Native Plants for Bird Habitat in South Dakota

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South Dakota State University Extension

Department of **Agronomy, Horticulture and Plant Science**
Department of **Natural Resource Management**

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About the Native Plant Initiative: Native plants are the foundation that supports insects, pollinators (including bees), birds, livestock and wildlife. This project supports the mission of conducting research, education and outreach to support excellence in the native plant materials system in the nation with specific focus on the Great Plains.

A special thank you to KC Jensen for providing all of the bird photographs in this publication.

South Dakota State University Extension

SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY®
AGRONOMY, HORTICULTURE AND PLANT SCIENCE DEPARTMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

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Introduction

Whether you are an avid bird watcher that seeks out rare species in all kinds of terrain, or a backyard birder who delights in seeing a Northern Cardinal or the first American Robin in spring, birds are beloved by many of us. Unfortunately, many bird species are in decline. Between 1970 and 2019, bird populations decreased by about 3 billion breeding adults across almost all habitats in North America (Rosenburg et al., 2019). Forests have lost approximately 1 billion birds and grasslands have lost more than 700 million birds. However, it is not only birds in forest and grassland habitats that are facing decreasing numbers. Backyard bird species, including many common and migratory songbirds, are also in decline primarily due to the loss and degradation of habitats.

Although large-scale conservation efforts are essential, adding bird habitat to your yard can be a great way to make a positive impact on birds in our region, and native plants are an important component of that habitat. Adding native plants to your yard directly supports bird populations by providing nectar, seeds, nesting material and ground cover. Native plants also support bird populations indirectly by boosting our native insect populations which birds then eat. In fact, 96% of our terrestrial bird species feed insects to their young, even hummingbirds. Many young chicks rely entirely on insects as a food source until fledging. Even for smaller birds, this can add up to a remarkable number of insects. For example, a Black-capped Chickadee will feed its chicks 350-570 caterpillars every day (Brewer, 1961).

South Dakota has a range of habitats that support many bird species, and native plants play an important role in all those habitats. In this factsheet, we provide an overview of habitat types present in South Dakota, highlight key native plants present in those habitats that are especially critical for supporting birds, and recommend ways you can improve bird habitat on your property.

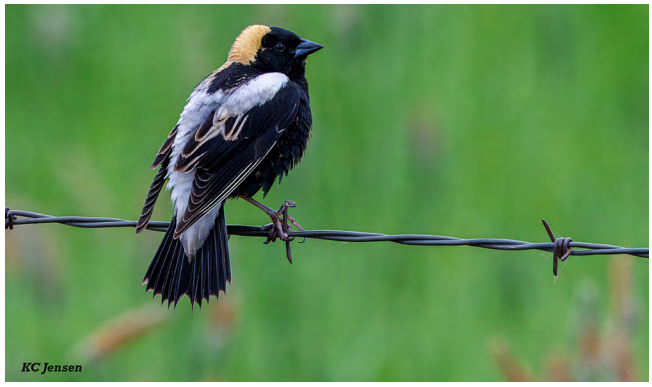
Black-capped Chickadee, Photo credit: KC Jensen

Grasslands

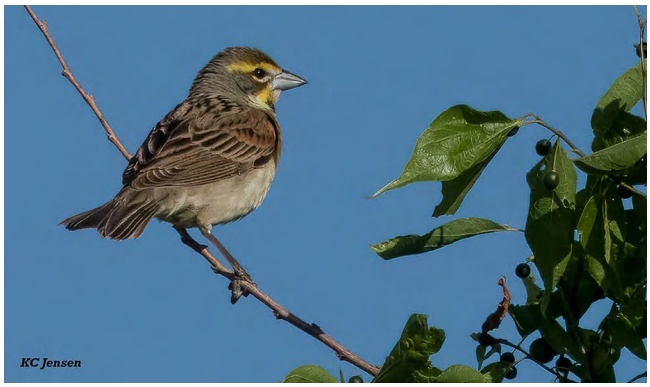
Among South Dakota's habitats, grasslands are among the most important and a great starting point for bird conservation. Grassland birds have declined precipitously over the past 60 years (Rosenburg et al., 2019) due largely to widespread habitat loss. Most of the habitat for our grassland birds are now found in fragments of what were historically widespread grasslands (Bernath et al., 2023). Although South Dakota is home to some of the largest areas of contiguous grasslands in North America, their ecological function has decreased due to the presence of invasive species and loss of natural grazers and fire. Despite these challenges, there is potential to restore native plants back into these habitats to support native bird populations. Providing patches of native grassland plants within a landscape dominated by agriculture has been shown to increase native bird and insect abundance while providing other benefits like increases in soil organic matter and water infiltration (Schulte et al., 2017).

There are three primary types of grasslands in South Dakota, tallgrass prairie, mixedgrass prairie, and shortgrass prairie, each shaped in large part by the amount of precipitation they receive, which dictates the types of plants and birds these landscapes can support. Tallgrass prairie occurs on the far eastern side of the state and is dominated by tall, warm season grasses. Mixed-grass prairie occurs in the central portion of the state and is a diverse mixture of species from both tallgrass and shortgrass prairies, and shortgrass prairie occurs in the western portion of South Dakota and is dominated by drought tolerant warm season grasses. The grass species in these prairies provide essential food, shelter, and nesting material for many grassland bird species, including the Western Meadowlark, Bobolink, Dickcissel, Eastern Bluebird, Grasshopper Sparrow, Lesser and Greater Prairie Chicken, and Sharped-tailed Grouse. Insects, including grasshoppers and caterpillars, also rely on these grasses for food, which in turn supports insect-eating bird species like the Eastern Meadowlark, Greater Prairie-Chicken, and Audubon Society priority prairie species such as the Long-billed Curlew (Wilsey et al, 2019).

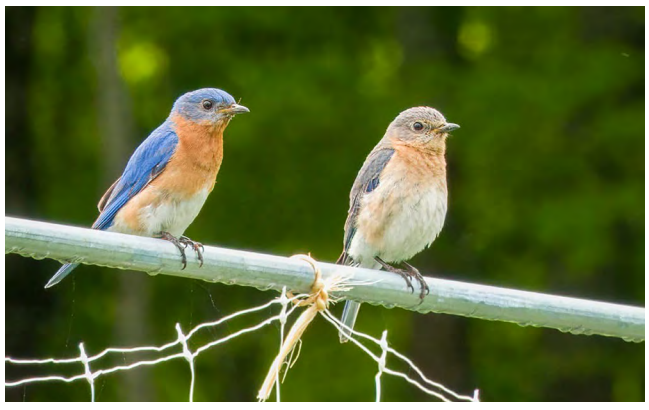
Western Meadowlark, Photo credit: KC Jensen



Bobolink, Photo credit: KC Jensen



Dickcissel, Photo credit: KC Jensen


Eastern Bluebird, Photo credit: KC Jensen

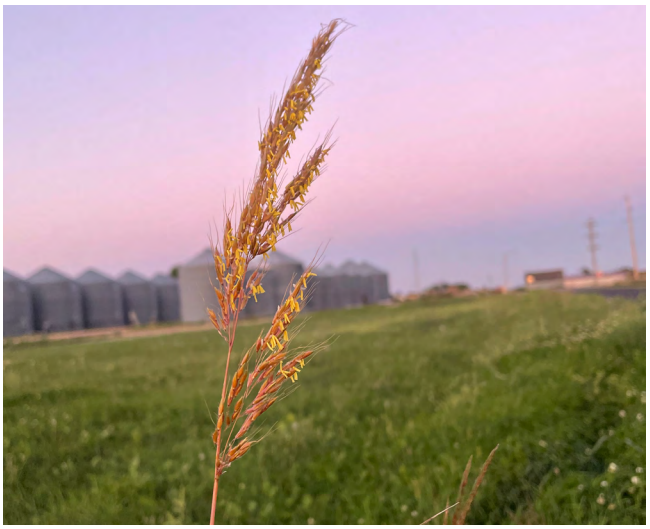
Grasshopper Sparrow, Photo credit: KC Jensen

Tallgrass Prairie Grasses

Big bluestem, *Andropogon gerardii*: Big bluestem is a perennial bunchgrass that can grow 2-7 feet tall. This grass blooms from late summer to early fall and produces brilliant reddish-purple fall foliage characteristic of the tallgrass prairie.

Big bluestem, Andropogon gerardii, Photo credit: Peter M. Dziuk

Indiangrass, *Sorghastrum nutans*: This grass is a perennial, sod-forming grass that can grow 3-8 feet tall. This grass blooms in late summer to early fall and is one of the earliest warm season grasses to produce seeds. The foliage turns a beautiful golden color in the fall. Indian grass can grow in full sun to shade conditions and is tolerant of a wide range of soils, from heavy clays to sandy, well-drained soils.



Indiangrass, Sorghastrum nutans, Photo credit: Kaitlyn Preszler

Little bluestem, *Schizachyrium scoparium*: Little bluestem is a perennial bunchgrass that can grow up to 3 feet tall. This grass blooms in late summer to early fall and produces white tufted seeds that are a particularly important food source for migrating sparrows in the fall. Little bluestem's foliage turns beautiful blues, reds, and browns in the fall. This grass grows in full sun to partial shade and can tolerate a variety of soils, from dry to well-drained.

Little bluestem, Schizachyrium scoparium, Photo credit: Julie Sperlich

Mixedgrass Prairie Grasses

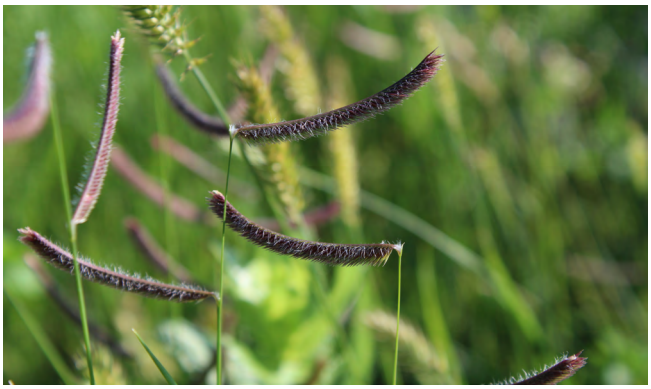
Western wheatgrass, *Pascopyrum smithii*: Western wheatgrass is South Dakota's state grass and an important species for birds! This grass is a perennial, sod-forming grass that can grow from 1-3 feet tall. It begins to bloom mid-summer with seeds beginning to ripen late summer to early fall. This grass grows in full sun and can tolerate a range of soils, from dry, well drained, to moderately saline soils (Blanchard et al., 2023).

Prairie Junegrass, Koeleria macrantha: This grass is a perennial bunchgrass that grows 6 inches to 2 feet tall. Prairie Junegrass flowers from May to June with seeds beginning to mature in June. This grass grows best in full sun and medium to dry soils.

