

THE Real Dirt



A PUBLICATION OF THE GCA HORTICULTURE COMMITTEE FALL 2024 ISSUE 67

"Where there are birds,
there is hope."

— Mehmet Murat ildan





Features



18

10 THE VISITORS WE WANT MOST

Three vital ways that wild birds benefit our gardens.

11 NO BUGS, NO BIRDS!

Some facts to consider before spraying your garden.

13 CLUB HAPPENINGS

Spotlight on GCA clubs helping wildlife.

18 PEACOCKS HELPING SPARROWS?

A GCA scholarship funds research on birds and plants.

In Every Issue

3 MESSAGES
Greetings from Horticulture Committee Chair and TRD Editor.

4 MY FAVORITE BLOOM
A Garden Club of Philadelphia member reveals her favorite bird-friendly plants.



4



6

6 THE DIRT
Are your plants stressed at night? Plus, sugar maples, flying fruit burglars, and the latest apps for birders.

22 GOOD READS
A coffee table book that deserves a place in your library.

23 GARDEN GALLERY
Birds photographed in and around members' own gardens.

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On the cover: An American goldfinch and Canada goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*) Photo by Lisey Good, Cohasset Graden Club, Zone I. **Contents page photos, From left to right:** Salt marsh, photo courtesy of Bridget Re; Lobelia, photo courtesy of Jane Ruffin, The Garden Club of Philadelphia; Cat, photo courtesy of Birds Be Safe

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The Real Dirt is produced three times a year by the Horticulture Committee of The Garden Club of America. Submissions and comments are encouraged and welcome. Contact trd@gcamerica.org.

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The purpose of The Garden Club of America is to stimulate the knowledge and love of gardening, to share the advantages of association by means of educational meetings, conferences, correspondence, and publications, and to restore, improve, and protect the quality of the environment through educational programs and actions in the fields of conservation and civic improvement.



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“What would a morning be without birdsong? What enlivens winter more than birds?”



FROM THE HORTICULTURE COMMITTEE CHAIR

What would a morning be without birdsong? What enlivens winter more than birds?

For many of us, birds are what wake us up in the morning and bring our gardens to life, even—and especially—in the dead of winter. In 1962, Rachel Carson warned us of a future of silent springs because of the rampant use of pesticides. And more recently, Doug Tallamy has taught us about the importance of native plants and insects in our gardens to feed those birds.

We need to pay close attention to all of this in our gardening practices. What are a few holes in a plants’

leaves compared to no birds?! Plants, insects, and birds have coevolved over thousands of years. To help all of these species, consider growing more local ecotype native plants, which then feed native insects and the birds we love. Let’s work *with* nature not against her!

And before I go, have you tried the Cornell Labs’ Merlin app? What a great way to ID birds and to get children interested, too; I can’t recommend it enough. Read more about it on page 8.

Happy reading, birdwatching and gardening!

Carrie

Carrie Waterman, Horticulture Committee Chair, Noanett Garden Club, Zone I



EDITOR’S MESSAGE



Why do we garden? For many, a garden is intended to be interacted with by family and friends, including those who fly in. In fact, as this issue of *The Real Dirt* attests, many individuals and local clubs increasingly view gardens as spaces to protect and nurture wildlife, and as a hedge against an uncertain environmental future. In that spirit, this issue is designed to take a look at the relationship between our gardens and our birds. Enjoy!

Lisey

Lisey Good, Horticulture Committee Vice Chair,
Editor, *The Real Dirt*, Cohasset Garden Club, Zone I





My Favorite Plants

By Jane Ruffin, The Garden Club of Philadelphia, Zone V



Above: Robins, along with many other birds, will flock to enjoy the fruit of the serviceberry tree.

Right: Native serviceberry trees display beautiful white spring blossoms.

Far right: Leaving dead heads intact will help birds during lean winters.

