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## Dead Trees

By Jane Galetto

Before you cut down that old dead tree for aesthetic reasons, keep in mind that it might have an impact on cavity-nesting birds and other animals.

Depending on the variety, a dead tree could stand for years without posing a safety hazard.

For a number of wildlife species, dead trees are just as important as living trees.

Dead trees are like a lunchbox for insect-feeding birds like woodpeckers. As long as a dead tree is not posing a personal danger, leaving it standing can oftentimes do more good than harm.

The cavities in dead and dying trees—as well as some living trees—are invaluable to bluebirds, owls, flying squirrels, American kestrels, wood ducks, woodpeckers, and chickadees. In fact, there are as many as 40 different species of cavity-nesting birds in North America and nearly half are in decline.

The natural benefits provided extend well beyond cavities in the trunk. The separating or peeling bark can shelter resting bats during daylight hours, or provide habitat for insects that many wild birds consume. The bare, weather-worn branches are favored hunting perches for hawks and owls. After the tree falls, it provides shelter for amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals and insects. The tree's decaying debris also returns nutrients to the soil, ultimately strengthening the forest's ability to support life.

Naturalists, wildlife managers, and concerned citizens have long helped the plight of cavity-nesting birds by providing nesting boxes. In fact the blue birds, wood ducks, and purple martins are all conservation success stories in terms of turning around declining populations of birds.

The next time you think of felling a dead tree, stop and consider its power to give life to so many creatures.