



"The greatest threat to our planet is the belief that someone else will save it." — Robert Swan, polar explorer and environmentalist. Conservation does not require moving to a rainforest or chaining yourself to a tree. It requires millions of people making thoughtful choices in their daily lives. Every action in this guide is something you can do from where you are, with what you have, starting today.

■ At Home

- **Plant native species:** Replacing even a small section of lawn or a few pots with native flowering plants transforms your yard into pollinator habitat. Native plants evolved with local insects, birds, and soil organisms — they provide food and shelter in ways non-native ornamentals cannot. In NYC: goldenrod (*Solidago*), native asters (*Symphyotrichum*), milkweed (*Asclepias*), coneflowers (*Echinacea*), and native grasses are excellent starting points. NWF's "Certified Wildlife Habitat" certification (nwf.org) provides a framework.
- **Bird-safe windows:** Apply window tape, CollidEscape film, or WindowAlert UV decals to home windows. These products, placed 2×4 inches apart, break up reflections visible to birds without significantly obstructing your view. Even one treated window reduces strike mortality.
- **Eliminate pesticides and herbicides:** Lawn and garden chemicals kill the insects that birds, bats, and reptiles depend on. Organic lawn care, manual weed removal, and targeted spot treatments as a last resort are far more wildlife-friendly.
- **Reduce outdoor lighting:** Light pollution disorients migratory birds at night, disrupts bat foraging, and confuses sea turtle navigation. During peak migration (April–May, September–October), turn off or dim non-essential outdoor lights after 11 PM. NYC Audubon's Lights Out NYC program tracks and advocates for building light reductions during migration.
- **Compost:** Composting reduces waste, creates habitat in your compost pile, and reduces the need for chemical fertilizers.

■ For Wildlife in Your Neighborhood

- **Responsible bird feeding:** If you feed birds, use species-appropriate seed (sunflower seeds attract the most native species), keep feeders clean (mold and *Salmonella* can kill birds), take feeders down during late spring/summer to avoid unnaturally habituating bears or foxes, and be aware that feeders also attract squirrels, raccoons, and deer.
- **Leave leaf litter:** Raking up all fallen leaves removes overwintering habitat for fireflies, native bees, spiders, beetles, and salamanders. Leave a layer of leaves in garden beds and at the bases of trees — a "messy" garden is a biodiverse garden.
- **Indoor cats:** Outdoor and free-roaming cats kill an estimated 1.3–4 billion birds and 6.3–22.3 billion small mammals in the United States annually (Loss et al., 2013, *Nature Communications*). This is the single largest direct human-associated source of bird mortality in North America. Indoor cats live significantly longer, healthier lives than outdoor cats. Outdoor enclosures ("catios") provide enrichment safely.
- **Dogs on leash in wildlife areas:** Off-leash dogs flush nesting ground birds, disturb basking turtles and sunning snakes, and displace mammals from critical habitat. Keep dogs leashed in parks, especially near water and during breeding season (April–July).
- **Recycle fishing line:** Monofilament fishing line entangles birds, turtles, and marine mammals in devastating numbers. Dispose of in designated monofilament recycling tubes (available at many NYC parks and marinas), or mail to the Berkley Monofilament Recovery Program.



Citizen Science

Citizen science is research conducted with the participation of the general public. Your observations contribute directly to scientific databases used by researchers, conservation managers, and government agencies worldwide:

Program	Website	What You Do / Data Use
eBird (Cornell Lab)	birds.cornell.edu/eBird	World's largest biodiversity database; 1+ billion bird observations from citizen observers
iNaturalist	inaturalist.org	All species; AI-assisted ID; used by researchers and invasive species monitors globally
Monarch Watch	monarchwatch.org	Monarch butterfly tagging and monitoring program
Christmas Bird Count (Audubon)	audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count	125+ years of bird population data; NYC area CBCs are among the most data-rich in North America
BatDetective	batdetective.org	Acoustic bat monitoring; help classify bat calls to assess population health
CoCoRaHS (Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network)	cocoahs.org	Precipitation monitoring that informs wildlife and climate research
NYC Mussel Project (Riverkeeper)	riverkeeper.org	Water quality monitoring using native mussels as bioindicators in NYC waterways
Frogwatch USA (AZA)	aza.org/frogwatch	Amphibian population monitoring through call surveys

Reduce Your Footprint

- **Sustainable seafood:** Download the Monterey Bay Aquarium's **Seafood Watch app** (free). It provides real-time recommendations on which seafood to buy and avoid based on how it is caught or farmed. Choosing "Best Choice" seafood directly reduces pressure on overfished populations and reduces bycatch.
- **Reduce single-use plastic:** Carry reusable bags, water bottles, and coffee cups. Avoid products with excessive plastic packaging. Support plastic reduction legislation.
- **Dietary choices:** Reducing consumption of animal products — particularly beef — is among the most impactful individual actions for reducing land use, water use, and greenhouse gas emissions associated with habitat loss.
- **Energy efficiency:** Residential energy consumption drives power plant emissions that contribute to climate change and, in the case of some power plants, direct bird mortality. LED lighting, efficient appliances, and reduced heating/cooling all reduce your footprint.

Advocate, Volunteer, and Support



- **Contact elected officials:** Call, write, or email your city council member, state representative, and federal legislators about wildlife protection issues — Endangered Species Act funding, pesticide regulation, clean water protection, climate policy. Constituent contact demonstrably influences votes.
- **Support accredited zoos and aquariums:** AZA-accredited institutions are conservation organizations that use zoo revenue for field conservation. Your membership and admission fees fund SSPs, field projects, and conservation education.
- **Volunteer with local organizations:** NYC Audubon, NYC Parks, Wild Bird Fund, Riverkeeper, and many other organizations actively recruit volunteers for surveys, cleanups, habitat restoration, and public education.
- **Donate thoughtfully:** Verify organizations via Charity Navigator or GuideStar. Even small, recurring donations (monthly giving) are more valuable to nonprofits than one-time gifts.

■ **One Health and You:** Every action in this guide is also an investment in your own health and the health of your community. Pollinators that survive in your garden pollinate the food you eat. Healthy waterways provide the water you drink. Wildlife populations that remain intact reduce spillover risk for emerging disease. Conservation starts where you are, with what you have, today. Xavier's Veterinary Care believes that the health of animals, people, and ecosystems is one — and that each of us has a role to play in protecting it.

■ Final Summary

You don't have to save the whole world today. Plant one native flower. Close one window with bird tape. Download eBird and record your morning walk. Turn off your lights during migration. Keep your cat indoors tonight. Every action matters. Every species counts. Every one of us has a role in the story of life on Earth.

■ Related XVC Guides:

- [WLD_22: Global Conservation Organizations](#)
- [WLD_21: NYC Wildlife Resources](#)
- [WLD_01: Why Wildlife Matters](#)



This resource may be shared for personal, educational, or non-commercial use provided it remains unmodified and Xavier's Veterinary Care is credited as the original source. Commercial reproduction or resale without written permission is prohibited. For diagnosis & prescriptions, consult a licensed veterinarian.
© 2026 Xavier's Veterinary Care.