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# **NYACK COMMUNITY GARDEN**

***July-August 2022***

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## **The Insect Apocalypse**

I recently read an important new book, borrowed from Nyack Library that I thought I should share with members of the Community Garden. The author of this book is a prominent entomologist, Dave Goulson. He is a professor of Biology at the University of Sussex in England, a fellow of the Royal Entomological Society, a trustee of Pesticide Action Network and an ambassador for the UK Wildlife Trusts. He also happens to be an excellent writer, and the book is *Silent Earth: Averting the Insect Apocalypse*.

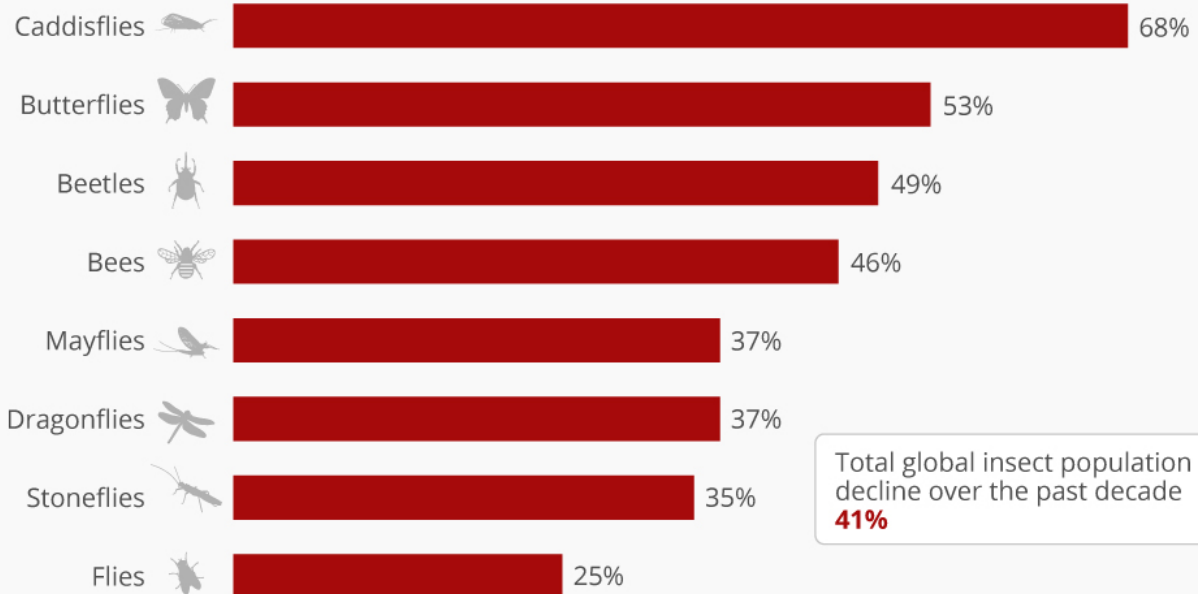
As Goulson writes in the book, “The importance of insects is often justified in terms of the ecosystem services they provide, which can be ascribed a monetary value, and pollination alone is estimated to be worth between \$235 and \$277 billion per year worldwide.” Financial aspects aside, “we could not possibly feed the growing global human population without pollinators.” But, in addition to pollination, “insects are important biocontrol agents...insects can also be valuable in controlling unwanted or invasive plants...insects are also intimately involved in the breakdown of organic matter such as fallen leaves, timber, corpses, and animal feces.” The latter is “vitally important work, for it recycles the nutrients, making them available once more for plant growth.”

And “on top of all this, burrowing, soil-dwelling insects help to aerate the soil. Ants disperse seeds, carrying them back to their nests to eat but often losing a few, which can then germinate.” So, if you were ever wondering why, when you planted some seeds in a certain part of your plot and then some seem to sprout up far from where you planted them, picture these ants with little backpacks carrying your seeds around. So, “it’s clear that many insects perform vital roles, but for most insects we simply do not know what they do. We have not even got round to naming 4/5ths of the perhaps 5 million insect species that are thought to exist, let alone studied the ecological roles they might perform.”

