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## G84-672 Backyard Wildlife *Making It Come Alive*

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## Backyard Wildlife Making It Come Alive

This NebGuide, the last in a series of four, provides "how-to" ideas for getting the most enjoyment from backyard wildlife.

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*Ron J. Johnson, Extension Wildlife Specialist*

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Inviting wildlife to your backyard can be enjoyable, educational, and fun for the whole family. A backyard can offer the fascination of a robin's nest or cardinal's song, the scurry of a squirrel, the speed of a dragonfly, and the beauty of a hummingbird or butterfly at a flower. Wildlife photography is another opportunity. Some of the best songbird photographs have been taken from a blind in a backyard or through a back window. And, songbirds are only one of many possible nature subjects. Backyards can also provide firsthand information for school assignments, 4-H projects, or fair exhibits. But most of all, a backyard with wildlife is a fun place to observe and enjoy nature.

## A Backyard Pool



A small pool can add to the attractiveness and enjoyment of some backyards, especially larger ones. Birds will make the pool a center of activity, and some pools can provide a home for turtles, damselflies (mosquito-eaters), or frogs--an extra sparkle for many outdoor observers. Small fiberglass or plastic pools can be purchased, or a pool can be dug and lined with concrete or plastic sheeting. Wooden oak barrels cut in half also make easy and inexpensive pools for a backyard. Water plants can be rooted in soil or sand in the bottom of the pool or in pots which are then set in the pool. Add a few small goldfish to help balance the pool and to control mosquito larvae.



## Butterflies-Moving Color

Butterflies need habitat too. They will add a touch of moving color to your backyard if a few plants that attract them are available. Adult butterflies use nectar from flowers, so a wide variety of flowers will provide one of their habitat needs. Here are some examples of plants that are liked by many adult butterflies.

### Plants For Butterflies

	Herbaceous Plants	
Trees or Shrubs	Cultivated	Wild
American Linden	Butterfly Weed	Boneset
Lilacs	Daisy	Dandelions
Others with flowers	Dill	Goldenrod
	Marigold	Joepyeweed
	Phlox	Milkweed
	Primrose	New England Aster
	Sedum	Thistle
	Verbena	Wild Bergamot
	Zinnia	Yarrow
	Other flowers	Other flowers

Another habitat need for butterflies is a place to lay eggs. Larvae that hatch from the eggs can usually eat only a certain kind of plant, so the adult female must deposit her eggs on the proper one. Because of the plants they choose and because they are usually not very abundant, butterfly larvae are not a threat to garden or ornamental plantings. And, the adults are beneficial because they help pollinate flowers. Here are some examples of plants that attract butterflies for egg-laying and provide food for the larvae.



## Reproductive Habitat For Butterflies

Trees or Shrubs	Herbaceous Plants
Black Cherry	Clover Family
Elm	Mallow (Cheeseweed) Family
Hackberry	Mustard Family
Hawthorn	Parsley Family
Poplar	Milkweed (Monarch Butterflies)
Willow	Dock
	Grasses
	Nettle
	Plantain
	Sorrel
	Thistle

Part of the above information on attracting butterflies was taken from an article by Maryanne Newsom-Brighton that appeared in the April-May, 1982 issue of *National Wildlife Magazine*. This article, entitled "Butterflies are Free," is well illustrated with color photographs and has helpful ideas for attracting colorful butterflies.

### Problem Animals

At times, some animals become a nuisance or cause problems in your backyard. Raccoons may raid garbage cans, squirrels may rob bird feeders, rabbits may eat garden vegetables, and snakes repel some people.

Generally, the surest and most permanent solution is to exclude the animal from the problem area. Tight-fitting and secured garbage can lids, squirrel or predator guards on bird feeders, and fencing the garden to exclude rabbits are all effective. Remove nest boxes during winter so the squirrels cannot use them, and close holes and repair damaged louvers in the attic so squirrels cannot get in.

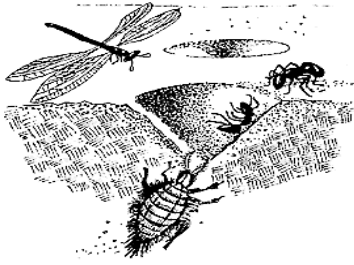
Another technique often useful in conjunction with exclusion is to capture and remove the problem animals. Removal is especially helpful if an animal has established an undesirable behavior pattern such as entering the attic. Permits may be necessary to capture animals, so check first with Nebraska Game and Parks Commission officials.

Snake problems can be handled by removing hiding places such as boards, rock piles, wood piles and high weeds from near the house. These provide shelter for snakes, and they tend to remain near them. Capturing and removing snakes or keeping a hoe or club handy to dispatch them are other options. Remember, however, that snakes eat insects, earthworms and mice, and are an important part of the natural environment. If they are not causing problems, it's best to leave them alone.

Animal problems in the backyard can usually be handled safely and effectively. For more help, contact the Cooperative Extension office in your county, or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Animal Damage Control.

### What to Expect

The kinds of wildlife that visit your backyard will vary depending on its location and size, stage of habitat development, and other factors. By watching and enjoying even the small things--from butterflies to songbirds and rabbits--the backyard can be a place of adventure for those willing to observe closely.



For furious action, try going on an antlion safari. Antlion larvae, or "doodlebugs," trap ants by digging inverted cones or pits in the soil. These pits are usually found in the soil near the base of a house or other building where they are somewhat protected from direct rainfall. The antlion larvae prepare the sides with fine sand or soil particles so ants that fall in can't climb out, and land in the jaws of the "doodlebug" are waiting at the bottom. Predation in action can be observed by dropping an ant into the edge of a pit. The "doodlebug" usually captures the ant but often flips soil and sand all around in the process. Antlion larvae eventually pupate in the soil, becoming adult insects that look somewhat like dragonflies. Antlions are beneficial to man because of their ant diet and they cause no problems.

Squirrels, although sometimes a nuisance, can be a source of much enjoyment in the winter. If you feed sunflower seeds, they'll be out scheming how to get at them, even during snow storms. Feeding them sunflower seeds can be expensive, however, but ear corn is a good alternative.

Observing and photographing butterflies in one backyard led to a small book about the complete life history of monarch butterflies. The same author is now taking pictures and writing the life story of thirteen-lined ground squirrels, and again the work is being done in his backyard. Look around. Many animals can be found that might make an interesting story. Writing one, taking some pictures, or just observing for the enjoyment of it can be an interesting, even exciting hobby.

Other NebGuides in the Backyard Wildlife series are G83-669, *Backyard Wildlife: Feeding Birds*; G83-670, *Backyard Wildlife: Bird Houses and Shelves*; G83-671, *Backyard Wildlife: Planting for Habitat*. Copies are available from the Cooperative Extension office in your county.

### Suggested Reading

Bourne, R., editor. 1974. *Gardening With Wildlife*. National Wildlife Federation. 1412 16th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036 191pp.

Harrison, G.H. *The Backyard Bird Watcher*. Simon and Schuster, New York. 284pp.

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