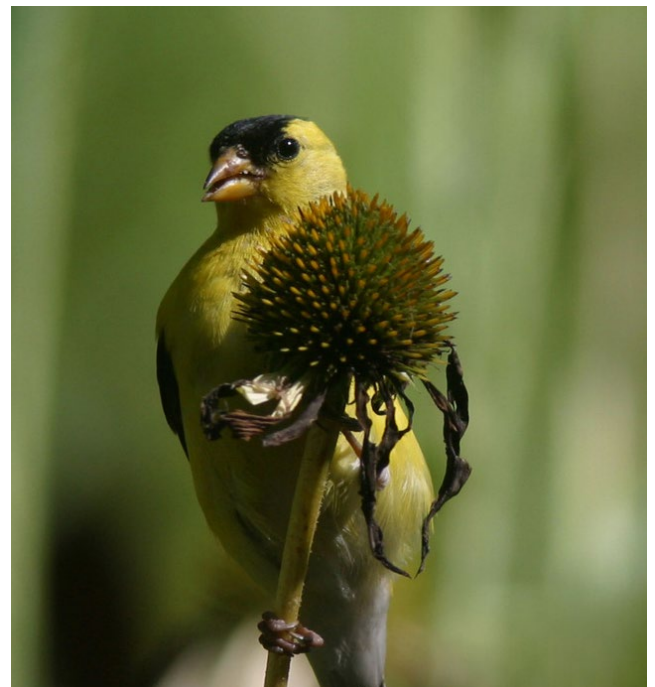
All Photos by:
Jane Ruffin, The
Garden Club of
Philadelphia,
Zone V



Watching birds visiting a feeder or bird bath in the garden gives a huge amount of pleasure (just remember to clean feeders and baths frequently)... but there are some very good plants that encourage visits from birds in all seasons.

AMELANCHIER: There are many small, fruit-bearing trees native to the United States. One good choice is common serviceberry (*Amelanchier arborea*), which has a wonderful display of white flowers followed by abundant red berries. The birds will come in flocks to eat the fruit and may strip the tree in a very short time. *Amelanchier* may develop rust on the fruit; this does not hurt the tree, and the next season it will be gone.

ECHINACEA: The seed heads of the purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) will attract goldfinches. Try not to remove all the seed heads!





SALVIA: There are many species of *Salvia*, and this long-stemmed plant has an extensive flowering season. Although the flowers produce only a small amount of nectar, it is replenished often, and both hummingbirds and butterflies will feed on it.

LOBELIA: Cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) makes a lovely splash of bright red color and will attract both hummingbirds and butterflies.

MONARDA: Beebalm comes in many colors and has a long flowering period. Hummingbirds are drawn to its nectar, and in fall and winter, many other birds rely on the seeds. Again, try not to remove all seed heads.

GRASS: An area of uncut grass with wildflowers is attractive to birds and pollinators. Birds will use the dried grasses for nesting, and the area will support insects that are vital to baby birds.



Tall grasses are crucial for habitat and support beneficial insects.

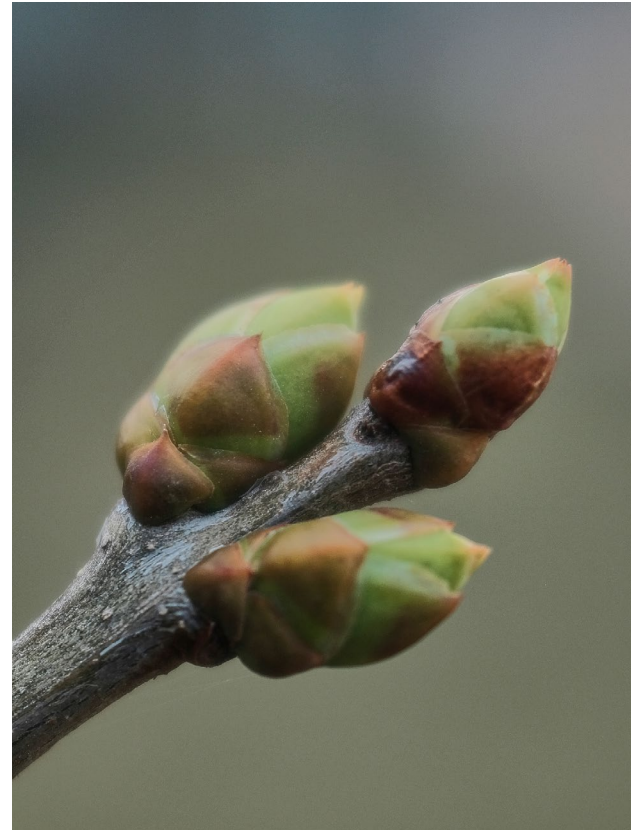


The Dirt

BRINGING BACK THE NIGHT: FIGHTING LIGHT POLLUTION

How dark is your yard and garden at night? Artificial light may obscure your view of the stars, but scientists are also raising the alarm about the impact of light pollution on plants, pollinators, and birds. The issue is complex, but likely stems from the fact that light disturbs human and non-human circadian rhythms, impacts the sleep/wake schedule, and affects the production of regulating chemicals such as

melatonin. Pollinators, for example, may spent too much time attracted to artificial light, impeding their pollinating efforts during daylight hours, along the lines of a jet lagged human. Migrating birds have been observed to be attracted in large numbers to areas most impacted by light pollution, becoming disoriented, circling endlessly and wasting precious energy needed for their migration. According to Joanne Chory, a professor at the Salk Institute for



