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Worms

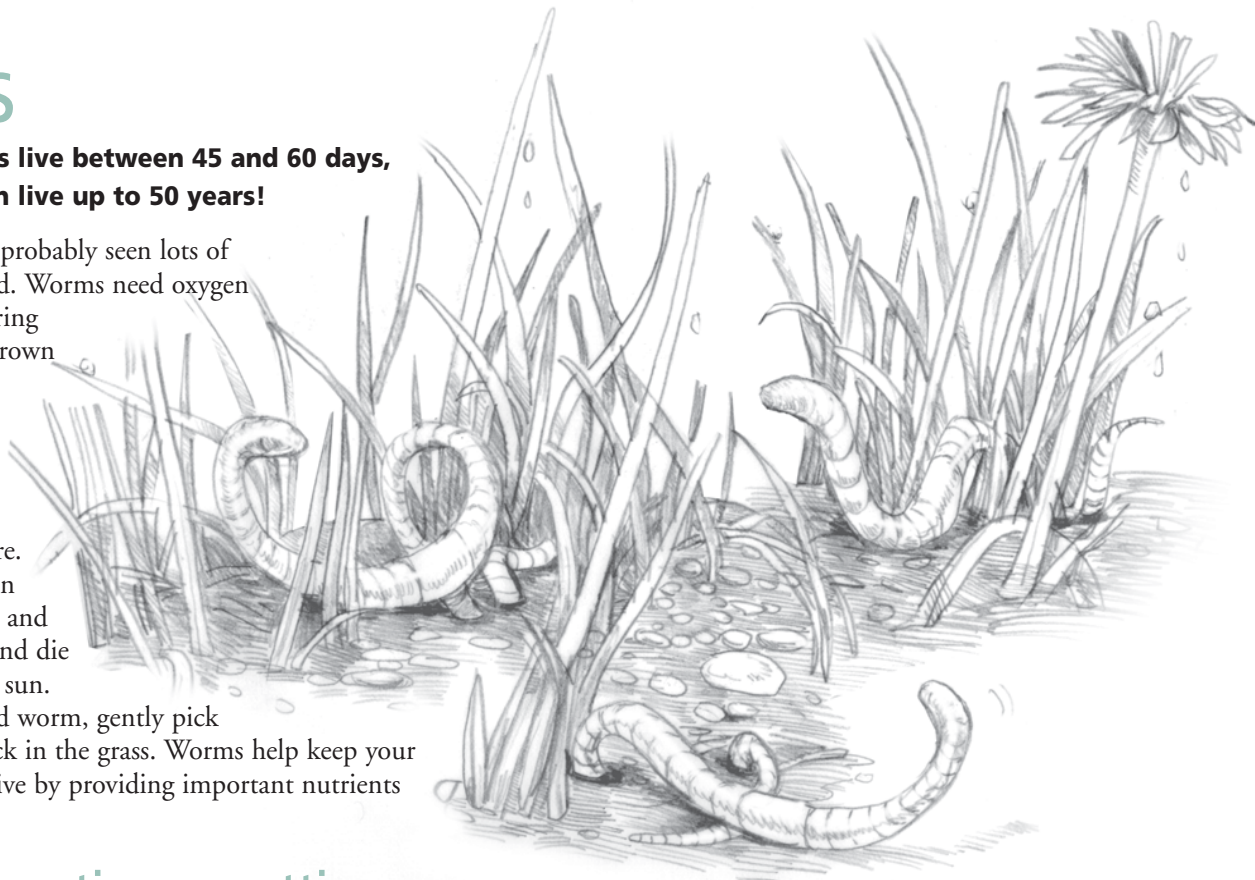
While most worms live between 45 and 60 days, certain species can live up to 50 years!

After rainfall, you've probably seen lots of worms on the ground. Worms need oxygen and must surface during storms or they will drown as the soil becomes waterlogged.

Sometimes worms will crawl onto the sidewalk or driveway and are stranded there.

Worms need to live in a moist environment and will quickly dry up and die if they remain in the sun.

