



Scatter Info As We Bloom and Grow

Horticulture Edition, Gail Berthe, Editor

Environmental Edition, Judy Keenan, Editor

Landscape Design Edition, Jane Hersey, Editor

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Environmental Edition

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Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the first Environmental Edition of Scatter Info As We Bloom and Grow. Gardeners, by our very nature, like to get our hands dirty and shape the world around us. We understand intimately the interconnectedness of our planet. The balance of nature smacks us in the face every time we go out to pull a weed from our vegetable bed or get rid of the invasive Japanese Beetles from our roses. Balance creates health in our gardens and on our planet. Some things we can change, such as the health of our soil through management. Some things we simply have to accept, such as the impossibility of growing Avocados in Zone 7 without a greenhouse. Consider this your forum for learning about the current environmental issues and how to change what we can to nurture our planet to grow a healthy future.

Judy Keenan, Environmental Editor

How Birds Change Your Life (And You Can Change Theirs)

By Mary Ann Bryant

Wild birds really can change (enrich) your life if you watch them, listen to them and learn to identify them. Bird watching is the fastest growing hobby in the U.S., second only to gardening. If you aren't already one of the 65 million American "birders," why not give it a try? All you really need to get started is an observant eye, although by adding a few accessories, such as those listed below, your experience may be even more rewarding.

A Good Bird Guide. These handy little books will help you to identify birds by observing their color, size and other characteristics, as well show you how to attract particular species to your yard. There are many good guides to choose from. Two of

my favorites are Beginner's Guide To Birds, by Donald and Lillian Stokes and Birds of Georgia Field Guide, by Stan Tekielo.

Binoculars. There are many brands and sizes ranging in price from less than \$100 to over \$1000. A good resource for understanding the options is <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/gear/binoculars/>.

It never hurts to entice birds to visit your yard. (This is where your ability to change the birds' lives comes in.) Bringing birds to your property is as simple as providing for their needs:

- *Food.* In addition to providing feeders, you also may want to plant shrubs and flowers that birds like, such as Pyracanthas, Beautyberry, Elderberry, Serviceberry, Marigolds, Sunflowers, Zinnias, Goldenrods, Coneflowers, and Black-Eyed Susans. (Be careful not to plant



non-native invasive species, such as Mahonia and Chinese Holly, which birds also love, but then spread their seeds into our forests.)

- *Water.* Birds need a source of water year around. Birdbaths and small in-ground ponds are good water sources, but a shallow saucer or pan also will serve the purpose. Just be sure to keep the water source clean. The addition of a small fountain further helps to attract birds through the noise.
- *Shelter.* Birds need a place to roost at night where they are safe from predators. You will attract more birds to your yard if there are abundant trees (both deciduous and coniferous), shrubs and ornamental grasses. Where practical, leave hollow dead trees for cavity-nesting birds. (If you can't leave the entire tree, consider leaving 12-20 feet of the dead snag.)

Finally, you can add roosting boxes. Some birds will even roost in clean birdhouses during a cold winter night.

- *Nesting Places.* Many birds are happy to nest in trees and shrubs, while others prefer houses. The surest way to attract bluebirds to your yard is by installing the appropriate nesting boxes placed in open, grassy areas that are accompanied by widely scattered trees and shrubs.

Take Time to Enjoy the Birds. Don't forget this step. Take just a few minutes each day to observe the wonderful show right in your backyard. It will change your life

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Moves to Protect Rare Georgia Rockcress

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife service has proposed to list the rare Georgia Rockcress, a plant found only in Georgia and Alabama, as a candidate to be named a Threatened Species.



Furthermore, they also would like to see 786 acres of river bluff habitat designated as a “critical habitat” for the Georgia Rockcress. Currently, only about 5,000 individual plants are known to exist, generally on steep river bluffs with shallow soils overlaying rock or with exposed rock outcrops. Habitat disturbance accompanied by invasive, exotic species pose the most dangerous threat to this Georgia treasure.

The largest population of the plant (more than 1,600 stems) occurs on Fort Benning, GA. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with Fort Benning to protect Georgia Rockcress and its habitat. In Harris and Muscogee Counties, Georgia Power maintains another large population of Georgia Rockcress (some 1,000 stems).