And they are disappearing at an alarming rate, which is hard to quantify, because we know so little, yet it is clear that it is happening, and we don’t even know what all the ramifications will be. But we do know that eventually, if it continues, it will mean the demise of all (plant and animal) life on earth. Goulson quotes a number of studies about the declines. I show you results of another study here:

## Massive Insect Decline Threatens Collapse Of Nature

Percentage decline in selected global insect populations over the past decade



@StatistaCharts

Source: Sánchez-Bayo & Wyckhuys, Biological Conservation, 2019

statista

And note the conclusion of that study: that there was a decline of 41% in just the last decade!! The causes? Loss of habitat, pesticide and herbicide use, over use of artificial fertilizers, insect parasites and diseases, the changing climate, and even light pollution. And there is much we still don't understand. At the same time, we are seeing the populations of certain birds and reptiles decline too, because many species survive by eating insects. We may not be so cognizant of this decline, but it is real.

Goulson goes on to offer actions we all can take. Luckily, we are already doing some of them in our garden. We now prohibit the use of anything other than organic fertilizers or pesticides in the garden. We have our lovely butterfly garden on one end and the pollinator garden on the other. But, if we have yards around our homes, we could do more. He suggests we "reduce...frequency of mowing" and "allow your lawn (or part of it) to flower." "Re-imagine 'weeds' such as dandelion as 'wild flowers'...'weedy' plants like dandelions, ragwort, hogweed, and herb Robert are great flowers for pollinators." Other ideas include building a log pile to support "tiny decomposers" and a compost heap, which provides a home to "worms, woodlice, millipedes, and more." And then he also encourages us to take political action.

For instance, in New York State, we need to work to pass the Birds and Bees Protection Act, banning a certain class of damaging pesticides, neonicotinoids, which passed the State Assembly this last session but failed to even come to a vote in the State Senate. We should make our voices heard in the next legislative session and make sure they pass this bill.

The decline of insects is “a sign that the fragile web of life on our planet is beginning to tear apart.” Think of the amazing way some insects, like tiny ants, can act together. We humans need to act together by “getting involved in a concerted effort to change our relationship with the small creatures that live all around us” and help us put food on our plates.

*--Kathy Schwarz*

## **Birds in the Garden**

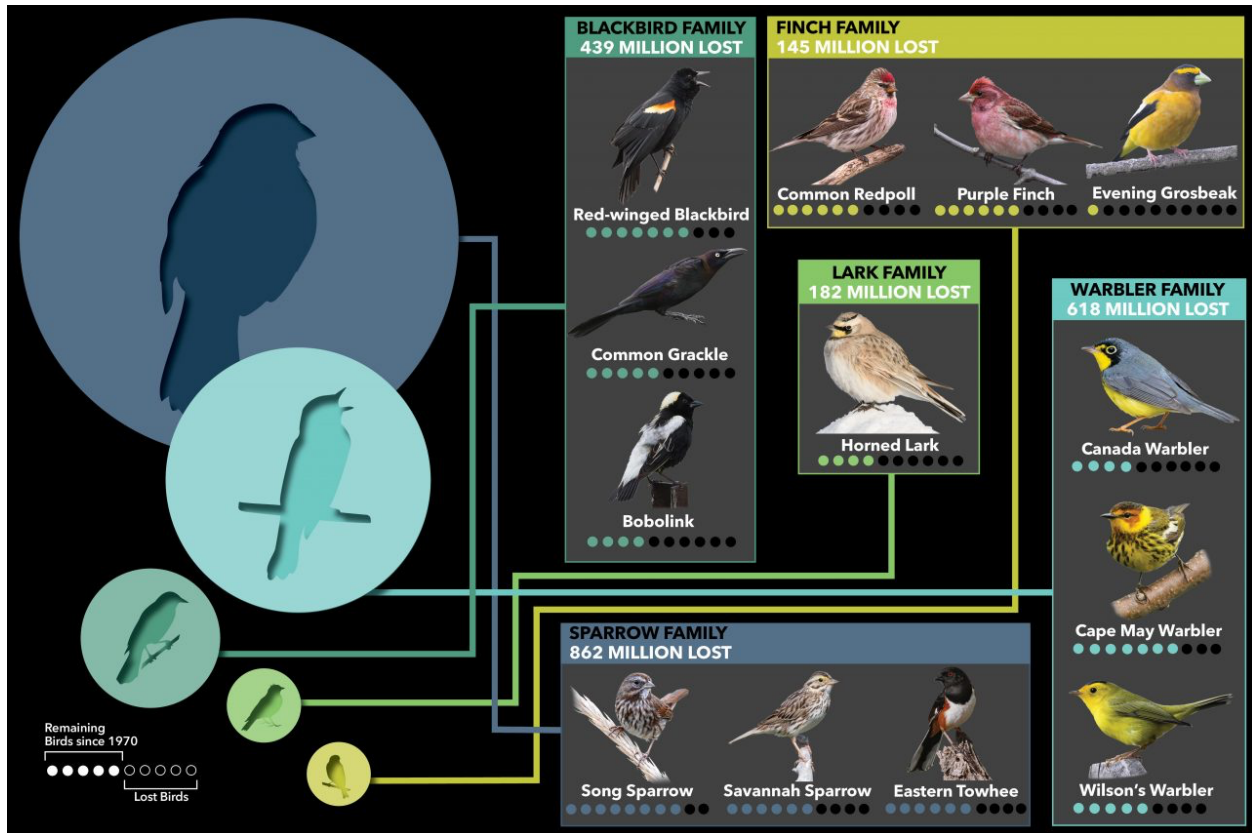
We all know we share a space with wildlife in the Nyack Community Garden. We have a fence to deter small mammals from getting into the garden and munching on our plants. We share tips on eco-friendly ways to prevent insects from eating our plants (neem spray has been a life-changer for me!). We also plant for wildlife, with the Pollinator Pathway. Just like butterflies and moths, birds are also important pollinators, and they provide a variety of ecological benefits.

