



adventures

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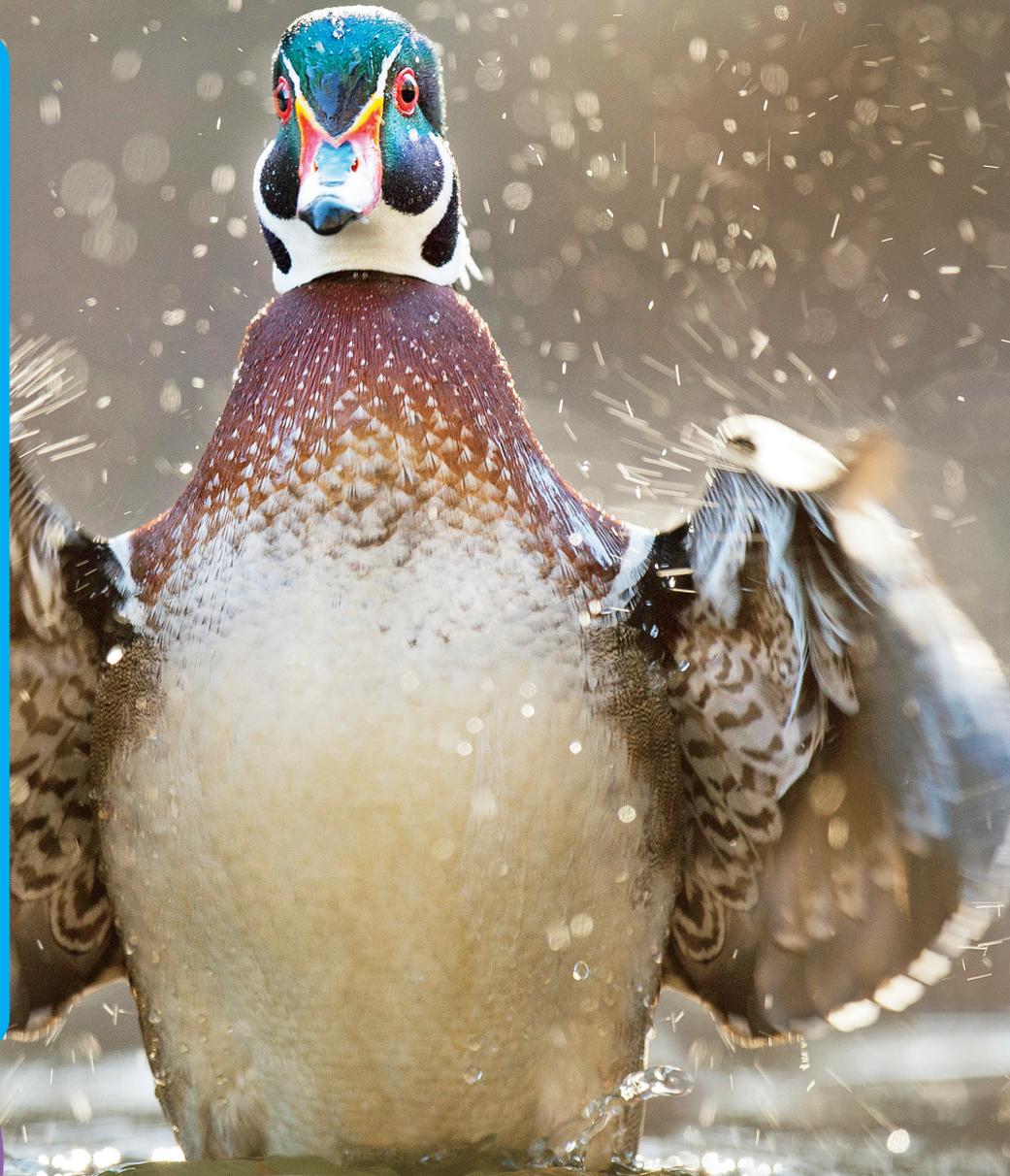
Caretaking Our World's Water

Ahhhh... There's nothing like a cool drink of water when you're thirsty.

Go ahead, take another sip. The water you're drinking started out as rain, snow, or another form of precipitation. As it fell from the clouds, it filled a nearby river or lake, or it drained into underground pools called aquifers. In most places, water for homes comes from the local public water supply. That's a system that pumps the water out of a river, lake, or aquifer, cleans it, and then pipes it to your home. All this water comes from something called a watershed.