10 Easy things you can do at home to protect endangered species

By Caroline Silcox

1) Learn about endangered species in your area. Teach your friends and family about the wonderful wildlife, birds, fish and plants that live near you. The first step to protecting endangered species is learning about how interesting and important they are. Our natural world provides us with many indispensable services including clean air and water, food and medicinal sources, commercial, aesthetic and recreational benefits. Check out our endangered species pages at www.stopextinction.org/endorangeredpecies. For more information about endangered species, visit endangered.fws.gov.

2) Visit a national wildlife refuge, park or other open space. These protected lands provide habitat to many native wildlife, birds, fish and plants. Scientists tell us the best way to protect endangered species is to protect the places where they live. Get involved by volunteering at your local nature center or wildlife refuge. Go wildlife or bird watching in nearby parks. Wildlife related recreation creates millions of jobs and supports local businesses. To find a wildlife refuge near you, visit www.fws.gov/refuges/. To find a park near you, visit www.nps.gov. To find a zoo near you, visit www.aza.org.

3) Make your home wildlife friendly. Secure garbage in shelters or cans with locking lids, feed pets indoors and lock pet doors at night to avoid attracting wild animals into your home. Reduce your use of water in your home and garden so that animals that live in or near water can have a better chance of survival. Disinfect birdbaths often to avoid disease transmission. Place decals on windows to deter bird collisions. Millions of birds die every year because of collisions with windows. You can help reduce the number of collisions simply by placing decals on the windows in your home and office. For more information on what you can do, check out tips from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

4) Provide habitat for wildlife by planting native vegetation in your yard. Native plants provide food and shelter for native wildlife. Attracting native insects like bees and butterflies can help pollinate your plants. The spread of non-native species has greatly impacted native populations around the world. Invasive species compete with native species for resources and habitat. They can even prey on native species directly, forcing native species towards extinction. For more information about native plants, visit www.plantsocieties.org.

5) Minimize use of herbicides and pesticides. Herbicides and pesticides may keep yards looking nice but they are in fact hazardous pollutants that affect wildlife at many levels. Many herbicides and pesticides take a long time to degrade and build up in the soils or throughout the food chain. Predators such as hawks, owls and coyotes can be harmed if they eat poisoned animals. Some groups of animals such as amphibians are particularly vulnerable to these chemical pollutants and suffer greatly as a result of the high levels of herbicides and pesticides in their habitat. For alternatives to pesticides, visit www.beyondpesticides.org.

6) Slow down when driving. Many animals live in developed areas and this means they must navigate a landscape full of human hazards. One of the biggest obstacles to wildlife living in developed areas is roads. Roads divide habitat and present a constant hazard to any animal attempting to cross from one side to the other. So when you're out and about, slow down and keep an eye out for wildlife.

7) Recycle and buy sustainable products. Buy recycled paper, sustainable products like bamboo and Forest Stewardship Council wood products to protect forest species. Never buy furniture made from wood from rainforests. Recycle your cell phones, because a mineral used in cell phones and other electronics is mined in gorilla habitat. Minimize your use of palm oil because forests where tigers live are being cut down to plant palm plantations.

8) Never purchase products made from threatened or endangered species. Overseas trips can be exciting and fun, and everyone wants a souvenir. But sometimes the souvenirs are made from species nearing extinction. Avoid supporting the market in illegal wildlife including: tortoiseshell, ivory and coral. Also, be careful of products including fur from tigers, polar bears, sea otters and other endangered wildlife, crocodile skin, live monkeys or apes, most live birds including parrots, macaws, cockatoos and finches, some live snakes, turtles and lizards, some orchids, cacti and cycads, medicinal products made from rhinos, tiger or Asiatic black bear.

9) Report any harassment or shooting of threatened and endangered species. Harassing wildlife is cruel and illegal. Shooting, trapping or forcing a threatened or endangered animal into captivity is also illegal and can lead to their extinction. Don't participate in this activity, and report it as soon as you see it to your local state or federal wildlife enforcement office. You can find a list of state wildlife departments at <http://www.fws.gov/offices/statelinks.html>.

10) Protect wildlife habitat. Perhaps the greatest threat that faces many species is the widespread destruction of habitat. Scientists tell us the best way to protect endangered species is to protect the special places where they live. Wildlife must have places to find food, shelter and raise their young. Logging, oil and gas drilling, over-grazing and development all result habitat destruction. Endangered species habitat should be protected and these impacts minimized. By protecting habitat, entire communities of animals and plants can be protected together. Parks, wildlife refuges and other open space should be protected near your community. Open space also provides us with great places to visit and enjoy. Support wildlife habitat and open space protection in your community. When you are buying a house, consider your impact on wildlife habitat.

