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The Old Railway Station
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CWH Protects 420 Acres of Habitat for Wildlife

CWH partnered with a conservation buyer to restore and protect the 245 acre Riverbend Farm. This farm has 3/4 of a mile of water frontage on the Little Blackwater River (a major tributary of the Nanticoke River), directly across from Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge. We restored 75 acres of wetlands, planted 30 acres of wooded buffers and 10 acres of warm season grass buffers on the farm. The owner donated a conservation easement that permanently protects the restored habitat and the previously existing woodlands, wetlands and farmland. Two house sites were reserved to maintain resale value on the property. CWH is currently pursuing new properties for similar projects with this conservation buyer. Maryland Environmental Trust is a co-holder of the easement.

CWH also worked with a landowner in Prince George's County to restore and then permanently protect 165 acres of forests and warm season grass meadows. Utilizing funding from the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), CWH planted 68 acres of woodlands and 38 acres of warm season grass meadows. These restored habitats along with an additional 57 acres of existing woodlands were permanently protected under a joint CREP easement purchase landowner donation easement. Maryland Environmental Trust and Department of Natural Resources were critical partners in this easement project.

Habitat Does Work

Last fall, an article in our Habitat Works newsletter, described the comparative bird surveys now being conducted in some of the meadows that CWH has planted. Although there is more data to collect, our preliminary findings show notable trends.

In two different meadows, both of which are similar in size and surrounded by woodland, one is planted in native warm season grasses, and the other is planted in hay and pasture species of non-native cool season grasses (CSG), primarily Orchard grass. "There is a very dramatic difference," says Robin Haggie, a CWH Wildlife Ecologist. "We are seeing significant activity in the warm season grass (WSG) meadow and practically zero use of the cool season meadow."

Preliminary reports show that there is more breeding and overwintering occurring in the WSG meadows, and very little at all going on in the CSG meadow. Good-sized flocks of White-throated, Field and Chipping sparrows are often seen in the WSG meadow. These meadow dependant species are in decline, whereas the birds being found in the CSG are mostly woodland dwelling birds, whose populations are stable. "In a second study site where the CSG meadow is directly across the creek from the WSG site, we are finding similar results, telling us a lot about the quality of habitat the grasses provide," says Haggie. Stay tuned for more results!

CHESAPEAKE WILDLIFE HERITAGE

Habitat works

The newsletter about building habitat for wildlife
Spring 2004

Why don't we see as many quail now?

Habitat Works is published by Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to creating, restoring and protecting wildlife habitat and establishing a more sustainable agriculture, through direct action, education and research, in partnership with public and private landowners. We welcome your comments and contributions.

Agriculture of Today

Ned Gerber

Let me begin by saying that I think farms, where food is produced and a diversity of wildlife is actively managed for, are one of the best land uses we have. Even farms where the natural landscape has been completely obliterated offer a hope of restoring some balance between human and wildlife uses in the future. If that land produces the "final crop" of a typical housing subdivision, options to create wildlife habitat become extremely limited (including only backyard birds and butterfly gardens).

"Where are the quail and meadowlarks?" is a common question we hear. Our "older" clients frequently mention that they remember visiting their grandfather's farm and seeing many more wildlife species than they see today. They cannot understand why farms don't have the wildlife species that they used to. Excepting the deer population, which would have been much smaller in the 'old days,' many other species could have fared better on the farms of yesteryear. Why? Let's take a look at some data from the folks at the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) statistics office.

Cropping history acreage in Queen Anne's County, MD over the past 60 years

	1940	1960	1980	2000
Corn	32,100 (28 bu)	46,700 (62 bu)	66,400 (88 bu)	47,100 (170 bu)
Beans	5,400 (13 bu)	10,300 (24 bu)	48,500 (25 bu)	70,600 (47 bu)
Hay/Pasture		30,700 acres	6,000 acres	1,800 acres

(Parentheses = bu/acre)

In 1940, Queen Anne's County had 32,100 acres in corn which yielded an average of 28 bushels an acre. The field where the corn grew had a lot of weeds in it, providing great cover to quail as well as a wealth of insects for young birds to feed on in the summer. The weeds may also have taken up any excess nutrients that the corn didn't use.

That same year the county had only 5,400 acres in soybeans of which only 2,200 acres were harvested (some soybeans were then cut for hay or tilled in as green manure) yielding 13 bushels to the acre. Wheat was grown on 32,900 acres yielding only 18 bushels per acre. We can't find accurate records for hay crops in 1940 but dairy farms were common and it is likely that there were at least 30,000 acres in hay.

