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Once-rare species make surprising recovery



Birds bounce back

The merlin is a falcon, a little smaller than a pigeon, that eats other birds. Their population plummeted due to exposure to the pesticide DDT, until the United States and Canada began restricting DDT in the early 1970s. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Tom Langen Clarkson University | THE CONVERSATION

When I started bird-watching as a teenager, a few years after the first Earth Day in 1970, several species that once thrived in my region were nowhere to be found. • Some, like the passenger pigeon, were extinct. Others had retreated to more remote, wild areas of North America. In many cases, humans had destroyed their habitat by cutting down forests, draining wetlands and converting grasslands to agriculture. Pesticides such as DDT, air and water pollution, and the shooting of birds added to the drop in numbers.

Birds are still declining across the continent. A recent study of 529 species found their numbers fell nearly 30% from 1970 to 2017. In 2025, nearly one-third of all North American bird species are declining; 112 bird species have lost more than half their population in the past 50 years.

Yet, half a century after I started birding, I am starting to see a few long-missing species reappear as I ride my bike from my home through the village and surrounding farmland in rural New York.

What has brought these species back while others are disappearing?

In some cases, like the bald eagle, state wildlife officials have reintroduced the birds.

But others have returned on their own as habitat protection and restoration, the elimination of certain pesticides, and a shift away from shooting raptors and other large birds made the region less threatening for them.

As a wildlife biologist, I believe their return is a testament to conservation and the positive effect of reversing harms to the natural environment. Here are three examples.

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The return of the pileated woodpecker is good for other species, too, as several birds and mammals benefit from the large tree cavities that the woodpeckers excavate. GETTY IMAGES

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CENTRAL BUCKS

How new regions change the 2025 election

Chris Ullery
Bucks County Courier Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

Don't be alarmed if you're a Central Bucks resident and don't see your school board on the ballot for the 2025 municipal election.

This is the first election since the district reorganized from nine members with their own regions to three regions split evenly across the nine seats in 2023.

Due to how the new regions are being implemented, that means there will not be a vote under the new Region 1 until 2027.

The change means that approximately 32,306 registered voters in the district will not have a school board candidate on the ballot on Nov. 4, based on a copy of the county's voter rolls from the Pennsylvania Department of State updated Oct. 13, 2025.

While that means that about 34% of the district's 93,954 voters will only be able to choose from the municipal official, county row offices and judge seats on the ballot, the change won't actually keep anyone who expected to vote this year from casting a ballot.

Can I vote in the Central Bucks school board race this year?

This year's election has four Republicans and four Democrats running, a list of mostly new challengers, to fill one two-year term in Region 2 and one four-year term and one two-year term in Region 3 in Central Bucks.

Region 1 will have two four-year terms and one two-year term on the ballot for the 2027 municipal election. The two-year term in Region 3 will also convert to a four-year term in the next local election.

Under the new map, Region 1 includes all of Plumstead's five voting precincts; every precinct in Buckingham except the Lower 1

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LGBTQ advocates in Pa. to rally for equal rights protections

Bethany Rodgers
USA TODAY NETWORK

A group of advocates are planning a Harrisburg rally in late October to pressure elected officials to protect rights for LGBTQ+ Pennsylvanians.

Organizers say they're holding the Oct. 26 event to demand equal rights and access to gender-affirming health care and to shield same-sex marriage. These steps, they say, are all the more important in a time when protections are being rolled back.

"The basic rights of LGBTQ+ people are under vicious attack every day across our state and nation," Jason Landau Goodman, board chair of the Pennsylvania Youth Congress, said in a statement. "That is why we are coming together to demand action from our government officials."

What are the event details?

The event planners say it will begin with a march around the capitol at 1 p.m. Oct. 26. After that, attendees will rally, with speakers to be announced.

Organizers say they are coordinating buses and carpool transportation so as many people can participate as possible. They've released a sign-up form so people can opt into updates.

What do organizers hope to accomplish?

The groups involved say they're demanding action to make sure LGBTQ+ Pennsylvanians have equal access to housing, jobs, health care and public spaces.

They're also condemning health networks, including UPMC and Penn State Health, for no longer providing gender-affirming care to minors in response to pressure from the Trump administration.

Finally, they want commonwealth lawmakers to pass bills that would safeguard gay marriage, ban therapies that attempt to change a child's sexual orientation and protect LGBTQ+ people under the state's hate crime laws.

Bethany Rodgers is a USA TODAY Network Pennsylvania investigative journalist.



LGBTQ advocates are planning a Harrisburg rally on Oct. 26.
DORAL CHENOWETH/COLUMBUS DISPATCH