Birds pollinate plants—approximately 2,000 of the 10,000 different species of birds pollinate plants. In our area, these birds are most often migratory birds, such as hummingbirds, orioles, and warblers. Our New York State Bird, the eastern bluebird, feeds on fruit from wild plants like blackberries, holly, and sumac, that require pollinators for their fruit production. The pollinating and fruit-eating species of birds also spread seeds, especially of native plants.

Birds control pests—as part of a balanced ecosystem, birds’ feeding on insects (and rodents, in the case of raptors) helps keep those populations in check. Insect-eating birds help farmers, too—barn swallows can consume up to 60 insects per hour!

Birds are “environmental indicators” or “sentinel species”—this means they indicate whether the environment is doing well or poorly. We learned about the hazards of DDT because of their effects on Bald Eagle eggs, and now, the National Audubon Society uses birders’ data to track birds’ migration and nesting ranges to indicate the effects of climate change, as birds migrate in search of food and nesting sites. Thriving birds indicate a strong environment, whereas the decline in bird populations, as we are seeing now, indicate environmental troubles.

Thanks to birders’ assiduous record-keeping and participation in citizen science, ornithologists are able to track bird populations all the way back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A 2019 study from researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology estimate that the bird population has declined by nearly 3 billion since 1970—a reduction of approximately 70 percent of the total bird population. The primary reason behind this incredible loss of bird life is habitat destruction. Most of the land in the U.S. (72 percent) is privately owned, developed, and used for housing, logging, or converted from grassland to agricultural fields. Most government-owned land is managed to protect natural resources, but privately owned land fragments or eliminates the natural habitats used by birds. This means, however, that we also have the power to modify our spaces to help birds.



We need to help birds in every way we can. Before getting into some resources to help birds, let's meet some of the birds we can commonly see in the Nyack Community Garden. Most of these birds are endemic, meaning they will generally stay in the same area year-round. However, we should never dismiss our "common" birds—as conservationists say, we want common birds to stay common!

American Robins – while called a harbinger of spring, these birds live in our area year-round, and they mostly forage in lawns for insects and earthworms.



Northern Cardinals – noticeable for their bright red plumage, especially in winter, these birds mostly forage on the ground for seeds. They are also quite noisy; once you learn their vocalizations, you'll hear them everywhere!

