



# Updates from the Trail: February 2022

## The Birds and the Bees

On any given day at the Eddy Sisters property, there atop a dead Locust tree bordering the road, you can spot a Red-tailed hawk. With incredible eyesight, the hawk watches the meadow for any sign of unsuspecting rabbits or squirrels trying to sneak a bite from crops in the Community Garden. Occasionally, the hawk will swoop down, as if riding a rollercoaster, and grab some unlucky prey in his massive talons.

Red-tailed hawks are among the few species of birds whose populations have been steadily increasing over the last few decades. However, many other common species of birds, like the Eastern Meadowlark, haven't been as fortunate.

Studies have shown North America has lost 3 billion birds, or every 1 in 4, since 1970. Researchers have also found, found that in the U.S 28% of bumble bee species are in decline, and 19% of butterflies are at risk of extinction. Things like habitat loss and fragmentation, pesticides use, fertilizer runoff, are some of the principal causes of these issues.

The same alarming stories of widespread bird and insect declines also offer hope as there are success stories, too. Since 1973, populations of ospreys, bald eagles, and waterfowl have soared. And in May of 2020, a bald eagle hatched on Cape Cod—the first in 115 years. During the 2021 Thanksgiving Count the Xerces Society reported nearly 250,000 monarch butterflies observed across western overwintering sites. This is a 100-fold increase from 2020, which reported record low of less than 2,000 butterflies.

The causes of these population declines can be quite complicated and contribute to other issues like declining water quality on the Cape. The good news is that the solutions can be quite

simple, they can address multiple problems, and can start in your backyard.

Reducing your lawn in favor of native plants provides food and habitat for birds and bees while reducing the amount of fertilizer, water, and pesticides used in your landscape. Native raingardens go a step further and filter stormwater runoff, further preventing pollutants from entering our ponds and wetlands. Removing showy invasive plants like burning bush or butterfly bush in favor of native counterparts like huckleberry or blueberry, will alleviate the pressures that our natural systems are facing. The issues facing us today can be overwhelming, but we can solve them, one yard at a time.



*The Red-tailed hawk perched within the dead tree at the Eddy Sisters property (2/24/2022). Populations of hawks and eagles have risen 78% since 1970, a total of 15 million birds. Photo courtesy of Roger Debenham*

### Sources

- Rosenberg, Kenneth V., et al. "Decline of the North American avifauna." *Science* 366.6461 (2019): 120-124.  
<https://www.3billionbirds.org/findings>
- <https://xerces.org/pollinator-conservation/whats-at-stake>