A United Kingdom study of deciduous trees showed that budburst, the emergence of new leaves on a plant, happens 7.5 days earlier in areas most impacted by light pollution. Photo by Megan Kellums from Getty Images



Dark Sky rated light fixtures are safer for pollinators, plants, and birds. For a list of safe options, [click here](#). Photo by Liz Huntington from Shutterstock

Biological Studies in San Diego, even plants have a sleep cycle and will get stressed under nighttime artificial light. The top tips experts recommend:

sensitive nighttime lights

- Switch outdoor light bulbs to warmer LED bulbs up to 3000K only
- Turn off outdoor lighting at bedtime
- Always choose “Dark Sky” rated outdoor lighting
- Remove flood lighting from your home and garden as it directs too much light upwards
- Opt for motion





The diet of the Northern mockingbird consists of about 50 percent fruit and 50 percent insects and spiders. Photo by Tessa Riley from Pexels

PROTECTING BACKYARD FRUIT FROM FLYING “THIEVES”

We love birds, we want them to visit our gardens, but we don’t want them to eat every berry, apple, or pear we grow! Large-scale exclusion netting is considered by farmers and orchard managers as the only fail-safe way to keep birds off of shrubs and trees, but there are some home remedies that might just help you to save more fruit.

- 1. Plant mulberries (*Morus rubra*):** The strategy is to plant something irresistible to birds in hopes they’ll stay away from the fruits you want for yourself! Mulberries are fantastic food for wildlife, and a small tree will provide habitat and a high-sugar source food for birds, while its deep roots will help to break up compacted soil.
- 2. Use fancy fruit and nut mixes in your bird feeders:** Again, your goal is to distract birds with what you want them to eat. A squirrel-proof feeder, sited well away from your fruit trees, is recommended. Best are the Audubon-approved versions with weight-sensitive perches that automatically lower when a squirrel attempts to raid the feeder.
- 3. Garden netting bags:** “Fruit protection bags” are widely available and range in sizes to protect individual fruits as they mature.
- 4. Reflective scare tape:** Tying short lengths of this tape to branches next to the growing fruit will flutter in the wind, causing a shiny reflection that might deter birds.

What doesn’t work? Artificial owls. While decoys can initially frighten fruit-seeking birds, most are smarter than we give them credit for, and quickly figure out that the “owls” pose no threat.



SEND US YOUR PHOTOS!

The Real Dirt wants to publish club member photos—on our cover and in our pages—and we heartily welcome submissions from novices and seasoned pros. Send your garden-related shots, in any and all seasons, to TRD@gcamerica.org.





BIRD-LOVING GARDENER? THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT!

The latest resources for bird-loving gardeners are just a click away.

- **Audubon's Native Plant Database:** Find bird-friendly native plants by your zip code. You'll learn which plants are native to your region ...and the specific birds they will attract.

[Audubon.org/native-plants](https://audubon.org/native-plants)

- **Merlin Bird ID:** Created by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, this app is considered the gold standard of birding apps. Available for smartphones or tablets, it enables users to identify birds through step-by-step questions about visual appearance or behavior clues—or even by recording and analyzing birdsong. Press a button and record all the birdsong in your garden, and the app will tell you exactly which birds are present at any given time.

Merlin.AllAboutBirds.org

- **Avian Knowledge Network:** This database,



Photo by Matt Coda from Getty Images



Birds respond better to visual clues than to aural ones, making these bright collar covers a more effective warning system than a bell collar. Photo courtesy of Birds Be Safe

run via the Bird Conservancy, offers resources for scientists, students and the general public, such as an observation map which can be customized by bird or location. AvianKnowledge.net

- **Birds Be Safe:** In the US, an estimated 2.4 billion songbirds are killed each year by outdoor-access cats. It may look silly, but it's been clinically demonstrated as highly effective at saving birds, reducing kills by up to 87 percent.

BirdsBeSafe.com

Birds respond better to visual clues than to aural ones, making these bright collar covers a more effective warning system than a bell collar.





The Dirt is written and curated by Lisey Good, Cohasset Garden Club, Zone I, Editor of *The Real Dirt*

SPOTLIGHT ON: SUGAR MAPLES



A majestic sugar maple in full fall colors. Photo by Mirceax from Getty Images

A beloved site in autumn, majestic sugar maples (*Acer saccharum*) are sweet trees for our gardens that also provide major benefits for wildlife, especially for visiting songbirds. A recent survey of trees planted as part of the **GCA's Centennial Tree Project** reveals good news for birds: 14 clubs in seven zones (see complete list at right) planted a whopping 224 sugar maples.

