

Creating Habitats to Attract Wildlife

What is the Delaware Estuary?

The Delaware Estuary is located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, surrounded by portions of Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware. An estuary is where fresh water from a river mixes with salt water from an ocean or bay. Estuaries are fragile ecosystems, which support some of the Earth's richest and most productive habitats. The Delaware Estuary stretches approximately 134 miles, from the falls of the Delaware River between Trenton, New Jersey and Morrisville, Pennsylvania, south to the mouth of the Delaware Bay between Cape May, New Jersey and Cape Henlopen, Delaware.

Steps to improving local habitats.

Forests and natural open spaces are rapidly declining due to development and the growing number of people in the Delaware Estuary. Where you live, shop, work, or go to school was once a pristine habitat for native wildlife. While pristine habitat is irreplaceable, there are many actions you can take to provide the necessary requirements for wildlife. Whether you have 4 acres of mowed lawn in your backyard or small strips of grass in the parking lot where you work, these areas can be used to provide habitat: water, food, shelter, and a place to raise young for many creatures. Following are ways that you can help to enhance habitats across the Delaware Estuary region:

Water

- Make sure fresh water for drinking and bathing is available all year in a cool shady spot.
- Be aware that moving water is better at attracting wildlife and diminishes the ability for mosquitoes to breed.
- The water source should be located in an area that provides protective cover from predators. While an elevated birdbath will protect birds from cats, an additional water source on the ground will create an active wildlife environment for small mammals, frogs, insects, and reptiles.
- Water receptacles should have a dry ledge with a shallow end and a deep area so that it can be used by various species of wildlife.
- Creating an ecologically balanced pond will not only be aesthetically pleasing, but also can provide an excellent source of water, food, shelter, and a place to raise young.

Food

- Native shrubs and trees that produce berries, seeds, nuts, or nectar can provide an excellent source of food, as well as safe cover from predators. If you are planting vegetation to provide food for wildlife, make sure to not use pesticides that could poison the species you are intending to attract.
- Rock piles, leaf piles, and dead logs help to attract earthworms and insects, which are a valuable food source for other species.
- Commercial feeders can help to supplement natural food sources throughout the year.



Sense of Place

Habitat Enhancement Program



Shelter

- Various trees and shrubs provide food and shelter to many different wildlife species and protection from predators and temperature extremes. (See below.)
- Plant a diverse group of plants to attract a greater variety of creatures.
- Plant evergreens to provide year-round coverage.
- Dense hedgerows, thickets, tall grasses, wildflower meadows, brush piles, rock piles, and fallen logs are not commonly found in landscaped areas, but can be incorporated to provide valuable habitat.

Places to Raise Young

- Evergreens, deciduous trees, thickets, and hedgerows provide excellent conditions for raising young.
- Dead trees and fallen logs are used by cavity-nesting species.
- Watering holes are needed for fish, amphibians, and many insects like dragonflies, to reproduce.
- Butterfly larvae use many flowering plants.
- Rather than removing vegetation as it dies back, leave it in your garden so that it can be used for nesting material.
- Since leaving a dead tree standing on most properties is considered a liability, artificial nesting boxes can be purchased or made for cavity-nesting creatures. Artificial boxes can be made for many beneficial creatures which feed on flying insects, such as bats, bluebirds, wrens, purple martins, and swallows.

*Do you have a particular creature that you would enjoy seeing?
Well, invite them over for their favorite food and a place to stay.*

Butterflies

- Plant a wildflower meadow in a sunny spot, protected from wind.
- Flower shape and color should be diverse to ensure a variety of butterflies. Plants with clusters of flowers, like butterfly weed, may be favored because the butterflies can perch and feed from one flower to another without leaving the cluster.
- Most butterflies prefer intensely sweet fragrances.
- Since plants flower at different times of the year, include a variety of bloom times in your meadow so butterflies have access to nectar throughout the growing season.
- Plants and herbs such as alfalfa, red clover, parsley, fennel, dill, and butterfly weed all make up an important part of the butterfly's diet while in the caterpillar stage.
- Other excellent native plants that attract butterflies include aster, black-eyed susan, goldenrod, milkweed, and Joe-pye-weed.

Hummingbirds

- Tubular-shaped, red flowers like bee balm, scarlet sage, coral bells, and cardinal flower are especially attractive to hummingbirds.
- A hummingbird feeder can be bought to supplement natural food sources. The feeder should be cleaned and refilled weekly with a mixture of four parts water (boil first) to one part sugar. Please do not use honey or red dye.

Squirrels, Chipmunks and Other Small Mammals

- Nut producing trees such as oaks, hickories, walnuts, hazelnuts, and beeches are greatly appreciated by these mammals.
- Purchase or make a bat house for the bats to sleep in during the day. At dusk they will immerge and feast on flying insects in the area.

Song Birds

- Trees provide a safe nesting spot for many migratory birds, while also supplying a food source for millions of caterpillars and other insects hatching in their treetops. Migrating birds depend upon large blocks of undisturbed forest and continuous tree corridors, or greenways, for their survival.
- Evergreens such as pines, firs, spruces, cedars, hemlocks, and hollies provide excellent winter food and cover.
- Conifers, cone-bearing evergreens, are favored by titmice, chickadees and some finches because of their tiny seeds and needles.
- Junipers and cedars produce nutritious berries eaten by cedar waxwings and purple finches. Wild robins, sparrows, and mockingbirds also like to nest in these trees.
- Some additional deciduous trees within the Delaware Estuary region that provide food and nesting sites include the black cherry, red mulberry, red maple, sugar maple, river birch, flowering dogwood, American beech, black gum, and many species of oak.
- Commercial bird feeders and food can be purchased for the specific birds that you want to attract.

Amphibians

- A small barrel set in the ground with some shrubs planted along side can provide an excellent habitat for many different types of frogs.