Prairie Junegrass, Koeleria macrantha, Photo credit: Peter M. Dziuk

Shortgrass Prairie Grasses

Blue grama, *Bouteloua gracilis*: This grass is a perennial bunchgrass that grows to 6 to 20 inches tall. Blue grama begins to flower in late summer and begins to produce ripened seeds in late summer to early fall. This grass displays particularly interesting looking seed heads that resemble an eyebrow, giving it another commonly used name, "eyebrow grass". It grows best in full sun and dry, well-drained, rocky soils.



Blue grama, Bouteloua gracilis, Photo Credit: Jess Lindstrom

Buffalograss, *Bouteloua dactyloides*: Buffalograss is a perennial, sod-forming grass that grows 4-6 inches tall. It begins flowering in April and continues until July, with seeds ripening from early summer to late fall. This grass grows best in full sun and dry to medium, well-drained soils.

Buffalograss, Bouteloua dactyloides, Photo credit:Ruth Wilford

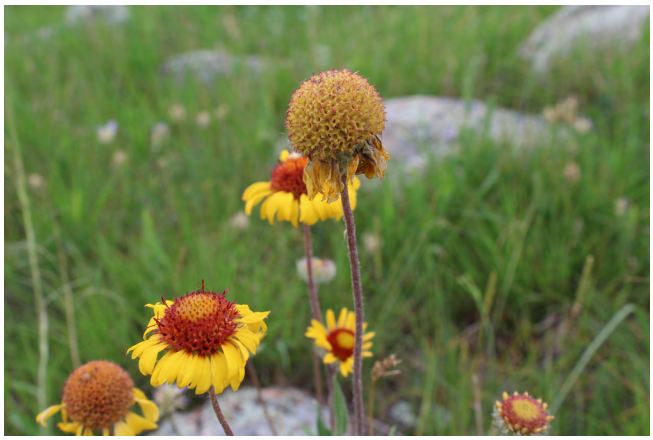
Native Forbs/flowers

Prairie ecosystems possess diverse wildflower communities, many of which are important for bird species. Many of these wildflowers retain their seeds late into the winter, providing fats and carbohydrates that are an important energy source for migrating bird species and breeding residents like the Bobolink and Vesper Sparrow, which are both Audubon Society priority prairie bird species at risk (Wilsey et al, 2019).

Narrowleaf purple coneflower, *Echinacea angustifolia*: Narrowleaf purple coneflower is a perennial forb that grows 1 to 2 feet tall. It produces beautiful large purple flowers from June to October and ripened seeds in late fall. This plant can be found across all of South Dakota. This flower grows best in dry, well-draining soils and full sun conditions.

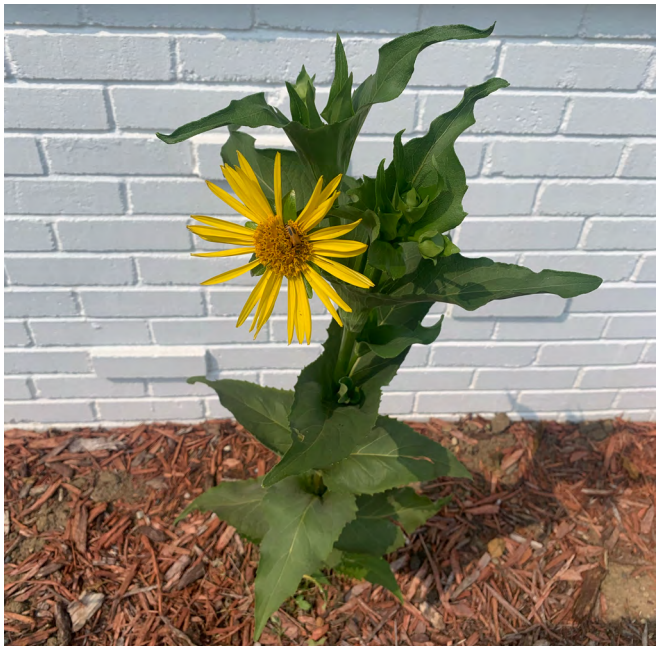
Narrowleaf purple coneflower, Echinacea angustifolia, Photo credit Fiona Shapiro

Blanketflower, *Gaillardia aristata*: Blanketflower is a short-lived perennial that grows 1-2 feet tall. It blooms with showy red, yellow, to orange sunflower-like flowers from late spring to fall. Blanketflower is common across the Great Plains and will reseed. It prefers full sun and well-drained soil.



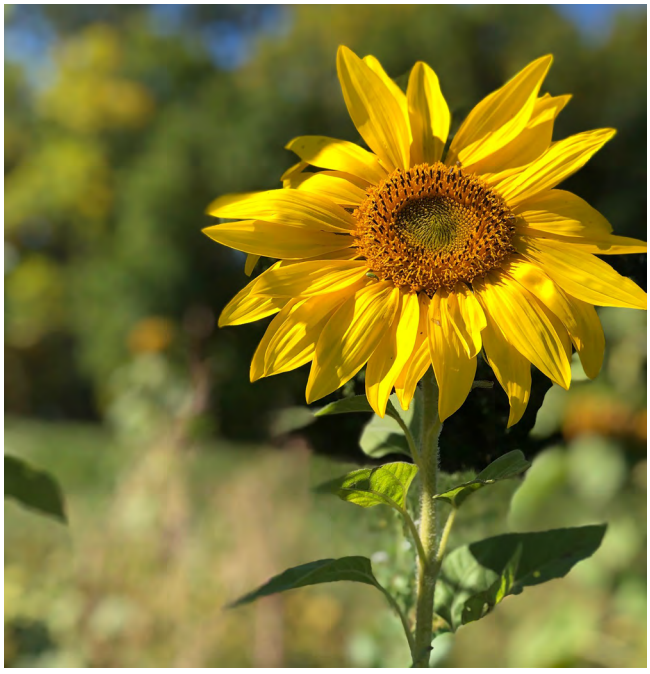
Blanketflower, Gaillardia aristata, Photo credit:Jess Lindstrom

Cup plant, *Silphium perfoliatum*: Cup plant is a perennial, deciduous plant that can grow 3 to 8 feet tall! It blooms from July to September with multiple bright yellow, sunflower-like flowers on each stem. The plant gets its name because the leaves grow opposite each other on the stem and form a cup that holds water from rain or dew, offering a drink for thirsty insects and birds. This flower grows best in full sun to part shade and in sandy to loamy, well-drained soils.



Cup plant, Silphium perfoliatum, Photo credit: Nancy Feroe Manson

Maximilian sunflower, *Helianthus maximiliani* This perennial wildflower grows 2 to 10 feet tall and prefers full sun and sandy, well-draining soils. Maximilian sunflower produces showy, bright blooms from July until October and readily reseeds.



Sunflower, Helianthus sp., Photo credit: Karen Hendricks

Blue giant hyssop, *Agastache foeniculum*: Despite its name, blue giant hyssop only grows 2 to 4 feet tall but produces spike clusters of purple flowers from June to October that are loved by bees. Seeds are present into late fall. This plant can grow in full sun to shade conditions and does best in dry to medium, well-drained soils.

Blue giant hyssop, Agastache foeniculum Photo credit: Bryanna Chipley

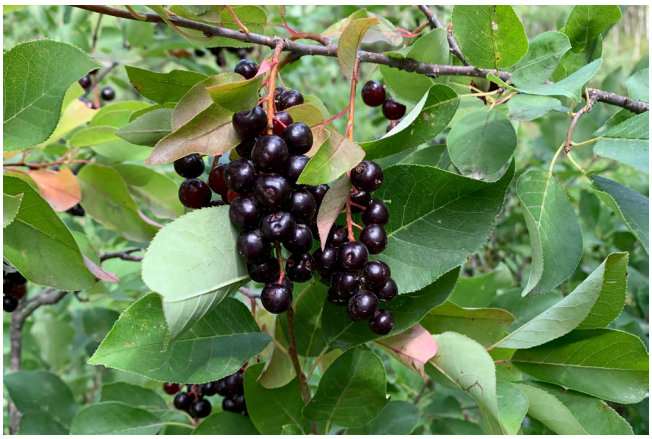
Plains milkweed, *Asclepias pumila*: Plains milkweed, also known as prairie milkweed, is a perennial wildflower that grows from 1 to 3 feet tall. This plant flowers from May to July, with its abundance of pink to lavender colored flowers attracting various pollinator species. A variety of birds also consume milkweed seeds when they become available in late summer to early fall. Plains milkweed grows in full sun and sandy to loamy well-drained soils.

Plains milkweed, Asclepias pumila, Photo credit: Mary Lata

Trees/shrubs

When you envision a prairie, you don't often think about trees and large shrubs; however, woody plants growing in thickets provide important food, cover, and nesting sites for birds in grassland settings.

Chokecherry, *Prunus virginiana*: Chokecherry is one of the most common trees/shrubs in North America and can be found growing in a variety of habitats. It can grow from 10 to 25 feet tall as either a shrub or small tree. Chokecherry is in the rose family and provides a stunning display of beautiful white flowers from May to June. In the summer and fall, this plant yields reddish-purple to black berries that are highly favored by birds. Once established, this plant is very drought tolerant.



Chokecherry, Prunus virginiana, Photo credit: Kahomy Souksavath

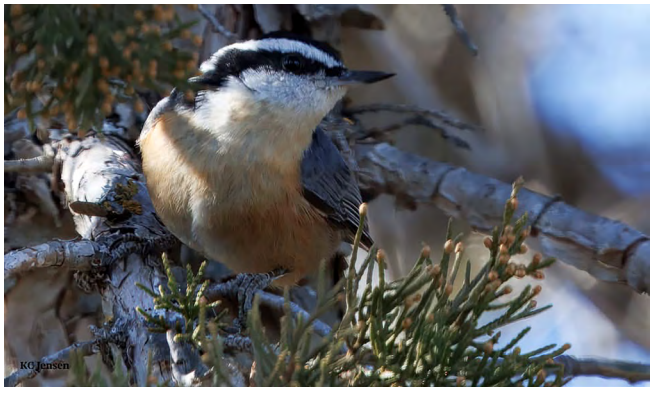
Leadplant, *Amorpha canescens*: Leadplant is a deciduous shrub that grows from 1 to 3 feet tall. It is considered one of the most conspicuous, widely distributed, and abundant prairie plants in North America. This shrub blooms from June until August with an abundance of bright purple flowers that form in clusters all over the plant. Leadplant is favored by bees and other pollinating insects that are important for insect-eating bird species. Leadplant does best in full sun and sandy, to silty well-drained soils.