The sugar maple's benefits are so critical for birds like the scarlet tanager, the black-throated blue warbler, the wood thrush and the Eastern wood-pewee that the National

Audubon Society created the "Bird Friendly Maple Project." The program incentivizes maple syrup producers to sustainably manage their "sugarbush," a forest-stand comprised mainly of sugar maple trees, using bird-friendly techniques that

prioritize bird habitat. Look for the label when buying maple syrup for those fall pancakes!

The bird-friendly maple logo: courtesy
National Audubon Society



GC of Mount Desert, Zone I

Bennington GC, Zone I

GC of Dublin, Zone I

Monadnock GC, Zone I

Fox Hill GC, Zone I

GC of Hartford, Zone II

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The GC of Michigan, Zone X

Kettle Moraine GC, Zone XI

**The Lake Minnetonka GC,
Zone XI**

Saint Paul GC, Zone XI



The Visitors We Want Most:

How birds benefit our gardens



Close your eyes, and summon up the most beautiful garden you've ever visited—or even your own yard at its most perfect. Your memory of this

ideal space is probably not silent, is it? For most of us, our gardens would not be the same without birdsong...but happily, birds do much more for our gardens—and our local ecosystems—than simply providing a pleasant soundtrack.

Pollination: While bees get most of the credit, birds also serve a vital role as pollinators, a process called *ornithophily*. In fact, many bird species have evolved with traits that make them ideally suited for pollination, such as a hummingbird's ability to hover mid-air to reach blooms without a perch and its extremely long bill that fits deep into long tubular flowers like a key fitting a lock. Ironically, it is the oriole's *short* beak that causes it to be such an effective albeit messy pollinator: while feeding, orioles must get so close that their bodies get covered in sticky pollen that they then transfer to the next plant they visit.

For other birds, behavior, not body type, is the key to the species' success as a pollinator. In the deserts of the Southwest, for example, the

white-winged dove is critical to the survival of the Saguaro cactus (*Carnegiea gigantea*). The birds' migration is synchronized to the flowering of the cactus, allowing the doves to help pollinate plants while sipping nectar. The doves also voraciously eat saguaro seeds, ultimately dispersing them to the large nesting trees they favor, trees which in turn serve as "nurse plants" for young cactus seedlings.

Spreading seeds: Did you think you were the only gardener in your yard? Think again. Globally, birds account for an estimated half of all new plant life, most commonly by ingesting seeds which pass through their digestive system unharmed, or even better prepared for growth. Indeed, some plants, notably the invasive sweet cherry (*Prunus avium*) and bird



Bottom, left: Hummingbirds are prolific pollinators, visiting up to 2000 flowers per day, such as this anise-scented sage (*Salvia guaranitica*). Photo credit: Suzette de Turenne, The Seattle Garden Club, Zone XII

Bottom, right: The Saguaro cactus and the White-winged Dove have a mutually beneficial relationship. Photo by Alan Crouch from Shutterstock





cherry (*Prunus padus*) have seeds that must pass through a bird's digestive system to effectively germinate. There are even "gardener" birds such as blue jays. These birds actively collect and hide seeds to consume later, with many of the forgotten or neglected seeds germinating.

Insect control with a side benefit: Birds need bugs, with even birds of prey relying on insects as babies. Orioles, grosbeaks and blue jays will happily devour Japanese beetles and slugs in your garden. And while house sparrows and blue jays will occasionally go after mosquitos, barn swallows, Eastern phoebes and blackpoll warblers are considered champion mosquito

Did you think you were the only gardener in your yard? Think again. Globally, birds account for an estimated half of all new plant life, most commonly by ingesting seeds which pass through the their digestive system unharmed, or even better prepared for growth.



hunters, able to eat up to 850 an hour. American robins will eat beetles, flies, caterpillars, snails, spiders, termites, centipedes and more. And with all their pecking in search of earthworms? American robins are great at helping to aerate your soil and your lawn.

—Lisey Good, *Cohasset Garden Club*

Top, left: Scientists think that blue jays were responsible for helping regenerate forests after the last ice age by planting oak and beech trees in America's Northeast.

Top, right: Baltimore orioles are known to be "messy" eaters, which facilitates pollination.

Photos this page by Becky Field, The Lake Minnetonka Garden Club, Zone XI

No Bugs, No Birds!

Some facts to consider before spraying your garden

What percentage of backyard birds rely on insects to raise their young?

96 percent of birds rely exclusively on insects like mosquitos, grubs, beetles, and caterpillars to feed their young.

