



## WINGIN' IT PRE-READ ARTICLE

### Seven Simple Actions to Help Birds

In 2019, scientists documented North America's staggering loss of nearly 3 billion breeding birds since 1970. Helping birds can be as simple as making changes to everyday habits.

Here's our quick list of 7 Simple Actions you can take to help birds.

And in case anyone asks you why bird conservation is so important, here are five specific, bedrock reasons why birds matter and an in-depth article on the economic value of birds.

### **1. Make Windows Safer, Day and Night**

**The challenge:** Up to 1 billion birds are estimated to die each year after hitting windows in the United States and Canada (1).

**The cause:** By day, birds perceive reflections in glass as habitat they can fly into. By night, migratory birds drawn in by city lights are at high risk of colliding with buildings.

**These simple steps save birds:** On the outside of the window, install screens or break up reflections—using film, paint, or other markers spaced uniformly 2 inches apart across the entire surface of the glass, or Acopian BirdSavers spaced 4 inches apart. (2).

**Take it further:** Work with businesses or public buildings to offer a contest for creative “window mural” designs that make windows safer for birds. Support legislation for bird-friendly building designs. Start a lights-out campaign in your city.

### **2. Keep Cats Indoors**

**The challenge:** Cats are estimated to kill more than 2.4 billion birds annually in the U.S. and Canada (3). This is the #1 human-caused reason for the loss of birds, aside from habitat loss.

**The cause:** Cats can make great pets, but more than 110 million feral and pet cats now roam in the United States and Canada (4,5). These nonnative predators instinctively hunt and kill birds even when well fed.



**A solution that's good for cats and birds:** Save birds and keep cats healthy by keeping cats indoors or creating an outdoor “catio.” You can also train your cat to walk on a leash.

**Take it further:** Speak out about the impacts of feral cat colonies in your neighborhood and on public lands. Unowned cats’ lives may be as short as two years because of disease and hardship, and they are responsible for more than two-thirds of birds killed by cats in the United States (5,6).

### **3. Reduce Lawn, Plant Natives**

**The challenge:** Birds have fewer places to safely rest during migration and to raise their young: More than 10 million acres of land in the United States were converted to developed land from 1982 to 1997 (7).

**The cause:** Lawns and pavement don’t offer enough food or shelter for many birds and other wildlife. With more than 40 million acres of lawn in the U.S. alone (8), there’s huge potential to support wildlife by replacing lawns with native plantings.

**Add native plants, watch birds come in:** Native plants add interest and beauty to your yard and neighborhood, and provide shelter and nesting areas for birds. The nectar, seeds, berries, and insects will sustain birds and diverse wildlife.

### **4. Avoid Pesticides**

**The challenge:** More than 1 billion pounds of pesticides are applied in the United States each year (9). The continent’s most widely used insecticides, called neonicotinoids or “neonics,” are lethal to birds and to the insects that birds consume. Common weed killers used around homes, such as 2, 4-D and glyphosate (used in Roundup), can be toxic to wildlife, and glyphosate has been declared a probable human carcinogen (10).

**The cause:** Pesticides that are toxic to birds can harm them directly through contact, or if they eat contaminated seeds or prey. Pesticides can also harm birds indirectly by reducing the number of available insects, which birds need to survive.



**A healthy choice for you, your family, and birds:** Consider purchasing organic food.

Nearly 70% of produce sold in the U.S. contains pesticides ([10](#)). Reduce pesticides around your home and garden.

**Take it further:** Urge U.S. Representatives to cosponsor the Saving America's Pollinators Act. The bill, H.R. 1337, requires the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to suspend registration of neonics.

## 5. Drink Coffee That's Good for Birds

**The challenge:** Three-quarters of the world's coffee farms grow their plants in the sun ([11](#)), destroying forests that birds and other wildlife need for food and shelter. Sun-grown coffee also often requires using environmentally harmful pesticides and fertilizers. On the other hand, shade-grown coffee preserves a forest canopy that helps migratory birds survive the winter.

**The cause:** Too few consumers are aware of the problems of sun coffee. Those who are aware may be reluctant to pay more for environmentally sustainable coffee.

**Enjoy shade-grown coffee:** It's a win-win-win: it's delicious, economically beneficial to coffee farmers, and helps more than 42 species of North American migratory songbirds that winter in coffee plantations, including orioles, warblers, and thrushes. Here's a primer on [what the terms you find on coffee labels mean](#).

**Take it further:** Look for Bird Friendly coffee, a certification from the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center that also includes organic standards. Educate coffee shops and grocery stores about shade-grown coffees.

## 6. Protect Our Planet from Plastic

**The challenge:** It's estimated that 4,900 million metric tons of plastic have accumulated in landfills and in our environment worldwide ([12](#)), polluting our oceans and harming wildlife such as seabirds, whales, and turtles that mistakenly eat plastic, or become entangled in it.

**The cause:** Plastic takes more than 400 years to degrade, and 91% of plastics created are not recycled ([13](#)). Studies show that at least 80 seabird species ingest plastic ([14](#)),



mistaking it for food. Cigarette lighters, toothbrushes, and other trash have been found in the stomachs of dead albatrosses.

**Reduce your plastics:** Avoid single-use plastics including bags, bottles, wraps, and disposable utensils. It's far better to choose reusable items, but if you do have disposable plastic, be sure to recycle it.

**Take it further:** Advocate for bans of plastic bags, styrofoam, and straws. Encourage stores to offer incentives for reusable bags, and ask restaurants and other businesses to phase out single-use plastics.

## 7. Watch Birds, Share What You See

**The challenge:** The world's most abundant bird, the Passenger Pigeon, went extinct, and people didn't realize how quickly it was vanishing until it was too late. Monitoring birds is essential to help protect them, but tracking the health of the world's 10,000 bird species is an immense challenge.

**The cause:** To understand how birds are faring, scientists need hundreds of thousands of people to report what they're seeing in backyards, neighborhoods, and wild places around the world. Without this information, scientists will not have enough timely data to show where and when birds are declining around the world.

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