

From one animal lover to another...



This is a plea for the smallest members of the animal kingdom—most especially, the butterflies, birds, bees, and lightning bugs.

- Did you know? “In the last 50 years, our **moth and butterfly populations have declined by more than 80 percent**,” so says Josef H. Reichholf, author of *The Disappearance of Butterflies*.¹
- Meanwhile, since 1970, **we have lost a staggering 3 billion breeding birds “in every biome.”**²
- By now we have all heard of the huge decline of honeybees, but did you know that the honeybee is not native to our continent and that **there are 4000 species of native bees in the United States?** It is difficult to track the rate of decline in so many species of bees, but one native species, the rusty patched **bumblebee, has declined by 87 percent** in the past 20 years.³
- It is also difficult to gather data on the decline of lightning bug populations, but anecdotal evidence suggests they are rapidly disappearing as well.

I don't know about you, but it breaks my heart to think our great-grandchildren may never know the delight of a fluttering butterfly or the pure wonder of lightning bugs. I want them to know the sound of hardworking buzzing bees and the joy of a bird's lilting song.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- If you own your home, **one of the best things you can do is plant as many native plants as possible.** This is because butterflies and bees cannot recognize plants that come from other countries. This includes tulips, daffodils, impatiens, pansies, begonias, petunias, and most plants bought at the big box stores. *Sometimes butterflies and bees have to fly many miles before there is a plant they can gather pollen or nectar from.* Some of the best plants for birds and pollinators in the Mid-Atlantic region include the following. **Flowers:** various native milkweeds (essential for monarch butterflies), native sunflowers, goldenrod, asters, purple coneflower, and mountain mint. **Trees:** oaks, red maples, black locust, black cherry, serviceberry, and native willow trees. **Bushes:** mountain laurel, native rhododendron, mock orange, and elderberry. Bushes and shrubs are also important because they provide safe places for birds to nest in and hide from predators, such as hawks.



- **Please, do not succumb to pressure from landscapers or neighbors to spray pesticides or weedkillers.** This has a devastating impact on the pollinators as well as the birds who require insects to feed their young. Baby birds cannot eat seeds and must have insect protein in order to develop properly. And don't believe the companies who say their sprays kill only mosquitos. Unless you hire an environmentally conscious company, it's patently untrue.⁴ In addition, studies show that weedkillers can harm your dogs, who walk on our lawns every day.⁵ Weedkillers—especially Roundup---contaminates our crops and seeps into our water system, increasing cancer risk among human beings.
- If at all possible, **allow some places on your property where leaves and twigs are permitted to decompose.** Many beneficial insects, including luna moths, lightning bugs, and worms make their homes in leaf litter. Leaf litter not only contributes to biodiversity, including the survival of bird populations whose diets require insects, it makes excellent soil. It's better than buying mulch!
- Rather than leaving lights on all night long, **consider getting motion-detector lights.** Light pollution negatively impacts fireflies.
- Ask your landscapers to **avoid using leaf blowers.** The noise is deafening to the sensitive hearing of birds and dogs as well as to many human beings who cannot tolerate the onslaught. Leaf blowers also cause an enormous amount of pollution. One study found that found that “a two-stroke gasoline-powered leaf blower spewed out more pollution than a 6,200-pound Ford F-150 SVT Raptor pickup truck.” But most relevant to this document, blowing away leaves destroys the homes of necessary and beneficial insects.⁶
- **Don't be afraid of bugs. Learn to respect them.** They are an essential part of the ecosystem. In fact, they are essential for our survival.⁷



THANK YOU FOR CARING ABOUT LIFE ON EARTH.

¹ www.salon.com/2021/06/22/butterflies-are-in-decline-and-that-could-have-dire-consequences-for-life-on-earth/

² www.birds.cornell.edu/home/bring-birds-back

³ www.nytimes.com/2020/12/07/science/native-bees-census.html

⁴ www.humanegardener.com/in-the-shadows-of-butterflies/

⁵ www.petmd.com/dog/poisoning/pesticide-poisoning-in-dogs

⁶ www.nytimes.com/2021/10/25/opinion/leaf-blowers-california-emissions.html (An excellent opinion piece except that it advises mulching leaves with a lawnmower, which would kill the insects we are trying to save.)

⁷ www.almanac.com/why-do-we-need-bugs

Monarch butterfly image: Photo by Justin DoCanto on Unsplash

Butterfly image: Photo by Aaron Burden on Unsplash

Robin image: Photo by Steve Smith on Unsplash

Damselfly image: Photo by [jithu p.a](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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