Chickadee parents typically have one brood per year. How many caterpillars do they need to feed their young each season?

7,500, or around 13 per hour.

Native trees support a greater number of caterpillars than non-native trees. How many caterpillar species does the average native oak tree support? How many does the average non-native Ginkgo tree support?

A native oak tree supports 950+ types of butterfly and moth caterpillars, one reason that oaks are ranked the #1 or #2 tree to support the “food web” in 84 percent of all United States counties. The average non-native *Ginkgo* tree (*Ginkgo biloba*) supports just five species of caterpillars.



How many insects does a barn swallow need each day? How many ticks does the average wild turkey eat each day?

Insects make up 99.8 percent of a barn swallow's diet. They need around 850 per day. Adult turkeys eat approximately 200 ticks per day. Their diet also relies heavily on worms, grubs and snails.

Right: Wild turkeys are voracious tick hunters. A turkey family can eat close to 4,000 ticks per day. Photo by Mirceax from Getty Images

Below: Ginkgo trees, native to East Asia, are often planted by cities and towns as street trees yet they support only a tiny fraction of the wildlife that a native oak tree can support. Photo by Leung Cho Pan from Canva



OUR KIND OF TOWN

September 16th – 17th, 2024

Get ready for the Shirley Meneice Horticulture Conference in Chicago! GCA Club Presidents, Horticulture Chairs, and interested club members will enjoy thoughtful and substantive programs based at the **Chicago Botanic Garden**. The two-day conference will feature five prominent speakers, plus diverse educational workshops and tours. As always, a variety of optional pre- and post-conference trips will be offered, including tours of stunning private gardens. Be sure to explore the Horticulture Committee landing page for more information about this year's **SMHC!**



Club Happenings

Spotlight on GCA clubs helping birds

70 percent of all North American Bird Species Migrate Through Texas

Here's how one club is helping them!



The Garden Club of Houston strives, as one of its missions, to bring conservation efforts to Houston through its various projects. For the last three years, we have used a Garden Club of America **Partners 4 Plants** grant we received to work with

Hermann Park Conservancy. A heavily used green space in the Museum District, Hermann Park is one of Houston's biggest and oldest city parks, situated right in the middle of the city. It contains a municipal golf course, the Houston Zoo, and the Miller Outdoor Theater within its boundaries. The plan we implemented involved rebuilding pocket prairies in underused areas of the park to both improve the hard-packed soil and to attract wildlife.

At our initial meeting, HPC's horticulture manager, Caitlin Talkington, gave us a brief explanation about the original flora of the ecoregion encompassing Hermann Park and central Houston, what was growing when the first settlers arrived by wagon, and how the HPC staff are planning to reintroduce native plants

into certain parts of the park. In each of our work sessions, a group of GCH members dug out invasive plants like Chinese tallow tree (*Triadica sebifera*), pepper vine (*Nekemias arborea*), wild privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*), and yellow flag iris (*Iris pseudacorus*). We then scattered seeds of various native grasses, including blue grama grass (*Bouteloua gracilis*), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), Western wheatgrass (*Pascopyrum smithii*), and planted plugs of other native grasses like Texas bluegrass (*Poa arachnifera*) and savanna panicgrass (*Phanopyrum gymnocarpon*).

Houston, located in the middle of the Central Flyway, is a major migratory path for birds heading from Canada and the northern United States across the Gulf of Mexico. The Hermann Park Project constitutes part of a larger idea to both educate visitors and allow wildlife like birds, resident and migratory, to flourish. The Houston Audubon Society conducts weekly bird counts there during high season.

—Carol Price, The Garden Club of Houston, Zone IX



Top, left: Carol Price was among the club members who removed invasive plants from underused sections of the park to reintroduce bird and wildlife-friendly native plants.

Bottom, left: Aynsley Letzerich and Carol Price hard at work.

Photos by
Cristi Harvey,
The Garden
Club of Houston,
Zone IX

Guilford Garden Club Publishes an Essential Tool for Native Plant Gardeners



cross the country, there is an awakening to the value of native plants and their many ecological benefits to birds and pollinators.

Guilford Garden Club's founding purpose, written in 1925, is "to stimulate the knowledge and love of gardening" and "to aid in the protection of native plants and birds." In the past 25 years, GGC has redoubled its commitment to its mission and has been consistent in promoting the value of native plants as a sustainable focus of gardening. The 40 member club, located in the Baltimore area, has accumulated extensive lists of trees, shrubs, vines, ferns, grasses, and perennials native to the Mid-Atlantic with emphasis on the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Using native plants in its civic projects and selling native plants at local plant sales has enriched the club's knowledge of ideal

growing conditions and pertinent characteristics of a vast array of native plants.

