Half the Day is Dark, Let's Leave It That Way

Half the creatures on the planet are active at night. We are probably not aware of most of them, but that is how they have evolved over millions of years. They thrive in the darkness, and need the darkness.The dark of night provides cover and safety for countless species of wildlife. This is the way of nature, the way things are supposed to work for half of every 24 hours.

We, as humans, are changing that environment at an alarming rate. Light pollution is a serious and growing danger for these nocturnal creatures. Birds are highlighted and clearly outlined to their predators. Insects are confused and distracted. Creatures on the ground are scared away from food and resources.

Birds go twice yearly on a migration up and down the East Coast. The growth and profusion of lights on the ground has made their nightly flights more dangerous, and more difficult to navigate. An abundance of artificial light can lead to mistiming of migration, disorientation, and dangerous changes of migratory patterns, which can have deadly effects on bird populations. Each year man-made light pollution contributes to the death of millions of birds.

More than half of insects are active at night, and only at night. That means they have to feed, move about, mate, nest, and lay their eggs in the dark. A light source can literally exhaust them to death in as little as one night, as they fly about the source in a frenzy rather than gather pollen, procreate, and carry out other essential activities. These same insects also become easy pickings for the creatures that eat them, without the cover of darkness helping to hide them. The number of insect casualties each year can number in the billions worldwide, and even hundreds around each light source. Just a few minutes of looking at a lamplight on a summer night reveals the number of insects that are unlikely to live through another day.

We can do something about this. And it's easy. Turn off your outside lights. Turn off the light by your front door, turn off the light at the end of the drive, turn off the light by the basement entrance. If there is a security concern, or you need it for when you get home after dark, motion sensors are readily available and at very low cost. Motion sensors are now built into the light bulb itself, meaning you don't even need to get a special light fixture. Motion sensors work better as a deterrent for anyone who might be around at night, rather than having a light on all the time. You can also put your lights on a timer, but think about giving the wildlife 8 hours or more of solid dark per night. You also may find that you and your neighbors sleep better. After all, we evolved to sleep in the dark, not with some light pouring in the window at the wee hours of the morning.

You also can, and should, contact other buildings and structures that burn lights in parking lots, for instance, all night long. Speak to the organization that controls the street lights in your neighborhood. As an alternative for lights that need to be on, make the light red. Red light works just as well to illuminate a given area. Most wildlife cannot see red light, so it does not affect their behavior patterns. Many LED bulbs are programable to be turned red. Or sticking a simple red plastic film, easily available, over the lens does the same thing. We can see red light

illumination, and it doesn't reduce our night vision capabilities as humans, and also doesn't negatively affect our sleep patterns.

There are not that many actions we can take that positively impact both the wider world and our own local environment. This is one of them. Burning a light all night long hurts the environment, kills wildlife, does nothing for your home security, disturbs your sleep, and costs you money. Let the creatures that live in the dark, live in the dark. And let's see the stars again.