If you find a stranded worm, gently pick it up and place it back in the grass. Worms help keep your flowers and plants alive by providing important nutrients to their roots.



Vermicomposting – putting worms to work

Composting is the natural breakdown of organic matter, like potato peels and apple cores, into nutrient-rich soil. You can reduce the amount of garbage that ends up in landfills and produce fertilizer for your garden by using a backyard composter. If you have limited space in your backyard, worms can do the work more quickly. Redworms or 'red wigglers' are super garbage eaters, consuming their body weight each day — that's as if you were to eat 250 hamburgers a day! These wiggling wonders can convert kitchen waste into rich, fertilized soil in about two months.

For more information about vermicomposting, visit the Recycling Council of Ontario's website at http://www.rco.on.ca/factsheet/fs_e05.html



To learn more about backyard critters check out these websites:

Natural Resources Canada:
<http://www.glf.cfs.nrcan.gc.ca/landscape/froge.html>

Nature Watch:
<http://www.naturewatch.ca/english/frogwatch/on/>

The Toronto Zoo – Adopt-A-Pond Program:
<http://www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/index.asp>

Naturalizing your backyard

As you are naturalizing your backyard, you might also attract chipmunks, squirrels and rabbits with cobs of corn or sunflower seeds. Chipmunks are very tame and can be trained to take peanuts out of your hand. Remember, though, that these creatures are still wild so always be careful when handling them, or any other wildlife. They may be in your backyard but they are also in their natural habitat. Be sure to thoroughly wash your hands when you go inside, especially after touching any animals.

Although some creatures may sting or bite, most will not bother you unless they feel threatened, so always handle them gently, or better yet, observe them from a distance.

Answers: These creatures in this Nature Note are insects: moths, mosquitoes, dragonflies, ants, harvestmen/daddy-long-legs and butterflies. These creatures are not insects: frogs, hummingbirds, robins, worms, Baltimore orioles, hawks, bats, toads, salamanders, newts, turtles, squirrels, rabbits and chipmunks.



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Printing: DTP Inc.

Think you have to go to the zoo to see wild creatures? Think again and go Wilderness Walking in your own Backyard

Whether you live in the country or the city you can observe, sketch and photograph wildlife. Grab a magnifying glass, some jars with holes punched in the lids, paper and pencils, and maybe even a camera, then make the trek to your backyard in search of wild things.

Do you have a fancy for frogs? A high regard for hummingbirds? An interest in insects? Read on to learn how to attract flying, crawling, slithering, jumping and burrowing wildlife to your back door.

Planting native species (instead of grass) is one of the best ways to attract and keep wildlife.

Animals need habitat where they can live, eat and reproduce. Planting trees, shrubs and flowers will provide this necessary habitat, while grass does not. In a large backyard, eastern white cedar, white spruce, oak, mountain ash and maple trees can provide shade and protection for birds, mammals and insects. In smaller yards, plant shrubs such as dogwoods, high-bush cranberry, serviceberry or staghorn sumac to provide cover and habitat for wildlife.

Want to attract wildlife at night?

