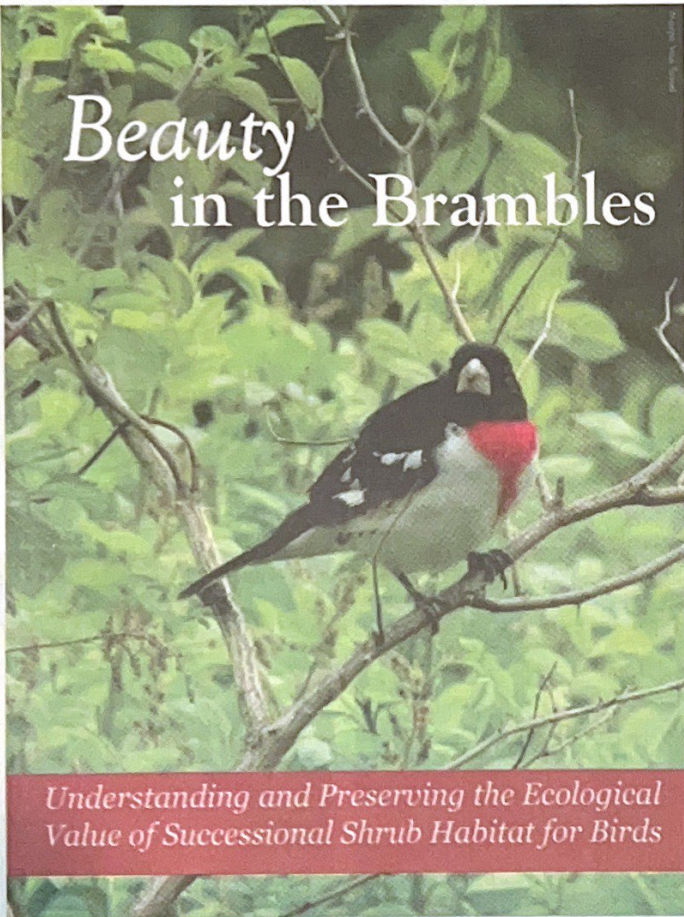


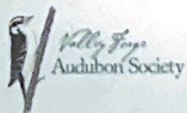


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Beauty in the Brambles

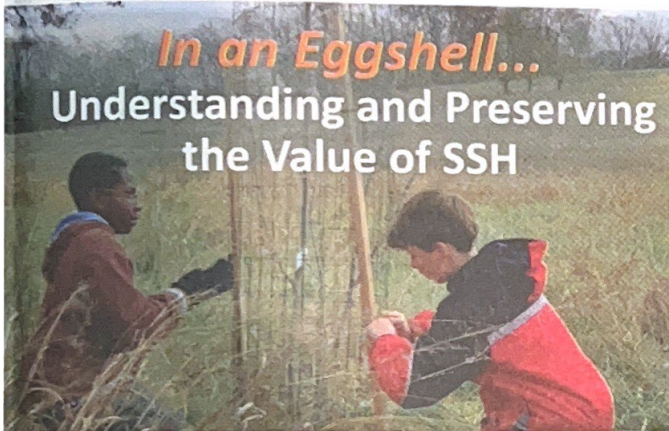


Understanding and Preserving the Ecological Value of Successional Shrub Habitat for Birds



**Think of SSH as an
ecological teenager**

The unconventional beauty of these threatened shrub habitats becomes more evident once you realize the critical value they hold for birds and wildlife. Preserving the ecological value of this habitat is easy!








In an Eggshell... Understanding and Preserving the Value of SSH



Taking Care of SSH: When in Doubt, Leave it Alone

SSH is a dynamic habitat with a diversity of plants, and the habitat as a whole is ecologically valuable. There are two routes you can take to preserve and manage SSH:

-  **Shrub Habitat Is Critical To Baby Bird Survival**
It also provides shelter and excellent food sources for migrating and overwintering birds.
-  **SSH Is Declining In Southeastern Pennsylvania**
Many people clear it without understanding its ecological importance.
-  **SSH Harbors Both Native And Invasive Plants**
Native plants support more biodiversity and provide higher quality food for birds.
-  **Never Clear SSH Without Replanting With Natives**
Even a shrub area composed entirely of invasive plants provides more habitat for birds than a cleared area.
-  **SSH Restoration Should Occur In Stages**
Wholesale clearing before replanting can lead to erosion, temporary habitat degradation for wildlife and recolonization by invasive plants.

LEAVE IT ALONE: It can be tempting to clear SSH simply because of the stigma surrounding invasives, but the disturbance caused by clearing typically leads to colonization by more aggressive invasives. If you are not committed to replacing removed invasives with natives, simply leave things alone. The invasives still provide habitat structure and stability for birds.

OR

REPLACE INVASIVE SHRUBS WITH NATIVES IN PHASES: If you have the desire and capacity to be a top-notch SSH steward, you can either remove individual plants or clear small manageable patches at a time. Immediately fill the cleared space with native shrubs (closely spaced 4-6 ft. on center) that have high value for wildlife (see reference section). Phasing the project in this way preserves some habitat structure for wildlife while the new shrubs are maturing.

Newly planted shrubs should be protected from deer with fencing for at least the first three years. Invasive vines and shrubs may need to be removed each year.

A Rare Habitat Gem

Successional Shrub Habitat (SSH) is the low brushy area that occurs naturally after a meadow grows up but before woodland is established.

SSH is dominated by shrubs with a few small trees, vines, grasses and wildflowers. It may take the form of a hedgerow bordering a field, a small patch of shrubs in your yard, or a wild thicket at the edge of woodland. SSH teems with wildlife, especially birds, which depend on it year-round as an exceptional source of food and cover from predators. Unfortunately, SSH is threatened by our society's suburban aesthetic preferences. People frequently clear these shrub habitats from their properties, seeking a cleaner, neater look, unaware of its intrinsic habitat value.