To get involved, contact the [Endangered Species Coalition staff](#) or find a group near you on our [ESC member organization list](#).

Thanks for caring about our nation's wildlife and wild places!

Environmental Studies School

By Renie Faulkenberry

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle--why should we do this? What is sustainability--is it really important? Air, water, land and everything living on the Earth--what decisions do we make to keep our planet safe for the future? Why are oysters and alligators "keystone" species? What is a wetland, why might it be important? What causes the incursion of salt water into wells? How can the aquifer be safeguarded? Are dams the solution or just one more manmade problem? The answers may not all be known, but at the very least, you will gain a better understanding of the questions. Studying the issues makes it easier to make the right decisions. We have a beautiful state--by understanding the environment we can work to keep this so.

The Environmental Studies courses aim to foster understanding of important issues facing each of us. We were charged to "go forth and multiply" and have we ever. Now, how are we to balance the needs of the increased population with the needs of Earth? Take this course to understand the basics and then begin to implement solutions.

The National Garden Clubs, Inc. created the Environmental Studies Schools with its curriculum in 1991. The school requires four sessions, each two days long with a test. Air, water, land and the interconnectedness of it all are the topics covered by the four sessions. Take this opportunity to expand your understanding of our environment and the issues facing Georgia.

The first two of the sessions will be in Valdosta on November 4-5, 2013. Sessions three and four will be in Tifton. Each session is separate--but all are important. For information check the website created by the Valdosta chair, Vickie Elliott, www.sgaenvironmental or email her at hahira98@hotmail.com.

Alien Invasion

By Judy Keenan

Imagine walking the aisles of your local garden center. If you're anything like me, this shouldn't be too difficult, because I do it way too often. Now, look around you—what do you see? There's some lovely Nandina and the oh-so-reliable Mahonia and a sturdy Privet for your hedge. Over in the groundcover section you find several kinds of ivies and Mondo grasses and a pretty Periwinkle with the cute purple flowers. Now, imagine walking through the forest . . . what do you see? Unfortunately, in most of Georgia you now see those very same Nandinas, Mahonias, Privets and ivies, none of which belong in the wilds of Georgia. These plants are choking out our native landscape much like Kudzu, only a wee bit slower.

When shopping for new plants, I take a “do no harm” approach. I have many non-native species in my gardens, but I’ve learned that some are benign and some are actually covert forest terrorists. Take Privet and Mahonia. We buy them, landscapers install them and garden stores push them because they are easy to grow, evergreen, hardy and relatively inexpensive. Another seeming bonus is that these shrubs produce berries in abundance, which the birds adore. Ah, but that’s the problem. Birds eat the berries, fly away and deposit the seeds elsewhere. The same holds true for Mondo grass and even English Ivy.

English Ivy is a rampant spreader that likes to climb trees. When it reaches about 12-foot high it begins to produce fruit. Next time you see ivy climbing up your neighbor’s tree, look up and notice if it has berries. The second issue is that each of those leaves clinging to the bark of the tree acts like a tiny sail when struck by a gust of wind, making it much more likely to topple the tree in a storm. If that isn’t enough to discourage you from buying ivy, remember that another non-native species—rats—love the safety of a thick cover of ivy.

Georgia’s Piedmont region has few native evergreens. When the non-native evergreen shrubs and groundcovers take over, they shade out the many beautiful and beneficial native plants, like trillium and bloodroot. This causes a ripple effect, suppressing the diversity of flora and fauna that live in our forests. For example, did you know that our native Aster blooms just in time for the hummingbird migration? If the Asters are choked out, the hummingbirds lose an important food source for their long journey.

Many native species make excellent choices for the landscape and thrive, because that’s where they belong. Once established, nature takes care of Her own. Let’s say you want an evergreen screen. There are many non-native species that are not invasive—azaleas and camellias are much better choices than Mahonia and nothing says “Southern Hedge” like boxwood. Want to go native? Try a Florida Anise as a foundation shrub or perhaps a dog hobble –both evergreen natives. If your goal is to attract birds, then choose native species, like winterberry and choke cherry or inkberry.

For more information on native plants, visit www.gnps.org for the Georgia Native Plant Society. For a list of native plants for landscape use, visit www.ecoterrallandscape.com/html/Plantlists.htm#A, compiled by Teresa Schrum.

Scatter Information as We Bloom and Grow is a monthly publication of the Garden Club of Georgia. Each edition focuses on one of three themes: horticulture, the environment and landscape design.

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