

Provide Wildlife Habitat

What does it mean to Provide Wildlife Habitat?

Providing wildlife habitat is the process of creating a healthy environment with food, water and shelter for wildlife. In New Jersey more than half of the state is developed and many species have declined because of loss of habitat. Providing habitat, even in small spaces, can have a positive environmental impact and attract birds, butterflies, beneficial insects, small mammals, reptiles and amphibians.¹ Providing wildlife habitat around a new home can be as easy as minimizing disturbance of the existing site, or as involved as planting a wildlife-friendly garden.² It is important to recognize that the land is already part of an ecosystem and to integrate a new home into the existing ecosystem with minimal negative impact on the animals and plants that may live on the same site. Open space on-site should be connected to similar open-space habitats off-site to maximize connectivity and safe passage for wildlife between the site and the larger environment.³



Figure 1 – Butterfly garden (Source: Flickr Jesus Branch <http://www.flickr.com/photos/jesusbranch/4328466281/>)

How to Provide Wildlife Habitat

When creating wildlife habitat select a wide variety of plants that are suited to the site's soil, sun exposure, drainage, and space conditions. Whenever possible incorporate native plants that are beneficial to native wildlife (see [Native and Adapted Plants](#) strategy). Just like humans, wildlife need food, water, and shelter. A diverse palette of berry and seed-bearing plants will provide food for local wildlife. Ponds, fountains, or other water features can be important sources of water for birds and other wildlife. Shelter can be provided with low-lying shrubs or structures such as bird and bat houses and brush piles offer protection and breeding sites for ground nesting birds and small mammals. Protect wildlife by minimizing artificial fertilizer and pesticide use. Incorporating native plants and creating a diverse landscape will reduce the need for artificial fertilizers and synthetic

¹ Conserve Wildlife Foundation of NJ. <http://www.conservewildlifenj.org/protecting/backyard/> (accessed April 16, 2011).

² See the Minimize Site Disturbance strategy for more information.

³ Hopper, Leonard J. 2007. *Landscape Architectural Graphic Standards*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.: Hoboken, NJ. Google Books Link: http://books.google.com/books?id=4Toh06XEgMoC&dq=mini+mize+building+footprint+to+reduce+site+di+sturbance&source=gbs_navlinks_s (accessed December 3, 2010).

pesticides needed to maintain a healthy garden. See the [Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey](#) for additional suggestions about creating wildlife habitat.

More specific examples of wildlife habitat creation techniques are outlined below.

Butterfly Gardens

A butterfly garden attracts and retains butterflies. Butterflies are natural pollinators which will benefit any flowering plants in the area. The garden should be placed in a sunny area of the yard and should include diverse nectar-producing plants that will provide nectar consistently throughout the year. Examples of plants that provide nectar for butterflies include mint, lilac, daylilies and petunias. The butterfly garden should have taller plants or shrubs planted on one or more sides to provide shelter from the wind.⁴ Slightly fermented fruit slices will also attract butterflies to the garden area.⁵



Figure 1: Butterfly gardens can be colorful additions to the site's landscaping. (Source: Wilson's Garden Center)

Deter Problem Animals

Securing access to trash cans and compost will decrease the number of non-native and aggressive animals that are attracted to the site.⁶ Additionally, native animals are often natural predators of non-native animals and introducing habitat for native animals may help to reduce the number of non-native and aggressive animals present.

Integrated Pest Management

Integrated pest management is a type of pest management that concentrates on a combination of environmental and social pest controls coupled with reduced use of

⁴ University of Minnesota Extension. Creating a Butterfly Garden. <http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/components/dg6711e.html> (accessed December 5, 2010).

⁵ Walter Reeves. Com. Butterfly Puddle – Building. http://www.walterreeves.com/insects_animals/article.phtml?cat=21&id=514 (accessed December 5, 2010).

⁶ Hopper, Leonard J. 2007. *Landscape Architectural Graphic Standards*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.: Hoboken, NJ. Google Books Link: http://books.google.com/books?id=4Toh06XEqMoC&dq=minimize+building+footprint+to+reduce+site+disturbance&source=gbs_navlinks_s (accessed December 3, 2010).

chemical pesticides (see Integrated Pest Management strategy).⁷ Additionally, decreased use of broad spectrum pesticides will often result in an increase of natural predatory insects which will eat the problem insects.⁸

Natural Fertilizers

The production of many commercial chemical fertilizers releases large amounts of carbon dioxide.⁹ Create natural fertilizer by setting up a compost site (see Composting strategy). Food scraps such as vegetable peels, coffee grounds and eggshells can be combined with yard debris to create a natural and nutrient-rich fertilizer over time.