People, birds, other animals, and plants all need water to live. A big challenge is to make sure there's enough clean water to go around. We can do this by helping to prevent pollution and by making changes to reduce the amount of water we use in our daily lives.

Keep reading to discover a lot more about water—a natural resource we can't live without.



Wood Duck

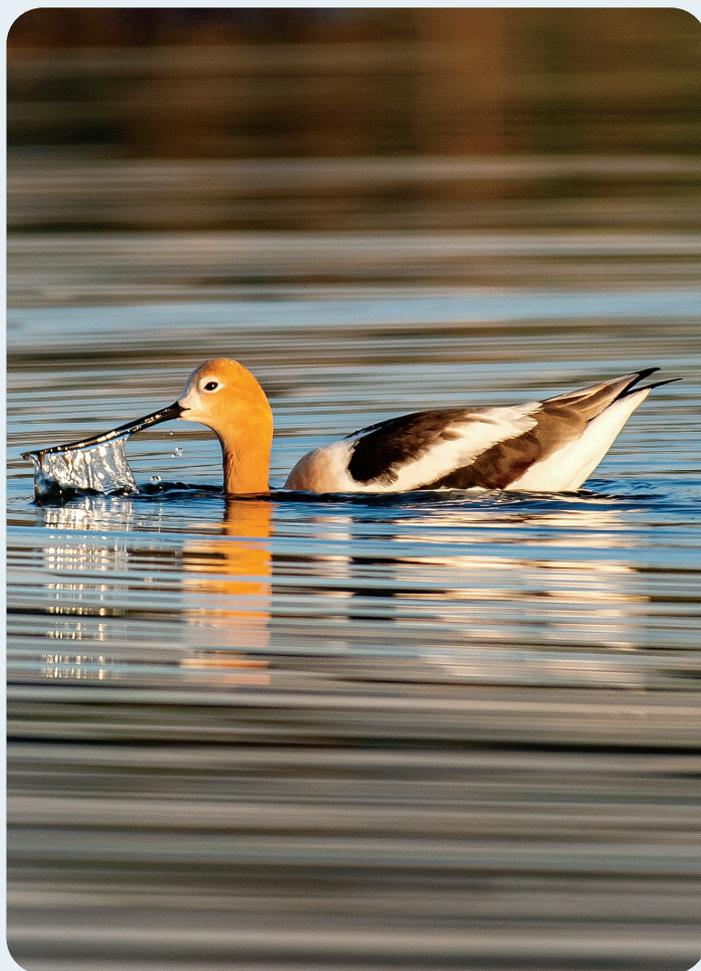
NOT MUCH TO DRINK



Earth looks like a watery world from space. But most of Earth's water is salty ocean water, not drinkable fresh water. If all Earth's water fit into a gallon jug, about half a cup of it would be fresh water. And only six or so drops of it would come from rivers and lakes. The rest of the fresh water would be in icecaps, glaciers, and the atmosphere.



Wise, Not Wasteful



↑ Marshes, wetlands, lakes, rivers, and other bodies of water are important habitat for wildlife, including birds like this American Avocet.

Without water, life on Earth would be impossible.

There would be no people, no animals of any kind, no plants.

Water is not just for drinking. Lakes, rivers, and other bodies of water are also habitat for wildlife. How can we make sure there's enough to go around—for people and nature? Using water wisely, not wastefully, can help conserve it. This is especially important as Earth's climate changes and droughts become more frequent and last longer. Simply turning off the tap each time you brush your teeth saves almost two gallons of water. Do the math for your family! Can you think of other ways you and your family can save water?

When water goes down the drain, where does it go? As you take a shower, think about what happens to the soapy water as it slips down the drain. It likely goes to a water treatment plant where it's treated, cleaned, and released into a local river or lake—back into the watershed. In this way water is constantly recycled.

We use ancient water to meet our modern needs. Earth's water is never really used up. Still, with more people using more water every day, some places struggle to provide clean, drinkable water for everyone. And when cities and towns are running low, clean water for wildlife, wetlands, and other habitats becomes even scarcer. Water is a very important natural resource.

What's a Watershed?

A **watershed** is an area of land where all the rain, groundwater, and melting snow eventually flows, or drains, into one place. Everyone lives within one of the more than 2,000 watersheds in the United States.

