

# Charlestown Township Nature News

Brought to you by:

The Charlestown Township Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC)

July, 2023



Photo compliments of Cindie Underhill at Brightside Farm Park

*Summer sun  
Rain and sky combine  
Gardens bloom*

## MISSION

The Charlestown Environmental Advisory Committee's (EAC) mission is to advise the Board of Supervisors on environmental issues, the protection and preservation of natural resources, the use of open land and creating inventories of natural areas with unique features. All advice to be focused within the township and in the best interest and general welfare of its residents.

You are receiving this email because at some event or activity or through networking you signed up to be on the Charlestown EAC mailing list. Please feel free to share this with others who might be interested in future volunteer activities. To see the EAC's annual meeting schedule go to [Charlestown Township](#).

## HAPPENINGS/ THINGS TO KNOW

- Charlestown Township is now officially a **BIRD TOWN**! Check out the *Bird Beat*, the quarterly Bird Town community eNewsletter. Community members can sign up to receive it at <https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/su/Rh6gEGx>. Keep PA Beautiful state initiative - The EAC has adopted the clean-up of Charlestown Road as a project. We are responsible for 2 clean-ups of this road per year. We will be hiring a “flagger force” (not indicative of actual company name) to drive behind us and ensure our safety. We can use all the help we can get so we hope you will join us! Plans are underway and details are forthcoming.
- Learn about timely township news and notifications by signing up for the Charlestown Township weekly email. <http://www.charlestown.pa.us/updates.aspx>

### *Unique Opportunity*

Charlestown Day is September 30<sup>th</sup>. See the upcoming Charlestown newsletter for information on a fun and meaningful opportunity to help the environment on your property. The EAC is providing an opportunity to improve your garden and the environment. If you are willing to replace an invasive plant on your property with a native plant, the EAC will provide you with the native free of charge. The Charlestown newsletter has all of the details, and they are also included at the end of this issue of Nature News.

### *This issue focuses on Helping Our Native Birds to Survive and Thrive*

Whatever you do that focuses attention on improving ecological conditions for birds will have an exponentially positive impact on the environment. Did you know that Charlestown Township has received distinction as a Bird Town community? A lot of work went into this designation and the EAC is very proud of this work. See if you can spot the signs noting that we are a Bird Town community on Charlestown roads.

In the previous issue of Nature News, we discussed native versus invasive plants. That topic is very related to this one. Partly due to the spreading of invasives, birds and other native wildlife are decreasing in health and numbers. The invasives push out the natives and the birds cannot use the invasives for food or habitat.

What are some other reasons for the decline in our bird and insect populations and is there something you can do as an individual or small group to change this negative trend?

Let's start with causes for concern beyond the spreading of invasive plants:

1. Climate change is causing more droughts, fires, floods, and severe weather. Birds and for that matter, all species, cannot adapt quickly enough to compensate for these

changes. Wildlife lives well and flourishes within specific parameters. When those parameters change, wildlife becomes threatened (1).

2. Deforestation is replacing habitats and food sources with developments, farmland, and commercial enterprises.
3. Insecticides and pesticides, when ingested, kill birds and insects. They also poison water that birds use for drinking.
4. Diseases such as West Nile Virus among other infectious viruses, bacteria, and fungi can lead to sickness and death in bird populations.
5. Buildings, windows, and other shiny surfaces confuse birds who fly into them and are maimed or killed. Night lighting also confuses birds who lose their way in finding food and habitat.

## Some Interesting Information

- The PA state bird is the Ruffed Grouse.
- There is a special classification for endangered species called 'The Priority Species'. A priority species is one that is particularly threatened in terms of the species' long-term survival. "All priority species have been selected through rigorous scientific analysis, and most represent a broad array of other birds and wildlife that use the same habitat type. Conservation focused on priority species is almost always focused on priority habitats as well. Audubon has identified 32 priority-bird species within the Atlantic Flyway." - Audubon Society <https://pa.audubon.org/birds/priority-birds>. See this link for a list and pictures of these birds.
- From 1970 to 2019 North American bird populations have declined by almost a third. That's a loss of 3 billion birds over the last 50 years (2).
- The NIH estimates that by 2021, 6-14% of bird species will be extinct (3). This trend is expected to continue unabated in the future.
- Declines in pollination rates and seed dispersal because of bird extinctions may lead to extinctions of dependent plant species (3).
- 54 bird species have been observed in Brightside Farm Park alone where a project is in progress to improve the park for birds and bird nesting. If you are interested in seeing the list, please respond to this email and it will be forwarded to you.

## Ways You Can Help Mitigate this Trend and Make a Difference

1. Replace as much of your lawn as you can with these natives (create a national park in your yard).
2. Use outside lights only when necessary for safety. Turn them off as soon as possible.

