



What's Bugging You?

By Martin Král

North American bird populations have dropped by nearly 3 billion, or roughly 29%, since 1970, with declines accelerating across most habitats. Over 122 species (47%) show significant declines, attributed mostly to habitat loss, pesticide use, and climate change. Let's not forget the predators, including feral house cats! Common species are declining fastest, signaling a broader accelerating ecological crisis.

The situation is no better farther down the birds' food chain. Global insect populations are also experiencing concerning losses. About 40% of insect species are threatened with extinction, with land-based insects declining at a rate of roughly 9% to 15% per decade in highly affected regions. This threatens global ecosystems, as insects comprise 80% of animal life and pollinate 75% of global crops. Causes for these are similar to those experienced by other biodiversity populations (see above). Not all insects are affected by these; some species have experienced explosive growth in their geographic region. However, it must be noted that insects important for pollenization (and so for human food production) — namely bees, moths, butterflies, and other flying insect orders — have been decreasing in number.

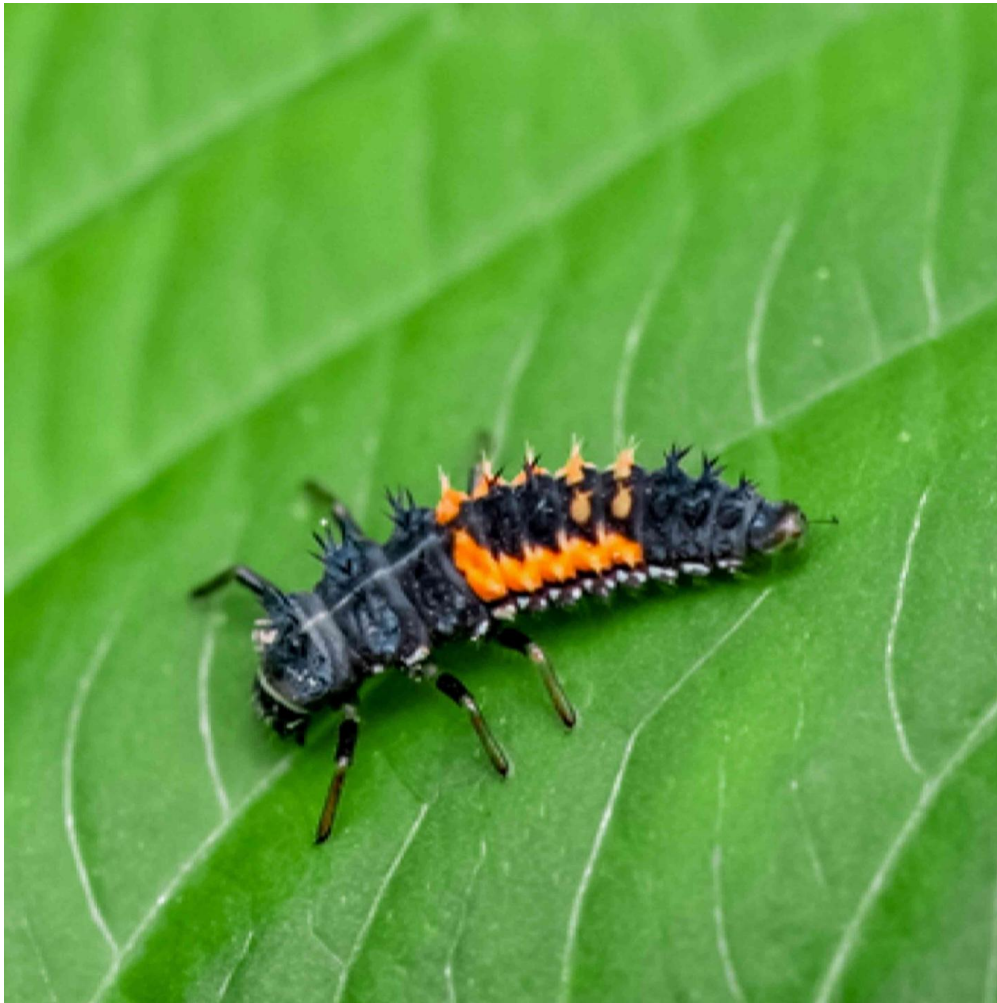
Dahlia raisers face different challenges from insects throughout the growing season. Depending on their local conditions and the spread of certain populations during their development, some well-known marauders in the dahlia plot quickly can become persistent pests requiring firm control. Keeping dahlias 18 or 24 inches apart neatly solves the problem of overcrowded plantings that encourage bug populations to settle there.