Leadplant, Amorpha canescens, Photo credit: Lora Perkins

Woodlands

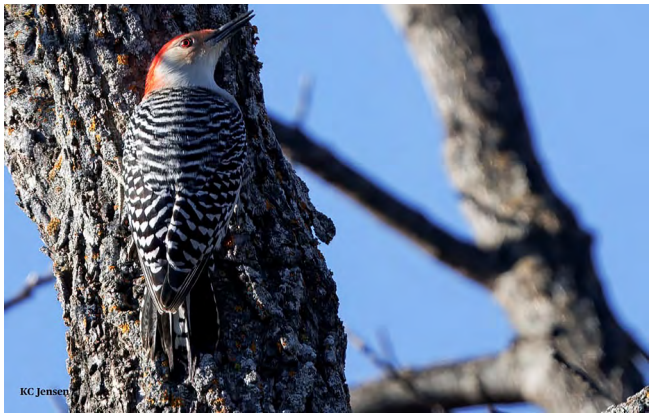
Although only 3.1% of South Dakota is forested, the state contains several distinct woodland ecosystems, including the forests of the Black Hills and riparian wooded areas along rivers. These areas are ecologically important for their biodiversity, habitat complexity, and role in supporting bird life. For example, the forests of the Black Hills are a unique convergence of western and eastern ecosystems and are home to over 250 species of birds, and over 1500 native species of plants, whereas riparian forest habitats are found throughout the state next to rivers and moist areas and are often areas of high bird abundance and activity.

Altered land use and invasive species have reduced plant diversity in these woodlands, degrading bird habitat. These issues threaten the bird communities that live in woodlands or use them for breeding, foraging, or migration stopovers. Species such as the Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-winged Junco, Three-toed Woodpecker, Black-backed Woodpecker, and Brown Creeper have been noted to be particularly sensitive to forest management practices in the Black Hills (Matseur, 2017). Other common woodland birds of South Dakota include Black-capped Chickadees, White-breasted and Red-breasted Nuthatch, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and Northern House Wren.



Red-breasted Nuthatch, Photo credit: KC Jensen

Black-capped Chickadee, Photo credit: KC Jensen



Red-bellied Woodpecker, Photo credit: KC Jensen

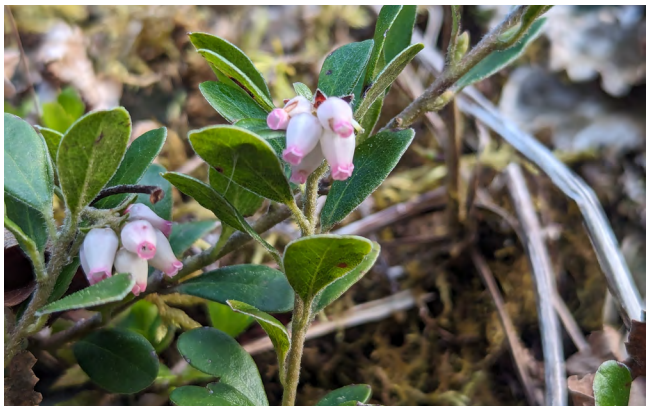
Northern House Wren, Photo credit: KC Jensen

Native Berry Bushes

Common snowberry, *Symphoricarpos albus*: Snowberry is a bushy, deciduous shrub that grows 3 to 6 feet tall. The shrub produces clusters of small, bell-shaped, pink flowers from May to July that mature into round, white berries in late summer to early fall. The plant retains these berries into the winter and early spring, and they are an important food source for birds during this time. This plant will grow in a variety of different conditions, from full sun to shade, and dry to moist soils.

Common snowberry, Symphoricarpos albus, Photo credit: Peter M. Dziuk

Kinnikinnik, *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*: Kinnikinnick, also known as bearberry, is a perennial evergreen shrub that grows from 2-12 inches tall. This plant loves rocky outcroppings common to the montane habitat of the Black Hills. It has a low-growing nature that makes it a good groundcover and weed suppressor. From March to June, this plant produces clusters of small pink flowers that attract hummingbirds, butterflies, bees, and other insects that are important to insectivorous bird diets. In late summer, the flowers mature into small red berries that ripen in late fall. These berries stay on the plant for a long time and are available long after most other fruits are gone. Kinnikinnick will grow in most light and soil conditions.



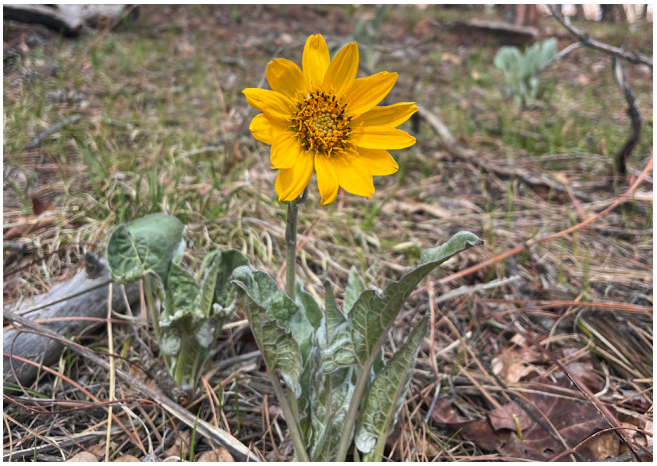
Kinnikinnik Arctostaphylos uva-ursi, Photo credit: Brandon Clark

Redosier dogwood, *Cornus sericea*: Redosier dogwood is a deciduous shrub that grows between 8 to 10 feet tall. During the fall and winter, the plant develops deep, red stems. The plant has clusters of white flowers from May to August and clusters of small, white berries in the fall that provide a great food resource to birds and other wildlife. This plant prefers partial shade to full sun, and moist, well-drained soils but will tolerate both wet and dry soils.

Redosier dogwood, Cornus sericea, Photo cedit: Peter M. Dziuk

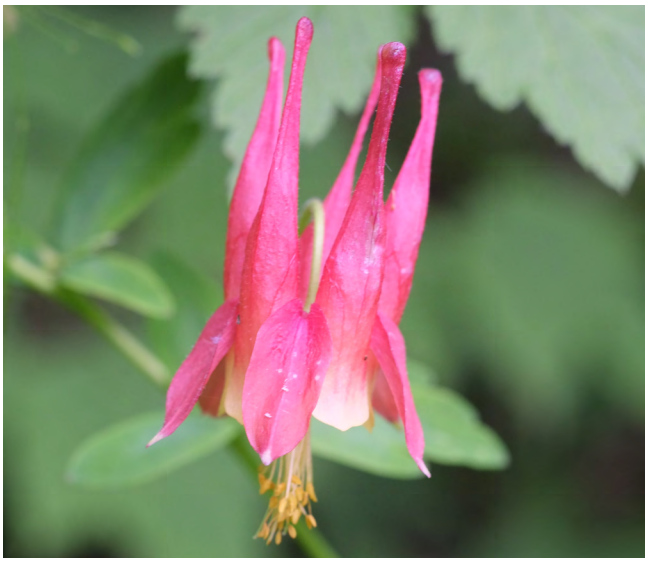
Native Forbs/Flowers

Arrowleaf balsamroot, *Balsamorhiza sagittata*: Arrowleaf balsamroot is a perennial that grows up to 2 feet tall. It produces robust, yellow sunflower-like flowers from April to June. Like a sunflower, the flowers produce seeds that stay on the plant for a long time, making this plant a great winter food resource for many birds when food is scarce.



Arrowleaf balsamroot, Balsamorhiza sagittata, Photo credit: Anna Manson

Red columbine, *Aquilegia canadensis*: Red columbine is a perennial wildflower that grows approximately 2 feet tall. The curved, bell-shaped red flowers blooming from March through July are particularly unique. This spring flowering plant provides an early food source for hummingbirds, which are attracted to the red color of the nectar-containing flowers. Other nectar-loving insects like butterflies are also drawn to red columbine, which many insectivorous birds rely on for food. This plant will do best in full sun to partial shade, moist, well-drained, sandy soils.

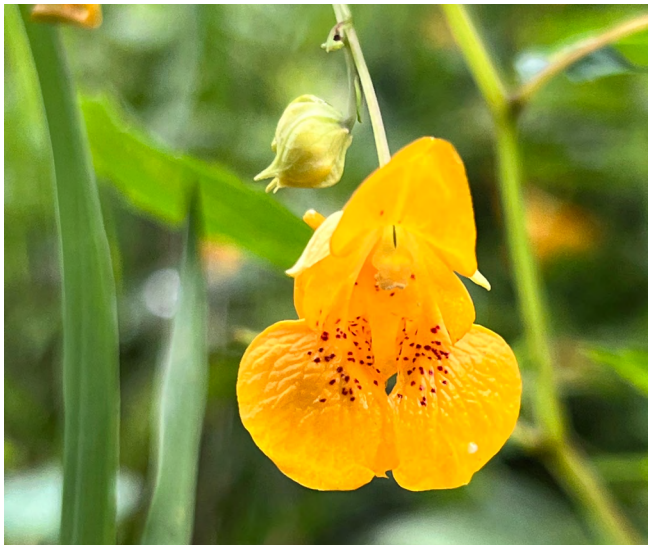


Red columbine, Aquilegia canadensis, Photo credit: Josh Leffler.

Gray goldenrod, *Solidago nemoralis:* This perennial grows up to 2 feet tall and produces bright yellow flowers from August to November. Each flower head produces an abundance of small seeds that provide birds with a great end-of-year food source during fall migration. This plant grows in a variety of different conditions from full sun to shade, to dry sandy, rocky, and wet clay soils.

Gray goldenrod, Solidago nemoralis, Photo credit: Katy Chayka

Jewelweed, *Impatiens capensis*: Jewelweed, also sometimes called spotted touch-me-not, is an annual flowering plant that grows 2 to 5 feet tall. This plant flowers from July-September with beautiful golden-orange spotted flowers that hummingbirds and other pollinators love. This plant can grow in shade to full sun in moist soils.



Jewelweed, Impatiens capensis, Photo credit: Amy Knofczynski

Starry false lily of the valley, *Maianthemum stellatum*: This perennial, also called starry false Solomon's seal, grows 1 to 3 feet tall. Small, star-shaped, white flowers appear in clusters at the tops of the stems in May and June. Birds love to eat the mature, red berries that are present from mid to late summer. This plant grows in partial shade and a variety of wet to moist well-draining soils.

Starry false lily of the valley Maianthemum stellatum, Photo credit: Katy Chayka

Great blue lobelia, *Lobelia siphilitica*: Great blue lobelia is a perennial that grows 1 to 4 feet tall. This plant blooms from July until October in a spikelet of bright blue-violet flowers that attract a variety of hummingbirds and pollinators. Great blue lobelia can grow in full sun to partial shade and prefers moist soils.

