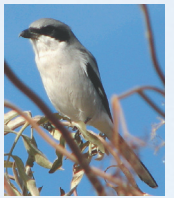




Optimizing Hedgerows for Birds

Planning and Management



1 Hedgerows support beneficial birds and can help with more pest control

More insects pests can be consumed by birds near hedgerows than in fields with bare or weedy edges. More avian predators are in hedgerows than in weedy margins, in part because the habitat is present throughout the seasons, as opposed to roadside weeds which only flower once a year.

2 Hedgerows are not a magnet for pests

Pest birds and rodents do not increase in numbers when hedgerows are present. Both are usually found throughout the crop in the same numbers as in hedgerows. In some cases, edge habitat harbors pest birds, but they may also consume pest insects. Hedgerows do not cause a noticeable increase in rodents or pathogen prevalence of any that are present.

3 Link hedgerows with other semi-natural and natural habitat

While birds can fly easily from one habitat patch to the next, they do better with continuous cover that provides safety from predators. Hedgerows' value to birds increases when combined with well-vegetated ditches, field borders, pastures, riparian areas or other natural areas, also because of better access to food.

4 Provide structural complex vegetation

Using trees, shrubs, flowers and grasses with their variations in height, gives a diverse, structural composition to a hedgerow. Different birds use the upper, middle and lower parts of the canopy and the ground.

5 Supply plant diversity

Increasing the diversity of plants can provide year-round availability of food. Especially important is that the plants support insects, which are fed to the majority of nestlings during breeding season. Fruit, nuts, seeds and nectar provide sustenance during other times of the year.

6 Use similar plants found in birds' natural breeding habitat

Woodland bird species prefer tall, wide hedgerows with lots of native trees; woodland edge and shrub bird species prefer low, wide and often dense hedgerows; and grassland species prefer hedgerows of native forbs and grasses. Some birds are more dependent on the surrounding landscape.

7 Maintain cover in the base of the hedgerow

Avoid excessive cutting and herbicides, and manage grazing to conserve low growing vegetation at the base of the hedgerow. Dense vegetation cover there increases the abundance and diversity of birds and their nesting sites.

8 Hedgerows make a difference in simple landscapes, if not too isolated

Installing hedgerows on farms with less natural vegetation in the landscape gives the most bang for the buck when it comes to increasing bird diversity. However, because isolated hedgerows can also reduce bird survival it is best to connect hedgerows to existing natural habitat, to plant hedgerows on several fields, or to coordinate with neighbors to plant several hedgerows in an area. Providing any habitat on any farm, though, will likely still be a net gain for birds.

9 Plant larger hedgerows to support more birds

Tall, wide hedgerows with a large volume support more birds than short, narrow ones. The larger the hedgerow the more it provides shelter from harsh weather, roosting and nesting sites, and helps reduce the incidence of predation.

10 Support presence and abundance of old, dead or decaying trees

Trees provide nest cavities, foraging opportunities and perches. As snags decay and drop limbs, additional cavities are created. Many native tree species support critical insect food for birds. Oak and willow trees support over 500 and 400 species of caterpillars, respectively, in the Eastern U.S. Retaining large old trees in orchards attract birds that eat pests from orchard trees and increase pest reduction.

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