

a voice
for the natural
landscaping
movement



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Celebrating natives
plant and natural
landscapes
since 1979.

The Grapevine

By Maryann Whitman

The message and the method...

This fall the National Audubon Society reported in its annual WatchList that populations of more than 200 native species of birds show some disturbing trends. Since 1970, many songbird species have declined by 50 percent and some by as much as 70 percent.

According to the WatchList report, changes in bird populations, communities, reproductive rates, and behavior, alert scientists to alterations in habitat integrity, water quality, fishery stock health, and the presence of toxic pollutants.

Further, "The reasons for identifying species on the WatchList are not entirely altruistic," Frank Gill, Audubon's chief ornithologist, concluded. "Like the proverbial canary in the coal mine, birds are primary indicators of environmental health, and what hurts birds also hurts the people who share the same space. We should in no way take WatchList birds for granted; we should rather listen to what their declines are telling us about the ecosystems we both inhabit."

For more information, see the Audubon Society's WatchList website at <http://www.audubon.org/bird/watchlist>.

Another interesting statistic: the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment tallies 71 million Americans participating in bird watching in 2001, up 250 percent from 1982. (However you feel about it, this number also includes hunters who track game birds.)

When I read these two sets of numbers, the comic book "light-bulb" lit up over my head. We Wild Ones members have the message and the method to help these bird watching Americans, from Maine to Hawaii, become part of the solution for the declining populations of birds by providing them with habitat! And that's not counting Canadians and Mexicans!

Folks, we need to "make friends and influence people." We need to attend Audubon Society meetings and bring along Wild Ones' information about the benefits of native plants (always ask permission before you share, some might not perceive your intentions as innocent). Why stop with the Audubon Society? Let's include Sierra Club, Hardy Plant Society, Federated Garden Clubs, every naturalist's group...you get the idea. Every nature center should have a subscription to the Wild Ones Journal and a stack of information about Wild Ones.

Portia Brown of the Louisville Chapter tells us about her chapter's intention to attend Sierra Club's Alternative Gifts Fair and sell Wild Ones memberships. The Louisville Chapter takes care of the paperwork and the buyer gets a lovely woodsy patterned card to give to a deserving friend, announcing the gift membership. What an excellent idea!

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The stack of information that I mentioned earlier should include the new Wild Ones brochure, "In Harmony With Nature—Landscaping with Native Plants." If you haven't seen it yet you're in for a treat! It says all the right things to help the reader realize that we're not discussing an academic exercise, nor a purely aesthetic one, but rather one of serious import and impact. And it does this so calmly and pleasantly that the reader can't help but hop on board. Congratulations to Lorraine Johnson (Toronto Chapter) and Babbette Kis (Milwaukee-North Chapter) and Camin Potts (Central Wisconsin Chapter) on a job well done.

See also the information on landscaping for birds on the What's New page of the Wild Ones website, www.for-wild.org. Those of you with web connections who haven't explored the Wild Ones website recently (like yours truly I'm embarrassed to admit), are going to be stunned by the changes. We have had some very dedicated volunteers mounting it, especially Peter Chen and David Nowak. You'll notice that the material has been written by volunteers as well, like our own Mariette Nowak.

**...and now, for something completely different...
(thank you Monty Python)**

If you ever are in a position to handle turtle eggs, and want them to hatch, you need to know (at least) one absolutely critical thing: You must keep them in the identical orientation that you found them. No turning, no jostling, no oops-I-dropped-it-but-it-didn't-break. It seems that the turtle embryo, very early in its development, attaches to the eggshell; jostling, before another developmental stage is completed, breaks this attachment and the embryo dies.

Because of development along our ocean shorelines a number of rare ocean-faring turtles are becoming even more rare. Development affects the native dune vegetation, which subsequently affects the slope and the ability of dunes to withstand storms. Rare turtles come ashore on moonless nights and lay their rare eggs without understanding the affects of development. Environmentalists, who do understand the affects of development, are trying to assist the turtles' survival by moving and marking the nests. To do this successfully they need to obey the no-turning commandment.

Other environmentalists are trying to stave off the degradation of the dune ecosystems by replanting hundreds upon hundreds of rootlets of dune grass, *Uniola paniculata*, which is native from Virginia southward into the West Indies. Its extensive, laterally growing rhizomes, which root readily in dry sand, permit it rapidly to colonize and establish itself; its penetrating deep roots permit it to hold fast and to find moisture where there is little; its dense surface roots trap the wind-blown sand that eventually mounds and begins dune formation.

Marram grass, *Ammophila breviligulata*, stabilizes dunes in a similar manner on the south and east shores of Lake Michigan, Saginaw Bay, Lake Huron and the eastern shore of Lake Ontario, where the prevailing winds from the north and west cause the sands on the shoreline constantly to be on the move.



Lake Michigan dunes

Both grasses thrive in an environment in which they are constantly being buried, little by little. With the sand anchored by roots, other plants take hold and dunes grow, sometimes to heights of 30 or 40 feet. Thus, the dunes are held in place unless something destroys the plants. A particularly fierce storm can do it. People can do it by trampling the grasses or driving over them, breaking the surface rhizomes more quickly than they are regenerated.

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