This wealth of information has been compiled in a new resource, *Native Plant Garden Workbook: Selecting Plants for Mid-Atlantic Gardens*. The workbook is designed to be interactive: its plastic cover and backing are durable, allowing the gardener to carry it into the nursery when selecting plants; its spiral binding allows pages to lay flat; and its graph pages and blank pages encourage sketches or notes. Beautiful illustrations bring the concept of gardening with native plants to life. The workbook's organization is truly unique—plants are grouped by the combinations of sunlight and moisture where they've been found to thrive. The index helpfully ranks optimal growing conditions. Visit the club's [website](#) to purchase!

—Carol Garinther and Kay McConnell,
Guilford Garden Club, Zone VI

The guidebook is full of beautiful illustrations such as this rendering of yellow marsh marigolds (*Caltha palustris*) on the cover. The flowers are known to attract hummingbirds, while the seeds are prized by wood ducks and other waterfowl. Illustration by Andi Curran, Guilford Garden Club, Zone VI



A “Pocket Park” For Birds

Club creates tiny park at site visited by birders from all over the globe

Beaumont, Texas, is located on the central “flyway,” a route millions of migratory birds pass through during spring and fall migrations. The Magnolia Garden Club, Zone IX, recently supported a *Partners 4 Plants* project to create a “pocket park” in the city’s Terrell Park to aid woodland birds, both migratory and resident. It’s one of three such parks installed by the city for birds, butterflies, and pollinators. The garden club’s bird pocket park is adjacent to Tyrrell Park via a walkway to Cattail Marsh, home to many wetland birds. The project sought to address the depletion of the tree canopy: many trees in both Tyrrell Park and Cattail Marsh have been lost due to intense storms, disease, and decay.

To begin, the planting site was cleared of dead trees, and the soil was prepared for planting. The plants chosen were from the five types of vegetation to meet the food and shelter needs of birds—large trees, understory trees and shrubs, forbs, grasses, and ground covers. The Magnolia Garden Club purchased plants, soil, mulch, and labels for each plant and worked to install all the plantings. Club members will now monitor the garden in the coming years. Since Cattail Marsh attracts birders from all over the world to view the migration, these pocket parks won’t just help the birds who live or pass through: they will enhance that experience for all birders.

—Cheryl Welch, Garden Club of Jackson, Zone IX



Plants installed included Southern live oak (*Quercus virginiana*) pictured here, bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*), Turk’s cap (*Malvaviscus arboreus* var. *drummondii*), Mexican plum (*Prunus mexicana*), wax myrtle (*Myrica cerifera*), coneflower (*Echinacea*), red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*), muhly gulf (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*), wood fern (*Dryopteris*), yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*), frogfruit (*Phyla nodiflora*), blueberry (*Vaccinium*) and zigzag iris (*Iris brevicaulis*) Photo by D.Corn from Getty Images

P4P, or Partners for Plants, is a GCA program designed to aid projects between local clubs and land managers on federal, state, local and other significant public lands.





Adding rocks to a shallow saucer of water creates a simple bird bath that ensures baby birds have a safe perch from which to fly. Photo by Lisey Good, Cohasset Garden Club, Zone I

Bird-friendly Basics



Vesta Fort, a member of the **Garden Study Club of New Orleans**, Zone IX, has a question for those hoping to create the best habitat for birds: “Did you know that leaf blowers are an ‘invasive species’ that destroy birds’ main source of food?” She’s referring to how the jet stream from a leaf blower doesn’t just displace topsoil and disrupt the healthy microbiology of your soil: it also maims and kill insects, such as pollinators critical to our ecosystems and the bugs birds need to survive and to feed their young. Another tip from Vesta: a simple clay pot saucer filled with water and some perching rocks will help attract birds, bees, and dragonflies to your yard and garden.

—Lisey Good, **Cohasset Garden Club**, Zone I

SPOTLIGHT ON: GCA WEBSITE

Attention:

Program Committee Chairs! Did you know there’s a space on the GCA’s website designed specifically to make your job a little easier?