Aphids (and ants with ladybug)

At first in our area these are aphids; their unobtrusive egg clusters were deposited by flying aphids. In spring time, aphid colonies quickly develop into packed larvae infestations. They suck plant juices and extrude sticky honeydew residue as waste. When you see small ants running up and down the stem, there is a curious relationship underway: while harvesting that sweetness, ants also protect aphids from other predators. These include even adult aphids that feast on the bountiful larvae! At the same time, those prey on adelgids, mealybugs, and scales — but never to the point of preventing further infestation. Ladybug larvae look like colorful monsters and are reputed to be voracious

aphid eaters. No insecticide or soap needed in my plot. Instead I use the digital method: I grab the stem with two fingers and **squish!** They are no more.



Ladybug larvae

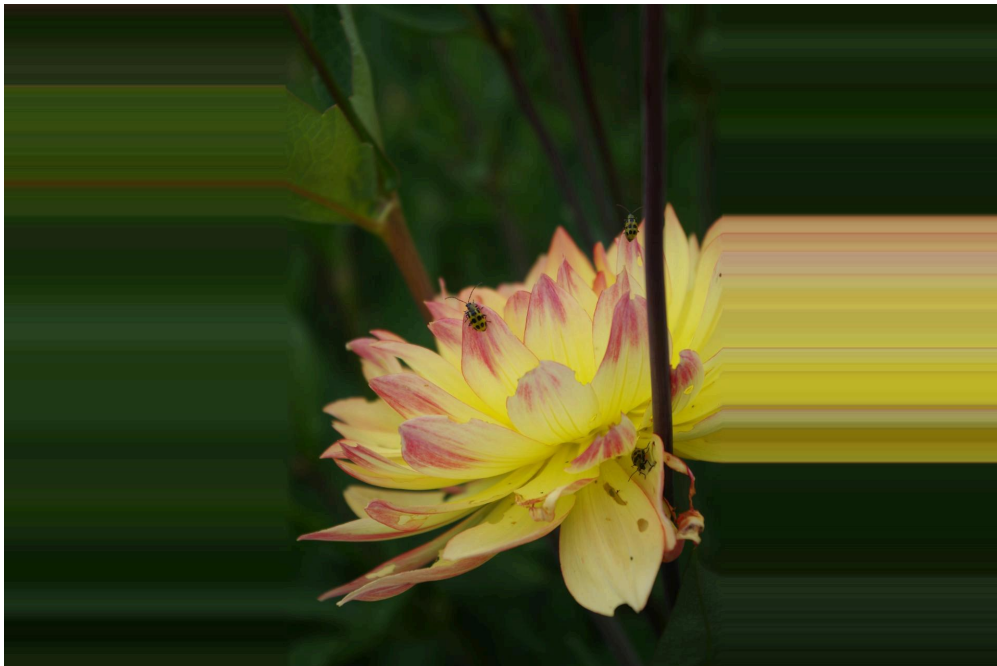
A more dangerous pest is the tiny spider mite. Usually appearing in late summer (during spells of hot days/cool nights), by the time a mite invasion is detected, they are mighty difficult to control. These two-spotted mites feed on the underside of leaves, reproduce rapidly, and create webs that may withstand even sharp streams of water. While they have many enemies (including their own kin), these spiders are adept at avoiding detection. That is, until their persistent boring results in stippled foliage and eventually causes the plant's demise. Available pesticides must be applied repeatedly, since the mite reproduces within days. Dish soap or Neem oil may limit their fecundity, but removing lower leaves and improving air circulation are proven deterrent measures. Another tip from experience: don't plant dahlias next to an impervious surface, such as an asphalt driveway.

In all my years, I have not encountered thrips — not even on the gladiolus, one of their favorite targets. These small, slender insects, however, can infest dahlias and cause damage on foliage and light-colored blooms. By ensuring healthy plants through regular care and watering their intended victims can dodge this bug. In addition, use of organic pyrethrin sprays on the entire plant (including blooms) may deter the invader.

