



Brunswick Wildlife Common Birds in Decline (Part 2)

Last week's article featured common birds in decline, a new focus of the National Audubon Society. The main culprit is loss of or degradation of the quality of habitat and this serves as a proxy for the health of our natural resources, the environment, and our quality of life. What can be done to halt and reverse the decline?

The solution is to preserve and restore habitat to allow bird populations to recover...before and not after they become endangered. Habitat conservation is not just a local initiative since it must protect a bird's winter grounds, migration stopovers, and its breeding grounds. So conservationists must continually improve our knowledge of the life cycle of different species through monitoring and use those findings to devise comprehensive recovery plans.

North Carolina populations of the Common Tern and Field Sparrow pictured above have declined 79% and 59% respectively over the last forty years. The tern needs more barrier island habitat for nesting and the sparrow needs more overgrown fields with high grass, weeds, and small saplings.

What can individuals do? Join and support conservation organizations and initiatives. Politicians and developers need political and economic "votes". Individuals have both; however, individuals will only have influence if their "votes" are accumulated with many other like-minded people and the best way to accomplish that is through a group.

The Cape Fear Audubon Society, The Nature Conservancy, and the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust are three of many conservation organizations you can join that are directly involved in education, advocacy, and preservation of land in the Lower Cape Fear region.

You also have the opportunity to support Land for Tomorrow, a statewide partnership of North Carolina conservationists, farmers, business leaders, local governments, and community groups (<http://www.landfortomorrow.org>). Join them in urging the General Assembly to provide \$1 billion over five years to protect our land, water, and special natural

areas before they are irreversibly lost. Please let your representatives know you support this initiative.

In addition to contributions, support conservation organizations through volunteering by assisting with maintenance of preserves through adopt-a-site programs, by teaching others especially children, and attending public meetings and expressing your concerns. You may also volunteer to be a citizen scientist by monitoring wildlife for organizations like Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Another key action individuals can take is to “buy green”. Market-based actions cast important economic votes! Discuss the concepts below before signing contracts.

Unfortunately, “green development” is an oxymoron. Regardless of the precautions taken, once developed, a property will not have the same quality of habitat for the species of animals and plants that remain. We cannot be lulled to sleep thinking green development will eliminate the need for setting aside additional habitat.

We should, however, support “greener development”...development that leaves the most environmentally friendly result. If a property is going to be developed, make it “greener” by building among existing trees, using permeable blocks for driveways to eliminate runoff, and establishing and enforcing municipal and home owner association tree and landscape ordinances.

For landscaping, use a mixture of native plants including those that produce berries, vines such as Trumpet Creeper and Honeysuckle, and indigenous trees. Go to Audubon-At-Home for tips on landscaping: http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/index.html.

Also, promote the use of sustainable forests. Through efforts of the Forest Stewardship Council many architects and builders are using FSC-certified wood to show their support of environment-friendly design. To ensure a wood product originated from well-managed, certified forests and not uncertified tropical rainforests, green suppliers are provided chain-of-custody certifications. To learn more, go to: <http://www.fscus.org/>.

Closer to home, I always recommend using sustainable products like pine straw and bark for mulch instead of cypress that comes from wetlands and to avoid mulch with dye and pesticides added. Additional around-the-home recommendations will be included in a future article on backyard birding.

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