

*For the Beauty of the Earth*  
Unitarian Universalist Church in Cherry Hill  
Sunday, April 16, 2023  
Rev. Margret A. O’Neill

### **Reflection**

Amélie Harris-McGeehan

American marine biologist, conservationist and author, Rachel Carson first learned about the devastating effect of the pesticide DDT on bird life in the 1950’s and she published her landmark book, *Silent Spring*, in 1962. Carson concluded that “pesticides are dangerous to the environment and humans, and that ‘pests’ often rebound massively after spraying, once nature’s built-in system of checks and balances have been disrupted.” The writing of *Silent Spring* was a crucial element in advancing the global environmental movement, and eventually it led to the establishment of Earth Day. The use of DDT was banned in the US ten years later, in 1972.

Due to his childhood upbringing near Clear Lake, Wisconsin, Gaylord Nelson learned to love the outdoors. He was serving as Governor of Wisconsin in 1962, the year *Silent Spring* was published, and he went on to serve as a US Senator for 18 years. While in the Senate, Nelson sponsored countless conservation bills including the one banning DDT, along with a wide range of other bills on progressive social issues. In Spring of 1970, Senator Gaylord Nelson founded Earth Day as a way to force environmental issues on to the national agenda. The date of April 22nd was chosen to maximize the participation of college students in the period between their spring break and final exams. An estimated 20 million people nationwide attended the inaugural Earth Day events across the United States. Earth Day is now observed in 192 countries and is coordinated by the nonprofit [Earthday.org](http://Earthday.org).

“In 1973, the Endangered Species Act was signed into law. This was the most comprehensive legislation to protect endangered species to be established in the United States.” The Endangered Species Act has been credited with saving the Brown Pelican, Peregrine Falcon, California Condor, Florida Manatee, Humpback Whale, and Grizzly Bear from extinction, along with many insects, fish, reptiles, crustaceans, flowers, grasses, and trees. This list also includes the Bald Eagle, which brings me to my own story.

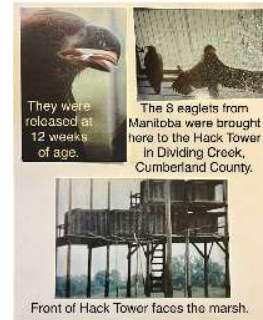
In 1980, New Jersey had only one known nesting pair of Bald Eagles remaining, in a remote area of Cumberland County. The cause? Due to the widespread use of DDT, this insecticide had a long – lasting impact on the food chain, accumulating in fish that eagles eat, causing eagles to lay thin-shelled eggs that could not withstand incubation.

In the summer of 1983, “Operation Eaglet” began when officials in Manitoba, Canada allowed wildlife experts from the US to seek out Bald Eagle nests there, and to remove an eaglet from nests that had more than one eaglet in the nest. Some of these eaglets were brought to New Jersey.

Between 1983 and 1991, 60 eaglets were brought from Manitoba to the Hacking Tower at Dividing Creek, in Cumberland County, New Jersey. This structure provided a protected and controlled way to raise and release the eaglets, with the hope that they would bond with this area, eventually search for a mate when they became 5 years of age, build their nest, and have young of their own, to bring the eagle population here back to healthier numbers.

During the spring and summer months of 1988 I was hired by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection as one of many individuals to work at this Hack Tower project. Our work involved monitoring the eaglets from a distance, and supplying them with fish meals each day.

This first photo shows the Hack Tower used during the 8 years of “Operation Eaglet.” Notice the metal poles at the front of the Hack Tower, which kept the eaglets from leaving the nesting platform.



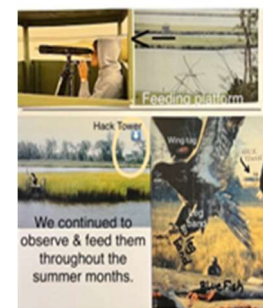
This next photo shows us preparing and providing pieces of fish through the back of the platform, so the eaglets don't see us. My two colleagues and I shared these daily responsibilities, in assisting the NJDEP wildlife biologists overseeing this project.

When the 8 immature eagles were 12 weeks old, we observed a lot of wing-flapping. They were ready to go! One young eagle at a time was approached, scooped up carefully and hooded to calm them. I don't know who was more nervous, me, or the young eagles that I got to hold while they were being evaluated, had a wing tag sewn on to their shoulder, a leg band attached, and a radio transmitter glued to their back. It took everything I had to sit quietly and calm during this time, while mosquitoes landed on my hands and face.



We placed the eaglets back on the platform, the metal poles at the front of the Hack Tower were removed, and the young eagles were then free to go. We continued to monitor them with a spotting scope from a small enclosure in the marsh accessible only by canoe, and we supplied fish for them every day for many weeks, at the feeding stations that we constructed in the marshes of Dividing Creek that flows into the Delaware Bay.

This photo shows one of the released eagles at a feeding station in the marsh, with the Hack Tower in the background. Our team had to learn the tide schedule in order to get to this observation box. The arrow points to the Hack Tower, in the background, near the edge of the marsh.



