

How To Increase Beneficial Wildlife Around Swine Facilities

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Introduction

While production, biosecurity, and maintaining environmental quality should be primary functions in the design of swine barns, there are steps you can take to promote wildlife around your facilities as well. Many of these steps are simple, cheap, and do not interfere with pork production. In addition to the aesthetic value, managing for the right kind of animals can help reduce vermin like rats, blackbirds, and flies and can also improve recreational opportunities like hunting and bird watching. This How-To fact sheet lists several easy steps you can take to increase the wildlife around your swine facilities, along with some helpful resources to help you complete these projects.

Increasing Raptors

Raptors are birds of prey like hawks and owls. These birds frequently prey on small rodents like rats and mice. Also, Cooper's Hawks and other bird-eating raptors can help to discourage roosting colonies of pigeons, starlings, and blackbirds, which may carry diseases that can be transferred to your swine herd.

Ways to Increase Raptors

1. Installing raptor perches
 - a. Perches consist of a pole with two cross pieces and look similar to a utility pole.
 - b. They should stand 15 to 20 feet above the ground.
 - c. Place perches in open spaces overlooking areas where problem birds feed or roost.
2. Installing owl nest boxes



- a. Construct a 14 x 14 x 28 inch box with an 8 inch diameter hole 7 inches from the front from the bottom. Slant the roof 30°.
- b. Hang a 1 x 7 inch piece of cloth from the hole inside the box to assist fledging young.
- c. Hang the box at least 15 feet above ground in a large tree.

Attracting Insect Eating Birds

Many birds are insectivorous, meaning their diets consist mainly of bugs. Some common examples are the Eastern Bluebird, Barn Swallow, and Purple Martin. These birds are skilled at catching flying insects on the wing and a single bird can eat over 1,000 insects each day.



Ways to Increase Bug-Eating Birds

1. Bluebird nest boxes
 - a. Construct a 5 ½ x 5 ½ x 12 inch box with a hinged door on one side.
 - b. Center a 1 ½ inch hole 2 inches from the top on the front of the box.
 - c. Hang the single box on a metal pole 5 feet from the ground.
2. Swallow nest sites
 - a. Swallows will show up on their own and build nests out of mud on ledges protected from the weather.
 - b. If you leave the nests they build in acceptable locations around your facilities the swallows will return every year.
3. Purple Martin Houses
 - a. A variety of Purple Martin houses are available for purchase and some work better for excluding house sparrows and starlings, which compete for nesting spots.
 - b. Purple martins favor houses in open areas near water.
 - c. Hang martin houses at least 15 feet high and clean them out every fall when the birds leave.
 - d. Visit www.purplemartins.com for more detailed information on constructing martin houses.

Bat Houses



Although bats have an undeserved reputation as dangerous bloodsuckers, they in fact pose almost no safety risks if not handled. Also, while bats can carry rabies, it is very rare to encounter a rabid bat. They have voracious appetites for insects, and are mother nature's bug zapper. The Big Brown Bat, which commonly uses bat houses, can eat up to 7,000 mosquitoes in a single night.

Visit batconservation.org for free plans to build your own bat house. There are also instructions for placing a bat house based on what part of the United States you live in.

Landscaping with Native Plants

Landscaping around your facilities can be used to control runoff, provide a windbreak, or used to hide eyesores. Native plants produce beautiful flowers, plenty of food and cover for wildlife, and have evolved to thrive in the conditions of your region. This means that once they are established, they may withstand drought, cold, and disease better than many exotic landscaping plants. When choosing what varieties to plant around your facility, consider using plants native to your area and you should locate a local nursery that specializes in plants native to your region. A comprehensive directory of these nurseries along with other helpful information can be found at www.plantnative.org.

What Are Some Common Native Wildlife Plants?

Grasses:

Sideoats gramma, big bluestem, buffalo grass

Wildflowers / vines:

Virginia creeper, American honeysuckle, sunflowers, harebell

Shrubs:

Wild plum, chokecherry, viburnums, blackberry

Trees:

Redcedar, crabapple, dogwood, black cherry

Attracting Other Birds

While the grain present around your facilities will attract pest birds like starlings, house finches, pigeons, and cowbirds there are other colorful and interesting birds you may actually want around your property. Songbirds, like goldfinches, nuthatches, and chickadees can be attracted with thistle or suet feeders, while ornately colored hummingbirds can be lured next to your kitchen or office window with hummingbird feeders.

- Hang thistle feeders to help exclude starlings and blackbirds
- If you choose to install raptor perches, do not place bird feeders within sight of them.
- Keep cats inside!! Cats are responsible for killing hundreds of millions of songbirds every year.



- You can attract hummingbirds in the summer with hummingbird feeders. Fill them with a solution of 4 parts water to 1 part cane sugar.
- Adding a heated bird bath near your feeders can increase the amount of birds you see year round.

Farmland Habitat Management

Don't stop with the areas around your facilities. You can make small changes on your woodlots, pastures, row crop fields, and wetlands to increase nongame wildlife as well as game species like bobwhite quail, ring-necked pheasants, wild turkeys and white-tailed deer for viewing and hunting opportunities.

Allow 10-15 foot wide fencerows to grow into herbaceous and woody cover. This provides food, shelter, and travel corridors for quail, pheasants, and deer. The same goes for field borders, which are often low-yield areas and can provide a buffer between fields and forest cover. These areas will also provide crucial nesting and brooding habitat for game birds.

For more information on farmland habitat management visit the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources' Habitat How-To's website at <http://fw.ky.gov/howto.asp>.

Summary

Having the right animals take refuge around your barns can help reduce pest species and diseases on your farm. Many of the projects described could be put together in an afternoon with scraps you may already have around the farm or require only small changes to everyday operations. Kids love these kinds of projects too, and they make great Boy Scout, Girl Scout, and 4-H projects. Contact your local state wildlife agency for more information or to speak with a wildlife biologist.

Additional Information

Woodworking Plans:

- <http://mdc.mo.gov/nathis/woodwork>
- Woodworking for Wildlife: Homes for Birds and Mammals. By Carrol L. Henderson

Bird Feeding Tips:

- www.audubon.org
- www.dnr.state.mn.us/birdfeeding/index.html

Native Landscaping

- <http://www.plantnative.org/>
- <http://www.wildflower.org/plants/>

State Wildlife Agencies:

This website lists all State Wildlife agency websites:

- www.tc.umn.edu/~devo0028/gov.htm

Select University's with Extension Programs – Many other universities have wildlife extension programs. Check with you state's land grant institution if they are not listed below.

- Southeast – North Carolina State University
www.ces.ncsu.edu/nreos/wild/wildlife/index.html
- Northeast – Penn State
<http://rnnext.cas.psu.edu/>
- Midwest – University of Wisconsin
http://forestandwildlifeecology.wisc.edu/wl_extension/extension.html
- Southwest – New Mexico State University
<http://aces.nmsu.edu/academics/fws/--extension.html>
- Northwest – Oregon State University
<http://fw.oregonstate.edu/Extension%20&%20Outreach/Wildlife%20Extension/index.htm>