American Goldfinch – In spring and summer, their bright yellow breeding plumage is striking. Goldfinches mostly forage on the ground for seeds, but they also love seeds from sunflowers, milkweed, and thistle. I have seen quite a few of these beautiful birds in the garden enjoying the seeds of our flowers—thank you, gardeners!



Common Grackles – This black bird (not to be confused with starlings or red-winged blackbirds) can be identified by their glossy bodies with a duller black head. These birds mostly forage on the ground, but they also love eating corn—since we don't grow corn in the community garden, this is not an issue for us!

Blue Jay – These birds are easily identified by their blue, white, and black plumage and the crest on their head. They are very noisy, often mimicking hawk calls, and will caw away other birds at bird feeders. You can hear them in the trees behind the garden, but since they mostly forage on the ground or eat berries in trees, they won't eat from the garden.



Just like we have invasive, non-native plants, we also have invasive, non-native birds. Two of the most populous birds in the country are native to Europe and were introduced to the US in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for two very different reasons. These two species are the most common birds you will see in the garden and in and around Nyack. With over 200 million European Starlings and more than 150 million House Sparrows in North America, they are among the most common birds on the continent and they are not protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, which makes it illegal to hunt, kill, capture, or sell migratory birds. What makes these starlings and house sparrows invasive is their effect on native bird populations, competing with other cavity-nesting birds and negatively affecting the ecosystem due to their large numbers.

House Sparrows – In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the Brooklyn Institute and the Commissioners of Central Park each brought over House Sparrows with the goal of controlling insects to help farmers. Ironically, House Sparrows primarily forage for seeds, thus causing more damage to farmers' crops. They only eat insects when breeding and feeding their young. Around the garden, we primarily see these small brown birds taking straw for nesting material in late spring or taking dust baths in the soil. (Please note there are *many* native sparrows in our area; the House Sparrow is the only non-native one!)





European Starlings – In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the chair of the American Acclimatization Society wanted to bring over all of the birds mentioned in the works of Shakespeare. These black birds can be identified by their white spots that make them look like a starry night sky. Starlings are impressive vocalizers and fly in large, undulating flocks called murmurations. Starlings primarily forage on the ground for insects, and they often forage in the grass around the garden.

Now that you've met a few of the different species that you'll see around the garden, what can we do to help birds? Since the primary reason for the decline in bird populations is habitat loss, planting native plants for birds in the garden and at your house is a wonderful solution, alongside removing invasive plant species. The New York Audubon Society has a website called "Plants for Birds," where you can enter your zip code and get a list of native plants and other information:

<https://ny.audubon.org/get-outside/plants-for-birds>. Gardening reference books also help; I purchased a copy of *The Northeast Native Plant Primer* (2022, Timber Press) at Pickwick Books. Since most of this habitat loss happens in our own spaces, domestic cats who go outside significantly contribute to bird deaths, and all wildlife conservation and domestic animal protection organizations recommend keeping cats indoors—for cats' own health as well as the birds'.

You can also join a local Audubon chapter and learn more about the birds in your area—I serve on the board of Rockland Audubon Society and would be happy to talk to anyone about our work. We hold free walks around Rockland County, listed on our website: <https://www.rocklandaudubon.org>. Finally, if you want to learn more about birders' wildlife and environmental conservation efforts, you can check out my book on the topic—*For the Birds: Protecting Wildlife through the Naturalist Gaze* (2019, Rutgers University Press). It's a sociological study of contemporary birders and also gives tips on how to get into birding.

(Ornithological and image sources: Cornell Lab of Ornithology)

--Liz Cherry



# Plant-a-Row 2022

*Please help us fill the cooler near the shed! Pickups Mondays at 10am.*

According to the US Department of Agriculture in May, grocery store prices were up 7-8% this year over 2021. This is the highest grocery store price rise since 1980. And many people are struggling!

People to People, the food pantry in Nanuet, is feeding about 5000 Rockland residents every month and we can help. As is usual, Nyack Community Garden is "planting a row" for People to People, and we should be as generous as we can be with our bounty of crops.