Mighty rivers are part of some watersheds. People need them and so do birds and other wildlife. In the West, for example, the Colorado River provides drinking water to 36 million people. Its habitats are home to about 400 species of birds.



↑ This photo shows how many smaller rivers flow into a larger one.

Native Plants Save Water, and Help Birds and Other Wildlife

in the field



We know from experts that climate change is affecting our planet right now.

One result of climate change is that there will be more droughts and they will last longer. A drought is an unusually long period with less rainfall than normal. To see a map of current drought conditions in the United States, go to droughtmonitor.unl.edu.

Droughts put an extra strain on Earth's already limited fresh water supply. It's important to find as many ways as possible to save water so it's available for the most important uses. One way to save water is to use native plants in our gardens, yards, and parks. Native plants are the plants that evolved over time to survive in a particular area. In areas where dry periods are common, native plants can get along with less water.

No matter where you live, it's smart to have native plants for another very important reason. They provide food and shelter for native birds and other animals, and they don't need as much help from people to stay healthy and beautiful.

↑ Native plants like these coneflowers can survive with less water, and they're good for bees and other wildlife, too.

Feed and Water the Birds

All wildlife needs food and water.

A birdbath is a great way to make sure birds get enough to drink. You can make one with a large plastic or terra cotta saucer (the kind that goes under flower pots) and an old bucket or flower pot. Just set the bucket or flower pot top-down on the ground in a shady spot near some trees or bushes. (The birds need a place to sit nearby out of sight.) Place the saucer on top. Place a small rock in the middle that comes just above the water line to give small birds a place to stand. Two inches of water is a good depth. Be sure to keep the birdbath clean.



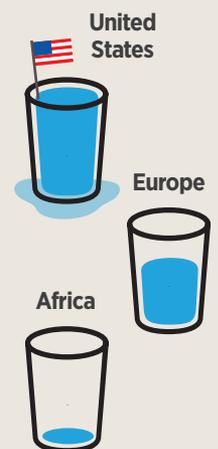
↑ This young Dark-eyed Junco is enjoying a homemade birdbath.

THIRSTY AMERICANS



Each person in the United States uses about 80–100 gallons of water a day at home.

(Most of that water gets used up in the bathroom—flushing toilets and bathing.) How does that compare to others around the world? Europeans use 45–65 gallons per person every day. And Africans use only 3–13 gallons. With limited freshwater resources on Earth and with some places experiencing severe drought, Americans should do more to reduce the amount of water we use.



Helpful or Harmful?

PROTECT WATERY HABITATS



Clean water is essential for the survival of all living things.

You can take action every day to help keep our water resources clean and plentiful, even if you don't live near a body of water. Here's how:

- 1 Learn the names and locations of waterways and wet habitat in your town, city, or region.
- 2 Conserve water. Turn off the faucet while brushing your teeth. Catch rainwater in barrels to water gardens and lawns.
- 3 Always carry away trash and anything else you bring when visiting lakes, ponds, rivers, and seashores... and anywhere outdoors. Never litter!
- 4 Reduce use of single-use plastic bottles and plastic bags. Plastic pollution in oceans and other habitats is harming wildlife.



Clean lakes and rivers and conserving water are important for everybody, and everybody can help. Making better choices at home can help prevent water pollution and save water, too.

Did you know that any water that flows across a yard, sidewalk, or street can end up in nearby streams, rivers, and lakes? That's because most street drains empty right into local waterways. This water, called runoff, can carry with it liquids, such as oil, and solids, such as litter, that people have spilled or dropped. We want to make sure all bodies of water are clean for people and for wildlife. That's why it's very important to keep chemicals, soap, oil, animal waste, garbage, and other pollutants from going down street drains.

Look at these examples of some things people do that could affect the health of bodies of water and the amount of water they use. Which are helpful and which are harmful? **Make your choices, then write a brief explanation of why you chose that answer. You can check your answers at the bottom.**

1. Growing native plants

Helpful Harmful

Why?

2. Washing a car in a driveway or street

Helpful Harmful

Why?

3. Littering

Helpful Harmful

Why?

4. Cleaning up pet waste

Helpful Harmful

Why?

5. Letting water run while brushing teeth

Helpful Harmful

Why?



Helpful: 1, 4; Harmful: 2, 3, 5

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