



WESTERN CUYAHOGA AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Nearly Three Billion Birds Gone. How Can We Help?

By Michelle Brosius, Western Cuyahoga Audubon Board Member

Last week, bird lovers around the world held a sharply drawn breath when they tuned into the news and faced a headline that went something like this: “[North America Has Lost More Than 1 in 4 Birds in Last 50 Years, New Study Says](#).” In the largest study of its kind, using data from multiple organizations including the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, The American Bird Conservancy, and the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, coupled with data from weather radars that capture the biomass of migrating birds, it was found that the continent has, indeed, nearly three billion fewer birds today than it did 50 years ago.

The culprit? The usual suspects: habitat loss, pesticides, and climate change. However, a few other offenders are now in the spotlight: outdoor cats, light pollution, and building/window collisions. It seems bird population decline is a complex problem that will require more than one solution. Fortunately, there are many ways in which we can help.

1. **Fill your garden with native plants.** Exotic plants may be fragrant and beautiful but, unfortunately, do not meet the dietary needs of our local birds, pollinators, and other wildlife. Native plants are plants that are indigenous to an area, and therefore, local wildlife has evolved to depend on them. Western Cuyahoga Audubon holds native plant sale events during the spring and fall planting seasons, in fact, we have a [Native Plant Sale](#) event coming up this weekend. Please join us!
2. **Add a native tree or two.** Increasing the tree canopy, especially if you live in the city, will have a huge benefit for birds. Evaluate your landscape and consider where you can add a native tree. Would it be nice to have some shade in your backyard? Is your tree lawn empty? If so, contact your city’s arborist for more information about obtaining a tree. Some cities will even cover the cost of a tree lawn tree.
3. **Contact your local private lands biologist.** If you have a large property that you want to ensure remains ideal to suit the needs of local wildlife, then the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Wildlife employs [biologists](#) who will offer personalized recommendations for managing your land.
4. **Switch to Bird Friendly Coffee.** Smithsonian Certified Bird Friendly Coffee is not only certified organic, but is also shade-grown under a canopy of trees which offers a habitat for migratory

birds. Ditch sun-grown coffee for the traditional practice of shade-grown by visiting Western Cuyahoga Audubon's [Bird Friendly Coffee Store](#) to place your order by the 10th of every month.

5. **Eliminate pesticide usage.** Whether you have a vegetable garden or a farm, pesticides can harm birds as they ingest the insects or seeds that may be coated with toxic chemicals. Consider switching to a more sustainable practice to reduce, and preferably, eliminate pesticides altogether.
6. **Be mindful of the bird feeder.** Up to a billion birds are killed each year in the U.S. due to window collisions. The [National Audubon Society's recommendation](#) is to place bird feeders and baths "within three feet of the nearest window so that birds don't hurt themselves upon liftoff; or place them more than 30 feet away so that feeding birds have plenty of space to clear the house." American Bird Conservancy has some additional [solutions](#) to offer to protect birds from window strikes.
7. **Turn off outdoor lights during peak migration.** Outdoor lights tend to confuse migratory birds who have already expended much energy on their journey. In a disoriented state, many will collide with buildings or succumb to death by wasting their last energy reserves as they try to reorient themselves. Turning off outdoor lighting at night during peak migration can immensely help migratory birds. Check out [Audubon's Lights Out](#) program for more information.
8. **Keep cats indoors.** According to the American Bird Conservancy, cats are responsible for killing 2.4 billion birds in the U.S. per year. Keeping your cat inside is best, for the birds and for the cat. See Western Cuyahoga Audubon's [official position](#) regarding feral and roaming cats.
9. **Join us at a WCAS Conservation Project Lab.** Interested in collaborating with others on conservation projects? This group comes together to brainstorm new ideas and bring those ideas to fruition in an impactful way. Join us at our next [Conservation Project Lab](#)!
10. **Vote.** Support candidates who stand firmly in favor of tackling issues such as plastic pollution, habitat loss, and climate change. Pay attention to how your current representatives vote on these issues and ask them to favor environmental protections. Hold them accountable.
11. **Use eBird.** eBird is an online database created by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology where you can record your bird observations, which provides researchers with data regarding species distribution and abundance. The report that spurred this blog post was supported by the data that diligent birders have been recording for decades. It is important for our conservation efforts that we continue to have insight into bird populations in North America and around the world.

Please join me in taking action to protect our birds today by considering the above solutions to bird population decline.