(continued on page 2)

(continued from page 1)

By 1960 new hybrid seed was being used and synthetic commercial fertilizer became more readily available. The corn field was "cleaner," having fewer weeds as herbicide use was becoming more common. Corn and soybean production rose from the 1940s level and hay was grown on 15,700 acres with another 15,000 acres in pasture.

By 1980 corn yields rose even further, occupying 66,400 acres, while soybeans, yielding 25 bushels, were grown on 48,500 acres. Hay production shrank 50% from that of the 1940s, likely due to a decrease in dairy farms, less beef stock and dairy replacements in the region. Also in days gone by there were often whole fields of hay left unharvested until later in the season.

By the year 2000, 47,100 acres of corn was averaging a yield of 170 bushels/acre average yield. Soybean yields from 70,600 acres of beans nearly doubled to 47 bushels/acre.

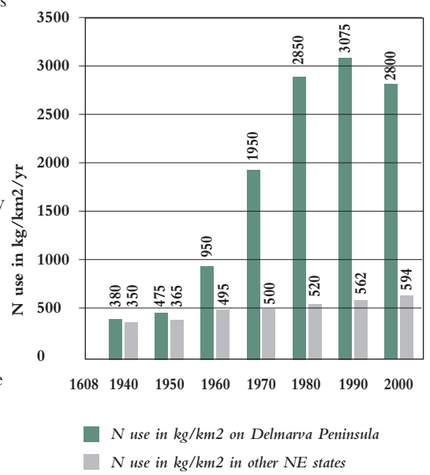
One serious implication of this shift in crops is the general increase in fertilizer use in the bay watershed over the years. Per acre production has increased, so has pesticide use. As herbicide use has increased, the weeds once present in a corn field of the 1940s are no longer present. We have lost the weeds that the quail and meadowlarks enjoyed while we increased the crop yields.

The problems for wildlife were also exacerbated by the destruction of hedgerows as fields were made larger. Edge loving species like quail and sparrows suffered as a 100 acre field has much less edge habitat than 5 twenty acre plots. Hayfields that were cut maybe 2 times in the old days are cut 5-6 times and dosed with insecticides under modern farming practices. This frequent cutting leaves no time for ground nesting birds to lay and incubate eggs before haying would destroy them. Agriculture has become so efficient that there is little or no room left for wildlife, and very little for farm workers either who have been replaced by machines.

If we acknowledge that farming is a leaky system nutrient-wise, it is easy to see how agriculture became the major non-point contributor to our over-enriched bay waters. From a wildlife perspective, we are particularly interested in the hay/pasture acreage for production of grassland birds like meadowlarks and quail. In just 40 years it went from 30,000 acres to almost zero today! It is known that these birds and others regularly nested in pastures and hayfields that no longer exist because of the decline of the dairy/cattle industry here on the shore. Quail have declined over 70% since 1970. The Barn Owls that were once common here, who hunted the small mammal populations that inhabited these hay meadows, are now rarely found. Almost all of those pastures/hayfields are now converted to corn/soybean acres.

The nutrients used to feed the agricultural crops have changed a great deal as well. It is likely that in 1950 an average agriculture field would have been in a 4 year rotation--growing one corn crop followed by a small grain and then 2 years of hay/pasture. The nitrogen for these crops often came from the legumes in the hay (alfalfa, clover and lespedeza). Nutrient loading to the bay from this would likely have been significantly lower than today's situation. Though the cows produced nutrients much of their nutrient production may have been absorbed by crops and the pasture grasses where they fed during the growing season. Now, 150-200 pounds of nitrogen per acre and 60-80 pounds of phosphorus per acre are annually applied to a corn crop where a 170 bushel yield is expected.

Nitrogen Fertilizer Use



Research scientists think that 20 pounds of nitrogen per acre leaches into the bay each year for every acre of cropland in a watershed. Some data shows that 9 pounds of nitrogen is produced per person on a working septic system. We can postulate that every person living in a watershed generates the nutrient load of one-half acre of cropland annually.

