

Imagine A Wildlife Refuge That Does Not Protect Its Wildlife

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Imagine a wildlife refuge that does not protect its wildlife. How could this be possible? It is not only possible, it is likely, unless we take immediate action to prevent it.

Unfortunately, many advocates of native plants, birds and pollinators - - good-hearted people who want to help reverse biodiversity declines by providing the native plants which wildlife needs in their yards - - inadvertently make just this mistake. When we design ecologically attractive landscapes they also include real dangers to wildlife, we have actually created ecological traps that draw many animals to their death. And that, of course, is not the goal!

We are asking for a culture change on how we do native plant promotion and we know that changing culture can be an uphill battle. Nevertheless, the logic of not killing the wildlife we want to protect is overwhelming. We need to up our game on how we promote native plants – and protect wildlife.

There are five key actions that should be in place the day a native is planted.

1. No cats in the yard. Residential cats kill over 1 billion birds and who knows how many butterflies annually.
2. Install an attractive bird window collision prevention systems on the home's windows. Death by window collision can undo much of the benefits of planting natives. Bird window collisions kill over a billion birds in the US every year, and billions more worldwide, but they *can* be prevented in several different ways.
3. Manage pests without pesticides. It makes no sense to plant natives and then hire a mosquito fogger to fog your property. Contrary to popular belief, mosquito fogging kills all insects including essential bird food, not just mosquitoes. The same non-target effects can be said of broad-spectrum lawn treatments.
4. Turn off outdoor lights, install motion detectors, or switch to yellow bulbs. Residential outdoor lights are a major cause of insect declines, particularly the moths that create the caterpillars that feed the birds.
5. Be mindful of wildlife when doing routine maintenance. Avoid mowing in the evening when toads are active. Raise mower blades so that you mow over the box turtle instead of through it. Put window guards on basement windows so that frogs and toads don't get trapped and die.

We need to consistently couple this important message with our efforts to recruit new native plantings in residential landscapes. For example, one major wildlife organization recently spent 4,900 words describing the benefits of native plants, providing details about how to plant, choose and buy them. But they only spent one closing paragraph about protecting birds from window

strikes. And this article was an exception. Most articles promoting natives say nothing about protecting the wildlife those plants will attract to your yard.

To protect against window collisions see <https://ornithologycenter.com/protectbirds/> To control mosquitoes without killing bees, butterflies, caterpillars, fireflies, dragonflies, and literally thousands of species of insect predators and parasitoids that will maintain food web balance in a well planted yard, visit <https://summitchemical.com/products/mosquito-dunks/>. Avoid lawn insecticides as much as possible. They are rarely necessary at all but are pushed by lawn care companies preventively.

We are asking for a culture change and we know that changing culture can be an uphill battle. Nevertheless, the logic of not killing the wildlife we want to protect is overwhelming. We need to plant and protect simultaneously, or we have actually conserved little.

Dr. Klem's book "Solid Air" can be ordered at: solidairbook.com

Dr. Tallamy's word is featured at <https://homegrownnationalpark.org/>

For bird window collision prevention see <https://ornithologycenter.com/protectbirds/>

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