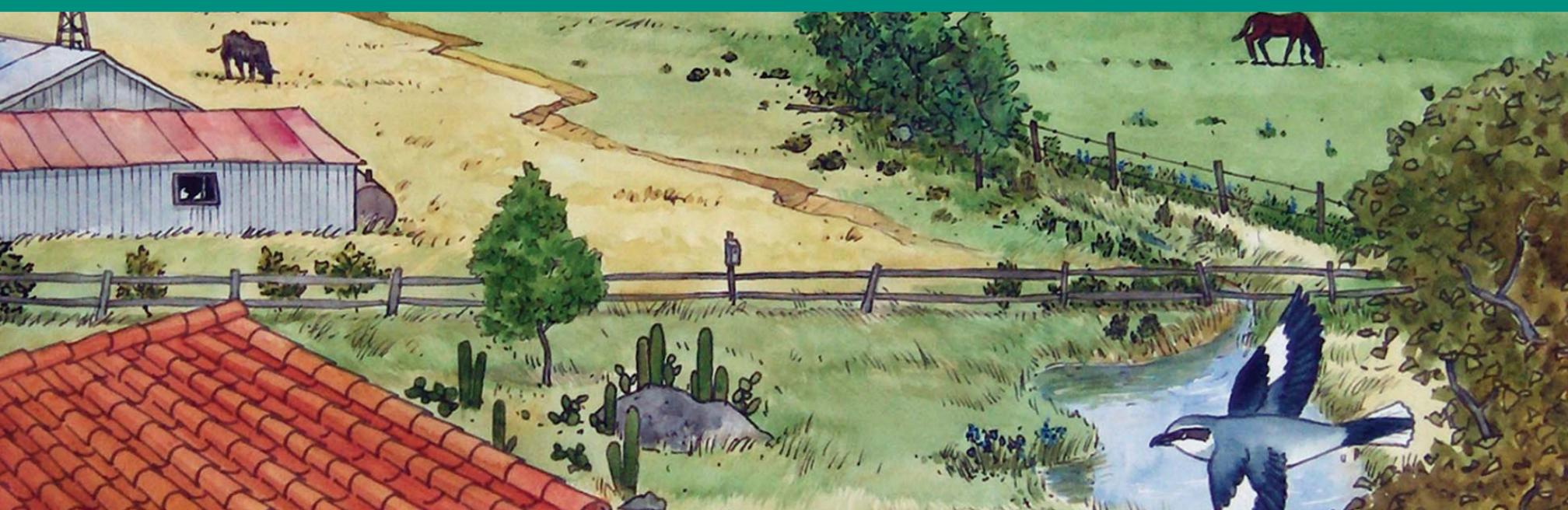
- ✓ Reduce pesticide use
- ✓ Conserve water
- ✓ Protect water quality
- ✓ Remove invasive exotic plants
- ✓ Plant native species
- ✓ Support wildlife on your property

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 COUNTRY HOME



Invite Birds, Bats, and Butterflies to YOUR COUNTRY HOME

- 1 Work with **NEIGHBORS** to encourage habitat protection across property lines.
- 2 Do not plant **INVASIVE PLANTS**. Deal with invasive weeds early and often, and restore grasslands with native forbs and wildflowers.
- 3 Screen **FENCELINES** with native shrubs to create additional habitat and wildlife corridors.
- 4 Monitor **WETLANDS**, including ponds and playas, for overall health, and manage runoff to prevent erosion and flooding.
- 5 Bats are common inhabitants of rural areas. A **BAT HOUSE** will provide a daytime roosting place for these aerial insect eaters.
- 6 Create a **BUTTERFLY GARDEN** by planting wildflowers and other plants to feed adult butterflies and caterpillars.
- 7 In the **YARD**, include items that will attract, protect, and support birds and other wildlife. Include bird feeders, a birdhouse, a source of clean water, and native plants for cover, food, and nesting. Keep cats indoors, and modify windows to prevent bird strikes.



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

- 8 Manage **WOODLANDS** for the conservation of forest birds. Unless there is a significant threat of wildfire, leave brush and dead snags in place as nesting and feeding places for birds and insects.
- 9 Protect trees and other vegetation along streams with fencing to prevent overgrazing and erosion. The health of these **RIPARIAN AREAS** is key to the overall health of the land, because so many animal species depend on this type of habitat.
- 10 If you have livestock, rotate **GRAZING HERDS** to different pastures to promote sustainable forage growth. Pay attention to stocking densities to maintain healthy vegetation. Explore herd types to determine which best suits your property.
- 11 Maintain native **SHRUBLAND** or shrubby pastures for quail, grouse, and other game birds. Native prairies or meadows should be preserved for nesting grassland birds, such as meadowlarks and sparrows, as well as for hunting birds, such as hawks, owls, and falcons.

BIRDS TO HELP ON YOUR PROPERTY

With a large-acreage property or ranchette, you have a great opportunity to help birds, bats, butterflies, and other wildlife. Consider managing your land to provide food and shelter for five or six bird species that need the most support in your area. Keep a close watch to see how the birds respond to your efforts. To determine which species near you need the most help, and to find ways to help support them on your property, visit www.audubonathome.org/birdstohelp.

My target species

Action points
