



Article Reprint from

# *Cooks Current* Newsletter

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## The View from Laughing Springs: Hans Reimann's ecological notes

Spring 2013

### Get Ready for “Birdtown”

The annual renewal of the spring season was tempered somewhat by the reluctant withdrawal of the winter season's chill. But, the stream corridors, wetland expanses, and spring headwater areas still had insect activity after the skunk cabbage flowered in February.

As I pen this April 2013 article, our year-round bird neighbors are very happy. Kohlberg Hill has six species of woodpeckers: from coo-cooing nuthatch, to the downy, flicker, and squawking red headed. Hurricane Sandy's tree damage has not hurt the woodpeckers' habitats. Here at the Laughing Springs section of Kohlberg Hill, the biggest centenarians fared well in the storm: ash, red oak, black oak, white oak, chestnut oak, black birch, and maple. These trees are well over one hundred years old and prime bird habitat. The pristine nature of Laughing Springs can serve as a template for other property owners to improve their home turf into better bird habitat. I continue to marvel at the resilience of our forest habitat after two major autumn storm events in successive years. The Laughing Springs forest now channels deer away from many small trees, shrubs, and wildflowers because of the maze of smaller downed trees and limbs. These trees and limbs will eventually decay and be assimilated by an incredible variety of insects, fungi, mushrooms, and other creatures. It's the amazing forest food chain and cycle. Birds seem to be the best ambassadors of this cycle.

Part of our Cooks Creek Watershed Association mission may be described as creating sustainable communities through the lives of birds. To help us help you in this grand endeavor, the Springfield Township Environmental Council has implemented the Audubon “Birdtown” program. And, the Springfield Township supervisors approved this voluntary participation with the National Audubon Society. It will enhance our sense of place by promoting native plants as a basis for our living landscape. The plantings are vital to the life of birds and also to our own lives. Benefits of “Birdtown” participation include: 1) improved quality of eco-systems, 2) community pride, 3) expanding resources available to native birds and insects, 4) safer, more happy places to live, work, and play, 5) reduced maintenance bills and times, 6) cleaner water and air and less landfill, 7) cooperation among community officials and residents, 8) encouragement of exercise and recreation, 9) renewed eco-system services such as stormwater management, and 10) better informed constituency. While implementing the best landscaping practices on an

individual property, such practices can help support wildlife, protect natural resources, link adjacent properties through a broader community plan, and can yield even greater conservation outcomes by stabilizing common bird populations but also expand the resources to more specialized species. “Birdtown” provides the framework for implementing such a plan. {<http://pa.audubon.org/AAH-Birdtown>}. Here are some bird-friendly tips that may sound familiar:

- a) Plant like nature, as a diversity of plants yields a diversity of insects and more birds.
- b) Eliminate the use of pesticides, and a mix of insects and others will create a natural balance.
- c) Tolerate leaf damage, as all native insects are beneficial and nibbled leaves mean your yard is functioning.
- d) Provide fresh water for all birds to bathe and drink.
- e) Be vigilant, as birds will accidentally transport invasives to your yard; so learn to identify and remove exotic plants. Native “weeds,” on the other hand, might be beneficial.
- f) Consider colors and texture; native flowers and other herbaceous plants come in a variety of shapes, colors, and textures to enhance your habitat garden.

P.S. We are hoping Durham Township will join the “Birdtown” program, so that this could become a “Watershed-wide” program. CCWA members or anyone living in Durham Township should attend Environmental Council meetings and urge them to act on this.

*For more information on “Bird Town”: <http://pa.audubon.org/bird-town>.*