

# Conservation Corner

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This year, as we count down the days to Christmas, we have been focusing on the four themes of Advent – Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. And while these attitudes are perhaps more prevalent during the Christmas Season than the rest of the year, somehow the less commendable attitudes of selfishness, vanity, greed, and fear also creep into the season. Today I'd like to share one version of the Legend of the Evergreen Tree, this one from Northern Europe, that contains both the good and bad attitudes of Christmas hanging from its branches.

Most birds fly south in the winter to escape the cold. Few stay behind willingly. One winter a very small bird broke its wing. It could not fly south. The other birds felt bad, but they could not wait. The poor little bird could not fly at all. It could not keep up. It tried and tried, but it could not go any farther.

The cold weather came. The little bird shivered and looked around for help. It asked the trees of the forest to give it some shelter from the cold. The trees were not very nice. The birch tree was very proud of its beauty. It did not want the bird cluttering up its branches. The proud oak tree was afraid the little bird would eat all of its acorns. Even the willow tree, who looked soft and gentle, would not talk to the little bird at all. It did not want to speak to strangers.

The little bird started to cry. It tried to fly but it could not. Its wing was simply too weak. The spruce tree saw the bird crying and asked what was wrong. The bird told the tree about its hurt wing and how it needed help to stay warm in the winter. The spruce let the bird stay in its warm, soft branches. The tall pines and firs offered to help too. Even the little juniper tree said the bird could eat its red berries. The tiny bird rested all winter long with the friendly trees. In the spring, it was all better and ready to fly.

The Frost King had been watching. He told the North Wind to leave the spruce, fir, pine and juniper trees alone. He told the wind to tear the leaves off of the willow, birch, oak and all the rest. Those trees were left bare and cold all winter long. Even today, the spruce, fir, pine and juniper stay green through the cold winter months.

What kind of tree are you? Are you an invasive species who, like the deciduous trees in the legend, don't want needy folks cluttering up their lives, eating all their food, or forcing them out of their comfort zones? Or are you an evergreen, willingly sharing your food and shelter with those in need?

Conservation wishes all the trees in the woodlands a season filled with hope, peace, joy and love. Merry Christmas, everyone!