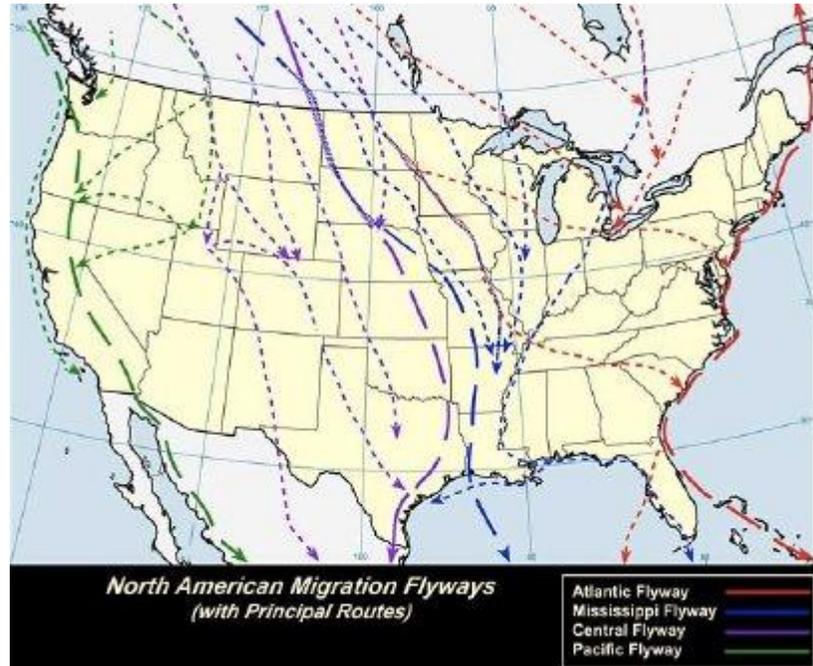


Figure 2: New Jersey lies along the Atlantic Flyway for migratory birds. (Source: Treehugger)

Control Light Pollution

Sources of constant artificial light can negatively affect wildlife in addition to attracting unwanted nocturnal insects and animals (See Downlighting strategy).¹⁰ Therefore minimizing sources of light pollution by reducing the number of extra light sources, or installing motion-sensitive lights, will enhance wildlife habitat on the site.

Provide for Protection of Migratory Bird Flyways

⁷ USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and Wildlife. ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/WHMI/WEB/pdf/IPM_Wildlife.pdf (accessed December 5, 2010).

⁸ University of Minnesota Extension. Creating a Butterfly Garden. <http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/components/dg6711e.html> (accessed December 5, 2010).

⁹ National Wildlife Federation. Wildlife-Friendly Fertilizers. <http://www.nwf.org/Get-Outside/Outdoor-Activities/Garden-for-Wildlife/Gardening-Tips/Wildlife-Friendly-Fertilizers.aspx> (accessed December 5, 2010).

¹⁰ Hopper, Leonard J. 2007. *Landscape Architectural Graphic Standards*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.: Hoboken, NJ. Google Books Link: http://books.google.com/books?id=4Toh06XEgMoC&dq=minimize+building+footprint+to+reduce+site+disturbance&source=gbs_navlinks_s (accessed December 3, 2010).

New Jersey lies along the Atlantic Flyway for many migratory birds (Figure 2).¹¹ Therefore, providing shelter, water and food sources for birds year-round can help support the survival of migratory birds along the Atlantic seaboard.

Example

The New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife, in partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service, offers a Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). This program offers financial and technical assistance to land owners who are interested in creating or restoring habitat for endangered or threatened wildlife and their habitat types. Applicants to this program must own their own arable land or land that is otherwise suitable as wildlife habitat. The program reimburses land owners at a rate of 60-75% of the average cost of implementing the specified habitat improvements.¹²

Funding and Priority Projects

Grassland Habitat: Target minimum size of habitat = 20 acres. There is funding available to support the creation and management of grasslands that provide habitat for ground-nesting birds. Grassland habitats cannot be disturbed during the birds' nesting season from April 1st through July 15th, but the protection of grassland habitat is still compatible with the production of bio-fuels or mulch hay.

Woodland Habitat: Target minimum size of habitat = 10 acres. Woodlands provide habitat for many species while still being compatible with carefully managed woodlot programs.

Bog Turtle (Priority Species): Target minimum size of habitat = 0.1 acres. Bog turtle habitat can be maintained on currently grazed areas.

Disturbance-Dependent Habitat: Target minimum size of habitat = 10 acres. WHIP program funds can be used to maintain disturbance-dependent habitats such as Atlantic white cedar forests and scrub/shrub habitats.

Pollinator Habitat: Target minimum size of habitat = 0.25 acres. Even very small areas of land can be planted with nectar, pollen or larval food sources for pollinators that are important to productive agricultural lands.

¹¹ Treehugger. Migratory Bird Flyways and Off-Shore Wind Farms: - A Co-Evolutionary Overlap. <http://www.treehugger.com/files/2008/03/migratory-bird-flyways-off-shore-wind-farms.php> (accessed December 8, 2010).

¹² USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service. Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) in New Jersey. <http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/whip/archives/index2010.html> (accessed December 5, 2010).

Wetland Habitat: Target minimum size of habitat = 5 acres. Small wetlands are home to important wildlife species like reptiles, amphibians and birds that also help to control problem insects in the area year-round.¹³

Delaware Bay

(Priority Area):

Target minimum size of habitat = 5 acres. WHIP funding is available for any habitat enhancement project benefiting an endangered species in the Delaware Bay area which includes the New Jersey counties of Salem, Cape May, and Cumberland.