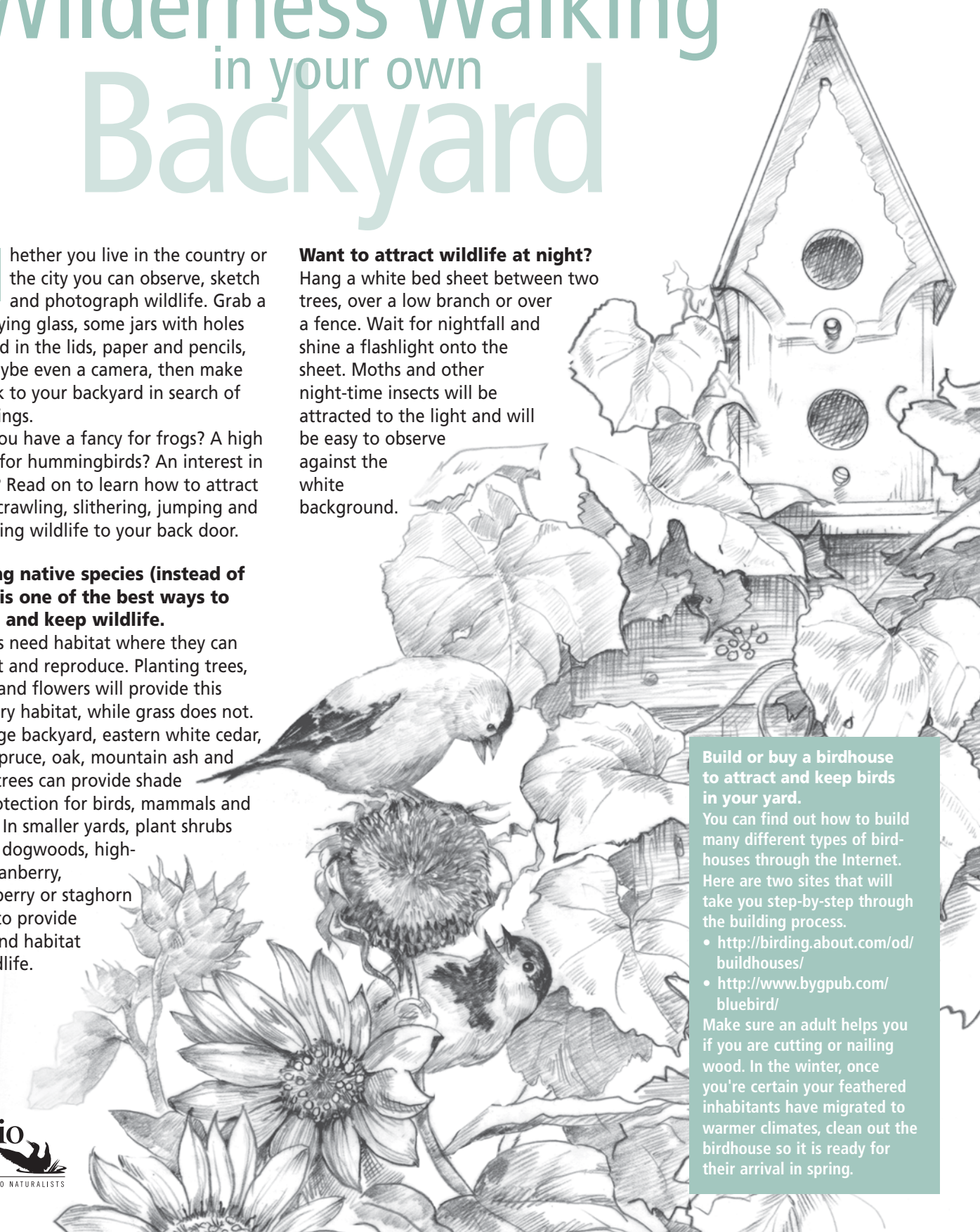
Hang a white bed sheet between two trees, over a low branch or over a fence. Wait for nightfall and shine a flashlight onto the sheet. Moths and other night-time insects will be attracted to the light and will be easy to observe against the white background.

Build or buy a birdhouse to attract and keep birds in your yard.

You can find out how to build many different types of birdhouses through the Internet. Here are two sites that will take you step-by-step through the building process.

- <http://birding.about.com/od/buildhouses/>
- <http://www.byggpub.com/bluebird/>

Make sure an adult helps you if you are cutting or nailing wood. In the winter, once you're certain your feathered inhabitants have migrated to warmer climates, clean out the birdhouse so it is ready for their arrival in spring.



Supplement to ON NATURE, Autumn 2006





Everyone loves a dip in the pool to cool off in the summer and birds are no different

You can easily make a birdbath using a large clay plant saucer or metal pie plate. If you have cats in the neighbourhood, you should suspend the birdbath using two, one-metre long pieces of strong binder twine or rope. Place the two pieces of rope in a large X on the floor. Tie the two ropes into a knot in the middle of the X. Place the plate on top of the ropes so that the knot is in the middle. Gather the ends of the ropes and tie a double knot. Hang the saucer from a large tree branch and fill the birdbath with water. Your birdbath is safe enough for small birds to frolic in but take it down during storms so that it doesn't fall and break.

