

## Gardening for Birds and Pollinators

By Gary Metzger

This past February Joan and I moved from our long-time home in the Williamsport area to the Foxdale Village retirement community in State College. As with any such relocation there has been a formidable learning curve, but we've made good progress. I've learned to exclaim "Go Penn State" pretty readily, but much of our energy has gone into finding our beloved birds. Luckily, Centre County is just loaded with publicly accessible wild and birdy land for us to explore and enjoy!

I've spent a surprising amount of my time and energy here this summer working on the roughly 2600 square feet of garden space on three sides of our new cottage home. The previous residents had been avid gardeners, but in recent years the garden had tended itself...or not. When we arrived in February it was a big mulched space, with mature Eastern Redbud trees the only visible vestige of what once was. Seeds, bulbs and root systems were still there however, and an incredible profusion of perennial and self-seeding annual plants and flowers appeared in due course as the growing season progressed.

I was determined to steer our new garden towards a more bird and pollinator friendly mix of native perennial plants and flowers, shrubs and trees. By and large, native plants provide better nutrition and they support reproduction better for critical pollinators, other insects and birds. As our garden sprouted there was a mix of native and non-native plants and flowers. Much of my attention went to the native beauties, and we've had a good crop of common milkweed, goldenrod, crane's bill (wild geranium), daisy fleabane and scarlet bee balm.

I planted a native serviceberry tree and a native viburnum shrub to support pollinators and to provide berries and insects for our birds. It turns out that many native trees and woody shrubs are veritable "factories" producing the caterpillars and other soft insects that most bird species must have to feed their young. I've planted a couple of additional species of goldenrod and milkweed; also New England asters, aromatic asters, great blue lobelia, narrowleaf or swamp sunflowers and other native plants. Our garden will constantly evolve, becoming more and more valuable to butterflies, moths, bees and all of the essential pollinators, as well as many bird species.

Here at Foxdale, and in many other communities, the trend towards planting species that are native to our area and naturalizing more of our private and public landscapes is growing. Our next-door neighbors have established a Master Gardner certified pollinator friendly garden in their cottage garden space. Our Foxdale landscape and garden committee advocates for a bit less mowed and chemically treated grass here on campus and for greater emphasis on planting native trees, shrubs and perennials in common areas.

Especially encouraging to us is the 1.5-acre bird and pollinator garden planted this summer on a parcel of land connecting the 23-acre Foxdale Village campus with the existing municipal Tussey View Park. Both residents of Foxdale and visitors from the greater State College community will be able to enjoy this interesting and beautiful space! Besides new walking paths and a burbling water feature sited on a boulder supported terrace, several thousand herbaceous plants and flowers, shrubs and trees were planted among the existing mature trees and shrubs. Most of these plantings are native—nearly 100 species in total.

Dr. Douglas Tallamy, renowned entomologist, author and lecturer, proposes that we can fix the catastrophic decline in the world's insect and wildlife populations one garden, one back yard, one community park, at a time.

I'm thinking that our retirees enjoying the new Bird Garden will take ideas for planting with natural, native species back to their own gardens. Visitors from the greater State College area will surely do the same. Hey, save our pollinators and birds, and the web of life in our natural world, one garden, one public space at a time. We can all do our part!

*Gary Metzger and Joan Sattler, now residents of Foxdale Village, were long time officers in the Lycoming Audubon Society. They remain enthusiastic, but by no means expert, bird-watchers and gardeners.*

Photos by the Author

- 1) Foxdale Garden
- 2) Metzger Garden

