Gardens that are good habitats for birds provide five things: food, water, shelter from predators, nesting material and nesting sites.

FOOD
Birds consume different types of food depending on species, time of year and who’s actually eating. For example, nearly the entire diet of a developing baby bird is insects. Therefore, it is important to encourage insects, especially caterpillars, in your garden. You can do this by not using pesticides and by letting some leaf litter accumulate on the ground. Adult birds also consume insects, as well as fruits, nuts, berries and/or seeds. Let plants go to seed before removing or deadheading them.

Annuals
_Amsinckia menziesii_ (fiddleneck)—Seeds are enjoyed by goldfinches
_Salvia columbariae_ (chia)—Nutritious seeds (nutlets)

Groundcovers
_Achillea millefolium_ (yarrow)—Seeds are eaten off the ground by doves
_Berberis aquifolium var. repens_ (creeping barberry)—Blue berries ripen in summer
_Fragaria_ spp. (strawberry)—Low growing with berries that are eaten by many different birds

Shrubs
_Atriplex lentiformis_ ssp. _breweri_ (quail bush)—Many birds eat seeds and salty leaves
_Berberis nevinii_ (Nevin’s barberry)—Red berries ripen in late spring/early summer
_Frangula_ and _Rhamnus_ spp. (redberry and coffeeberry)—Summer berries for jays and thrashers
_Heteromeles arbutifolia_ (toyon)—Red berries are an important winter food source
_Malosma laurina_ (laurel sumac)—Produces berries and attracts insects
_Prunus_ spp. (cherry)—Woodpeckers and jays eat the fruits whole; smaller birds pick pulp off the large seeds
_Ribes_ spp. (currant, gooseberry)—Berries are relished by many birds
_Rosa_ spp. (wild rose)—Nutritious hips enjoyed by quail and goldfinches
_Salvia_ spp. (sage)—Seeds for many small songbirds, especially goldfinches
_Symphoricarpos_ spp. (snowberry)—White berries are eaten by thrushes

Vines and Vine-Like Plants
_Lonicera_ spp. (honeysuckle, twinberry)—Many birds like the berries
_Rubus_ spp. (blackberry, salmonberry and thimbleberry)—Berries eaten by various birds
_Vitis_ spp. (wild grape)—Fruit appeals to many birds

Trees
_Juglans californica_ (Southern California black walnut)—Nuts are favored by jays
_Quercus_ spp. (oak)—A source of insects and acorns (especially for jays)
_Sambucus nigra_ ssp. _caerulea_ (elderberry)—A favorite for berries, as well as insects that it attracts

WATER Most birds drink water every day and also need water for bathing. Choose or build a shallow birdbath, pool or water feature that is easy to clean. Moving water attracts birds and keeps them healthy. More on the subject from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology,
www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/notes/BirdNote09_ProvideWater.pdf.
SHELTER, NESTING SITES AND NESTING MATERIAL

Shrubs and trees of differing heights and densities provide cover and safety for many different types of birds. A varied mix of plants also makes for an interesting garden!

Birds nest in all types of places. Towhees and quail build loose nests on or near the ground, within or underneath protective shrubs. Hummingbirds generally build nests in the crotches of branches, often 10-15 feet off the ground. Orioles create complex sock-like nests that hang on the outer branches of deciduous trees. Woodpeckers and wrens use cavities in tree trunks. When purchasing or building a nesting box, be sure it is the right style and size for each specific type of bird.

In California, nesting season for most birds ranges from March through August, and may begin as early as December. Therefore, try to avoid ANY unnecessary tree and shrub pruning during this time.

Different birds, depending on species, use different materials to construct their nests, including dead twigs, leaf litter, blades of grass, animal hair and bits of string. Hummingbirds use spider webs, lichen, pieces of leaves, and soft hairs from the underside of sycamore leaves. Leave fallen leaves and other debris in your garden to help out birds during nesting season.

Plants that Encourage and Support Nesting

*Arctostaphylos* spp. (manzanita)—Nesting sites
*Atriplex lentiformis* (quail bush)—Shelter
*Berberis (Mahonia)* spp. (barberry)—Prickly foliage provides protection
*Ceanothus* spp. (California lilac)—Visited by many birds for shelter
*Frangula (Rhamnus) californica* (coffeeberry)—Dense shelter
*Heteromeles arbutifolia* (toyon)—Shelter and nesting sites
*Lyonothamnus floribundus* spp. *aspleniiifolius* (Santa Cruz Island ironwood)—Bark for nesting material
*Platanus racemosa* (Western sycamore)—Nesting material and nesting sites for hummingbirds
*Prunus ilicifolia* spp. *ilicifolia*, *P. ilicifolia* spp. *lyonii* (holly-leaf cherry, Catalina cherry)—Excellent shelter
*Rosa* spp. (wild rose)—Prickly plants offer cover
*Quercus* spp. (oak)—Superior habitat for many birds; provides shelter and nesting material
Grasses, many species—Dry leaf blades are used for nesting material

BIRDS THAT EAT BERRIES

Band-tailed pigeon (*Patagioenas fasciata*)—Eats seed, as well as fruit; loves *Sambucus nigra* ssp. *caerulea* (Mexican elderberry); travels in flocks of 30 to 50 birds
California thrasher (*Toxostoma redivivum*)—Loves fruit and dense foliage; most common near wildlands
Cedar waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*)—Winter visitors that travel in large flocks; especially fond of *Heteromeles arbutifolia* (toyon)
Hermit thrush (*Catharus guttatus*)—Eats insects, as well as fruit of *Symphoricarpos* spp. (snowberry)
Hooded oriole (*Icterus cucullatus*)—Eats many berries and fruit
Phainopepla (*Phainopepla nitens*)—A summer visitor from the Sonoran desert; loves berries, especially *Sambucus nigra* ssp. *caerulea* (blue elderberry)
Western tanager (*Piranga ludoviciiana*)—An insect eater that also eats fruit, such as *Ribes aureum* var. *aureum* (golden currant)

BIRDS THAT EAT SEEDS

Black-headed grosbeak (*Pheucticus melanocephalus*)—Spring to mid-summer visitors; fond of sunflowers
California quail (*Callipepla californica*)—*Atriplex lentiformis* ssp. *breweri* (quail bush) is a major food source
House finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*)—One of our most common seed eaters
Lesser goldfinch (*Spinus psaltria*)—Especially enjoy *Cirsium* (thistle) and *Amsinckia* (fiddleneck)
Mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*)—Year-round seed eaters
Oak titmouse (*Baeolophus inornatus*)—Need oaks, such as *Quercus agrifolia* (coast live oak), to survive
Western scrub-jay (*Aphelocoma californica*)—They bury caches of acorns throughout the yard
White crowned sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*)—Fall-to-spring visitors; favor *Cirsium* spp. (thistle) seeds

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