Why Shrub Habitat Should Not be Shunned:



It's habitat: 21 million acres of natural land in the U.S. is lost to residential development each decade, an area nearly ¼ the size of Pennsylvania. Habitat loss is the leading cause of decreased biodiversity.



It's the biggest bang for your buck: Shrub habitat benefits breeding birds even in small patches.

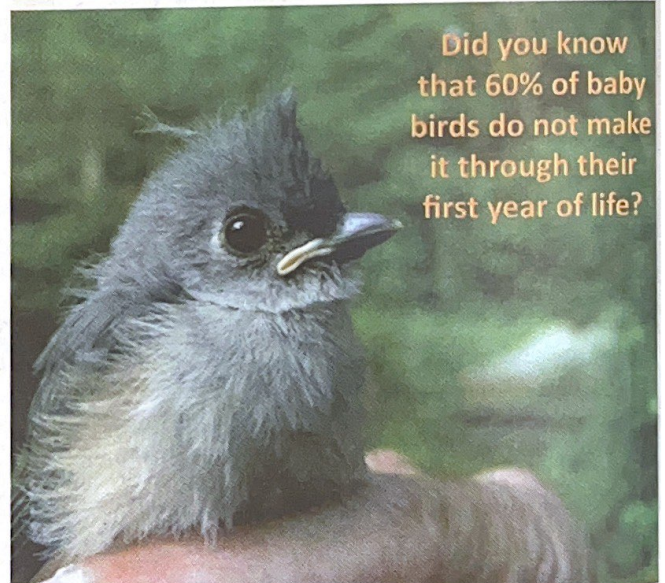


It's supposed to be here: SSH was once much more prevalent in forest gaps that were created by fire, storms, Native Americans and beavers.

Shrub Habitat Offers a Safe Haven for Birds

SSH provides cover and food sources for juvenile birds trying to survive their first vulnerable year of life. Research now shows that soon after leaving their nest in the forest, young birds head straight for brushy SSH tangles, presumably for the superior protection from predators-like snakes, hawks and chipmunks.

SSH also serves as a harbor for exhausted young and adult birds during their strenuous migratory journeys, using SSH as a brief stopover site or overwintering place full of rich accessible food sources.



Did you know that 60% of baby birds do not make it through their first year of life?




SSH is like a university for birds. Just as many humans "leave the nest" and go to college where they can weather the realities of adult life, young birds go to SSH before graduating to the real world. Without this transition, many baby birds simply don't make it.

Native Plants vs. Invasives: Weeding Through the Facts

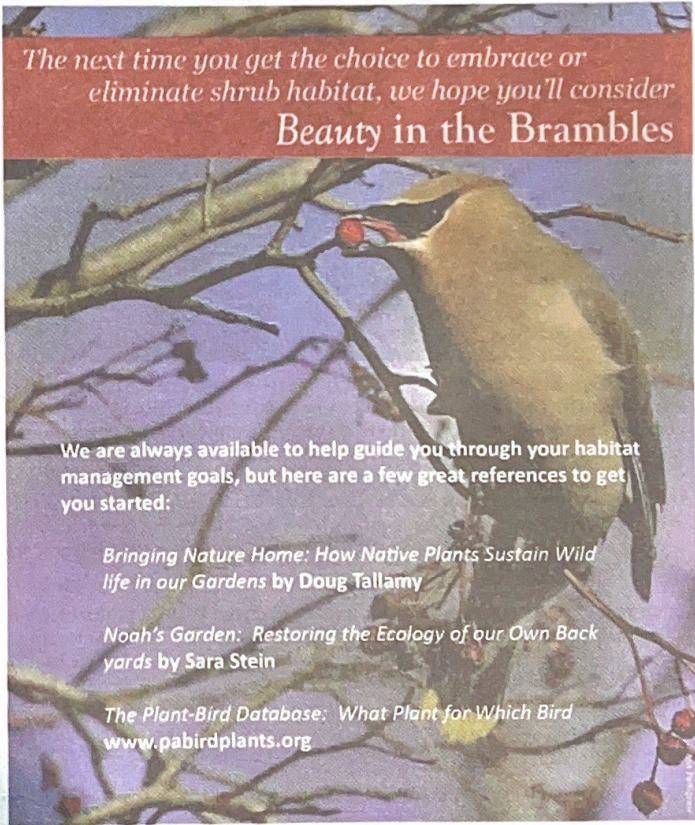
Existing SSH in Pennsylvania has become a modern experimental community of plants, including native species and non-natives that hail from other parts of the world. These non-native plants have been introduced for a variety of reasons: some for their ornamental beauty and others for economic or cultural benefit. Some non-native plants are harmless, whereas others – the invasives – aggressively out compete native plants.



Native Plants Are Always Preferred

-  Native plants have evolved over centuries with associated native insect species, so they support a greater diversity of native birds and other fauna that feed on the insects.
-  Native plants often provide berries that are high in fat and nutrients for birds.
-  Invasive plants alter the plant community and decrease biodiversity by out-competing native plant species.

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The next time you get the choice to embrace or eliminate shrub habitat, we hope you'll consider **Beauty in the Brambles**

We are always available to help guide you through your habitat management goals, but here are a few great references to get you started:

Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wild life in our Gardens by Doug Tallamy

Noah's Garden: Restoring the Ecology of our Own Back yards by Sara Stein

The Plant-Bird Database: What Plant for Which Bird
www.pabirdplants.org

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