

10 + 1 Ways to Save Birds

An Initiative of the *For the Birds 2008* Conference

If there was one resounding message that came out of the *FOR THE BIRDS 2008* Conference it was: Birds are declining. Possible causes were looked at such as habitat loss, climate change, pollution, shrinking food supplies; and action plans were formulated. One of these plans is to raise public awareness and encourage individuals to help. Here are some suggestions of things you can do:

1. Feed Birds

Put out finch feeders since these species are struggling to find food, especially Evening Grosbeaks, Red Crossbills, and House Finches. Purple Finches and Pine Grosbeaks may not be far behind. Feeding all birds is beneficial, so put out suet feeders, sunflower seed feeders and fruit feeders as well.

2. Provide Water

Bird baths don't have to be fancy or expensive. End of summer is a good time to buy these on sale; and a heating element will ensure that the water doesn't freeze during our cold spells. If you don't have the room for a bird bath, a sturdy, plastic dish, heavy enough not to blow away in a high wind, can be placed on your balcony or patio. You can find inexpensive heated water bowls meant for livestock in most feed stores. Please make sure it is a shallow bowl. Change the water when it freezes. Warm water right from the tap is preferable to boiled water.

3. Construct a Pond

Again, this doesn't have to be elaborate or expensive. If your property is large enough, pick a low, wet spot to make digging easier. Line your pond with a plastic tarp, or rubber pond liner. Cover your liner with gravel, dirt or old sods. Add some dirt from the bottom of an existing woodland pond – and fill. You can put more rocks around the edge of your pond if you wish. There are plenty of ideas and advice on the Internet. Don't be discouraged if your pond "dries up". This is Nova Scotia where it rains all the time!

4. Provide Cover

Plant native shrubs with flowers in spring and berries in fall. Plant dense hedges for birds to hide from predators or roost in at night. Plant trees if you have the room: Mountain Ash, Serviceberry, Spruce, Hemlock – there are so many to choose from. Go green! Leave some brush piles to provide cover and habitat. Consider leaving "snags" or dead trees where they are; they provide important nest sites for cavity nesters such as woodpeckers.

5. Put up Nest Boxes

If you live near a lake or wetland area, put up swallow nest boxes or Wood Duck boxes. If you live near woods, try erecting woodpecker boxes or chickadee/nuthatch boxes. These cavity nesters are having an increasingly difficult time finding suitable nesting spots. Around your home or garden try Robin platforms or sparrow nest boxes. Dark-eyed Juncos have been known to nest in planters on balconies!

6. Don't Use Pesticides, Poisons, or Toxic Materials

Insects attract birds. Worms, grubs, spiders, ants are all food for birds. Many non-toxic, herbicidal soaps and sprays are sufficient to keep your property looking healthy and green. Hard to mow areas can be landscaped into large "steps" with shrubs, or can be seeded with wildflowers. Poisons meant for rodents will also poison any

animal that finds the dead or dying rodent. Avoid the use of lead in any form. Lead sinkers used for fishing and lead shot used for hunting can poison and kill any bird that eats or scavenges an animal with lead in its body.

7. Protect our Beaches

Don't leave garbage or other litter on beaches. This will attract gulls, foxes, raccoons, and other predators that will then turn to shorebirds for their next meal. Keep your dog on a leash. You can run with him rather than letting him run loose. Birds have been scared off their nests when frightened by running dogs. Avoid the use of all terrain vehicles on beaches; they are harmful to habitat and can scare birds from their nests.

8. Embrace “No-Trace” Camping

Whatever you take in to your campsite, be sure to take back out. When you leave, it should look the same as it did before you arrived. Leave no footprint. Birds are often seen around campsites, but won't continue to nest there if they are frightened away by predators attracted by your garbage; or if bushes are trampled and trees cut down.

9. Avoid Window Strikes

Whether you live in a house or an apartment, you may well have seen or heard birds fly into your windows. Hang reflective ornaments in your window so birds can see the glass barrier. Turn out lights in outer rooms at night, or keep the drapes drawn. If a bird sees a hallway or a large lit room, it won't notice the glass barrier – especially if it's exhausted from migrating. For a comprehensive list of how to avoid window strikes at home and in the business environment, visit www.flap.org and follow the “being bird friendly” path.

10. Be a Responsible Cat Owner

Consider keeping your feline friend as an indoor cat. Scientists estimate that domestic, free-roaming cats are responsible for killing a hundred million birds every year. Cats can easily be kept indoors and it is a proven fact that indoor cats live longer than outdoor cats. Free-roaming cats are often hit by cars, poisoned, attacked by other animals, and exposed to infectious diseases such as feline leukemia. Keeping your cat indoors will ensure that both your cat and the wildlife they may prey upon will remain safe. For more information, please visit www.abcbirds.org and find “cats indoors” under the programs list. If you still feel strongly that your cat needs fresh air and sunshine, try putting a harness on him and taking him for a walk; or tie him to the end of your railing. The harness should be close-fitting and comfortable.

- *Suzanne Borkowski, Past President – Nova Scotia Bird Society*
- *Helene Van Doninck, DVM, Owner/Operator – Cobequid Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre*

11. Drink Bird-Friendly Coffee

Coffee can be grown in full sun with no over-story or in shade, under a canopy. Bird researchers have recorded up to 140 species, including 46 species of migrants, present in shaded coffee plantations. Many of the warblers that nest in Nova Scotia winter in coffee plantations in Central America. Look for organic and bird-friendly labels.

- *Satya Ramen, JUDES*
- *Mark Butler, Ecology Action Centre*