Great blue lobelia, Lobelia siphilitica, Photo credit: Katy Chayka

Native Grasses

Slender wheatgrass, *Elymus trachycaulis*: Slender wheatgrass is a perennial, cool-season bunchgrass that grows up to 4 feet tall and produces a slender spike seed head that matures in July. The stems and leaves can have a purple hue, and the seeds are a great late-season food source for seed-eating birds. This grass grows in moist to dry sandy loam and full to part sun.

Slender wheatgrass, Elymus trachycaulis, Photo credit: Peter Dzuik

Prairie dropseed, *Sporobolus heterolepis:* This is a perennial bunchgrass that grows from 1 to 3 feet tall, including the seed heads. In the fall, this grass turns a beautiful golden bronze, and its seeds provide a food source for migratory songbirds. This grass grows best in full sun but can tolerate partial shade and can be found growing in moist to dry sandy to gravelly soils.

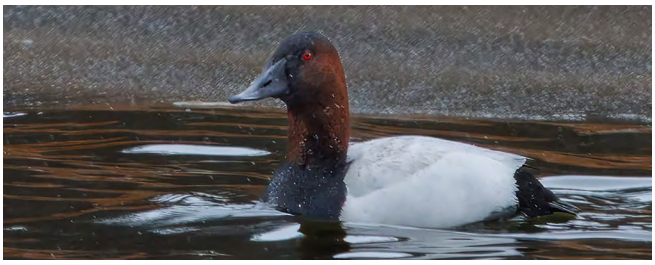
Prairie dropseed, Sporobolus heterolepis, Photo credit Peter M. Dziuk

Wetlands

South Dakota's wetlands are important ecosystems that serve as a stopping point along the Central Flyway, one of North America's most significant migratory bird corridors. These wetlands, ranging from temporary prairie potholes to permanent lakes and marshes, provide essential habitat for millions of waterfowl and shorebirds during their annual migrations (Andersson et al., 2018). The Prairie Pothole Region, which encompasses much of eastern South Dakota, is so critical for breeding that it has been coined "America's Duck Factory."

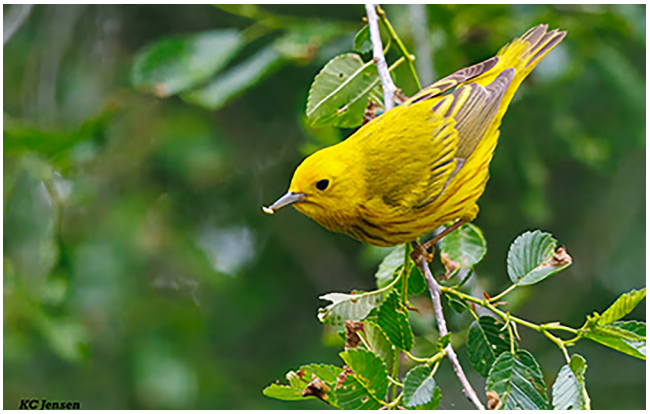
These wetland systems not only support migratory birds but also provide crucial ecosystem services such as flood control, water filtration, and groundwater recharge. The diverse plant communities found in these wetlands, including emergent vegetation, submergent plants, and wet meadows edges, create complex habitat structures that support birds year round, providing breeding and nesting sites in spring and summer, foraging areas and shelter in fall and winter, and feeding and resting sites during both spring and fall migration. Many breeding South Dakota ducks create their nests on the ground entirely out of native grass!

Wetland restoration throughout South Dakota has been successful in supporting bird populations and improving ecosystem function. Strategic placement of constructed wetlands, particularly in areas where historic wetlands have been lost, has created new stopover and breeding sites for migratory birds and resident species (Ratti et al., 2001). These projects have shown that even small, restored wetlands, when properly designed with varying water depths, natural vegetation gradients, and appropriate hydrologic cycles, can attract diverse bird communities in just a few seasons. Common wetland birds in South Dakota include Northern Pintail, Canvasback, Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal, Yellow Warbler, Green Heron, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Killdeer, Belted Kingfisher, and so many more!

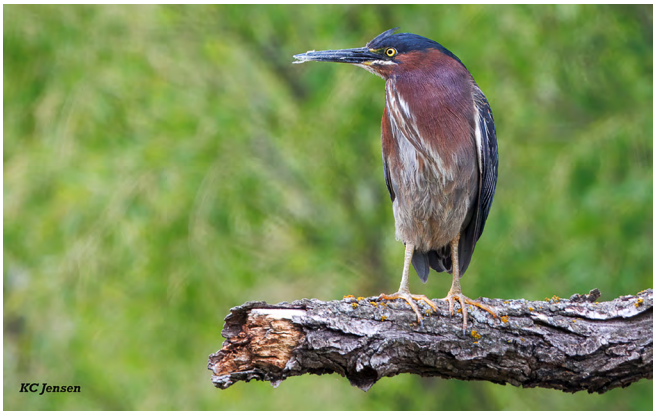


Canvasback, Photo credit: KC Jensen

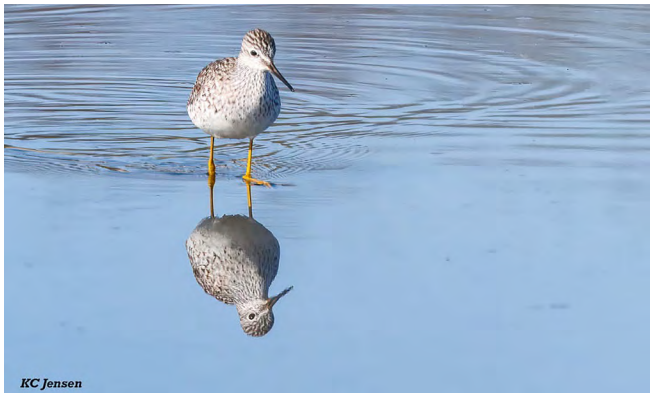
Blue-winged Teal, Photo credit: KC Jensen



Yellow Warbler, Photo credit: KC Jensen



Green Heron, Photo credit: KC Jensen



Lesser Yellowlegs, Photo credit: KC Jensen

Prairie pothole

By far the most common wetland in South Dakota is the prairie pothole. Located in the eastern portion of the state, the prairie pothole region provides some of the most important stopover habitats for migratory waterfowl. In the spring and fall it's hard to find a single pothole not full of migrating ducks, shorebirds, and geese. To make it to their destination, each of these birds relies on the food and habitat that plants residing in the pothole region provide. Although these wetlands play a particularly critical role in the success of many bird species, eastern South Dakota wetland habitat has decreased by around 35% in the last 200 years, from about 2.7 to 1.8 million acres. Restoring these ecosystems is important for the success of our waterfowl and other wetland-dependent species. A good place to start is with the reintroduction of native wetland plant species in any ponds or wetlands that you may have on your property.

There are many types of wetland plants that make up a healthy, functioning wetland ecosystem. Emergent plants are rooted at the bottom of a wetland habitat, but "emerge" or have a large portion of their leaves or flowers outside of the water. Submerged plants have most of these structures below the water. There are also floating plants that are not rooted in the soil and exist on the surface of the water. Planting a varied community of upland, partially submerged, and submergent plant species in your wetland will benefit our native waterfowl by providing a direct food source, as well as supporting a diverse community of aquatic invertebrates that these birds also need in their diet.

Upland/Transitional plants

Prairie cordgrass, *Spartina pectinata*: Prairie cordgrass is a perennial, warm season bunchgrass that can grow from 3 to 8 feet tall. This grass is commonly found growing along wetland ecosystems across the state. While birds will occasionally eat the seeds of this plant when it fruits from August to September, this grass also provides cover and habitat for nesting and migrating birds. Prairie cordgrass prefers full sun and can grow in a variety of soil conditions, from moist to dry sandy or loamy soils. This grass can tolerate some flooding; however, it is intolerant to prolonged flooding conditions, so it is usually found on the upland edges of wetlands.

Emergent plants

Hard-stem and soft-stem bullrush, *Schoenopectus tabernaemontani, S. acutus*: These two plants are both perennial wetland plants commonly found growing alongside each other. Both species grow from 2 to 9 feet tall, produce spikelet fruits from July to September, and provide a food source, cover, and nesting sites for many birds. Bullrush prefers full sun and can tolerate growing in standing water up to 5 feet deep.

Hardstem Bullrush, Schoenopectus tabernaemontani, Photo credit: Katy Chayka

Broadleaf arrowhead, *Sagittaria latifolia*: Broadleaf arrowhead is a perennial wetland plant that grows from 1 to 4 feet tall along the edges of wetlands in shallow water. Another common name for this plant is Duck Potato as it is a favorite source of food for ducks, geese, and swans. These waterfowl will feed upon the shoots, tubers, and seeds of this plant. Broadleaf arrowhead is a very easy wetland plant to get started that will support so many migrating waterfowl! This plant blooms from July until September with an abundance of attractive white flowers and grows best in part shade to full sun.

"Broadleaf arrowhead, Sagittaria latifolia, Photo credit: Katy Chayka"

Submergent plants

Sago pondweed, *Stuckenia pectinata*: Sago pondweed is a perennial, submersed aquatic plant that is found in water depths between 2 to 15 feet and grows 3 feet tall, on average. This plant is potentially the most important waterfowl food in the US, and accounts for a significant portion of the food consumed by young ducklings. Sago pondweed has very narrow leaves and a bushy appearance in the water. This plant can grow in full sun to partial shade conditions.

Sago pondweed, Stuckenia pectinata, Photo credit: Yu Ito, CC-BY-SA-3.0

American eelgrass, *Vallisneria americana*: American eelgrass, also called wild celery, is a perennial, submersed aquatic plant that grows in water depths of up to 15 feet. This plant produces dark-green, ribbon-like leaves that grow below the water surface. Together with Sago Pondweed, this plant is considered one of the most important submergent plants for US ducks and produces very nutritious seeds and tubers. It grows in full sun to partial shade.

American eelgrass, Vallisneria americana, Photo credit: CC BY-SA 4.0

Longleaf pondweed, *Potamogeton nodosus*: Many different species of native pondweeds occur in South Dakota, and this is one of the most common ones. Longleaf pondweed has both submersed and floating leaves and can grow 1 to 3 feet tall. The floating leaves are around 5 inches long and sit flat on top of the water. Longleaf pondweed is another favorite for migrating waterfowl, who consume seeds, fruits, and starchy roots. This plant grows in partial shade to full sun and in shallow waters up to 6 feet deep.

American Pondweed, Potamogeton nodosus, Photo credit: Peter M. Dziuk

Floating plants

Common duckweed, *Lemna minor*: Common duckweed is a perennial, floating aquatic plant that is very small, 1 to 2 millimeters in height, but forms dense colonies on quiet waters of various wetland habitats. As indicated by the name, various duck and geese species readily consume this plant as a part of their diet. Common duckweed is easy to grow. It needs full sun and calm waters that maintain little to no movement.

