



March 10, 2025

To: Maryland House Government and Operations Committee

From: Tom Rogers, President, Audubon Society of Central Maryland (ASCM)

Subject: Favorable Testimony for Maryland House Bill 368 – Maryland Native Plant Month

A respectful greeting to you all.

The Audubon Society of Central Maryland (ASCM) is a local non-profit whose major assets are two wildlife sanctuaries in Frederick County, Maryland. Our 270 acres provide positive habitat for birds and other forms of wildlife. The sanctuaries also provide a peaceful place of recreation and rest for citizens of Frederick, Howard, Carroll, Montgomery and Washington Counties.

Like most places in the state of Maryland, these counties face increasing environmental challenges, habitat loss, pollution, and climate change. Our Audubon chapter, like so many chapters across the state, also provides programming and education about the benefits of birds and bird habitat. In this way, our perspective is long-term, intending to influence people of all ages with the understanding of the importance of caring for nature, the environment and God's many creatures who cannot speak for themselves.

The Audubon Society of Central Maryland enthusiastically supports HB368—the establishment of a Maryland Native Plant Month. Establishing this month of recognition will advance the protection our unique landscapes and the birds that depend on them for many generations of Marylanders to come. This bill is good for birds, for people, and for the dynamic ecosystems that make Maryland so special. Science tells us birds are in decline due to habitat loss and climate change. 1/3 of eastern forest and grassland bird species experienced significant population declines in the past 50 years. Ruby Throated Hummingbirds and other species have fewer native plants to sustain themselves. This bill will help iconic birds that are in decline across Maryland, including the Wood Thrush, American Kestrel, Brown Thrasher, Prairie Warbler, Eastern Meadowlark, and Baltimore Oriole. Through education and outreach that draws attention to the importance of native plants to our landscapes, HB 368 will help slow and reverse these trends of population decline.

P.O. Box 660
Mt. Airy, MD 21776
www.centralmdaudubon.org



HB 368 is not just for the birds. When native plants are a dominant factor in the landscape, all wildlife benefits—pollinators thrive, beneficial seeds are dispersed, pests are kept in check, and human communities benefit. Native forests, meadows, and gardens support local economies throughout the state through ecosystem services, green job training, tourism, and other associated industries. Promoting native plants in Maryland is also an investment in a future defined by climate change. We know that forests, grasslands, wetlands, and coastal marshes that are comprised of native plants actively sequester carbon, slow flooding, filter water, and buffer vulnerable communities from increasing risks of climate change like storms and sea level rise.

Science tells us:

- Invasive and exotic plant species provide minimal ecosystem services to birds and other wildlife
- Maryland's unique landscapes and birds are under threat from non-native plants
- Promoting native plants in Maryland's landscapes is a critical step to protecting our state's biodiversity, protecting bird habitat, and keeping Maryland resilient in the face of climate change

HB 368 and a Native Plant Month will celebrate native plants through outreach and education, protect birds and bird habitat, create a more resilient environment, and support the local Maryland nursery economy. It will also further solidify Maryland as a leader in habitat conservation, ecosystem preservation, and the protection of birds now and into the future. The Audubon Society of Central Maryland respectfully urges a favorable review of this legislation.

With appreciation,

Tom Rogers, President
Audubon Society of Central Maryland
trmmv77@gmail.com
443-307-7323

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