

BUILDING FOR THE BUNTINGS

A Guide to Attracting Painted Buntings



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BUNTING BIO

Painted Buntings (*Passerina ciris*) are unlike any bird species that visit this area. With their blue head, red belly, and green backs, the colorful males lead many people to believe they've seen an escaped pet. This striking appearance makes them one of the most sought after birds by novice and avid birders alike. Unfortunately, Painted Buntings have seen a large decline in their population and become a species of concern for many conservation organizations (IUCN, US FWS, SCDNR).

Breeding Bird Survey data indicates that the eastern and western combined populations of Painted Buntings declined over 60% between 1966 and 1995 (Meyers 2004), the equivalent of 3.5% annually (Sauer et al. 2007). While declines in the populations are attributed to Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*) parasitism and trapping for the pet trade, habitat loss is considered to be the main influence. The Eastern population of Painted Buntings shares our affinity to maritime areas, preferring shrub-scrub maritime habitats along the coastal areas of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Unfortunately, as we develop these areas, we often remove the shrub-scrub habitat that is so important to their survival.



IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME

Preservation of available land and restoration of developed home sites (especially replacing lost shrub-scrub species) may play a vital role in the recovery of this species. As Painted Buntings and humans continue to vie for similar habitats, the Bunting population will probably continue to decline. Moreover, as our development removes understory and opens more land, we attract more Brown-headed Cowbirds. By restoring vegetation, we could improve the bunting's habitat quality, reduce cowbird parasitism, and promote successful nesting – potentially preventing a further decline of the population on Kiawah Island. Buntings used roughly ½-2 acres on Kiawah, allowing a small number of residents to have a positive impact on their survival. Here are some tips on how you can improve habitat for Painted Buntings on your home site:

- Preserve Understory
- Plant Natives
- Remove Alien Invaders
- Save the Snags
- Go Wild, Prune Less
- Lose the Lawn
- Prevent Window Injuries
- Become a Citizen Scientist



If You Build it, They Will Come...

PRESERVE UNDERSTORY

Understory vegetation is vital habitat to Painted Buntings. This vegetation layer (usually vegetation from 1-15 feet high) is extremely important for Painted Buntings survival and reproduction. In fact, female and young buntings spend most of their time in these areas. In a study conducted on Kiawah Island, high densities of small woody stems were typical in the areas that bunting inhabited and nested. What's a small woody stem? Basically, if you can grab a plant stem and still touch the tips of your pointer finger and thumb together, then that would be falls into the category of small woody stem. Many of the small woody stems were:



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- **Wax Myrtle**
- **Yaupon Holly**
- **Eastern Red Cedar**
- young **Live Oaks**
- young **pin**s (**Slash & Loblolly**)





PLANT NATIVES & REMOVE INVASIVES

Not only do native plants require less maintenance and costs, but Painted Buntings on Kiawah Island also use them more than non-native species. The top native species used by Painted Buntings were **Live Oak, Wax Myrtle, Slash Pine, Eastern Red Cedar, Loblolly Pine, Seaside Oxeye, snags, and Yaupon Holly**. When providing habitat for buntings, choose some of these plants.

Invasive species should be removed. Two of the most troublesome species on Kiawah Island, SC are Chinese Tallow Tree (AKA Popcorn Tree) and Autumn-olive. These species pose a threat because they are highly invasive, displacing many of our native species (invasive.org). Replace Chinese Tallow Trees with species used more commonly by Painted Buntings, like Loblolly or Slash Pines. Moreover, opt for Wax Myrtle instead of Autumn-olive.

SAVE A SNAG

Snags, or standing dead trees, are important for many wildlife species. They provide shelter for cavity nesters, areas for perching, and food sources from insects and fungi that decompose these trees. Removing snags can cause many of the cavity nesting and insect eating birds to leave the area. This may result in an increase of insect populations, as their main predators have been departed. Male buntings often use them for perching and singing, and female buntings were sometimes observed perching on snags to feed fledglings.



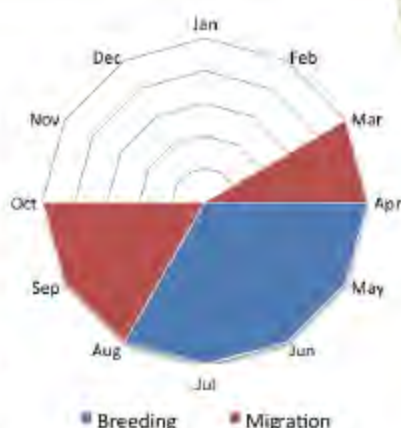
Sarah Latshaw ©

GO WILD, PRUNE LESS

When possible, Go Wild, and allow vegetation to grow and prune itself naturally. Not pruning can save you time and money. For plants that need to be pruned, make sure you **prune before or after the nesting season of the Painted Bunting**.

LOSE THE LAWN

Most lawns require time, money, and lots of maintenance. In the process of maintaining them, lawns contribute to air, water, and noise pollution. To keep them green, fertilizers and pesticides usually have to be used. Some fertilizers and pesticides can kill insects, decreasing food availability for the Buntings (and other species), or can lead to toxicity. Painted Buntings are rarely seen using open areas of grass or sod. These areas should be planted with understory vegetation when possible.





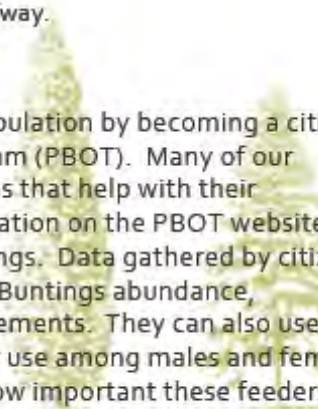
PREVENT WINDOW INJURIES

The Fish and Wildlife Service estimates 100 million to 1 billion birds are killed each year from flying into windows. Glass often reflects what is outside, confusing birds who think they are flying toward trees, shrubs, etc. Even those that fly off after the impact, may die later from internal bleeding. You can do some simple things to prevent the death of Painted Buntings (and other birds) from window strikes:

- Place feeders far away from or as close to windows as possible (>30 ft. or <3 ft.)
- Add netting or a screen (>5/8 in. in diameter) at least 2-3 inches from glass to the outside of your windows
- Add transparent film to the outside of the window, making it non-reflective
- Make vertical lines on the outside window (no more than 10 cm apart), using wood, tape strips, soap, or paint
- Close outside shutters
- Add decals, stickers or sun catchers
- Leave vertical blinds down and only opened halfway.

BECOME A CITIZEN SCIENTIST

You can help monitor the Painted Bunting population by becoming a citizen scientist for the Painted Bunting Observer Team (PBOT). Many of our buntings have unique color band combinations that help with their identification. By reporting this band combination on the PBOT website, you can help biologist learn more about the buntings. Data gathered by citizen scientists, help the biologists understand the Buntings abundance, distribution, and detect patterns in their movements. They can also use this information to determine difference in feeder use among males and females or adult and juvenile, as well as understand how important these feeders are to the Buntings.



PLANT:

- Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*)
- Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana*)
- Loblolly Pine (*Pinus taeda*)
- Redbay (*Persea borbonia*)
- Slash Pine (*Pinus elliottii*)
- Wax Myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*)
- Yaupon Holly (*Ilex vomitoria*)

AVOID:

- Autumn-olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*)
- Chinese Tallow Tree (*Triadica sebifera*)



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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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