



# BACKYARDS FOR BIODIVERSITY

Yards and other areas around human development are most heavily used by common wildlife species that are adapted to disturbance (such as pigeons, starlings, gray squirrels, and raccoons), but uncommon species can also use these areas if nearby habitats are suitable. Depending on how it is managed, your backyard may serve as a buffer to nearby habitats by moderating the effects of development, may provide travel corridors for wildlife, or may itself provide habitat for certain species. The following measures can encourage wildlife to view your backyard as a haven rather than a threat.

## CREATE MULTI-LAYERED, DIVERSE LANDSCAPES

The more your yard resembles a natural, unmanaged habitat, the greater its value to native wildlife will be.

- Consider replacing lawns with wildflower meadows, perennial gardens, or ornamental woodlands.
- Preserve or promote (by planting or allowing natural regeneration) a variety of native tree species and tree sizes. Where safety concerns allow, leave dead trees standing and let fallen trees to decay in place.
- Leave parts of the yard unmanaged (without mowing, understory clearing, etc.) to increase benefits for wildlife.



N. Tabak 2008

- Landscape with native plants, which provide food and shelter for a variety of native wildlife. They often require less care and tend to be hardier than non-natives. Fruit-producing shrubs and trees are a great food source for birds, and native flowering plants attract butterflies and other pollinators.



K. Bell 2008



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### *The "legacy" of lawn*

Manicured lawns are the most popular form of residential landscaping, but have a lower habitat value than almost any other type of vegetation. While they are perceived as easy to maintain, they in fact require higher inputs of water, fertilizer, and labor than most other alternatives. Regular cutting with motorized mowers also contributes to air and noise pollution, and fertilizers and pesticides pollute the soil and nearby waterways. So let go of your lawn, and enjoy the benefits!

## PRESERVE WETLANDS IN YOUR YARD

Wetlands, streams, and ponds, can be valuable habitats for countless species of plants and animals. Their quality as wildlife habitats is directly related to the quality of water they contain. Vegetated stream shorelines, floodplains, and wetlands help to protect water quality, as well as to control erosion and moderate downstream flooding.

- Plant or maintain vegetation on the shores of streams and ponds; allow for the widest possible vegetated buffer between developed areas and the wetland.
- Avoid the use of pesticides and fertilizers near or in wetlands.
- Protect wetlands from drainage, channeling, filling, dumping, pollution, and other damage.



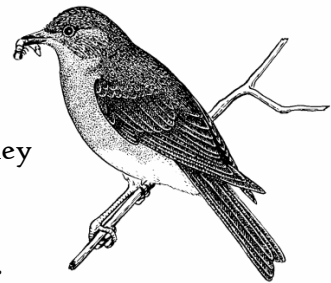
## MINIMIZE HUMAN DISTURBANCES

High levels of noise, light, and traffic in urban and residential areas are a hazard or deterrent to most wildlife species of conservation concern.

- Direct outdoor lights downward (rather than outward or upward) to minimize the light pollution to offsite and overhead areas, and turn off or dim as many outdoor lights as possible to minimize the disorienting effect they can have on nocturnal wildlife.
- Avoid constructing long driveways and access roads through intact habitats; reduce your driving speed and watch out for wildlife crossing your driveway.
- Minimize noise pollution (e.g. loud music, fireworks).

### *Constructed ponds*

Many landowners construct ponds for ornamental and recreational purposes. While such man-made ponds are used by some wildlife, their habitat value is greatly diminished by intensive management and nearby human activities. Their value to wildlife is seldom equal to that of the habitat they replaced. If you must add a new pond (or if you have an existing one), consider keeping the shoreline well-vegetated and designing the physical features of the pond to promote native wildlife (e.g., gently sloped and irregularly shaped shorelines).



**Eastern bluebird**  
Kathy Schmidt

### *Beauty is in the eye of the beholder*

Perhaps the hardest thing about providing more wildlife habitat in a residential yard is altering our perception of the ideal. In the eyes of a turtle, butterfly, or bird, manicured lawns are wastelands; fences are barriers; roads are hazards; window wells and steep-sided pools are pitfall traps. On the other hand, brush piles, creviced stone walls, and swamps may be valuable habitats. While personal and property safety is critical around a home, you may find beauty in less-intensively managed landscapes when you consider the needs of wildlife.