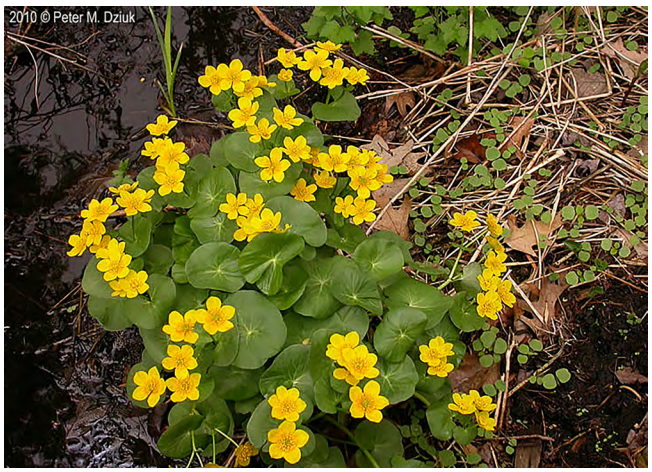
Common duckweed, Lemna minor, Photo credit: Katy Chayka

Riparian

South Dakota is also home to many riparian wetland ecosystems, most notably the Missouri river, which flows through the center of the state. Riverine floodplains often support higher tree cover that many songbirds and woodpeckers use as habitat. However, habitat loss is a concern in these areas due to factors like channel modification, shoreline development, and agricultural runoff. The Missouri river, like many riparian wetlands, has experienced significant losses in invertebrate and fish populations, key food sources for native birds (Wesner et al., 2020). Establishing native plantings along rivers or streams on your property can help stabilize soils, reduce erosion, and contribute to improved habitat for birds.

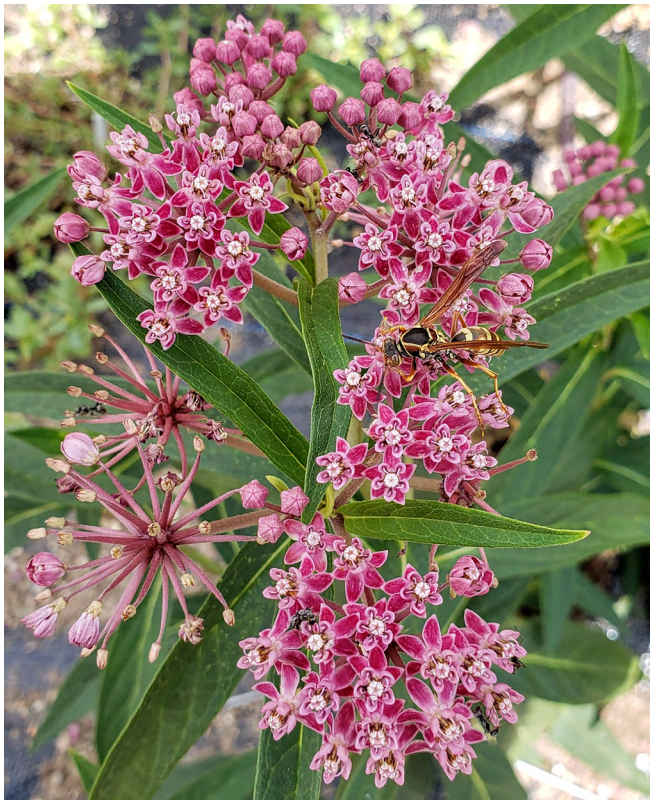
Native Forbs/Flowers

Yellow marsh marigold, *Caltha palustris*: Marsh marigold is a perennial flower that grows from 8 to 24 inches tall. This plant blooms with bright yellow, golden flowers in April and May. It is one of the first spring flowers to bloom and provides an important first food source for insects that birds eat in early spring. This plant will grow in full sun to partial shade in wet soils.



Marsh marigold, Caltha palustris, Photo credit: Peter Dzuik

Swamp milkweed, *Asclepias incarnata*: Swamp milkweed is a perennial that grows from 2 to 4 feet tall. This plant blooms from June until September with showy, bring pink clusters of flowers. Not only does this plant attract various pollinator and insect species that are consumed by insect-eating birds, but the high fat and protein content of mature seeds support migrating and resident birds in the fall. Another benefit of swamp milkweed, it is a top choice for monarch butterflies to lay their eggs! This plant grows in partial shade to full sun and medium to wet, loamy or clay soils.



Swamp milkweed, Asclepia incarnata, Photo credit: Dana Clark

Prairie ironweed, *Vernonia fasciculata*: Ironweed is a perennial flower that grows from 3 to 6 feet tall and produces beautiful, bright purple flowers that sit in clusters at the top of the plant from July into September. Ironweed is another plant that retains its seeds throughout the winter, making it a great food source for birds during these more difficult months. It grows best in full sun and moist soils.

Prairie ironweed, Vernonia fasciculata, Photo credit: Peter Dzuik

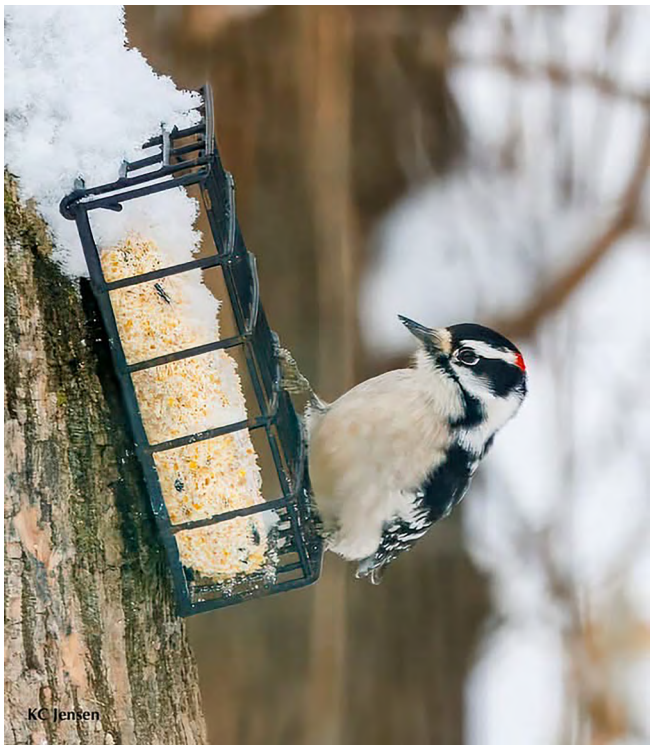
Golden Alexanders, *Zizia aurea*: Golden zizia is a perennial forb that grows from 1 to 3 feet tall. The bright yellow flowers that bloom from May until July are often associated with the similar Queen Anne's lace, an invasive plant that can be found growing in similar habitat. Opting for natives will help support your local wildlife! The native golden Alexanders is a host plant for many of our native insect species that birds rely on for food and produces seeds in the fall that support seed-eating birds' diet as well. This wildflower grows in part-shade to full sun, and prefers moist, well-draining, loamy to clay soils.

Golden Alexanders, Zizia aurea, Photo credit: Peter M. Dziuk

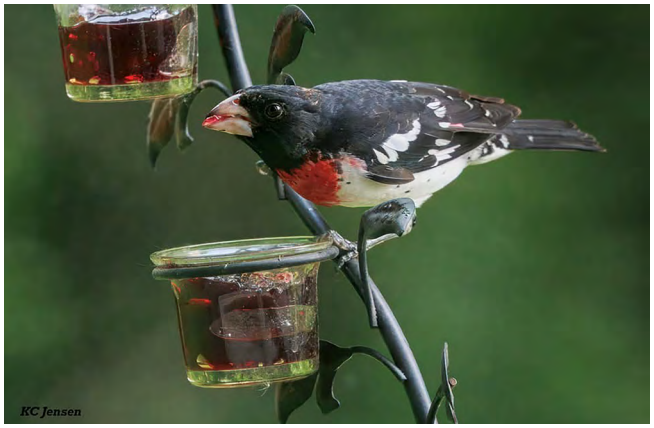
Urban/Residential

Urban development is a major factor for reducing overall biodiversity; however, with thoughtful planning urban greenspace has the potential to support bird diversity. Urban greenspace area is one of the most important predictors of bird species richness, especially if native trees and plants are present (Dale et al, 2018; Callaghan et al, 2019). Native plants provide seeds and fruits that are an important food source for birds, but just as importantly, they provide habitat and serve as host plants for caterpillars and other insects that are a critical part of many birds' diets, especially as they are raising their young. In contrast, the presence of non-native plants in landscaping contributes to insect declines, leading to decreased bird populations. Birds in yards without native plants had fewer young and showed decreased population growth when compared to yards that had at least 70% native plants, shrubs, and trees (Narango et al, 2018; Tallamy et al, 2021). During the winter, many insect-eating birds switch to eating seeds to continue getting protein and fat. Leaving architecturally interesting and functionally valuable native plants standing in your yard throughout the winter can provide habitat that helps support bird populations year-round. Many well-known songbirds are found in suburban areas, as well as a few less common species that are fun to spot! Some of these backyard birds include Finches, Black-capped Chickadee, Woodpeckers, Sparrows, Starling, Northern Flickers, Blue Jays, Crows, Nuthatches, Grosbeaks, Orioles, Northern Cardinals, Cedar Waxwing, American Robins, Red-winged Blackbirds, Mourning Doves, Grackles, Meadowlarks, Barn Swallows, Wrens, Sparrows, Warblers, and Dark-eyed Juncos.