Every February the Winter Eagle Festival is held in Cumberland County to educate the public about the Bald Eagle and other birds of prey in New Jersey. The festival provides an opportunity to view all these magnificent birds, and to visit the site where the Hack Tower was located.

The Bald Eagle was removed from the Endangered Species list in 2007, and in 2022, there were 250 nesting pairs, and 335 young Bald Eagles were hatched in New Jersey! According to Don Torino, the president of the Bergen County Audubon Society, “Bald Eagles are a palpable symbol of a new Earth Day in New Jersey.” If you are looking for action items or activity ideas for Earth Day, just go to [earthday.org](http://earthday.org).

### For the Beauty of the Earth

Rev. Margaret A. O'Neill

On this beautiful April Sunday we celebrate the planet Earth, this blue boat home that is all the world we know, and we pledge ourselves anew to care for the world on which we live, and to cherish all the life the Earth supports. We celebrate in word and music, poetry and prose, and by

sharing our own experiences in connection to this planet. Even as we live in community, sharing the earth with so many others in common experience, so also we each have our own unique relationship and experience with the planet we call home.

For some of us the earth is a playground, a place of sport and activity, while for others it is a garden, to nurture and cultivate into abundant growth. For some that cultivation is practical, producing crops to be consumed and sustain life, while for others the cultivation produces beauty, satisfying our senses with color and fragrance. And for still others, the earth is a temple, a sacred and protected space for contemplation, to nurture the spirit and reinforce our connection to the interdependent web of all existence.

None of these Earth experiences is exclusive of any other, since there are so many ways to celebrate the Earth and all life on the ground, in the ocean or the sky. Amélie shared with us this history of Earth Day, which originated from Rachel Carson's experience and commitment, was brought into the public arena by Gaylord Nelson, and is now celebrated around the world as a reminder of our responsibility to care for this precious and vulnerable corner of the universe. We will now hear from Sharon Hardy about her special connection to the planet through her love of birds.

### **Birds of the UUCCH Arboretum** Sharon Hardy

Good morning on this beautiful sunny spring day! As many of you know, my husband Walt Nadolny and I are avid birders and long-time champions of conservation and the environment. On the bird walk this morning in the Arb, we saw \_\_\_ species of birds!

Here is a fun picture of a feeder with many different birds on it – you might see any of these birds on a walk through the property here, although you would actually never see them all at once on a feeder! You probably recognize the Blue Jay and the Northern Cardinal, and maybe the American Goldfinch and the Red-bellied Woodpecker! On top of the feeder, we have a Baltimore Oriole and on the pole is the little Downy Woodpecker. A favorite to look for in spring is the Indigo Bunting - across from the small woodpecker -- and below him the Rose-breasted Grosbeak; mid-May for that migrant. We developed a bird list for the Arboretum on May 4th, 2019 as part of the Global Big Day of Birding, and there is a link to that in the Newsgram. We saw 32 species that day!



A few that thrilled us are shown here. There are probably closer to 50-75 species you could spot on this property, and over time we will update the list as birds are spotted.



As many of you know, Walt and I recently started up an environmental working group at UUCCH, under the umbrella of CREE, to provide easy ways for our congregation to stay up to date on local issues impacting the environment and to provide actions we can take. Today during social hour, volunteers will have computers set up in Fellowship Hall, and they can help you take an action to support some key environmental efforts. One important initiative we are working with UU Faith Action NJ and many other partner organizations to accomplish is to support the NJ State legislature passing the Green Amendment for the Generations. What is that? I quote:

*Green Amendments are self-executing provisions added to the bill of rights section of a (state) constitution, that recognize and protect the rights of all people, including future generations, regardless of race, ethnicity, tribal membership status, socioeconomics or geography, to pure water, clean air, a stable climate, and healthy environments. This then helps when laws need to be made or enacted that protect the environment.*

In celebration of Earth Day, I wanted to share a few thoughts to highlight why birds are so important, and how they help maintain, add diversity to and improve the quality of the environment:

1. Bird poop! You may not like it on your cars or lawn furniture, but it is critical as natural fertilizer. Spain once fought a war over bird guano, as seabird poop is called – and large colonies of sea birds fertilize the arctic and Greenland, as well as help coral reefs to thrive
2. Birds eat and then disperse seeds and spores everywhere they go, ensuring the continuation of many plant species and the health of forests and other ecosystems
3. Birds are important pollinators of wildflowers - especially hummingbirds!
4. Birds control pests and insect populations –swallows can eat up to 60 insects an hour, and research estimates birds eat around 4-500 million tons of bugs each year! Larger predators such as owls and hawks eat rodents and gophers that can decimate crops as well – they are natural pest control, eliminating the need for the wider use of harmful pesticides
5. Birds are nature’s clean-up crew – the vultures you see overhead are very effective scavengers and keep our environment free of diseases that could spread otherwise.
6. Birds inspire us when we hear them sing and see them fly, and they are natural mood boosters. Walt likes to point out that Birds as a family have no borders; they do not recognize nation states. They travel freely from the furthest reaches of Patagonia to the Arctic, the horn of Africa to Europe and from New Jersey to Costa Rica and South America every year!