So, with the change in farm management, we have lost much of the wildlife from farms and added great potential for nutrient runoff by cropping every acre every year. The good news is that there are solutions to reduce the harmful effects of agribusiness on the bay and its vanishing wildlife. Cover cropping a field with winter wheat or rye holds a lot of the nutrient load on the field for next year's crop if it is done in a timely fashion. Unfortunately, even in the best year ever in the Choptank watershed, only 10% of the tillable land was cover cropped. Nutrient management holds some promise when yield goals and timing of application are either regulated or voluntarily adopted by the agribusiness community.

Using programs like CREP to retire marginal land (wetland soils) as well as logical buffer areas (next to ditches, streams, rivers) from production makes the most sense from both nutrient and wildlife perspectives. The compensation rates landowners are paid for these practices are very competitive with existing land rental rates. Since various government subsidies for farming have been going on since the end of World War I anyway, why not subsidize it in ways that restore wildlife and water quality? These restored wetlands and buffers are in place year round, drought or flood, performing their function of improving water quality and sustaining wildlife. Once established they seldom need human intervention to work very effectively.

The concept of "working landscapes" is fine but we need to decide which parts of it are going to work and how hard we will work them. I believe we have a moral and spiritual obligation to take care of the wild creatures that are quite literally trapped here with us. The fact that many species have no "market value" does not relieve us from our obligation to ensure their well being. Their fate is in our hands and we need to find the political will to restore the balanced landscape that they need to simply survive.

Wildlife Profile:

How much wood could a Woodchuck chuck…

The answer is none. Woodchucks will not chuck wood despite the old tongue twister. Woodchucks mostly eat herbaceous material like grasses, clover, alfalfa and some fruits. Occasionally, they will eat insects and eggs.

Woodchuck, Gopher or Whistle pig, Groundhog and Marmot are among some common nicknames for this adorable animal. In the same family as their rodent relatives, the squirrels, the Marmot *(Marmota monax)* is found throughout North America. They range from southeastern U.S. through Northern Canada and into the Northwest to Alaska, but are more numerous in the east.

Groundhogs are about the size of a large cat. They have very strong short legs with powerful claws for digging. A young Groundhog can weigh about half of a pound when they emerge from their den for the first time. As an adult, the average weight is 9 to 11 pounds with some reaching weights of up to15 pounds. Groundhogs are solitary and often act aggressively towards each other. Males and females will only occupy the same den during mating which occurs usually in March or April.

In April or early May, after a gestation period of 31 days, the blind naked young, weighing about 26-27 grams, are born. There are normally four to six in the one litter per year. The young will remain in the den for about a month with their eyes opening between the 26th and 28th day. The mother brings green grass into the burrow and the young begin to eat. They are weaned within five or six weeks and soon begin to move out of the den for quick above ground visits that last only a few minutes at a time. By July they are able to leave the parent to establish their own shallow burrows. Groundhogs normally live 5-6 years, but can live up to ten years in captivity.

When winter comes, Groundhogs move inside their winter dens to hibernate. The winter dens, built in dry wooded or shrub areas, are deeper than the summer burrows which are two to three feet deep, and are built near grassy areas where food is plentiful. Some Groundhogs dig dens under old barns or sheds to avoid predators. There are normally at least two entrance holes, one obvious main entrance and at least one, but sometimes more, discrete exits. Burrows are made up of many separate chambers for sleeping, nursing and other living spaces. Old Groundhog burrows are used by a number of other wildlife for homes including rabbits, fox, mice and others.

In Maryland, most Groundhogs are hibernating by November 1. Animals that reach their full fat-stores hibernate first. They remain curled up throughout the winter, drawing on the fat stored during the summer. The heart rate during this time is reduced from 100 beats per minute to 15. Their body temperature drops from 96° to 47° F.

Hibernation lasts just three or four months, sometimes less in the southeastern portion of their range. Emergence dates in the south are less precise than those in the north where they are much more constricted by the seasonal weather. Often a Groundhog will emerge from its den in late winter but then resume its hibernation. This habit has given rise to "Groundhog's Day".

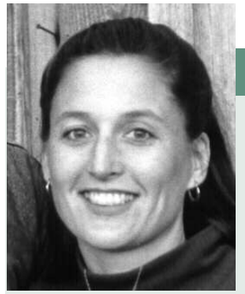
As far as natural predators, there are few excepting humans and their dogs, who often hunt Groundhogs. A fox may kill a small Groundhog but is unlikely to pursue a large adult. Development and other land management practices of today are also effecting Groundhogs by creating housing developments, roads, etc. in the fields and meadows that are their natural habitat.