It is important to clean birdbaths every day to prevent the water from becoming stagnant, the perfect breeding ground for mosquitoes and West Nile Virus.

Most birds can't resist the sound of running water. Carefully punch a very small hole in the bottom of a large plastic pop bottle. Cover the hole with your finger and fill the bottle. Replace the cap and hang the bottle by the neck from a tree branch directly over the birdbath. Unscrew the cap just enough so that water will slowly drip out of the hole in the bottom of the bottle and land in the bath below. A dripping birdbath also attracts dragonflies, which eat mosquitoes and blackflies. Dragonflies fly forwards, backwards and can even hover like tiny helicopters.



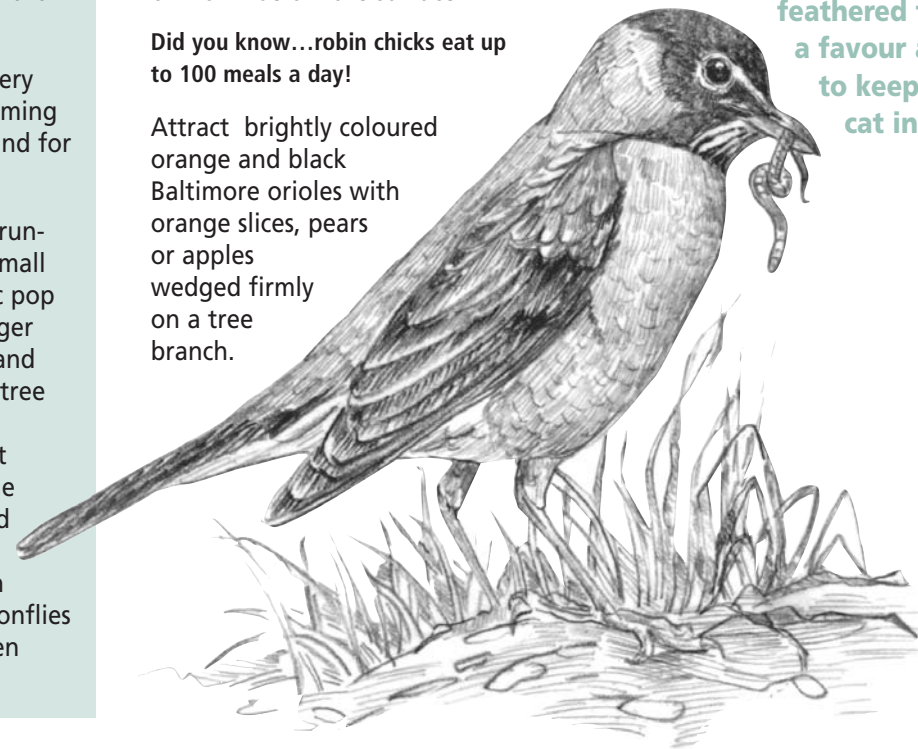
Hummingbirds are the world's smallest bird

Like dragonflies, they can fly forwards, backwards and hover. A hummingbird's wings beat up to 200 times per second, a feat that takes a lot of energy! To satisfy their incredible metabolism, hummingbirds need to consume up to eight times their body weight in water and nectar daily. Planting red tubular flowers such as trumpet honeysuckle, bee-balm and cardinal flower will provide a natural food source for these tiny birds. You can also buy a hummingbird feeder to help supplement their diet. To make hummingbird food for your feeder, ask an adult to help you boil 125 ml of sugar with 500 ml of water until the sugar dissolves. Cool this mixture and store in a tightly sealed jar in the refrigerator. Hang the feeder in the shade and clean it every two to three days to prevent mould and mildew from forming.

Robins, the first sign of spring, are plump birds with a red breast and brown feathers. You can find them hopping along the ground, searching for worms and insects during the fall and winter. You might see a robin with its head cocked to one side with its 'ear' towards the ground. It is not actually listening for worms, but instead looking intently at the ground for any slight movements in the soil, an indication that there is a tasty bug or worm below the surface.

