

## Recommendations for Best Management Practices for Healthy Environments for People, Birds, and Wildlife in Metro Atlanta

***“If you take care of the birds, you take care of most of the big environmental problems of the world.”***—Thomas E. Lovejoy, Tropical Conservation Biologist and National Geographic Fellow, from January 2018 National Geographic Year of the Birds, *Why Birds Matter*.

Atlanta Audubon builds places where birds and people thrive. What is good for the birds is also good for people. We approach our work through the lens of birds and other wildlife—because they cannot speak for themselves. We have assembled this list of best management practices we believe are applicable to regional planning, municipal planning, parks planning, neighborhood planning, and individual homeowners.

**Land Use:** *The way we manage our land has important implications for wildlife habitat.*

- Prioritize preservation of large areas of existing greenspace as potentially the best habitat for birds and wildlife.
- Prioritize greenspace along waterways, wetlands, and ephemeral streams, where biological diversity is greatest. Healthy wetlands lead to good water quality and are among the most productive ecosystems in the world.
- Create parks of all sizes which contain native habitat to attract birds, invertebrates, and other wildlife that contribute to a healthy ecosystem.
- Utilize green infrastructure to clean water, reduce flooding, and provide habitat.
- Look for land for preservation in re-purposed areas such as former golf courses, parking lots, vacant lands, unbuildable lands, and waste areas.
- Consider returning streams that have been piped to their natural streambed (daylighting) to create habitat.
- Encourage creation and retention of open, undisturbed water for waterfowl and other birds.

**Trees and plantings:** *Plants provide wildlife with food and shelter, and plant diversity correlates strongly with bird diversity.*

- Preserve the existing tree canopy. If canopy is lost to necessary tree removal, mitigate with native tree plantings within the same property.
- Preserve existing urban forests, and incentivize the retention of old growth forest remnants.
- Incentivize the retention and careful preservation of native trees, prioritizing those with large crowns, on properties where new development will occur, both commercial and residential.
- Add new native trees throughout Metro Atlanta to support native birds, insects, and other wildlife.

- Install a diversity of native plantings to provide year-round food sources for pollinators and birds. Prioritize plantings that create structural diversity with overstory and understory trees, as well as ground plane shrubs and groundcovers.
- Avoid pruning or removing trees during the nesting season.
- Mow natural areas when birds are not nesting.
- Keep plant material on site where possible. Retain standing dead trees and dead branches when they do not threaten people or property. Retain leaf litter and downed trees to provide homes for the insects and other invertebrates, small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians that are food for birds and contribute to the local food web.
- Prioritize removal of invasive, exotic plants, with a focus on privet, kudzu, non-native honeysuckle, and ivy, that have destroyed the natural ecosystems that once existed. After removal, supplement with native plants or seeds as appropriate.
- Avoid broad spectrum spraying of herbicides for invasive plant removal.

**Connectivity:** *When we connect patches of greenspace, we expand habitat, allow for healthier breeding populations of wildlife, and create a more meaningful experience for people.*

- Prioritize connectivity of greenspace along waterways to provide habitat and create wildlife corridors which enable animals to move throughout the environment.
- Prioritize connectivity of the tree canopy for birds and wildlife.
- Prioritize the connectivity of multi-use trails, which provide access for wildlife and people to otherwise inaccessible areas.
- Prioritize the connectivity of land so that mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and birds can navigate safely and thrive.

**Care of the land and wildlife:** *Acting as good stewards of the land has positive impacts on wildlife.*

- Keep the wildness in green spaces, being thoughtful about wildlife control.
- Discourage the feeding of wildlife by people. Wildlife require nutritious food from natural food sources.
- Manage the edges of water bodies by encouraging a vegetative buffer other than turf grass at the edge of the water in order to increase biodiversity and absorb excess nutrients.
- Minimize turf except where it is important for common park uses such as for ball fields and recreation.
- Avoid the use of pesticides or pesticide-coated products that eradicate food sources for birds and wildlife. This includes mosquito sprays and neonicotinoids.
- Encourage biological controls of mosquitoes and other insect pests with nest boxes, chimney swift towers, and bat boxes to provide homes for birds and other insectivores.
- Provide no support of feral cats or outdoor cats. They are not natural predators in the ecosystem.
- Minimize unnecessary outdoor lighting, while maintaining public safety. Utilize down-shielded lamps and motion activated lighting.
- Use chemical fertilizers sparingly and only where needed for horticultural success, such as on ball fields.
- Use pre-emergents only on a temporary basis until beds are established and weeds curbed.