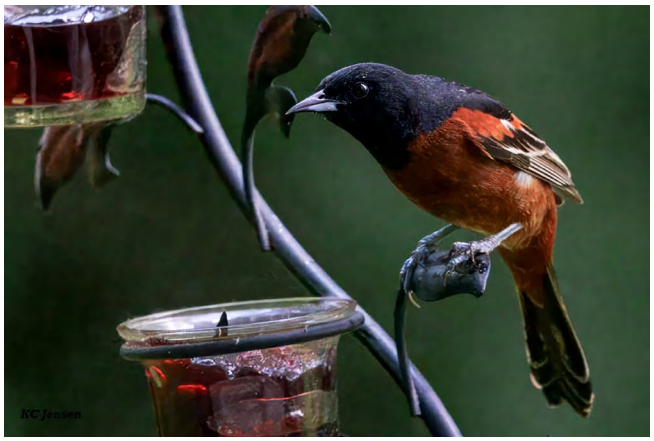
Black-capped Chickadee, Photo credit: KC Jensen



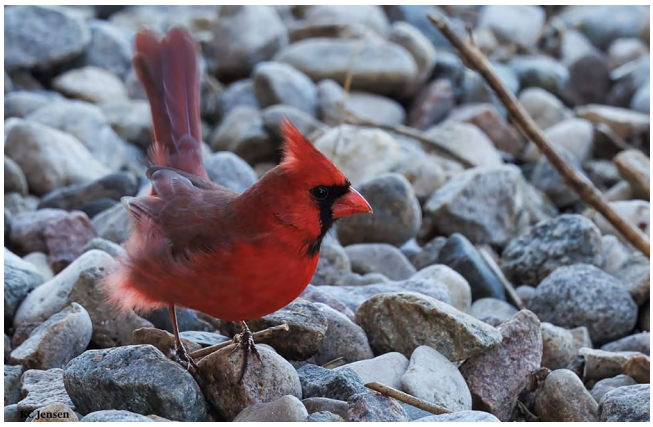
Downy Woodpecker, Photo credit: KC Jensen



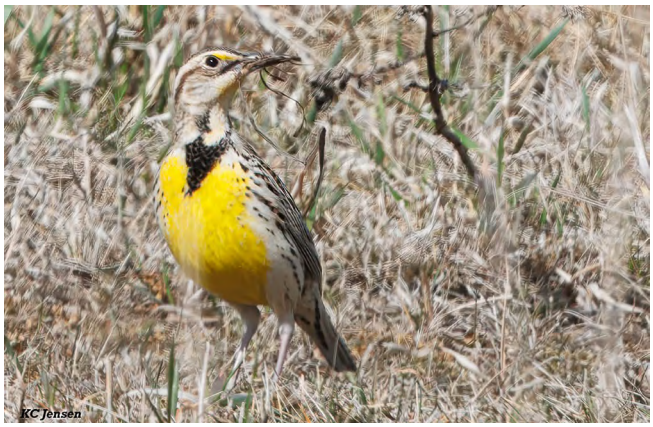
Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Photo credit: KC Jensen



Orchard Oriole, Photo credit: KC Jensen

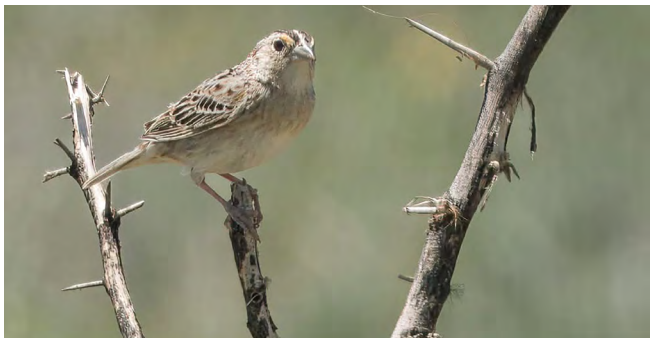


Northern Cardinal, Photo credit: KC Jensen

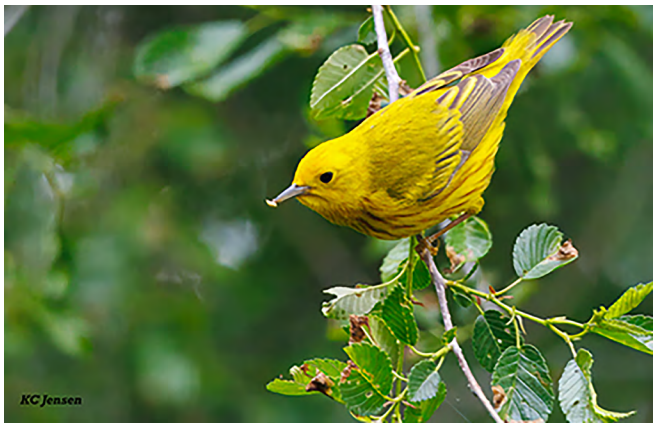


Western Meadowlark, Photo credit: KC Jensen

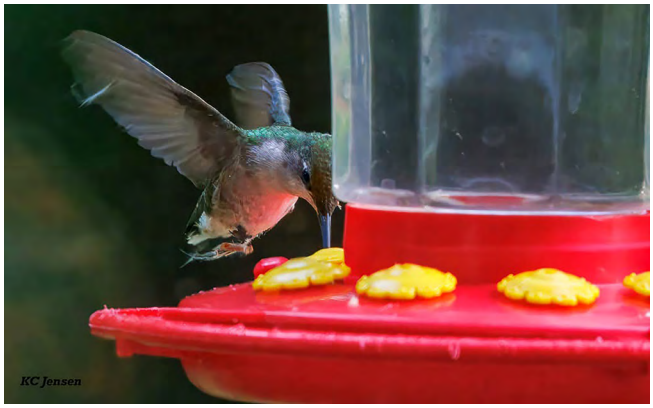
Northern House Wren, Photo credit: KC Jensen



Grasshopper Sparrow, Photo credit: KC Jensen



Yellow Warbler, Photo credit: KC Jensen

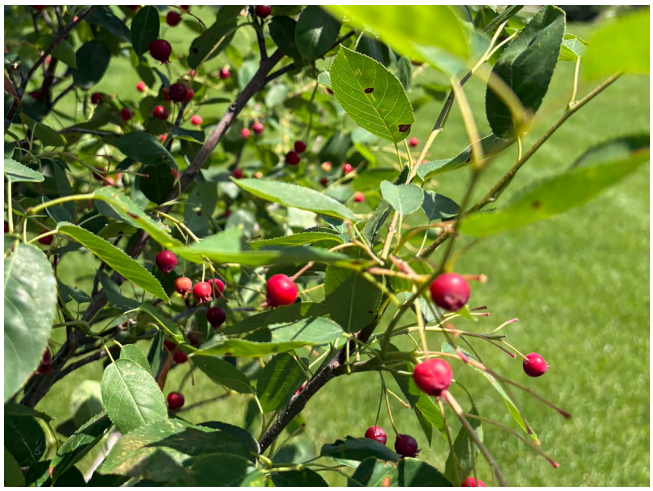


Ruy-throated Hummingbird, Photo credit: KC Jensen

Native berry bushes

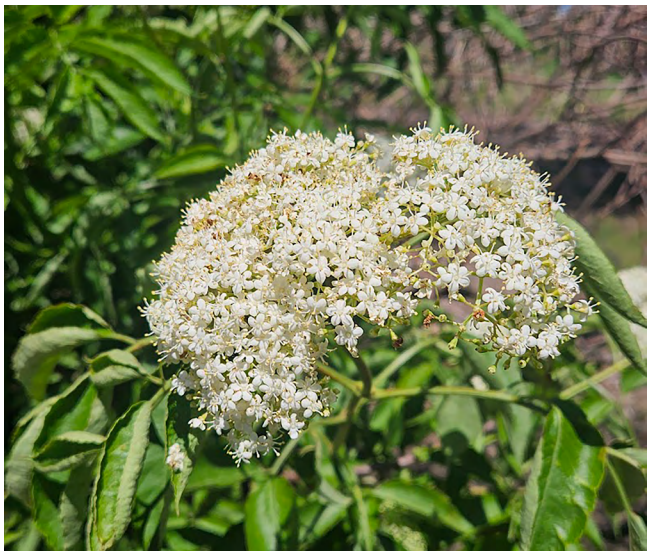
Native berries provide an important source of fats, carbohydrates, and nutrients for birds throughout the seasons. In the spring, sweeter fruits are more prevalent, while in fall and winter native berries have a higher fat content that is critical for fueling bird migration and survival in cold conditions. Even when non-native fruits are more abundant, birds often prefer and seek out native fruits (Gallinat et al., 2020). Berry producing shrubs and small trees not only provide a good food source for birds, but shrub thickets are also important nesting sites and shelter.

Serviceberry, *Amelanchier sp.*: There are many varieties of serviceberry that grow in either a tree or shrub form. Serviceberries have white flowers in early spring that attract pollinators, and the sweet, edible berries present in early to mid-summer are loved by birds and people. Serviceberries grow best in well-drained, moderately moist, loamy soils but can tolerate some sand or clay. Serviceberries can grow in sun or shade, but berry production is best in full sun conditions. Saskatoon serviceberry (Amelanchier alnifolia), a 6 to 9 ft shrub, grows across North America and is known for its high-quality fruit.



Serviceberry, Amelanchier sp., Photo credit: Chad Borchard

Elderberry, *Sambucus canadensis*: Elderberry is a woody shrub that grows 5-12 ft high and 6-10 ft wide in moist to average soil and full to part-sun. Elderberry shrubs are often found in semi-wooded areas or along stream banks but grow well in sunnier drier locations as well. The berries are a good food source for birds in mid to late summer and are edible for people too, with proper preparation.



Elderberry, Sambucus canadensis, Photo credit: Robin Buterbaugh

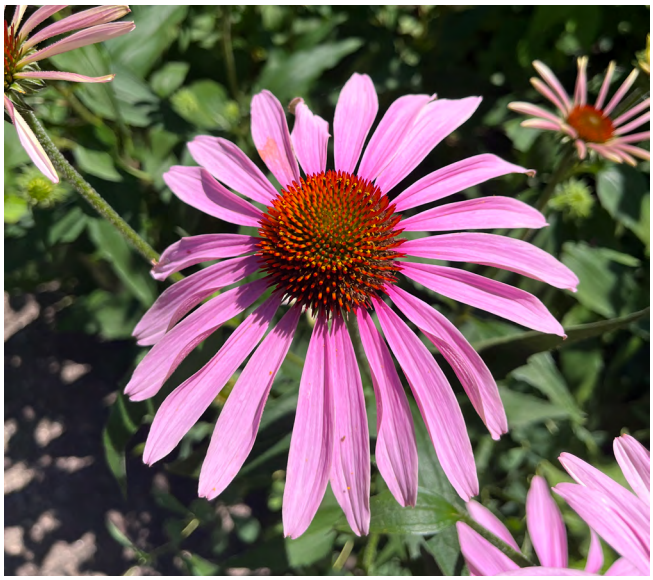
Black chokeberry, *Aronia melanocarpa*: Aronia berries have been touted as a superfood for people, but this shrub also produces berries that support birds through the fall and winter. Aronia grows to about 3 to 6 ft tall and wide in full sun or part shade and medium wet to medium dry soils. Aronia produces white flowers in the spring that attract pollinators, and the vibrant reddish orange fall foliage makes it an attractive landscaping plant.

Black chokeberry, Aronia melanocarpa , Photo credit: Peter M. Dziuk.

Native Forbs/Flowers

Many forbs support bird populations, either by creating habitat for insects that birds can eat, providing nesting cover, or by producing seeds that birds can eat throughout the seasons. Don't be tempted to deadhead the flowers of your native perennials, because that removes the seeds that birds need. Instead, plant a variety of plants that will bloom throughout the season, so you can have flowers throughout the season while also providing important resources for birds.

