

Getting to Know Your Migratory Birds

Migratory birds are birds that generally migrate south each fall from breeding grounds to their wintering grounds. In the spring they return north to their breeding grounds to breed and raise their young.

There are 836 species of native migratory birds that are protected by law under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Approximately 59% of these protected birds are songbirds. Anyone who has taken a walk in a local park or in the woods has heard the melodies of these winged singers. Songbirds are among the smallest of our birds and are often called “perching birds,” because they can hold tightly to branches with their toes.

These songbirds eat a wide variety of foods, including insects, seeds, berries, nectar, and fruit, consuming millions of insects that if left unchecked, could damage crops and trees.

Although these species are protected by law, they need your help to successfully raise their young. Federal and state laws protect almost all native wild birds and their nests and eggs during the breeding season. You must have a federal permit to disturb these protected adults and their nests and eggs during the bird breeding season.

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Photos: Bob Wilkin/Red Rock Audubon Society



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Protecting Migratory Bird Nests in Southern Nevada





Birds nest in the strangest places!

Birds nest in your gutter, clothes drier or kitchen fan vents; above your front door; in a bucket in your garage; in your hanging basket; in a pile of twigs on your window sill; in the shrubs next to your front door; and in the trees in your yard.

Are birds nesting in your yard?

In southern Nevada, migratory birds nest from approximately March through August, with the highest nesting activity occurring from April through June. For most bird species in urban areas, it takes approximately 30 days from when eggs are laid until chicks are able to fly (fledge).

The following behaviors may help you determine if you have breeding birds or an active nest in your yard:

- If you repeatedly see a brightly colored bird and a dull colored bird are in the same location you very likely have a breeding pair of birds. The male which is brighter in color than female, may act aggressively toward other male birds or even toward you if you get too close to where they are nesting.
- If birds are observed carrying food to the same location they are likely feeding their young. In many bird species, both the male and female will provide food to nestlings.

- You may be able to hear nestling making soft chattering and chirping because they want to be fed by their mom or dad.

If you see any or all of these breeding behaviors, you should assume that an active nest is present. The nest should be left alone until the chicks have fledged or the nest is no longer occupied. Enjoy watching the bird raise its family.

If you suspect you have birds breeding in your yard and need to trim trees or remove its habitat, seek the assistance of a professional biologist or other knowledgeable person so that you can avoid harming the bird.

Make your yard safe for birds!

Trim trees or remove vegetation outside the migratory bird nesting season (approximately September through February), so that you do not damage active bird nests. If you must trim trees or remove vegetation during the breeding season please make sure there are no birds nesting there first.

Keep your pet cats indoors particularly during the bird breeding season. Cats are a serious threat to baby and adult birds, especially when birds are incubating eggs, roosting at night, foraging at a feeder, and using a bird bath.

