

Is your yard bird friendly?

By Shelly Kremer, Micronesia Bird Conservation

Did you know that some of the birds you see in your yard are found only here in the Mariana Islands and nowhere else in the world? There are 12 endemic species and subspecies found in the Mariana Islands. Rota has two species only found on Rota, the Mariana Crow and Rota Bridled White-eye and Tinian has one species only found on Tinian, the Tinian Monarch. Aside from bats and lizards, birds are the main animals that made it to our islands. So why are our birds important, aside from being very unique to our islands? Turns out birds are extremely important for maintaining a healthy forest which in turn keeps our reefs healthy and alive.

Yes, birds help keep our reefs healthy and alive. It turns out birds are actually good indicators of forest health, no native birds means poor forest habitat. Our forest is extremely important in helping maintain good water quality and preventing soil and nutrients from washing into the lagoon — both of which keep our reefs healthy and alive. If we want to manage our water quality, fishing, coral reefs... we first have to look at how we treat the land because it is all connected — ridge to reef. So what can you do as a land owner, home owner, renter or busi-

ness person? First you must take a test ... don't worry it is an easy test. Go sit quietly in your yard. Watch which birds are flying around and living in your yard. If you only see the Eurasian Tree Sparrow then your yard is poor quality and not bird friendly. These birds are not native and like open grassy areas. If you see the Bridled white-eye, Micronesian Starling or the Micronesian Honeyeater then your yard is not bad bird habitat. If you have the Rufous Fantail, Golden white-eye or Mariana Fruit Dove then your yard is excellent and you have done an awesome job of making your yard bird friendly.

So how did your yard do? Poor? Not bad? Or Great? If your yard ended up in the poor side of bird friendly don't worry because luckily our birds are easy to please. Simply plant a tree, native trees are best of course but our birds aren't too picky. You can talk to CNMI Division of Forestry for some native tree ideas. We have all sorts of native trees some that grow big and some that even stay small so depending on your yard size there is something for everyone. So go native — plant a tree and make your home more bird friendly for our amazing and unique wildlife.