Leaving a Legacy

Not infrequently we hear about landowners who have inherited the family farm, but have lives and jobs elsewhere. Some of these family members may want to retain use of the farm as a weekend retreat, while others may want to simply "cash out".

All of these "second generation" landowners have been contacted by developers just dying to carve-up the family farm into a subdivision. This may be an attractive solution to those members who simply want as much cash as possible. Other family members may want to try to preserve the farm, but don't know how to afford to buy out their relatives. Everyone wants to avoid a divisive family disagreement.

Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage can help. We are able to design creative land disposition plans that achieve a fair price for family members that want to sell (including tax savings on the gains), and affordable ways for the others that wish to retain their rights to enjoy the farm. Most importantly for all of us, we can do this while restoring and preserving the wildlife habitat and open space values of the farm. If you or yours are in this situation, or know of a neighboring farm whose owners have this dilemma, please call on us for advice and information so that the best decision for all can be made.



Ask Andi

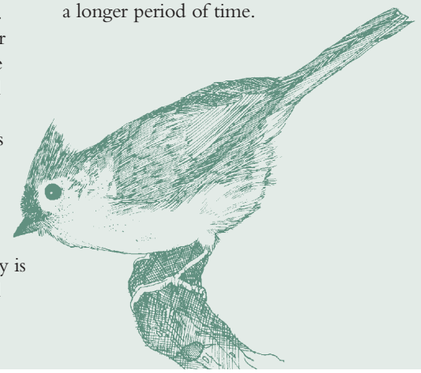
Questions & Answers about wildlife

By Andi Pupke

Q: I do not feed my backyard birds year round, when is the best time to stop filling the feeders for the summer.

R: Some avid backyard bird feeders believe that once the weather begins to turn warm in the early spring it is time to stop filling the feeder. Spring is an important season for feeding birds because most of the natural foods have been consumed over the winter. As the days start to get warmer plants start to bloom but they do not produce fruit and seeds until much later in the growing season. While a few native plants produce their fruit in the spring most do not produce fruit or it does not become edible until later in the summer or into fall. The timing for most fruit ripening coincides with fall migration. Insects are not plentiful either during the early spring season as the nights are still very cool. Though it depends greatly on the weather, a good rule of thumb to go by is continuing to fill your birdfeeders until June 1st.

Remember that birds will not become dependent on backyard feeders. They will still forage in the wild, but in harsh winter weather feeding will help individuals survive a cold night. The best thing you can do for your backyard birds is to plant native fruit producing shrubs and trees in your yard. A wide variety of plants will offer your backyard birds more food over a longer period of time.



Should I Cut *Phragmites* Down Over the Summer?

If you want to control the spread of *Phragmites*, the most practical method is to treat it with a glyphosate herbicide approved for aquatic use, such as Rodeo or Glypro. In order for these herbicides to be effective, the answer to the above question is "No!"

Spraying is done at a critical time in the early fall when the other wetland plants have gone dormant but the *Phragmites* has not. Since glyphosate is absorbed through the foliage, the cutting of the plant during the summer may not allow time for it to produce the needed amount of leaf surface prior to spraying in the early fall. If this is the case, it would be a waste of time and money to treat the *Phragmites* that year.

A reminder to all previous CWH Phragmites clients:

The time to sign up for the Fall 2004 spraying of Phragmites is just around the corner. Look for your sign-up letter in the mail around the middle of May. The deadline for sign-up will be July 15, 2004. If you have any questions or would like more information, please call Sandy at 410-822-5100.

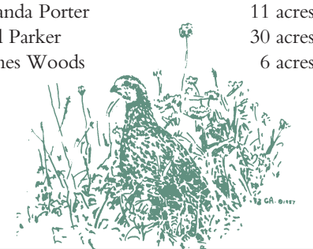
Who Has Created Habitat in Your Neighborhood Lately?

Warm Season Grass Meadows—Used by ground nesting birds, beneficial insects, burrowing mammals and birds of prey

Mike Batza	20 acres
David Bramble	10 acres
Shirley Brogley	18 acres
Robin Holt	10 acres
Mike Keating	20 acres
Bill Parker	5 acres
Larry Rash	27 acres
Larry Rash, Jr.	31 acres
Riverbend	12 ac. (WSG&CSG mix)
Dan Schwaninger	20 acres
Mark Sultenfuss	40 ac. (WSG&CSG mix)
Stanley Watkins	3 acres
James Woods	41 acres
Jim Wright	4 acres

Cool Season Grass Meadows—Offers good "bugging," or feeding area, for insectivores such as Turkey broods and bluebirds.

