



# WESTERN CUYAHOGA AUDUBON SOCIETY

CONNECT › EDUCATE › CONSERVE

## WCAS POLICY ON BALLOON RELEASES

*Around the world, birds and other wildlife are picking up plastics mistaken as food and succumb from consuming the plastics or regurgitate the plastics, along with food, to their young who then die due to lack of nutrition or impaction of plastic in the digestive tract.*

Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society (WCAS) has taken a firm stance against the practice of releasing balloons (latex balloons, mylar balloons, helium filled or not, etc.) at any event or memorial service. WCAS understands that some occasions for balloon releases are for festive purposes or as remembrances for a lost loved one. WCAS does not want to dampen the spirit of any event, but the public needs to be made aware of the problems that released or lost balloons cause.

Balloons, especially those filled with helium, whether they be latex or mylar and the accompanying strings (ribbon ...) once released, can travel great distances only to come down elsewhere causing a litter problem. If caught in vegetation, the balloons are more than a nuisance, again, they are unsightly litter and can endanger birds and small animals that get tangled in the string or ribbon. Birds are especially vulnerable in that the ribbon attracts their attention and may be attempted to be taken as nesting material only to get tangled and killed by the ribbon's length.

Mylar balloons do not decompose. They merely break down into smaller and smaller pieces, adding to the plastic pollution concern. Latex balloons will decompose, but it may take weeks to months. The plastic clips that seal the balloon do not decompose and the string or ribbon also lasts a long time. Balloons landing in water (fresh or saltwater) are mistaken for food by aquatic animals. Around the world, birds and other wildlife are picking up plastics mistaken as food and succumb from consuming the plastics or regurgitate the plastics, along with food, to their young who then die due to lack of nutrition or impaction of plastic in the digestive tract.

The alternative to balloon releases, recommended by WCAS, is to plant native plants that are wildlife friendly, such as trees that provide habitat, shrubs that provide food (flowers, fruits or seeds) or

flowering perennials that are good for pollinators (insects and hummingbirds). These would be a lasting legacy as a remembrance to a loved one, would provide a natural way to celebrate as the plants mature, and enhance a neighborhood, school yard or park.

WCAS hopes that the information presented will be considered and help the environment in a small, but significant way.