



# Visitors have arrived - let's make them welcomed

■ BY DELORES SAVAS

“Planting native species in our gardens and communities is increasingly important, because indigenous insects, birds and wildlife rely on them. Over thousands of years and sometimes millions of years they have co-involved to live in local and soil conditions.”

*David Suzuki,  
Canadian science broadcaster and  
environmental activist*

October is just around the corner, and Florida will be right into the fall season with the continuous arrival of wild bird species to join native wildlife, all of them getting ready for the special season.

It will be a special time for all of us to experience the sight of new animals in the area.

Many may not notice the slight change of weather in the area, but temperatures here will be above the normal of northern states. Local wildlife will follow the rituals of autumn. What is important is that residents welcome the avian arrivals with a safe and healthy habitat for their visit to Florida.

Birds are among the most common migrants passing through the area, and they include:

- Turkey vultures in South Florida;
- Peregrine falcons, especially along the coast as they follow shorebird prey;
- Warblers and chimney swifts in South Florida;
- Sandhill cranes that previously nested in more northern latitudes;
- Ducks arriving for the winter; and
- Grosbeaks, tanagers, orioles and thrushes just beginning their migration south for the winter.

According to Cornell Ornithology Lab, birds have fewer places to rest safely now during migration and to raise their young. Land development in the coastal U.S. has increased by 12 percent (over four million acres) since 1996, and nine million acres of trees have been lost.

Below are some ways to be become a welcoming host to our feathered friends:

- Plant native flowering plants to attract the three Bs of a healthy yard: birds, bees and butterflies.
- Provide water, shelter and nesting sites with natural or commercial birdbaths, wood piles, natural holes in tree trunks and other cavities for nesting.
- Provide a variety of quality seeds for birds, and clean your birdfeeder regularly to avoid spreading disease.
- Do not use pesticides. They can directly affect birds, as well as kill weeds

## Easy ways to help Migrating Birds

1. Keep cats indoors
2. Turn out lights at night
3. Make windows visible
4. Plant a house garden

that produce seeds or insects, both of which are food sources for birds.

- Stow your lawnmower and let a small part (or all of) your land go wild with wildflowers and grasses.

- Use natural pest control.
- Keep cats indoors or create an outdoor cat enclosure for them. Cats are estimated to kill more than 2.6 billion birds annually in the U.S. and Canada. This is the second-most human-caused reason for the loss of birds, after habitat loss, according to the Cornell Ornithology Lab.

- Make windows safer, day and night. Up to one billion birds are estimated to die each year after hitting windows in the United States and Canada. By day, birds perceive reflections in glass as habitat they can fly into. By night, they may not see the window at all and crash into it. On the outside of window, install screens or break up reflections using film, paint or Acopian BirdSavers.

There are also other wildlife happenings in October. Here is some interesting wildlife to look for, according to the Florida Wildlife Extension at UF/IFAS and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission:

- Mammals
- Flying squirrels will be moving into pecan groves as the nuts ripen.

- Black bears will be feeding in preparation for winter. Any accessible food source, such as unsecured garbage, pet food or bird seed can be enticing to a hungry bear. If given the opportunity, bears will take advantage of easy meals from unsecured trashcans and birdfeeders. However, if bears do not find food they will move on.

Insects

- Monarch butterfly migration nears its peak along Florida's Gulf Coast. Many can be seen at St. Marks Wildlife Refuge.

Fish

- Redfish and trout move up creeks and rivers in North Florida.

- Fall spawning of red ear sunfish occurs.
- Largemouth bass are active in cooler waters.

Plants

- Plants and shrubs, like holly and dogwood, produce berries to feed wildlife. Blazing star (Liatris) and other wildflowers bloom in pine uplands.

While welcoming wildlife, it is important that you also prepare for their search for a place to nest or survive. It is recommended that you check the soffits on your house, because any wild creature, including iguanas, raccoons, mice and other wildlife, will seek refuge from the weather.

Also check your fireplace opening, as chimney swifts will gladly take advantage of any opening to build a nest in the chimney. Place a screen on the opening to deter any creatures that assume it's open house for them to enter.

These precautions can be undertaken without too much of a problem. It is a small price to pay for helping out wildlife creatures of today.

The Cornell Ornithology Lab quote below will bring this home:

“We believe birds are the gateway to caring for the natural world. Help us spark curiosity and foster learning starting with the earliest ages through the college years and lasting a lifetime. Our work aims to inspire and equip the next generation of science and conservation leaders.”

Enjoy this special time of year while we still have wildlife in our midst.

### SOURCES

- [wec.ifas.ufl.edu/wildlife](http://wec.ifas.ufl.edu/wildlife) October happening
- Cornell Ornithology Lab - [birds.cornell.edu](http://birds.cornell.edu)
- FWC - [myfwc.com](http://myfwc.com)
- Jiminy Cricket

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