The cooler will be put out by the shed on Sundays and whatever is contributed will be collected and sorted on Monday morning at 10 AM for transport to People to People. They are leaving some plastic containers in the shed, if you need them, (or bring your own). If you have hardy greens (chard, kale, etc.), it would be very helpful if you can tie them or rubber band them together. But they do not want you to donate your lettuce, as abundant as it seems to be this year. Lettuce wilts too quickly and won't survive the journey.

Last year we donated a total of 619 pounds. We should be able to surpass that this year, as the need is even greater this year!

And Jill Remaly, who is chair of the Plant a Row Committee, wants you to contact her at [jillremaly217@gmail.com](mailto:jillremaly217@gmail.com) if you are going away and want someone to harvest from your plot for donation to People to People.

*--Kathy Schwarz*

## Nyack Community Garden Contest - July 27

The 2022 Garden Contest will take place on Wednesday, July 27, at 10am. A panel of 3 to 5 judges (from outside the garden) will assess our garden plots on the following categories:

- Best maintained garden
- Best vegetable and flower garden
- Most creative garden
- Best overall garden (top prize)

This fun contest gives us all a reminder at the height of the season to keep our plots in good shape, weeding and maintaining a harmonious environment for our plants to thrive. And when indeed our plants have thrived, we can donate our excess produce to Plant-A-Row!

*--Liz Cherry*

# Notes from the Board

## Remove invasive field bindweed!

The garden is having an issue with invasive field bindweed and we all received instructions for identification and removal in a June 8 email to the listserv. Please see this Cornell website for identification: <https://blogs.cornell.edu/weedid/859-2/> and remember to remove all roots and rhizomes to eradicate it.

We can take this same approach to the morning glories, which we have to keep from growing on the fence.

## Do your committee work!

Many hands make light work, which is the goal of having garden committees. The board wishes to remind everyone that committee responsibilities are a mandatory part of garden membership.

## Lock up!

Please remember to lock the gate, even when you are certain the other gardener is leaving in just a few minutes behind you.

## Good news and thank you!

A quote from the board: "Love love love all the new creative garden designs!"

Also, the seedling sale raised \$170 for the Nyack Homeless Project. Thank you!

Please notify us at [membership@nyackcommunitygarden.info](mailto:membership@nyackcommunitygarden.info) if our garden information has incorrect information for you such as wrong name spelling, email, phone number, plot number, committee assignment, or address OR if you change any of these.

While we do not email revised lists every time an update is made to all members, the up-to-date information is always posted on the bulletin board on the door of the shed.

## Nyack Community Garden Executive Board

Jill Remaly (plot 37)	co-president	<a href="mailto:jillremaly217@gmail.com">jillremaly217@gmail.com</a>
Michelle Morales (plot 22)	co-president	<a href="mailto:mzmichelle@hotmail.com">mzmichelle@hotmail.com</a>
Marie Dilluvio (plot 15)	treasurer	<a href="mailto:mvenus1220@aol.com">mvenus1220@aol.com</a>
John Dunnigan (plot 16)	member	<a href="mailto:pickwickbooks@gmail.com">pickwickbooks@gmail.com</a>
Laura Pakaln (plot 32)	member	<a href="mailto:laurapakaln@gmail.com">laurapakaln@gmail.com</a>
Yodit De La Cruz (plot 35)	member	<a href="mailto:yoditgg@gmail.com">yoditgg@gmail.com</a>
Elvin De La Cruz (plot 35)	member	<a href="mailto:ausfall00@gmail.com">ausfall00@gmail.com</a>
David Spatz (plot 5)	member	<a href="mailto:davidosco@mac.com">davidosco@mac.com</a>

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Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/nyackgarden>



## 2022 Dates to Remember

- Mondays by 10am** Plant A Row veggies in cooler will be given to food bank
- Wednesday, July 27** Garden Contest Judging
- October 20** Pot Luck Dinner with prizes awarded to attending contest winners and free raffle for all attendees
- Sunday, November 13** Garden closes, all items removed and plots restored to state as of April 3
- Saturday, November 20** 8:00 AM sharp: Winter prep clean-up

A message from your newsletter team:

It's your newsletter, so please send us your garden stories, questions, or tips on what you'd like to hear more about in the newsletter. We'd love to hear from you.

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