Under Read, Watch, Share, Shop, scroll down to the Event Inspiration page and you’ll find:

- *a comprehensive speaker’s list that’s been fully vetted by fellow members*
- *ideas for fundraisers, workshops, and civic projects to tour*
- *low or no-cost programs if your club is on a tight budget*



A suggested program: A virtual tour of Harvard’s famed glass flowers.
Photo courtesy of Harvard Museum of Natural History



Helping Birds on Boston's South Shore

A native plant advocacy group
powered by one local garden club

“**T**o aid in the protection of native flora and fauna” is part of the Cohasset Garden Club’s mission statement, and the ideal is also deeply embedded in the DNA of many of the club’s members. Barbara Wrenn has been a CGC member since 2022 and president of *Wild Cohasset*, a small environmental nonprofit dedicated to preserving local biodiversity, New England native plants, and the wild creatures that depend on them to survive. Indeed, the charity counts three Cohasset Garden Club members on its board, including Deborah Leggat, CGC member since 2018 and *The Real Dirt* editor, Lisey Good, who founded the organization in 2014.



Wild Cohasset relies heavily on the volunteer labor of Cohasset Garden Club members to carry out its community projects, such as the installation of native plant gardens in public spaces and the eradication of invasive plants in conservation areas and along Massachusetts roadsides. “We’re using plants to help bring nature back into balance” says Barbara Wrenn. “We’ve been able to make a real difference to the birds in our region by ensuring that invasive plants don’t outcompete the native plants that they need. We’re lucky that our garden club shares our values.”

—Lisey Good, *Cohasset Garden Club*, Zone I

Above:
Barbara Wrenn, CGC member and President, *Wild Cohasset*, planting a native wildlife meadow

Left: Deborah Leggat, Barbara Wrenn and Lisey Good of the Cohasset Garden Club, Zone I

Photos courtesy of Barbara Wrenn, Cohasset Garden Club, Zone I



Peacocks Helping Sparrows?

By Lisey Good, Cohasset Garden Club Zone 1

A Garden Club of America scholarship funds research on birds...and the plants they need

The *Frances M. Peacock Scholarship for Native Bird Habitat* was established in 1994, created and endowed by the estate of Frances Peacock, a former GCA director and longtime member of the *Garden Club of Barrington*, Zone XI. The scholarship's goal? To provide financial aid to college seniors or graduate students enabling them to study areas of the United States that provide seasonal habitat for at-risk bird populations. "It's a very specific grant, kind of niche as far as grants go," says Jen

Walsh, a research associate at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology which administers the grant. "The grants are directed 100% to help study the intersection of birds and plants, specifically how birds are using threatened habitats."

According to Walsh, six researchers from diverse backgrounds review the applications, which are also vetted by three scientists. The applications are ranked and a shortlist is then sent to the GCA for approval. Grants are \$4,500 each, with two to three per year awarded. Read on for a sample of recent grant winners and the critical work they are carrying out.



Jen Walsh of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The acclaimed Cornell University institution partners with the GCA to administer the Peacock Scholarship. Photo courtesy of Jen Walsh

HELPING BIRDS LIKE WILLOW FLYCATCHERS WEATHER CLIMATE CHANGE

Grant recipient: Kyle Rosenblad, PhD candidate, University of California, Berkeley

Awarded: 2022

Study Subject: Identifying drought-resistant willow shrub populations in the Sierra Nevada

Details: In California's Sierra Nevada, mountain meadows provide critical habitat to many breeding and migratory birds such as the endangered willow flycatcher. In these meadows, the birds rely heavily on willow shrubs, but recent droughts caused many of the willow shrubs to lose their leaves early, resulting in a decline in some bird populations. The study sought to find and identify the healthiest populations of willow shrubs in the region, to be used as genetic stock for future forest restoration projects, helping to create bird habitat that is more resilient to climate change.



2022 grant recipient Kyle Rosenblad in the field. His research focuses on how to use habitat restoration to make ecosystems more resilient to climate change. Photo courtesy of Kyle Rosenblad

PAINTED BUNTINGS IN LITTLE ST. SIMONS ISLAND, GEORGIA

Grant recipient: Diane Klement, masters candidate, University of Georgia, Warnell School of Forestry & Natural Resources

Awarded: 2023

Study Subject: How painted buntings choose vegetative communities to raise their young, which specific plants they consume, and which plants harbor the caterpillars they rely upon for sustenance.

Details: With their rainbow coloring, painted buntings are among the most visually stunning songbirds. During breeding season, they rely heavily on maritime grassland habitats that are currently imperiled because of coastal development and habitat loss. The study captured and tagged painted buntings with a leg loop harness, then observed which plants the birds frequented via radio tracking, visual observation, and fecal analysis. Researchers observed the significance of grasses to the birds in general, noting two native species that were of particular importance: giant bristlegrass (*Setaria magna*) and black oat grass (*Piptochaetium avenaceum*).

Left: Diane Klement with a tagged bird. Painted buntings were found to particularly love *Setaria magna*, a giant native bristle grass.

Right: Diane's grant involved tagging and monitoring birds to document both the plants the birds ate and those that hosted favored caterpillars.