3. DO NOT use chemical herbicides or insecticides on your plants. Find alternative DIY solutions that are safer (some suggestions given below.)
4. Place stickers or sun catchers on windows that have been struck by birds to avoid this happening in the future.
5. Brew bird-friendly coffee (5)
6. Provide a haven for birds.
  - a. Hang bird feeders, especially those that are not easy for squirrels to access. There is a huge variety from which to choose or make your own-a fun project to do with the whole family.
  - b. Put out water for birds to use for bathing or drinking, especially in hot summer months.
  - c. Make your yard or deck into a natural nesting site using a nesting box or simply creating an environment conducive to birds wanting to nest on your property. This can also be a fun and educational experience for children who can watch the process and develop respect for other species (4).
7. Create a fun project with kids or friends to learn about what birds exist in the area. Take pictures when you see a new one and use an app (such as Merlin) to store your findings. You can also use Merlin to identify birds by their song. Have competitions to see who can identify the most over a given time.
8. Visit an Audubon center or attend a Bird program to learn more about our feathered friends.
9. Be knowledgeable about local, state, and national policies that can help bird population or oppositely hurt bird populations. Politicians are not usually aware of bills they may be legislating for or against that have negative ramifications for birds.
10. Join an environmental protection group. Again, there are so many to choose from. One good example is to find a Citizen Science Program. See reference #5.
11. Buy a migratory bird stamp (duck stamp). 98% of proceeds go to conservation efforts.
12. Use less plastic. Birds can accidentally eat and choke on plastic waste or ingest enough to kill them.

#### What makes a good nesting site for birds

1. A year-round source of water and food. Food is best provided by planting trees and shrubs that provide nutrition for native birds. Native fruit trees are ideal if you have the space to support them.
2. A natural cavity created from a previous nesting spot or a quiet space provided with nest building materials, like sticks, leaves etc.
3. Build or set up a nesting box. For tips on how to do this go to: <https://www.nwf.org/Garden-for-Wildlife/Young/Nesting-Box>.

## *DIY Plant Solutions*

Many plant issues such as diseases and infestations can be addressed using safe substances such as:

1. Baking soda
2. Vinegar
3. Coffee
4. Cinnamon
5. Hydrogen peroxide
6. Epsom Salts

Here are 2 examples:

a. To treat leaf spot fungus, mix a teaspoon of baking soda in a quart of water and spray it on the leaves of the infected plant.

b. Here is a very interesting solution for tomato plant nibblers (tomato hornworms). Wasps kill hornworms that savage tomato plants when they emerge from their cocoons. They will also seek out other hornworms to feed upon and kill. To attract this hornworm-destroying wasp to your garden plant, and preferably near your tomatoes, plant parsley, dill, yarrow, and/or mustard. Adult wasps feed on the nectar of these plants. Also, provide a source of water. A birdbath will suffice. If you see white dots of wasp eggs on the hornworm it is a cause for rejoicing - they are evidence of an ecologically sound garden..

Of course, for other issues, and there are too many to discuss, what you use depends on the situation. Searching on youtube makes it easy to find DIY gardening solutions. If you call out the cause of the problem in your search you will surely find a solution. There are also many apps that focus on identifying plants and associated issues as well as non-toxic solutions.

## *Summer Sun and Fun with Awareness*

Enjoy everything summer has to offer but be safe by:

- ⊛ Always wearing sunscreen on exposed areas of your body.
- ⊛ Staying hydrated, especially if you spend a lot of time outdoors.
- ⊛ Examining yourself, pets, and kids for ticks when you come indoors and remove any you find immediately.
- ⊛ Wear long sleeve shirts and pants when gardening to avoid bites. Cover your face with netting for even more protection.
- ⊛ Become aware of what poison ivy, oak etc. looks like and avoid getting too close. If you are allergic you might want to consider having these plants mechanically removed by someone who is not sensitive. Either way, make sure to wash any exposed areas carefully, including your garden equipment if you believe you have had contact with these noxious plants.

## References

- (1) Audubon Society PA Chapter, [pa.audobon.org](http://pa.audobon.org)
- (2) Cornell Lab of Ornithology, [birds.cornell.edu](http://birds.cornell.edu)
- (3) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC539768/>
- (4) <https://www.nwf.org/Garden-for-Wildlife/Young/Nesting-Box>
- (5) <https://www.birds.cornell.edu/home/get-involved/10-ways-to-help-birds/>



"If America wishes to preserve her native birds, we must help supply what civilization has taken from them. The building of cities and towns, the cutting down of forests, and the draining of pools and swamps have deprived American birds of their original homes and food supply."

- *John Burroughs*