But bet on earwigs. These nighttime marauders love dahlias, because each petal offers shelter from sun and prying gardener eyes. They damage dahlias by eating holes into leaves and flowers, making these less attractive. Many buds

develop lacerated blooms from their early forays, and the insects' frass litters wherever they feed. Earwigs are scavengers and eat practically anything. However, their omnivorous habit also has its benefits: they prey on aphids and other bugs. Their fierce cerci (pincers) by their shape identify male or female, but they are used mostly for courtship, not defense. Their hideaways are dark and moist, so loose mulch, litter, or firewood stacks offer great cover. Although several control methods have been endorsed in garden circles, the use of spinosad-containing Sluggo Plus pellets resulted in effective extirpation of both slugs and [earwigs](#) in my garden.

Your dahlia garden may see other chewing bugs, such as Japanese beetles and caterpillars. In our area we are alarmed at the arrival of spotted cucumber beetles and stink bugs. Taking advantage of climate changes in the West, [cucumber beetles](#) moved north to infest large dahlia plantings, causing devastating injury to dahlias. Whether as winged yellow adults or as ground-level larvae, these bugs are difficult to control. Voracious chewers alight at the presence of a human, so Kristine Albrecht advocates the use of a Bugzooka to suck up these critters.



Cucumber beetle on dahlia

The Brown Marmorated Stink Bug (*Halyomorpha halys*) is an Asian invader of more recent times. As all malodorous stink bugs, it sports a shield-like hard carapace and inhabits both gardens and homes. This nuisance pest (let's call it BMSB) has moved west into Northern California and invaded Oregon in quantity. Washington is not immune. Counties around Seattle have reported BMSB infestations. Their voracious chewing of all plant parts (including fruit) make BMSB our next scourge in dahlia gardens. So far the only control is use of commercial pesticides — those that also kill beneficial bugs. Got your brain buzzing yet? We haven't even touched subterranean bugs here!

2026

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Securing the Future: The ADS National Show Endowment Campaign

The heartbeat of our ADS community lies in the excellence of our national exhibitions. To ensure these showcases remain a permanent fixture of our heritage, we are thrilled to announce a significant push for the ADS National Show Endowment Fund. This fund is designed to provide a permanent, sustainable financial bedrock for our national shows, protecting them from economic fluctuations and ensuring that future generations can experience the same caliber of artistry and competition we enjoy today.

The Goal: A Legacy in the Making

We have set an ambitious but vital goal to raise \$150,000 for the endowment. This will allow the annual interest earned from the endowment to be granted to societies with the commitment and capacity to host future national dahlia shows. Thanks to the incredible generosity of our community members, we have already raised \$45,000 toward this total! Now, we are looking to bridge the gap through a special commemorative campaign.

Honoring Eleanor and Wayne Shantz

In a cornerstone moment for this fund, a naming gift pledge has been established to honor the lifelong dedication of Eleanor and Wayne Shantz. Their impact on our organization has been profound, and this endowment will serve as a lasting tribute to their legacy. To reach our goal, we are launching a tiered matching campaign to inspire individual and society-level giving:

- The Shantz First Match: Every dollar donated by individuals or societies will be matched 1:1, up to the first \$25,000. **This effectively doubles your impact the moment you give.**
- The Board Challenge: If—and only if—we successfully meet that first \$25,000 goal, the Board of Directors will consider a second match of an additional \$25,000. If both matches are triggered and met, we will be well on our way to our \$150,000 target!

How You Can Participate

This campaign is timed to align with your mid or year-end charitable giving goals. We are seeking support from:

- Individual Members: No gift is too small when every dollar is doubled.
- Affiliated Societies: Help us honor the Shantzes by contributing as a collective group.

The campaign will run through **December 31, 2026. However, please consider giving by August 15th** as we would like to verbally recognize endowment donors at the 59th ADS National Show & Exhibition in Michigan at the awards banquet on Saturday, August 29. By contributing now, you aren't just giving a gift; you are ensuring that the ADS National Show remains a vibrant, well-funded reality for decades to come. Let's honor Eleanor and Wayne by making this vision a reality. Double your impact today. Visit our donation page to contribute to the ADS National Show Endowment Fund. Thank you!

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