Photos courtesy of Diane Klement



SALTMARSH SPARROWS AND TIDAL MARSH HABITAT

Grant recipient: Bridget Re, University of Maine, currently working as a loon biologist with the Loon Preservation Committee, NH

Awarded: 2023

Study Subject: The study sought to examine predator risk assessment and its implications for nest placement within the vegetative strata.

Details: Saltmarsh sparrows, which are endemic to coastal habitat from Maine to Florida, are critically endangered and predicted to be extinct by 2040 due to low reproductive success, habitat loss, and more frequent flooding of nesting habitat. Using microcontroller-based camera traps, the study generated a specific nest predator profile to aid in conservation. It also sought to determine if these birds use auditory clues to evaluate predator risk and influence nest placement.



Bridget Re with a tagged bird who participated—unwittingly—in the scientific study. Photo courtesy of Bridget Re

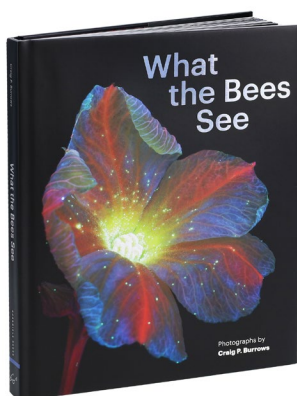
Saltmarsh sparrows are projected to be extinct in 15 years due to habitat loss and frequent flooding of breeding areas. Photo by KGC
Photo from Getty Images





Good Reads

Because birds aren't the *only* flying visitors we care about!



What the Bees See

by Craig P. Burrows (photographer)
and Nick Worthington (contributing
writer)

Chronicle Books, 2024, 192 pages

Despite its spectacular cover, this isn't just a coffee table book. Nor is it just a photography book or science text. It's a journey into the bees' world—what they see, how they live and the gifts they produce beyond honey. It also contains a healthy helping of plant sex.

The photos are otherworldly, shot with UV technology to approximate how you'd see a flower if

you were a bee. The images are saturated with luminous blues and yellows, spattered with brilliant white stars of pollen, and they alone might be enough. But if you get beyond the tiny font that allows for that artful space on each page, you won't be able to stop reading. The clarity of the narrative, the whimsical style, and the fountain of information intermixed with all those photos will suck you to the epilogue and the gentle warning about human-induced natural disaster.

This book was produced to convince us that the system created by flowers and honeybees is important for the future of life on earth, not just for our progeny, but for those of us here now. In the section titled "Pursuit of Immortality," the authors tell us how the fruits of this alliance could help us live healthier and even longer. Plant more flowers and protect more pollinators—what have you got to lose?

“I am using beauty as a gateway to get people to learn...and to care.”

—Craig Burrows

A BEE'S EYE VIEW:

TRD Editor Lisey Good chats with photographer Craig Burrows



A callary pear (*Pyrus calleryana*) Photo by Craig P. Burrows

Why did you undertake this project?

There's a lot of great photography of flowers already out there. This was a way to capture them in a new way. It touches on why bees are attracted to what they are attracted to.

Do these photos accurately portray how bees see flowers?

I don't want to diminish the work of scientists who study bees' vision and experience. This is an approximation, achieved by ultra violet fluorescence—a way for us to get a sense of something outside human experience.

Did any of the shots surprise you?

Yes! Patterns are revealed with this technique, like a bright red streak through a flower that's invisible to the naked eye, or a plant with a blue center so vibrant that it almost makes the petals invisible.



An anemone (*Anemone coronaria*) Photo by Craig P. Burrows

Good Reads was
written by Stacey
Weaver, Cohasset
Garden Club, Zone I



Garden Gallery

Birds photographed in and around members' own gardens!



A Baltimore oriole drinking nectar from a snowdrift crabapple. Photo: Becky Field, The Lake Minnetonka Garden Club, Zone XI



Baby robins hatching next to a flamingo lily. Photo: Peggy Searles, The Lake Minnetonka Garden Club, Zone XI



A juvenile ring-billed gull feasting on American mountain ash berries. Photo: Becky Field, The Lake Minnetonka Garden Club, Zone XI



Pygmy nuthatches cling to a ponderosa pine. Photo: Suzette de Turenne, The Seattle Garden Club, Zone XII



Hérons in flight. Photo: Martha Gangemi, Cohasset Garden Club, Zone I



Cedar waxwings feasting on serviceberries. Photo: Jane Ruffin, The Garden Club of Philadelphia, Zone V



A hatchling in a Rosa 'New Dawn' climbing rose
Photo: Heidi Condon, Cohasset Garden Club, Zone I