

# Landlords for the Birds

Discover more interesting facts along the WheatonArts Nature Trail.

**Deforestation has reduced habitat for cavity nesting birds that use hollow dead trees and caves for housing rather than raising their young in an open nest. Some species have become quite dependent on man-made structures.**

## Chimney Swifts

*Chaetura pelagica*

Historically chimney swifts nested in caves, hollow trees, and on cliffs. With urbanization most swifts now utilize chimneys, airshafts, and man-made structures that resemble their natural choices. During non-breeding season hundreds or thousands might roost together in a single shaft, but when nesting only one pair occupies each location. Changing chimney designs and newer structures without chimneys have greatly reduced nesting options for chimney swifts. In the past 50 years their numbers have dropped by 65%. They are insectivores (their primary diet is insects).

For more details: [www.chimneyswiftsnj.org](http://www.chimneyswiftsnj.org)



Chimney Swift photo courtesy of Michael Veltri

### Shared threats:

**Loss of habitat, reduced sources of nutrition, and introduction of invasive species (birds, plants, and animals that are not native)**

## Purple Martins

*Progne subis*

Originally, purple martins nested in woodpecker holes and other tree cavities. Native Americans discovered that martins would nest in hollowed gourds. European colonists continued this tradition by providing gourds and wooden houses for nesting pairs.

Beyond the pleasure people have derived from these winged acrobats, it is theorized they also served a dual purpose. The birds' propensity to announce intruders has long provided a type of early warning system. By the end of the 20th century, eastern purple martins made what is called a *behavioral tradition shift* and today are nearly entirely reliant on human-supplied housing. They are insectivores.

For more details: [www.purplemartin.org](http://www.purplemartin.org)



## Eastern Bluebirds

*Sialia sialis*

The vibrant colors of the male eastern bluebird make it one of the most recognized species in the Mid-Atlantic region. Bluebirds can be spotted on low perches along edges of meadows, open woods, forest clearings, and ponds. They nest in woodpecker holes and dead tree cavities.

In the early 20th century bluebird populations declined by an estimated 90%. Invasive species like starlings and house sparrows out-competed them for nesting cavities. Development that leads to urban sprawl and pesticide use further degrades their habitat and food supply, since they forage for insects and berries. Over the past 50 years, tireless conservation measures by caring people have shown promise in restoring bluebird populations.

For more details: [www.nabluebirdsociety.org](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org)



You Can Help!

### Provide for birds by...

- installing nesting boxes or gourds on your property. Or you can support others' conservation projects.
- allowing dead trees, or a portion thereof, to remain standing where safety is not an issue.
- reducing lawns and growing native plants, bushes, and trees for wildlife habitat and food.
- eliminating or reducing the use of pesticides and herbicides that kill food sources for wildlife.
- leaving leaf litter and brush for insect habitat; bugs are an essential part of many birds' diets.



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