Purple coneflower, *Echinacea purpurea*, **Narrowleaf coneflower**, *Echinacea angustifolia*: Purple coneflower is often seen in landscaping and is widely available at nurseries and garden centers; however, narrowleaf coneflower is the only coneflower native to South Dakota. Narrowleaf coneflower grows to a height of 2 ft and prefers medium to dry soil and full sun, while purple coneflower can grow up to 4 ft in medium-wet to medium-dry conditions and full to partial sun. Narrow-leaved coneflower has an earlier and shorter bloom time in June and July, while purple coneflower blooms from July to September. Planting these species together extends the bloom season and provides visual interest. Both species of coneflower produce seeds that birds eat in the winter, and the seed heads are also architecturally appealing in a winter garden.

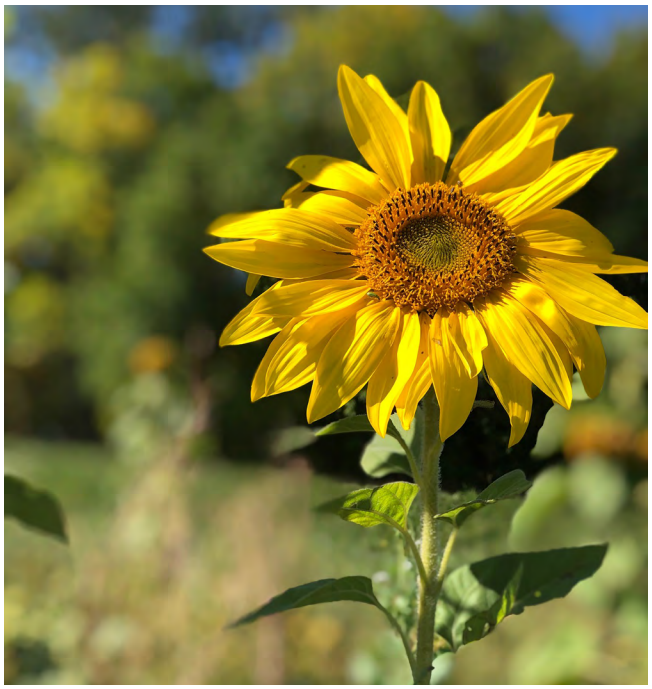


Purple coneflower, Echinacea purpurea, Photo credit: Anna Manson

Black-eyed Susan, *Rudbeckia hirta*: Black-eyed Susan is a cheerful yellow, well-recognized native garden biennial that provides seeds and shelter for backyard birds. It can grow up to 2 ft in a variety of conditions, including full to partial sun and medium wet to dry soils, and the blooms last from June to October if conditions stay warm. Although it is a biennial, leaving the seed heads throughout the winter will also allow the plant to reseed. Black-eyed Susan pairs well with purple coneflower in garden beds and both are drought tolerant and easy to maintain.

Black-eyed Susan, Rudbeckia hirta, Photo:credit Dana Anderson

Sunflowers, *Helianthus sp.*: Sunflower seeds are a major component of most bird seed mixes, but why not grow your own? There are both annual and perennial sunflowers that are native to our region. Although the large flowered annual varieties produce the seeds most used in bird seed and for oil production, perennial sunflowers can work well in landscaping, produce more flower/seed heads per plant, and don't need to be replanted every year.

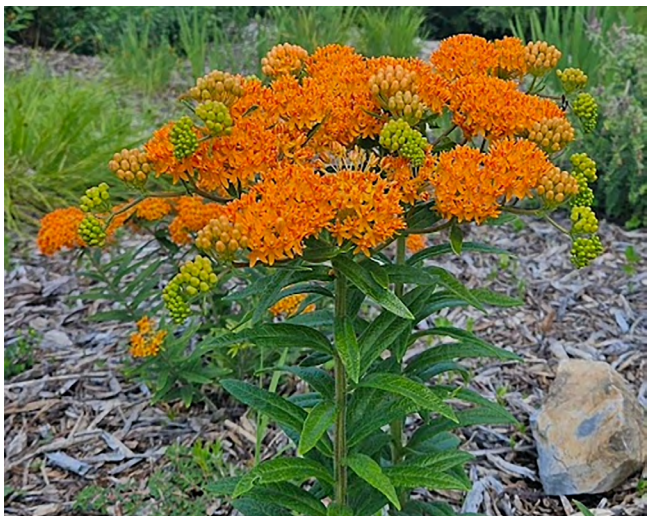


Sunflower, Helianthus sp., Photo credit: Karen Hendricks

Goldenrod, *Solidago sp.*: Goldenrod often gets a bad reputation for causing allergies; however, ragweed is often the culprit as it produces pollen at the same time. There are many species of goldenrod that bloom from late summer to fall and produce golden flowers that are magnets for bees and other insects. Goldenrod seeds are a good winter food source for a variety of songbirds, and leaving the stalks standing provides shelter. Two varieties of goldenrod that work well in landscaping are showy goldenrod (*Solidago speciosa*) and Zigzag goldenrod (*Solidago flexicaulis*). Showy goldenrod can grow to 4-5 ft tall, is more well-behaved in smaller landscapes, and prefers full sun and medium to dry soil. Zigzag goldenrod grows to 3 ft tall and prefers medium wet to medium-dry soil and part to full shade.

Showy goldenrod, Solidago speciosa, Photo credit: Katy Chayka

Butterfly milkweed, *Asclepias tuberosa*: Did you know there are around 19 native species of milkweed in South Dakota, and they grow in a wide range of sun and soil conditions? Milkweeds are most recognized as the host plant for monarch butterflies; however, milkweeds are an important resource for other pollinators and birds. Birds eat the seeds and use the fluff for nest-building and insulation. Butterfly milkweed works well in garden settings as it doesn't spread as readily as other species, and it has bright orange flowers from June to August that provide a unique pop of color to the landscape. It grows 2-3 feet tall and prefers medium to dry loamy or sandy soil.



Butterfly milkweed, Asclepias tuberosa, Photo credit: Robin Buterbaugh

Native grasses

There are a variety of native grasses that make good additions to the landscape depending on location and space. Grasses provide nesting habitat, shelter, seeds for food, and foraging areas for insects. Below are just a few of the grasses that can work well in residential landscaping. Growing characteristics for the following grasses are also described in the regional sections where the grasses are found; the information below provides suggestions for how to add these grasses to landscaping.

Big bluestem, *Andropogon gerardii*: Big bluestem is a warm-season bunch-forming perennial grass that grows up to 2-7 feet tall and 3 ft wide in average to moist soil and full sun. Big bluestem is suitable for moderate to large spaces and works well as a structural grass or focal point along back borders or fences in landscaping but may outcompete other plants in smaller areas.

Big bluestem, Andropogon gerardii, Photo credit: Peter M. Dziuk

Prairie dropseed, *Sporobolus heterolepis*: Prairie dropseed is a warm-season, bunch-forming perennial grass that grows 1-3 ft tall and 1-2 ft wide in average soil and full sun. Prairie dropseed has a nice shape and tufted structure with attractive seed heads that provide food for birds. Prairie dropseed works well as a filler plant between other native flowers or along a front border.

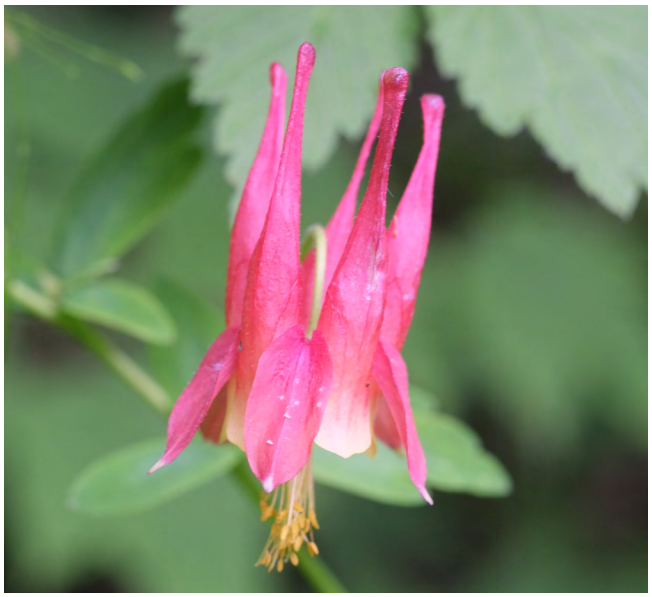
Prairie dropseed, Sporobolus heterolepis, Photo credit Peter M. Dziuk

Little bluestem, *Schizachyrium scoparium*: Little bluestem is a warm-season, bunch-forming perennial grass that grows 2-4 ft tall and 2 ft wide in average soil and full sun. It makes a good structural grass interspersed in native flowers or in groupings and has an attractive reddish color throughout the winter.

Little bluestem, Schizachyrium scoparium, Photo credit: Julie Sperlich

Plants that Attract Hummingbirds

Hummingbirds are a delight to watch, if you can catch a glimpse before they fly away! Hummingbirds are a migratory bird species found in the Midwest during the summer, and they need a lot of nectar to fuel their fast flights from flower to flower. Hummingbirds love nectar-rich, tubular flowers in bright colors, especially red, and there are many native plants that provide a much healthier energy source than sugar water feeders. Some of these plants include red columbine, *Aquilegia canadensis*, blazing star, *Liatris sp.*, and milkweed, *Asclepias sp.*



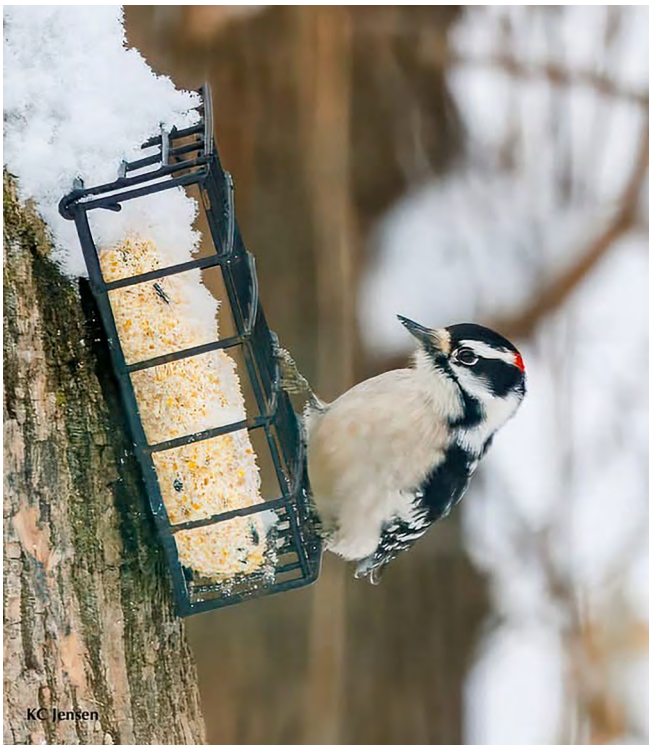
Red columbine, Aquilegia canadensis, Photo credit: Josh Leffler.

