

# Taking Flight! Conservation Challenge

## Birds and their Ecosystems

Birds of the rainforests, like in Asia, live in harmony with their ecosystem. The plants help give birds food, nesting materials, and shelter while many of the birds help to disperse plant seeds to help the rainforest grow. Some plants and birds form a symbiotic relationship where the seeds of the plant cannot grow unless they have been first eaten by a bird; and some birds have become particular in what they eat so they only eat the fruit or seeds of one particular plant.

Utah is home to over 400 species of birds. Just like the birds in our Expedition Asia exhibit, they are an integral part of their ecosystem. Some species will eat seeds and fruits to help disperse the next generation of Utah plants. Others eat insects to make sure that insect populations do not get too high, including insects that might harm us like mosquitoes and biting flies. Some of the larger species eat fish and small animals to help keep the prey animal populations in check.

## Is there a way that we can help the birds in Utah?

### Utah Bird Challenge #1

Many people enjoy feeding birds whether it is in your local park or your own backyard. Birds have small digestive systems to help them eat fast while being lightweight to fly. Seeds, nuts, and fruits are the best things to feed birds like finches, sparrows, blackbirds, and woodpeckers in your backyards. If you want to feed ducks and geese at your local park (as long as it is allowed), you should also feed them seeds and fruit. Birds cannot digest complex starchy foods like bread and crackers, and over time, these foods can make birds sick. Also avoid feeding birds seeds and nuts that contain excess sugar and salt that could also harm birds. Some of the best foods to feed birds are unsalted sunflower seeds, unsalted peanuts, millet seed, cut grapes, suet, Nyjer seed, safflower seed, dried corn, raspberries, blackberries, peas, and chopped apples and oranges.

### Utah Bird Challenge #2

Ecosystems have a balance amongst the different animals that live there. Birds eat insects and plants, but those birds are also food for predators like snakes, coyotes, and even larger birds. Unfortunately, there is an introduced predator that is eating too many birds: house cats. In the US alone, over 1 billion birds are killed annually by house cats. If you have a pet cat, here are some challenges to consider when it comes to your cat and wild birds:

- If you can, keep your cat indoors at all times.
- If your cat likes to be outside, make sure to supervise them when they are outdoors so they do not harm birds and so that your cat can stay safe as well!