William Dicus	7 acres
Carmichael Farm	69 acres
Wanda Porter	11 acres
Bill Parker	30 acres
James Woods	6 acres



Trees/Riparian Buffers—Trees and shrubs further filtering pollutants from the surface water before it reaches the bay while also providing wildlife with shelter

Riverbend	30 acres
Jim Moses	5 acres
George Hoffman	.5 acres
Clyde Kunst	4 acres

Wetlands—Used by migrating and over-wintering waterfowl

Riverbend Farm, Dorchester County- CWH designed and restored 16.5 acres of non-tidal wetlands along the Little Blackwater River, adjacent to Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge. The habitat restoration also included the establishment of the adjacent uplands. This wetland compliments 60 acres of wetlands and 60 acres of meadow and wooded buffers created in 2002.

Carmichael Farm, Queen Anne's County - CWH designed and restored 28 acres of wetlands and adjacent wet meadows on the farm located along the Wye River.

Poplar Grove Farm, Queen Anne's County - 20.4 acres of wetland and wet meadow was created an this property located along Emory Creek off of the Corsica River.

Visit our website at: www.cheswildlife.org

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Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage

The Old Railway Station
46 Pennsylvania Avenue
P.O. Box 1745
Easton, Maryland 21601

410-822-5100
410-822-4016 fax
info@cheswildlife.org
www.cheswildlife.org

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Choosing a Tree for Your Yard? Go Native

Originally published in National Wildlife. Used with permission from author Doreen Cubie.

About 15 years ago, when my husband and I bought a Victorian rowhouse in Washington, D.C., the "landscaping" consisted of a few scattered weeds. Not long after moving in, we began clearing and planting the tiny yard. There was room for only one tree, and we selected a Bradford pear. It turned out to be a terrible choice.

The beautiful white flowers of the Serviceberry **(Amelanchier arborea)** *(above), which is native to Maryland's Eastern Shore, are a perfect alternative to the showy white flowers of the invasive and non native Bradford Pear (below).*

Even though this Asian native is planted by tens of thousands of homeowners across the country, I soon learned these trees attract very little wildlife. Butterflies ignored its blossoms. The neighborhood catbirds and robins shunned it. Only flocks of invasive starlings came to dine on its stone-hard fruit.

"Many people make this mistake," says D.C. landscape architect Mary Pat Rowan. "A serviceberry would have been better." These small native trees, also called juneberry or shad-blow, entice more than two dozen species of birds to their fruit. Their beautiful spring foliage is equal to that of the Bradford pear, and their fall foliage is superior. One popular cultivated variety is called "Autumn Brilliance." A western species, Saskatoon serviceberry, also lures birds and grows as far north as central Alaska.

"The way I look at it, planting a native tree is always better," says Rowan. But many people like me buy trees that are originally from other parts of the world, even though these introduced species often offer very little to local wildlife. For example, the frequently recommended but nonnative Kousa dogwood has berries that are too big for most North American birds to swallow. Ted Stiles, a biology professor at New Jersey's Rutgers University, explains that Kousas evolved in Japan, where its large red fruits are mostly eaten by primates.

But our flowering dogwood—found in the East—has bird-sized berries that nourish nearly 75 species. And unlike the Kousa, this tree has another benefit: Its fruit is high in lipids—or fats—which provide birds with more energy than sugars do. In late summer and fall, songbirds use these native dogwood berries to help layer on the extra fat needed to fuel their long-distance migrations.

According to Rowan, another good reason to avoid introduced trees is that some exotics have the potential to escape suburbia and take over the surrounding woodlands. One especially bad actor is the Norway maple, a popular landscape tree in many parts of the country.

"They can alter the forest pretty severely," says Kurt Reinhart, a graduate student at the University of Montana who is finishing up his dissertation on the effects of Norway maples in riparian areas of the Northern Rockies. "Native species seem to decline whenever Norway maples gain a foothold," says Reinhart. "When you think about what you're going to plant in your yard, especially if you're near any natural areas, be very careful."

Planting trees in your yard that are native to your region of the country will provide more benefits to wildlife than exotic tree species. The berries of this Eastern Red Cedar will feed Cedar Waxwings, warblers, grosbeaks and more.