Blazing star, Liatris sp., Photo credit: Anna Manson

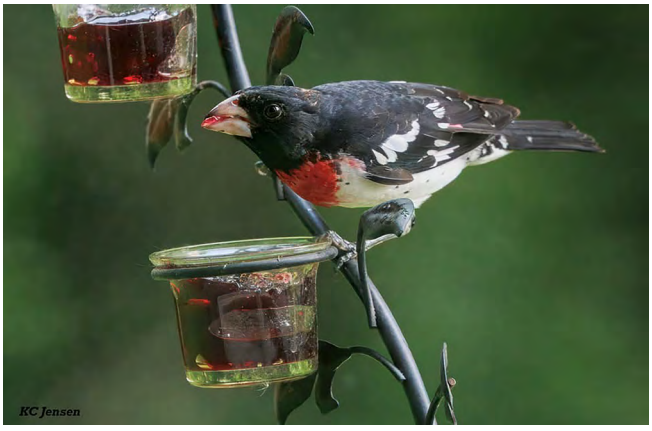
Steps to Create Bird-Friendly Landscapes

- Plant multiple heights and layers of native vegetation including vines, fruit, and nut-bearing plants.
- Include native grasses that provide nesting materials and habitat.
- Focus on keystone plants.
    - Keystone plants are those that provide food and habitat to the greatest number of insects, birds, and wildlife. Keystone plants are often host plants to large numbers of butterfly and moth caterpillars that are an important food source for birds. To find out which plants are keystone plants for your area, visit the National Wildlife Federation or Homegrown National Park websites that list keystone plants by ecoregion or zip code.
    - National Wildlife Federation Keystone Plants by Ecoregion
    - Homegrown National Park Keystone Plant Guides
- Provide bird baths or ponds for water sources as long as you keep the water fresh and clean.
- If space allows, keep thickets, brush piles, and rotting logs for food and shelter.
- Reduce chemicals/pesticides.
    - Approximately 67 million birds die each year from exposure to pesticides. In the U.S., 1 billion pounds of pesticides are applied annually. (American Bird Conservancy) Although most pesticides are used for agricultural purposes, homeowners often overuse pesticides, and research has shown that pesticide load can often be higher in urban areas than agricultural areas. (Robbins and Birkholz, 2003)
- Plant drought-tolerant native plants to provide habitat for insects while also conserving water.
- Include plants that offer a mixture of food sources for birds throughout the season, including insects, seeds, and berries. This approach supports their diet for a longer period of time.
- Instead of planting one of each species scattered throughout the garden, plant at least 3 of the same species together – this helps birds save energy when looking for food.

Birds in South Dakota are facing many challenges and conserving and restoring areas with native plants is important for preserving bird diversity in a variety of habitats. However, adding native plants to our yards is an easy way we can all help birds survive and thrive, especially if we create steppingstones or corridors of habitat within our neighborhoods and communities. When we plant native plants, we can create landscapes that are beautiful and beneficial!



Downy Woodpecker, Photo credit: KC Jensen



Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Photo credit: KC Jensen

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Appendix

Common Name	Scientific Name	Sun	Height	Bloom Time	Bloom Color	Habitat	Form	Resource
Blue giant hyssop	*Agastache foeniculum*	Full sun to partial shade	2 to 4 ft	Summer/ early fall	Purple	Prairie	Flower	Seeds
Red columbine	*Aquilegia canadensis*	Full sun to partial shade	2 ft	Spring	Red, pink	Forest	Flower	Nectar, insects
Swamp milkweed	*Asclepias incarnata*	Full sun to partial shade	2 to 4 ft	Summer/ early fall	Pink	Wetland	Flower	Insects, seeds, fluff for nest building
Plains milkweed	*Asclepias pumila*	Full sun	1 to 3 ft	Spring/summer	Pink, lavender	Grassland	Flower	Seeds, fluff for nest building
Butterfly milkweed	*Asclepias tuberosa*	Full sun	2 ft	Summer	Orange	Grassland, residential	Flower	Seeds, fluff for nest building, insulation
Arrowleaf balsamroot	*Balsamorhiza sagittata*	Full sun	1-2 ft	Early summer	Yellow	Forest	Flower	Seeds
Yellow marsh marigold	*Caltha palustris*	Full sun to partial shade	8 to 24 in	Spring	Yellow	Wetland	Flower	Insects
Purple coneflower	*Echinacea purpurea*	Full sun to partial shade	2 to 4 ft	Summer	Purple	Grassland, residential	Flower	Seeds
Narrowleaf purple coneflower	*Echinacea angustifolia*	Full sun	1 to 2 ft	Summer /early fall	Purple	Prairie	Flower	Seeds
Blanketflower	*Gaillardia aristata*	Full sun	1 to 2ft	Summer	Red/ yellow/ orange	Grassland	Flower	Seeds
Maximilian sunflower	*Helianthus maximiliani*	Full sun	2 to 10 ft	Summer/ early fall	Yellow	Prairie	Flower	Seeds
Sunflower	*Helianthus sp.*	Full sun	4 to 10 ft	Summer	Yellow	Grassland, residential	Flower	Seeds
Jewelweed	*Impatiens capensis*	Full sun to shade	2 to 5 ft	Summer/ early fall	Orange	Forest	Flower	Nectar, insects
Blazing star	*Liatris sp.*	Full sun	3 to 6 ft	Summer/Fall	Purple	Residential	Flower	Seeds, fluff for nest-building, insulation
Great blue lobelia	*Lobelia siphilitica*	Full sun to partial shade	1 to 4 ft	Summer/ early fall	Blue, violet	Woodlands	Flower	Nectar, insects
Starry false lily of the valley	*Maianthemum stellatum*	Partial shade	1 to 3 ft	Spring/ Summer	White	Woodlands	Flower	Berries
Black-eyed Susan	*Rudbeckia hirta*	Full sun to partial shade	2 ft	Summer	Yellow	Grassland, residential	Flower	Seeds
Cup plant	*Silphium perfoliatum*	Full sun to partial shade	3 to 8 ft	Summer/Fall	Yellow	Praire	Flower	Seeds, nesting, insects

Common Name	Scientific Name	Sun	Height	Bloom Time	Bloom Color	Habitat	Form	Resource
Gray goldenrod	*Solidago nemoralis*	Full sun to shade	2 ft	Summer/fall	Yellow	Forest	Flower	Seeds
Goldenrod	*Solidago sp.*	Full sun to shade	3 to 5 ft	Fall	Yellow	Grassland, forest, residential	Flower	Seeds and galls
Prairie ironweed	*Vernonia fasciculata*	Full sun	3 to 6 ft	Summer/ early fall	Purple	Wetland	Flower	Seeds
Golden zizia	*Zizia aurea*	Full sun	1 to 3 ft	Spring/ summer	Yellow	Wetland	Flower	Seeds, insects
Big bluestem	*Andropogon gerardii*	Full sun	2 to 7 ft	Summer	Red, purple	Grassland, residential	Grass	Nesting cover, shelter, insects
Buffalograss	*Bouteloua dactyloides*	Full sun	4 to 6 inches	Spring	White	Prairie	Grass	Seeds, nesting cover, shelter
Blue grama	*Bouteloua gracilis*	Full sun	6 to 20 inches	Late summer/ fall	Yellow	Forest/prairie	Grass	Seeds
Slender wheatgrass	*Elymus trachycaulis*	Full sun to partial shade	2-4 ft	Summer	-	Woodlands	Grass	Seeds
Prairie Junegrass	*Koeleria macrantha*	Full sun	0.5 to 2 ft	Early summer	White	Prairie	Grass	Seeds, nesting cover, shelter
Western wheatgrass	*Pascopyrum smithii*	Full sun	1 to 3 ft	Mid-summer	Bue-green to gray	Prairie	Grass	Seeds, nesting cover, shelter
Little bluestem	*Schizachyrium scoparium*	Full sun	2 to 4 ft	Summer	Green, blue, red	Grassland, residential	Grass	Nesting cover, shelter, insects
Indiangrass	*Sorghastrum nutans*	Full sun to partial shade	3 to 8 ft	Late summer/ fall	Yellow/Bronze	Prairie	Grass	Seeds, nesting cover, shelter
Prairie cordgrass	*Spartina pectinata*	Full sun	3 to 8 ft	Summer	Yellow	Wetland	Grass	Seeds, Nesting cover, shelter
Prairie dropseed	*Sporobolus heterolepis*	Full sun	1 to 3 ft	Summer	Green, cream	Grassland, residential	Grass	Nesting cover, shelter, insects
Hardstem/ Softstem Bullrush	*Schoenopectus tabernaemontani, S. acutus*	Full sun	2 to 9 ft	Summer	Orange	Wetland	Rush	Seeds, nesting cover, shelter
Leadplant	*Amorpha canescens*	Full sun	1 to 3 ft	Summer	Purple	Prairie	Shrub	Insects
Kinnikinnik	*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*	Full sun to partial shade	2 in to 1 ft	Spring/summer	Pink	Forest	Shrub	Berries
Redosier dogwood	*Cornus sericea*	Full sun to partial shade	8 to 10 ft	Summer	White	Forest	Shrub	Berries, shelter
Common snowberry	*Symphoricarpos albus*	Full sun to partial shade	3 to 6 ft	Summer	Pink	Forest	Shrub	Berries

Common Name	Scientific Name	Sun	Height	Bloom Time	Bloom Color	Habitat	Form	Resource
Serviceberry/ Juneberry	*Amelanchier sp.*	Full sun to part shade	6 to 9 ft	Spring	White	Residential	Shrub	Berries
Aronia/black chokeberry	*Aronia melanocarpa*	Full sun to part shade	3 to 6 ft	Spring	White	Residential	Shrub	Berries
Elderberry	*Sambucus canadensis*	Full sun to part shade	5 to 12 ft	Early summer	White	Residential	Shrub	Berries
Chokecherry	*Prunus virginiana*	Full sun to shade	10 to 25 ft	Spring/ early summer	White	Prairie	Shrub/Tree	Berries
Common duckweed	*Lemna minor*	Full sun	1 to 2 mm	Rarely flowers	Green	Wetland	Wetland	Vegetative food
Longleaf pondweed	*Potamogeton nodosus*	Full sun to partial shade	1 to 3 ft	Spring/ summer	Green	Wetland	Wetland	Seeds, roots
Broadleaf arrowhead	*Sagittaria latifolia*	Full sun to partial shade	1 to 4 ft	Summer/ early fall	White	Wetland	Wetland	Seeds, shoots, tubers
Sago pondweed	*Stuckenia pectinata*	Full sun to partial shade	3 ft	Summer/ fall	Tan	Wetland	Wetland	Seeds, tubers
American eelgrass	*Vallisneria americana*	Full sun to partial shade	3 ft	Spring/ summer	Green, white	Wetland	Wetland	Seeds, tubers