

FEATURES

# Attracting wildlife to your yard

By KRIS SOOKDEO

**OBSERVING** wildlife can be a very rewarding and enjoyable experience. But you need not go into the depths of the forests and swamps to do so (although you are heartily encouraged to do just that at some point!). You can easily attract wildlife to your home without much cost or effort.

Animals have two basic requirements, food and suitable habitat. If you provide these, they will come. Birds, being extremely mobile, are perhaps the easiest wild animals to lure into your backyard and chances are you already have them around to some extent. The best way to attract birds is to provide them with food.

Of course, if you have the space, planting trees is the natural way to attract birds. A pommerac, banana or mango tree will do an excellent job. Trees with suitable flowers will also attract nectar feeding birds. The downside to this, of course, is that you have to wait for the tree to be in fruit or flower. For this reason, bird feeders are often used.

A simple bird feeder is very easy to construct and there are many designs possible, but an ordinary plank of wood will suffice. Placement of your bird feeder is very important. It should be away from the house (and any glass windows into which birds might accidentally fly) and close to a tree or shrub. But even without vegetation nearby, the birds will be able to find and use the feeder.



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The feeder can be placed at whatever height makes it easier for you to both enjoy the birds and service the bird feeder. Place it in view of your porch or window where you can observe the birds comfortably.

The next decision is what to feed them. Fruit will attract a range of species and is your best bet. A ripe mango or banana works best and will have your garden full with tanagers, orioles, kiskadees and bananaquits in no time. Grains and bread are not as effective but will attract a few species that fruit would not, such as doves and grackles. Foreign birdfeeder mixtures, such as suet or bird seed mixes, tend to be ineffective in TT.

Hummingbird feeders are also quite popular in TT. These contain a sugary solution and, as the name implies, are used to attract and feed hummingbirds. Other birds, such as bananaquits, and nectar-feeding bats may also visit these feeders if the design allows them. There are strict rules which must be followed with respect to the solution used in these feeders; the basic solution should be one part white granulated sugar to four parts water, boiled and cooled. Brown sugar should not be used. Additionally, everything must be kept very sanitary and sterilised frequently. You can also attract hummingbirds by planting the right vegetation in your yard. Ixora and bottlebrush are both great plants for this. Native plants you can use include calliandra (powder puffs) and vervain.

The same fruit on the birdfeeder can attract other animals. Fruit-eating bats will come to overripe bananas on the feeder and you might

even have a maniocou pass by at night. If you have dogs as pets you might also have noticed the birds raiding the dog's bowl for dog chow or table scraps. However, you should not leave dog food lying around. While the birds will enjoy this, it is likely to encourage rats in your home – wildlife you do not want around.

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FEEDERS or fruits should be placed at whatever height to make it easier for you to enjoy the view.

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FEATURES

# Butterflies easy to attract

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Other than food, a nice way to attract birds is to have a bird bath. Again, this can be very simple and a clay saucer works fine. Keep it off the ground (about three feet) and close to a safe spot where birds can fly to hide or dry off. The water should be kept shallow (about half-inch is good). If it is too deep, birds will be nervous about using it.

Butterflies are also easy to attract to gardens. Planting a range of flowering shrubs works best and a hedge of lantana, zinnias, or vervain will work wonders. Overripe fruit also attracts several species of butterflies. This can be placed on the ground and away from where birds might disturb it. The stronger the smell the better!

If you wish to attract smaller critters a nice idea is to leave a large pile of branches or logs in a quiet corner of the yard. Various invertebrates will soon move in. Larger animals such as lizards, snakes and even mongoose may also use these piles.



THE best way to attract birds is to provide them with food.

You can even attract some aquatic wildlife if you keep artificial pools. A half drum of water can be stocked with water plants and native fishes such as guppies (to keep the mosquitoes away). This can attract dragonflies, diving beetles and even small tree frogs.

Of course, once you attract all this interesting wildlife, you now have the pleasure of

observing them! Keep a small notepad to write down the different types of birds you see and what food items they like best.

Also, try taking a walk in your wildlife-friendly yard at night to see which animals become active after dark. You might very well realise you have a passion for natural history that you didn't know you had before!

For more information on our natural environment contact the T&T Field Naturalists' Club at [admin@tfn.org](mailto:admin@tfn.org), our website at [www.tfn.org](http://www.tfn.org), Facebook and YouTube pages. The club's next monthly meeting will be on August 13 at StMary's College, Port-of-Spain and the lecture is titled "Eco-tourism and conservation in T&T" by Robyn Bath-Rosenfeld, AWNC.



THE bird feeder should be away from the house and close to a tree or shrub. The birds and butterflies will be able to find and use the feeder.

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