

Thurston County Commissioner's Meeting  
Earth Day Proclamation  
April 16, 2013

Good day, and thank you each, the Commissioners of Thurston County, for the honor of this Earth Day Proclamation and for the opportunity to share with you the presence of the 19<sup>th</sup> Procession of the Species Celebration.

The intention of the Procession is to elevate the dignity of the human spirit by enhancing the cultural exchange between communities and the natural world... and to advance that exchange through the languages of art, music, and dance.

Each year, as organizers, we are faced with this singular question: Does any of this color and pageantry truly make a difference on behalf of the natural world?

There are two separate answers to this question.

The first is explicitly expressed by the artist and sculptor, Mary Frank. During an interview on National Public Radio headlining a national retrospective of her work, Mary Frank, now at 90 years of age, was queried as to the purpose of art.

“Art,” she responded, “has many purposes: To comfort the dead and to awaken the living, to know the migration seasons of birds and fish, and to know the human immigrations of the past and present. To be able to use experiences and transform them. To make the eyes of children widen. To feel the power of color and shape. To fill an unspoken hunger for community. To give courage, use the heart, to risk and never be afraid of tenderness or the absurd. To gather joy.”

The second answer is no less explicit.

In 2012, we witnessed the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rachel Carson's publication of *Silent Spring* highlighting the destruction of song birds due to the pesticide DDT.

Yet, in the last several years, our spring, throughout the entire nation, has become even more silent due to the unlawful actions of the Scotts Miracle-Gro Company that defy comprehension.

In 2012, the Scotts Miracle-Gro Company pleaded guilty to selling wild bird feed that was poisonous to birds, along with deceiving regulators by falsifying pesticide registration documents, distributing pesticides with misleading and unapproved labels, and distributing unregistered pesticides.

According to the EPA, Scotts added the pesticide Storcide to its wild bird feed products to prevent insect infestations while the product was in storage. The warning label on Storcide, a product that Scotts sells, specifically states that the pesticide is toxic to birds, fish, and other wildlife. Scotts sold the tainted bird feed for two years after it began marketing the product, and for six months after company employees alerted management to the danger posed by the pesticides ([truth-out.org](http://truth-out.org)).

Scotts Miracle-Gro poisoned their bird feed -- a product intended to nourish song birds, in gestures of delight and care -- as a means to preserving their market capacity to sell the product -- not provide the care.

So let's do the math: Scotts Miracle-Gro sold 71 million "product units" over two years, and was fined \$4 million dollars by the EPA. Even if they had been fined one dollar per unit, \$71 million dollars, it is not difficult to imagine that they still would have maintained a substantial margin of profit.

When nature does the math however, the calculations are even more brutal. Imagine a conservative calculation of one dead bird per unit sold. 71 million units of poison bird seed – 71 million dead song birds.

Silent spring.

What is the worth of a song bird? \$4 million dollar fine – 71 million birds: six cents a bird.

Back to the question of the relevance of the Procession ---

This year, Thurston County Solid Waste is creating a life-sized grey whale made of plastic bags, milk jugs, fishing nets, and other discarded plastics readily found in Puget Sound. As these plastics break down in the marine environment, they take on the appearance of a food source for marine life -- a whale, a cormorant, a salmon, a dolphin come to that deceptive plastic-as-food as innocently as a songbird to a feeder of poison seed.

Bits of plastic floating in Puget Sound have the same reverberations in the sea as pesticide in bird feed.

What does the art and dance and music of the Procession have to do with our betrayal of this beyond-human world?

Art keeps our sensibilities alive – it keeps our tenderness alive, and tenderness matters because its companion is fierce determination to protect beauty and innocence.

Math and regulation alone will not hold our sensibilities for how we should engage the Earth and all that live upon it. Art and culture remind us who we want to be and how we want to live.

Art “gives courage, invites us to use our hearts, to risk and never be afraid of tenderness or the absurd. Art gathers joy.”

Thank you for recognizing the joy and art of the Procession as necessary responses to poisoned bird feed and plastics in the ocean; as a means for us to hold that we are a community where life on Earth matters.

Eli Sterling  
Founding Director  
Earthbound Productions  
Procession of the Species Celebration