

Blog Post - Simple But Meaningful

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In recent decades, humanity has pushed nature to the breaking point. Countless species are already threatened, many of which are on the cusp of extinction. As an avid birder, a particularly disheartening example of this is the decline of North America's birds. Within the last 50 years, North America has lost a staggering 25% of all its feathered fauna. Even with the dedicated efforts of conservationists, some of the most familiar species, such as the Baltimore Oriole, have experienced severe population losses. While it may not appear that birds are in trouble, there is overwhelming evidence suggesting that if we continue to recklessly pollute, develop upon, and destroy the natural world, a great many species, birds and otherwise, will become endangered and eventually plunge into extinction. I grant you, these facts are very depressing. However, the Sixth Extinction can be stopped. Every problem has a solution, and I would like to share one with you.



A brush pile that I made at the Autumn-Fieldcrest Preserve. While not particularly attractive, brush piles help promote animal welfare.

Meet the brush pile. At first glance, it appears to be nothing more than a disheveled mound of twigs and branches. But looks can be deceiving. Brush piles are actually hugely beneficial for a myriad of animals, especially birds. They provide shelter from the elements, protection from predators, safe habitat and nesting locations, and, perhaps most interestingly, they serve an all-you-can-eat buffet. If you were to deconstruct a brush pile, you would find it teeming with insects. Any animal (except a bug) fortunate enough to stumble upon a brush pile would see it as paradise. Having seen birds in and around brush piles on numerous occasions, I can testify to their importance. Though brush piles seem convoluted, there is no science behind building them; in fact, you can do so in just three steps.

The first step to creating an effective brush pile is to assemble the base. Thicker logs or branches should be used, adding stability. It is recommended that there are holes around the brush pile, providing entry and exit for larger animals. Next, build upwards in a pyramidal shape using medium to large branches. After completing step two, the brush pile should somewhat resemble a teepee. Finally, make the brush pile more dense by lacing branches within, providing more shelter from inclement weather. Adding branches that protrude outwards from the pile creates perches for birds. Additionally, leaves can be placed at the base of the pile to provide nesting material. Ideally, a brush pile should be between 8-10 feet long and 4-5 feet tall. A

successful brush pile also requires maintenance. As time passes, the branches that form the pile will begin to rot, causing the pile to collapse. This can be fixed by simply adding more branches and sticks to the pile. Trimming invading weeds or vines will also help maintain structural integrity.

In conclusion, brush piles are surprisingly beneficial and easy to build. Brush piles extend natural habitat, provide shelter and security, and serve as insect magnets. As the Sixth Extinction looms ever closer, there is a growing need to protect our living environment. What better way to do that than by constructing a brush pile? The next time you visit a Land Trust preserve, don't be surprised if you encounter a brush pile, for this messy heap of sticks is much more than it seems.

Sources:

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