



## **Legislation introduced to help Save Our Backyard Habitats from Pesticide Drift**

**by Julie Smith (Bird Town Media, PA)**

Hello Fellow Bird Lovers! I'm sure we all know by now the importance of insects to our beloved birds. 96% of our North American Terrestrial Birds rely on insects at some point in their lives. Insects are particularly important to young migratory birds, giving them the protein-rich fuel they need to make their long journeys.

Many of us are trying to help birds by literally growing native habitats in our own backyards. Adding native perennials, shrubs, and trees invites the insects the birds need to thrive, so it is a win-win-win for our plant world, our insect world, and our bird world (and for all of us!)

Unfortunately, in our suburban/urban areas, what neighbors are doing can greatly impact our own yards due to the close proximity. In the warm season of 2022, I noticed that none of the milkweed in my backyard had aphids, which was very odd to me. Milkweed always gets aphids and the milkweed in my front yard was covered in them. I also noticed that there were no bees on my mountain mint. Every time I went to my backyard pollinator garden, it was almost silent. The baby monarch caterpillars didn't make it. I couldn't figure out what was going on until one day in early August of 2022. I stepped outside my front door with my kids and was hit by a wall of garlic-chemical odor. I wandered around my house trying to figure out where the smell was coming from and when I went in the backyard, I saw the mosquito fogging happening on the hill above my house. I had my answer.

Right now, the only regulatory agency in PA for pesticides is the PA Department of Agriculture (DoA). Pesticide drift is illegal and they are the only agency that can enforce this. I called and reported the drift. The DoA came out 10 days later (even after some large rainstorms in between) and I received the results in December that bifenthrin drift (a pyrethroid – read more about it here - (<http://npic.orst.edu/factsheets/bifgen.html>) - NOT as safe as chrysanthemums as the marketing leads one to believe) was detected on my yard. The target property is 97 feet away from my property line. Despite the proven drift and the proximity of our houses, this company continued to spray at all times of day, from 7am to 6:30pm and even on a Saturday!, whether pollinators were active or not, every two weeks from May through October. A year and half later, after the third time I witnessed the drift and reported (one has to witness the application to be able to report) and the bifenthrins were still detected in my native backyard pollinator garden, the Dept of Ag came to the conclusion the bifenthrins were \*just\* residual. A chemical that is being applied by private companies every two weeks is lasting over a year and a half on non-target properties. This is one company at one house, and all my efforts to create habitat are being destroyed. All the insects I was inviting to my yard to build our ecosystem are being killed by the mosquito fogging. Unfortunately, 3 of my local friends with native pollinator gardens have had their yards \*accidentally\* sprayed by pesticide companies – it's not just drift.

Mosquito fogging is not necessary and not effective – hence the frequency of the applications. There are so many ecofriendly alternatives! Mosquito larvae traps are a great way to control mosquitoes (<https://www.audubonva.org/news/how-to-set-up-a-mosquito-larva-trap>). Make sure all standing water is dumped (don't forget gutters!), clean those bird baths every couple of days, use a fan on decks and porches (mosquitoes are weak flyers), and wear appropriate clothing and if need be, wear bug spray on yourself.

A group of community leaders in the Media area started meeting with local state representatives and our municipalities. Pesticide companies don't need permits to work in PA municipalities, they don't need to notify neighbors that they will be spraying (unless the neighbors are on the PA Pesticide Hypersensitivity List), they don't need to survey to know where property lines are, and they can use equipment that is meant to fog a minimum of more than 40 feet at a twin or row home property.

Here is the hopeful news – co-sponsored legislation has been introduced that will allow PA municipalities to have oversight and enforcement abilities in regard to pesticides. Our suburban/urban areas are very different than rural areas, so this will allow our municipal leaders to decide what is right for our towns. Please talk with your local legislators and let them know your priorities for a healthy ecosystem for our birds and ask if they will cosponsor this legislation. Read more about this legislation here - <https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/Legis/CSM/showMemoPublic.cfm?chamber=S&SPick=20230&cosponId=42827>.

For more information on how pesticides affect birds:

<https://abcbirds.org/whats-good-for-insects-is-good-for-the-birds/>