

How You Can Help Our Feathered Friends

by Marian Zimmerman

Go organic! There are two parts to going organic. The first is to eliminate chemical and pesticide use from our homes and yards. Many of us may remember the devastating impact of DDT on bird reproduction and how this pushed Bald Eagles nearly to extinction. In truth, the impact on Bald Eagles was just the tip of the iceberg. Large and visible, not to mention of iconic stature, the toll on them was easily noted. But similar effects were happening to many other bird and animal species. Those effects were just more difficult to document in other species, but still very real.



Chuck Homler Photo

With the recovery of the Bald Eagle after decades of work and a large financial investment, we can be lulled into a sense that the threat of pesticides is a thing of the past. However, the truth is that today's pesticides are far more lethal than DDT. Unlike DDT which acted relatively slowly and accumulated in body tissue, eventually disrupting biological function, today's pesticides are formulated to act quickly on the nervous system and then breakdown so as not to persist in the environment. Their effectiveness is brought about by contact with the pesticide. In changing the chemicals involved, we traded persistence with toxicity.

The second part of going organic refers to the food we eat. Pesticides not only affect the birds, other wildlife, and people living in the area treated, but they also affect the water and food to which they are applied. Realizing that much of the food that we eat is imported from abroad, especially Latin America, should heighten our concern. Pesticide regulation in much of Latin America lags behind that



in the U.S. Further, pesticides are often used in concentrations many times greater than recommended due to a sense that if a little is good, then more must be better. Hence, the pesticide load on imported food can be enormous.

This means that you may be getting a hefty dose of pesticides on the food you are eating AND the environment where many of our nesting birds over winter is heavily impacted. The toll is especially great on grassland species and those that associate with agricultural areas. By eating organic food, you not only reduce your own exposure to toxins, you also reduce the demand for food that

requires direct exposure to the farm workers who apply them as well as the birds and other animals that live in the effected area.

So go organic! Create a win-win-win situation for yourself, farm workers, and our birds and their environment!