



National Wildlife Federation® Issue Talking Points

Issue: Backyard Wildlife Habitat™ program (BWH)

Summary: The BWH program gives people the knowledge to turn their backyards into valuable wildlife refuges and teaches them the rewards of connecting with nature by inviting wildlife into their lives. Through this program people learn that habitat restoration is critical for wildlife survival in urban and suburban setting where commercial and residential development has eliminated most natural areas. Some of the most common backyard wildlife habitat residents include butterflies, songbirds, hummingbirds, frogs, turtles, rabbits, squirrels, and dragonflies. By creating a BWH site everyone can make a personal contribution by making their landscape more hospitable to wildlife and people, an effort which opens eyes and hearts to the natural world.

Since 1973, National Wildlife Federation (NWF) has been rewarding people who “garden for wildlife” by certifying their properties as official BWH sites. To qualify for certification, a habitat must provide the following four essential elements: food, water, shelter, and a place to raise young. Additionally, it must be maintained using “sustainable gardening practices” which include reducing or eliminating use of chemical pesticides, conserving water and controlling problematic exotic species. NWF encourages the use of plants native to soils and climate of an area, which support 10 to 50 times as many species of wildlife as non-native plants. Along with providing higher wildlife value, this natural approach requires less fertilizer, less water, less maintenance and less overall cost than traditional lawns and gardens.

To date, there are more than 38,000 certified BWH sites throughout the country. About 3,500 new habitats are certified each year, demonstrating the popularity of the program. These sites result from the hard work and commitment of individuals and families providing habitat near their homes, but habitats at in public spaces such as libraries, zoos, nature centers, as well as workplace habitats that allow employees to experience the natural world during the workday, are all also eligible for certification. NWF has also certified more than 2,000 schools through its Schoolyard Habitats® program, which focuses specifically on the special needs of developing, using, and maintaining habitat-based learning sites on school grounds. Its goal is to teach the wonders of nature and provide a hands-on learning opportunity for students and teachers alike. Five communities have been awarded “Community Wildlife Habitats” certification, recognizing their successful efforts to spread the message about habitat and certification throughout the community. They include Alpine, California; Zionsville, Indiana; Reston, Virginia; Tukwila, Washington; and Chamblee, Georgia.

Through its Habitat Stewards and Habitat Ambassadors volunteer opportunities, NWF trains individuals to serve as mentors in their community by teaching others the rewards of natural landscaping.

NWF resources include the book *Attracting Birds, Butterflies and Other Backyard Wildlife*” written by program manager David Mizejewski, a starter kit, a planning guide, a video, an interactive website that offers online courses and other interactive features. Resources can be ordered or accessed by calling 800-900-2656 or visiting www.nwf.org/backyardwildlifehabitat.

Communications

Targets: Newspaper garden and feature editors; gardening magazines; gardening clubs; birding groups; broadcast and other mass media with gardening or environmental/science columns and segments; environmental education journals.

Communications

Objectives: Publicize the NWF BWH program and position it as the premier educational tool for teaching people how to create a wildlife habitat on their property or in their community. Utilize the program to communicate NWF's broader vision of making a place for wildlife in the modern world through education and action. Highlight backyard habitats as refuges for people and wildlife alike.

Outreach

Vehicles: Press releases on newly certified habitats to local media; “special topic” press releases (e.g., safe bird feeding tips” or “attracting hummingbirds in the fall”); mailings to gardening editors; personal pitch letters to broadcast media; BWH video; speaking opportunities for BWH spokespersons; lendable slide show; BWH website; community workshops; exhibits at nature and gardening shows.

Primary

Message: The BWH program gives people the inspiration, knowledge, and tools they need to connect with nature, giving them the opportunity to make a place for wildlife and protect the natural world where they live, work and go to school. The program is NWF's way of showing everyone how to make a better world starting in their own backyard. Connecting with nature where we live improves quality of life and fosters a strong, meaningful conservation ethic.

Secondary

Message: Creating habitats with natural landscaping provides a pathway to environmental stewardship. It is often the first step people take to developing a lifelong commitment to protect the wildlife and wild places they love.

BWH sites – and gardens in general - can provide a source of solace, comfort and confidence in the future, especially in the post-September 11th world. Protecting the natural beauty of places we love and the wildlife they support is at the heart of America's conservation ethic. BWH sites can lift the spirit, mend the heart, and renew faith in our country's tomorrow. While the main focus of the BWH program is nurturing and protecting the wildlife in our world, these places of refuge can now come to our rescue, giving us the strength and hope we need to relieve our anxieties.

Bottom Line: The Backyard Wildlife Habitat program is a flagship for NWF because it shows people how they can personally make a difference by protecting and improving the environment both for themselves and for the wildlife with which they share the planet. The tremendous growth in the program is testimony to the enthusiastic response it has received. *(Point out specific wildlife species in your area that will use backyard habitats.)*

Cautionary

Notes: People sometimes worry that their Backyard Wildlife Habitat site might attract undesirable wildlife. This only happens in a rare minority of cases. Rats aren't

supported by naturalistic landscapes and pest insects are controlled by natural predators in a balanced habitat. By sealing off attics, basements and crawl spaces, wildlife can be safely excluded from houses and other buildings. The vast majority of wildlife species that are attracted to these mini-refuges are welcomed. NWF has received countless testimonials from program participants who find their efforts to create a habitat not only rewarding, but fun for the whole family and an inspiration to their neighbors.

Naturalistic landscape design that mimics nature can look very different from a typical suburban yard with a lawn and a few bushes. Some areas have “weed ordinances” that are not friendly to a naturalistic landscape. Participants should check their local codes and if they have bad weed ordinances they should work to educate the community and change them for the better. Fortunately, there are many native plants that provide for wildlife that are highly ornamental and most BWH sites are even more attractive than a spare lawn landscape.

People often ask, “Can one backyard habitat really make a difference when the rate of habitat destruction is so immense?” NWF's vision is that one backyard habitat will lead to another and another through increased awareness of the program, which will result in a shift in landscape management practices and more habitat for wildlife. Just as importantly, the process of creating habitat and then observing wildlife first hand teaches people in a very real way what all wildlife species need to survive and the impacts of their personal actions. These lessons and understanding are the first steps in developing a lifelong commitment to conservation. As a result, many BWH participants become advocates for protecting wildlife and wild places in their communities and beyond.

NWF

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