Instead of using a Norway maple, try a North American variety, such as sugar maple, big leaf maple, chalk maple or Rocky Mountain maple. "I don't recommend maples, though, unless a home owner really wants one," says Rowan. She thinks one of the more than 5O species of oaks found in the United States and Canada is a better choice for wildlife. One of her favorites is willow oak. Other possibilities, depending on where you live, include coast live oak, chestnut oak, bur oak, pin oak, northern red oak and Arizona white oak.

Finding a native tree to landscape your yard often takes more effort, although some species—such as live oak—are readily available. Look for a nursery near you that specializes in natives. If you can't find one, horticultural or native plant societies can be a good resource.

Sometimes you can even turn up natives in your own backyard. Let a small corner of your property grow naturally, without disturbing the soil. An oak or pine tree may soon sprout. Also, if you're building a new home, don't let the contractor bulldoze the entire lot. They can work within a restricted space, saving much of the natural vegetation.

That's what we did when we moved from Washington to South Carolina I remember standing between our house—in-progress and a 15-foot-tall black tupelo, talking to our builder. Since the tree was close to the house, he wanted to take it down. I was determined to save as many plants as possible, so it stayed. When autumn arrived, a pair of Pileated woodpeckers began to visit that tupelo to gulp down its blue-black fruit. This time, I knew I had made the right choice.

For more information about native plants and attracting wildlife to your yard visit www.cheswildlife.org.

Former CWH Director Passes Away

Gil Lewis had a Keen Interest in Wildlife

Gilbert A. Lewis, a former board member of CWH, passed away on February 28, 2004. In addition to his loving family, Gil leaves behind a legacy of support for our wildlife.

"Our investment in conservation will pay dividends to our children and grandchildren," Gil said. He joined the CWH Board of Directors in 1989 and served until 1998. Gil advanced the laudable combination of concerned conservationist and responsible hunter.

Born in Harford County, Maryland, Gil spent his youth on a farm dedicated to hog raising. Near Aberdeen, he learned agrarian skills and started his life-long hobby, decoy carving.

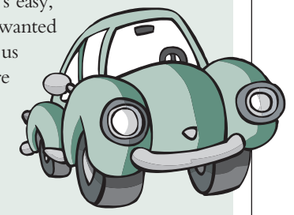
Gil was first involved with CWH as a volunteer in the Wood Duck Nesting Box Program. He participated in the installation of nest boxes in his own Cockeysville "backyard" at Loch Raven Reservoir, where 100 boxes were placed. Mr. Lewis was integral in starting what is now the grant funded CWH Wood Duck Box program. In addition to the many hours spent in the workboat and marshes, He also provided critical support for initiating the CWH Endowment Fund to ensure CWH's work is continued in years to come. Thanks to the hard work of Gil and many others, an estimated 25,000 Wood Ducks fledge from the 8,200 Wood Duck boxes that have been installed by CWH throughout Maryland. Since retiring from the CWH board in 1998, Gil has helped greatly in attracting new members to CWH by sharing his passion for wildlife.

Gil Lewis shared much of his time, talent and financial support. It is with his help that CWH has created a lasting network of habitat for our wildlife resource. Thank you Gil, you will be greatly missed!

Cars for Habitat

Tell your friends!

Do you have a vehicle that you no longer want or need? Would you like to dispose of that vehicle, gain a tax deduction, and benefit Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage at the same time? Donate it! It's easy, and your unwanted car can help us create, restore and protect wildlife habitat. For more information, please visit the "Donate a Car" link on CWH's website, www.cheswildlife.org or call Susanna at 410-822-5100. When you're ready to proceed, just fill out our online donation form, or email Susanna, and a representative of a firm acting on behalf of the Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage will contact you.



☐ Yes! I would like to join with Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage to help build and preserve wildlife habitat.

I am enclosing $ _____ as my tax deductible contribution.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

☐ Please send me information on the Planned Giving Program.

Please make your check payable to Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage, or charge to:

☐ Visa ☐ M/C Account # _____

Signature _____ Amount $ _____ Expiration Date _____

☐ $30	Individual Habitat Guardian
☐ $50	Family Habitat Guardian
☐ $100	Habitat Protector
☐ $250	Habitat Sponsor
☐ $500	Habitat Benefactor
☐ $1,000	Habitat Conservator
☐ $2,500	Habitat Steward
☐ Other	_____

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CWH is a private nonprofit organization designated 501(c)(3) by the IRS. A financial statement is available upon request.

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