Did you know...robin chicks eat up to 100 meals a day!

Attract brightly coloured orange and black Baltimore orioles with orange slices, pears or apples wedged firmly on a tree branch.



These birds may also pay a visit to your hummingbird feeder as they also enjoy sugary sweet treats.

Keep our feathered friends safe by planting shrubs near the bird feeder for cover. Birds can hide from cats and predatory birds like hawks among the branches. Nearly one third of all bird deaths are caused by domestic cat attacks. Please do our feathered friends a favour and try to keep your cat indoors.

Don't get bugged by insects

Some people have a phobia of insects, but once you understand these crawling creatures, they aren't so creepy after all

All insects have common features and characteristics. They have six legs, three body segments (head, thorax and abdomen), two antennae and one or two sets of wings. Using this information, circle the names of the creatures mentioned in this Nature Note which are insects and underline those that are not.



Some people think ants are pests and put out poison to kill ant colonies. But ants play a very important role as nature's garbage collectors. Ants are always searching for dead insects and bits of food to take back to their nests, reducing the amount of detritus (dead material) that could cause disease. If there are too many ants in your house, try this trick: put a little sugar water in a shallow dish outside in the garden. The ants will prefer to feast on that and will leave your kitchen alone!

Did you know...ants are the most numerous species on earth; their combined weight is more than the weight of all human beings on the planet.

Harvestmen, or daddy-long-legs as they are also known, are not spiders as is commonly thought, but insects. Spiders have two distinct body parts while these creatures have only one. Look under rocks and in moist environments for these small creatures. Don't worry, they won't bite you. Harvestmen only chomp on other insects when they are hunting for food.

In a bowl, mix together a mashed banana, a little fruit juice and some sugar until it is thick and gooey. Use a paint brush to spread this mixture onto a tree or a fence post. Flying and crawling insects won't be able to resist this tasty treat. You can examine these tiny creatures while they feed on the fruit.

Flowers such as yarrow, dill, sunflowers and asters, Butterfly bush and monarda (sometimes called bee balm) will attract butterflies to your yard. Milkweed is the only host plant that the Monarch butterfly will use to lay her eggs and that the caterpillar will eat on its journey to adulthood. Butterflies like warmth, so plant these flowers in direct sunlight.

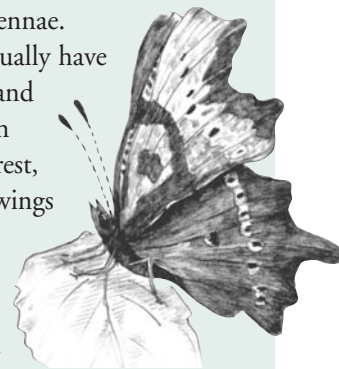


What is the difference between a butterfly and a moth?



Butterflies are usually found in the daytime while moths are usually out at night. Moths have thicker, furrer bodies than butterflies and feathered antennae.

Butterflies usually have slender bodies and thin antennae with small knobs at the end. At rest, most moths will fold their wings over their backs while butterflies will either hold them upright over their backs or open them to bask in the sunlight.



At night, moths, not butterflies, are king of the skies. Although many people think moths only eat fabric, they actually pollinate many plants. Moths, in turn, are prey for bats.

Did you know...a single bat eats between 500 and 1,000 mosquitoes in one hour!



Frogs and toads

The lightning-fast tongues of frogs and toads means no insect is safe. The American toad is about nine centimetres long and usually brown in colour but can also be grey, red or even green. If you live near a woodlot or running water, you may encounter other amphibians or reptiles such as spring peepers, wood frogs, bullfrogs, grey tree frogs or even salamanders, newts and turtles.

Toads and frogs have thin skin that is sensitive to heat. Protect your web-footed friends from the sun using a medium sized clay pot. Place one edge of the pot on a rock so that frogs can easily hop in and out. Eventually, a toad or frog may take up residence there and return day after day to escape the hot sun.