
coffee grown in shade provides birds with the shelter and food (insects!) they need.

Next, make your windows safe: Draw the shades at night or apply decals (available online) to deter window strikes.

Third, keeps cats indoors!

Fourth, become a citizen-scientist. By reporting the birds you see to Ebird (at ebird.org) you contribute to data scientists use to monitor bird populations.

Fifth, help children learn about birds: Since screens began dominating our lives, the children have grown more alienated from the world around them.

Sixth, garden with native plants. Many garden and landscape plants are non-native. They do not host the insects birds need to feed themselves and their young. Also, nonnative plants often change the chemistry of the soil, making it difficult for native plants to reestablish themselves. Visit Audubon.org/plants to learn more.

Seventh, "embrace your patch": Take part in local conservation efforts. Many preserves need stewards to help maintain them, often by removing nonnative plants and similar activities. Besides, it's a great way to meet like-minded people and make friends!

Eighth, buy a Migratory Bird Stamp ("duck stamp"). Duck hunters are required to buy these, but the money is used to maintain wildlife refuges that many birds use as nesting and feeding grounds.

Ninth, use less plastic, and try recycling as much as you can.

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Finally, join one of the many bird and conservation organizations working to protect birds. Some of the most active ones are the American Bird Conservancy, the National Audubon Society, The Nature Conservancy, The National Wildlife Society, and the Laboratory of Ornithology at Cornell University.

Whatever you do along these lines, you will be helping birds. In fact, the Bird Conservation Network reported in 2022 that several species of birds that had been in decline in the Chicago area, including the Red-headed Woodpecker (below) have shown recent gains in population!

Learn about the DuPage Birding Club at dupagebirding.org



Helping Birds

By
John Cebula © 2022



Do birds need our help? **YES!**

A study published in *Science* (Oct. 2019) found that since 1970, North America has lost 3 billion birds, about one in four!

Cornell University's Laboratory of Ornithology (the study of birds) says that grassland birds alone have declined by 53% during the same period. And the Bird Conservation Network, a group of Chicago conservation organizations, says that between 1966 and 1996, some grassland birds in the area declined by as much as 95%.

WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

Scientists in many areas have told us about the importance of birds to a healthy environment, one that includes humans and is the basis of our civilization. Birds control insects and rodent pests, reducing or eliminating the need for pesticides that stay in the environment and poison it.

Birds help disperse the seeds of plants. Birds, including the familiar Ruby-throated Hummingbird, even pollinate plants. Ultimately, birds are clear indicators of environmental health.

Nor should we ignore the important role birds have played in human culture. They have been symbols of power (eagles), of peace and love (doves), of mourning (owls), and of wisdom (ravens, owls).

(Cover: an Eastern Kingbird, a summer breeder. Below, a Brown Thrasher, also a summer breeder in the Chicago area. Next page, a Chestnut-sided Warbler, a spring and fall migrant.)



WHAT ARE THE MAIN THREATS TO BIRDS?

The Laboratory of Ornithology lists six significant threats to birds. Loss of habitat heads the list. This includes the loss of acreage when land is used for development and agriculture. Deforestation is included here: Close to 2,000 square miles of the Amazon rain forest is cleared each year (this also contributes to climate change). Altering a habitat, as when nonnative plants and animals invade an area, also cause habitat loss. Using nonnative trees (ginkgo, Norway maple, etc.) in parkways and boulevards hurts birds because the trees do not host insects the birds feed on.

Pollution also threatens birds. The National Audubon Society found microplastics in the ocean kill one million seabirds a year. Pesticides kill 67 million birds a year in the U.S.A. alone; another 600 million birds are exposed.

Wind turbines are reported to kill 680,000 birds annually. And window strikes--when birds hit a window, often at



night, kill one million birds a year.

But it is feral cats that the American Bird Conservancy calls the Number One human-caused threat to birds in North America. The ABC estimates feral and outside cats kill at least 2.4 million birds annually in North America.

WHAT'S THE GOOD NEWS? YOU!

The Laboratory of Ornithology suggests a number of ways individuals can help our birds. First, drink shade-grown coffee. Many of our birds winter in Central and South America. When land is clear-cut for coffee plantations, birds ignore it. But