Let me end with two quotes that I feel sum things up:

Melanie Driscoll, Director of Bird Conservation for the Gulf of Mexico and the Mississippi Flyway says: “Birds are important because they keep systems in balance: they pollinate plants, disperse seeds, scavenge carcasses and recycle nutrients back into the earth. But they also feed our spirits, marking for us the passage of the seasons, moving us to create art and poetry, inspiring us to flight and reminding us that we are not only on, but of, this earth.”

Our own NJ author and former Director of the Cape May Bird Observatory, Pete Dunne says: “Without birds, nature would lose her voice and the planet its most engaging envoys. Birds matter precisely because they matter to us. Environment is a concept. Nature a label. Birds are real, elements that live within our sensory plane. They spread their wings and bridge the gap between our world and the natural world.”

### **Margret**

Thank you, Sharon. And now, Rohn Hein brings a message of warning and hope, calling us all to do our part to make every day Earth Day in our awareness and our actions. Rohn.

## Challenge and Hope

Rohn Hein

As Amélie mentioned earlier, the origins of Earth Day in 1968 started as an effort to activate people through education about what was needed to make the environment as important an issue as ending the War in Viet Nam. Senator Gaylord Nelson, the US Senator from Wisconsin, proposed a nationwide teach-in on the environment that blossomed into the largest environmental rally in the United States with over 20 million people pouring into the streets. Over the next few years, people from throughout the world followed the lead of the United States in making the environment a transcendent issue for all of us.

What has happened in the intervening 55 years? For all of the talk about global climate change and the need to cut back on the use of carbon-based energy, our society continues to pump more and more hydrocarbons into the air. Why have we become so distracted?

Even though momentum had already begun to establish the first Earth Day as a great success, current events would soon swallow up a great deal of energy and begin to misdirect the organizing efforts. Remember that Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated only 6 weeks prior to the first Earth Day. Senator Robert Kennedy would be killed in California barely 6 weeks later. The torturous nomination of Hubert Humphrey as the Democratic nominee for President two months later took place as a police riot led by the Chicago Police Department beat and bloodied protestors. Although the Environmental Protection Agency was created in 1970 and many pieces of important legislation were enacted, the movement left the front page of the news and people became distracted from the urgency of the task.

After decades of neglect, in 2015 the UN Climate Change Commission brokered The Paris Agreement, that committed countries to limit world temperatures to an increase of 2.0 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels. Yet, every day we read about the Greenland Ice Sheet melting at record levels, the Arctic Ice Sheet disappearing, and the Antarctic Ice shelves calving into giant icebergs the size of Manhattan. We must redouble our efforts!

UUCCH has been an environmentally friendly church since its start. Led by Ken Arnold who envisioned an arboretum on our grounds, and followed by Kay Smith who brought her love of everything green and growing, we even endeavored to become Green Sanctuary Church under the leadership of Carol Suboleski and the Green Team. As a testimony to our commitment to being an example to our community, we have a solar array that powers our energy needs and an Arboretum Working Group that has built on Ken's dream and demonstrates to South Jersey that UUCCH cares about the environment. Now we have a new Environmental Working Group, led by Sharon Hardy and Walt Nadolny, who are bringing action at the local and legislative level in conjunction with UU Faith Action of New Jersey

But individuals in action, no matter how committed and energetic, are no match for the corporate interests who have brought Mother Nature literally to her knees. The greed of money agents and the short-sided goals of industrialists have underestimated the devastation that their actions have precipitated. By speaking out in unity, we must create a new agenda of environmental sustainability that will give our future sons and daughters, and their sons and daughters, the ability to enjoy that earth as we have for thousands of years. Time is running out and we must not delay or wait for others to sound the cry for action. On this week of Earth Day 2023, let us recommit ourselves to taking the time, energy, and resources to join with others and to save our earth from a disaster that will arrive unless we admit to our problems and work together to

implement solutions. This catastrophe has been in the making for over 200 years and we have only the next two decades to make a sharp change in how we make energy decisions.

Let us decide today to do our part. Often people don't get involved because they are perplexed at trying to figure out where to begin. We will make that easier for you this morning. Downstairs during Social Hour in Fellowship Hall we will have some computers set up to go to websites of various environmental organizations and we can send messages to make a difference today. Join Sharon and me and others in showing the world that UUCCH cares. Together, we can change our world in our lifetimes, if we make a commitment today.

### **Margret**

Thank you, Rohn; and thank you Sharon and Amélie, Susan and Jennie. From restoration of endangered species to creating awareness and appreciation of the life that is all around us; from our individual actions to our collective support for laws and regulations to protect the environment, we can each and all be part of the efforts to reverse the ravages of human greed and inattention, protecting the resources and the beings, restoring wholeness in the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

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