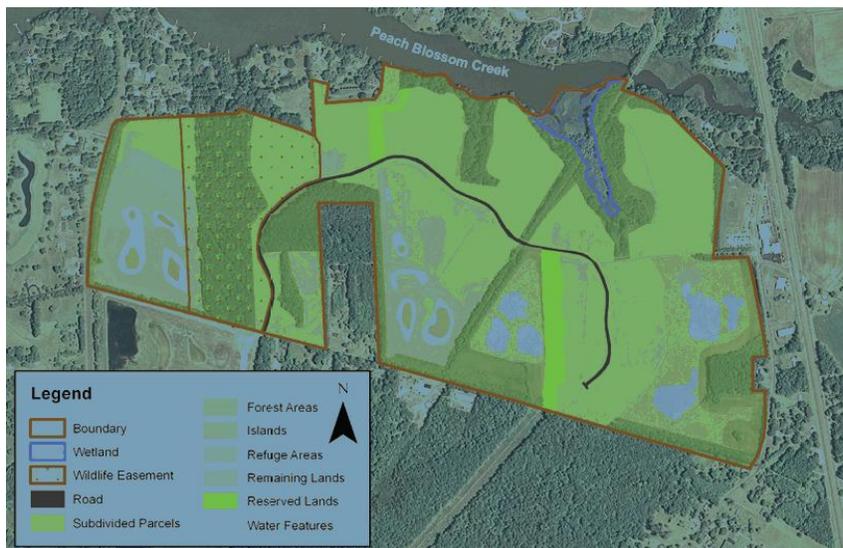


Figure 3: The Cooke's Hope at Llandaff Subdivision demonstrates several wildlife habitat creation and preservation techniques in a profitable residential development. (Source: The Conservation Fund)

A recent residential subdivision near Easton, Maryland has included provisions for wildlife habitat in its design by creating wetlands and protecting forested areas. This subdivision serves as a model for an alternative subdivision design geared towards those who prefer open spaces enhancing wildlife habitat.

The Cooke's Hope at Llandaff development, consisting of 26 residential lots on 284 acres, is located on Maryland's Eastern Shore (Figure 3). The nature-based lot design that the developers adopted has produced water quality benefits for the adjacent creek. An initial survey of existing wildlife features included a study of the soils and hydrology of the site. This survey allowed the developers to identify ideal locations for wetland and open water pond habitat restoration. A survey of forested tracts also helped the developers to identify the best suitable locations for roads and housing sites while preserving as much forested land as possible.¹⁴

¹³ USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service. Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) in New Jersey. <http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/whip/archives/index2010.html> (accessed December 5, 2010).

¹⁴ The Conservation Fund. A Sustainable Chesapeake: Better Models for Conservation. http://www.conservationfund.org/sites/default/files/The_Conservation_Fund_Chesapeake_Bay_Better_Models_for_Conservation_Chapt4_Residential_Design_Animals_People.pdf (accessed December 5, 2010).

In total, 68 acres of new habitat was created in the Cooke's Hope at Llandaff development. The new habitat also provides important resting sites for migratory birds along the Atlantic Migratory Flyway (Figure 2).¹⁵

Benefits

Benefits of creating a wildlife habitat within a residential development include:

- Increased enjoyment from viewing native animals and insects
- Educational opportunities to teach children about nature
- Increased biodiversity
- Monetary benefits such as the USDA/NJDFW Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program
- Decreased reliance on chemical fertilizers and pesticides
- Increased number of natural pollinators attracted to the region
- Potential for increased property values due to an increased desire for land with open space that provides habitat for wildlife

Costs

The cost of creating a backyard wildlife habitat will range greatly based on how large the project is and whether professional labor is hired to do the designing or planting. Many of the components of a unique and healthy backyard wildlife habitat can be purchased at local home and garden stores or nurseries.

Resources

Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey – Backyard Wildlife Habitats in NJ

<http://www.conservewildlifenj.org/protecting/backyard/>

The National Wildlife Federation (NWF)

<http://www.nwf.org/Get-Outside/Outdoor-Activities/Garden-for-Wildlife/Create-a-Habitat.aspx>

The New Jersey Audubon Society

<http://www.njaudubon.org/SectionBackyardHabitat/Welcome.aspx>

¹⁵ The Conservation Fund. A Sustainable Chesapeake: Better Models for Conservation. http://www.conservationfund.org/sites/default/files/The_Conservation_Fund_Chesapeake_Bay_Better_Models_for_Conservation_Chapt4_Residential_Design_Animals_People.pdf (accessed December 5, 2010).

The New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife, in partnership with the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service, offers a Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

<http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/whip/>

Information about the New Jersey WHIP program on the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service website

<http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/whip/>

The Humane Society of the United States Urban Wildlife Sanctuary Program

http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/resources/sanctuary_program_1.html