

Limiting the Hazards to Birds



Wildlife serves as an important indicator of the overall health of the environment. If there is little evidence of wildlife present in an area, it is likely that there is little available food, water or shelter in the area as well.

Some species of animals are more adaptable to difficult conditions--they are tolerant of the conditions that threaten survival to others. Some, in contrast are so specialized that it is quite difficult for them to find the food, water, shelter and other things that they need--they are intolerant of changes to the land often caused by humans.

Understanding that the loss of bird habitat is the leading cause of declining bird populations worldwide, many people have responded by planting native trees, shrubs and plants. And although we play an important role in offering healthy native habitat, there are plenty of actions we can take to ensure our community is providing our birds with safe places to nest and fledge their young, and help further protect them from the abundant dangers that lie ahead.

Window Strikes

One of the ways we can help protect birds is to understand the nature of window strikes. The following link is a valuable tool to understand why birds often fly into windows, and the many ways we can reduce or limit the number of window strikes and the amount of damage caused by them.

<http://birding.about.com/od/birdconservation/a/preventwindowcollisions.htm>

Keep in mind that most birds fly into windows because they are escaping predators (often the sky and clouds are reflected in the window) and think your window is an escape route. Keeping feeders within 3 feet of a window or more than 15 feet from your house is a great first step. This ensures that the birds (if feeding close to a window) will not gain the momentum for a truly damaging strike. Keeping feeders more than 15 feet away from your house will likely force birds to look elsewhere to escape. (Nearby shrubs, trees, tall grasses, etc.)

Making sure that birds SEE your window is crucial in preventing window strikes. Using blinds or sheer panels as window treatments works to make glass less reflective and therefore, more visible to birds.

A product called Bird Tape is a very effective measure to prevent window strikes.



<http://abcbirdtape.org/>

Applying any decals, stained glass, or other window décor can be effective, but only if they're spaced rather closely. Remember that birds are great aviators, and they can quickly fly through obstacles more than a few inches apart.

Other methods and products designed to reduce the injuries caused by window strikes are detailed in this article in Birdwatching.

<http://www.birdwatchingdaily.com/featured-stories/15-products-that-prevent-windows-strikes/>

Having shrubs close to windows or flower window boxes will act as a shelter from predators also. Given the option, birds will often choose to seek refuge from predators in nearby shrubbery and trees.

Cats



Another way to help protect your neighborhood birds is to keep your cat(s) inside your house. Cats (even well-fed cats) have an insatiable instinct to hunt. Birds and small mammals top the hunting list for any cat allowed to roam free outdoors. Well-meaning cat owners often let their housecat outside, believing their cat shouldn't be denied outdoor time. This is an understandable point of view, but the simple

truth is that cat predation can be nothing less than devastating to bird populations. Free-roaming cats are also at risk of disease, injury by cars and animal attacks, etc. Keeping your cat indoors at all times may not be ideal for every cat and their owner, but there are measures you can take to ensure that both cats and birds are safe and happy. Citizens of Whitewater should also be aware that free-roaming cats are against city ordinance 9.14, and can be fined if ordinance is violated.

Many cat owners have chosen to build outdoor cat enclosures. These "catios" can function beautifully as a means to allow your cat to be outdoors, yet safe from danger, and safe from hunting. Here are a few examples of some catios. Please understand that The City of Whitewater cannot endorse any particular brand of enclosure or product. These examples are for informational use only.





Some websites to visit for more photos and information on catios.

http://www.oldmaidcatlady.com/suncatcher_10x12_outdoor_cat_enclosure

<http://www.showcatsonline.com/x/wyndabbey2.shtml>

If a catio is not feasible, as some renters and even homeowners may find, there is a product called a Cat Bib that significantly reduces the cat's ability to successfully hunt by slowing the cat, and limiting its agility. It attaches to the cat's collar, by a Velcro closure, and allows the cat to engage in normal outdoor behavior, without killing birds.

<http://catgoods.com/>



DIY cat bibs:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dreisiger/sets/72157622626585783/>

One last comment regarding cats: Please make sure that your cat(s) are spayed or neutered. It only takes one time outdoors to make a new batch of kittens.

Pesticides and Herbicides

Remembering that birds are a barometer of the overall health of the environment is important when considering the use of chemicals to control weeds, insects, or other pests.

Years ago, canaries were used in coal mines to warn of impending danger because birds are more sensitive to a lack of oxygen and dangerous gasses than humans. If the canaries began to collapse and die, the miners knew that the mine was unsafe.

The book Silent Spring by Rachel Carson, outlined a time in the fifties and sixties when the absence of certain birds was a warning that the earth was out of balance, and becoming a dangerous place, unable to support life for certain birds. This time the poison killing the birds was DDT, a "miracle bug killer" sprayed widely across the US. It first entered the food chain through insects and insect predators, and then was washed into the food chain of the fish in our lakes. Birds of prey that relied on fish began to lay thin egg shells that cracked before the chicks could hatch and resulted in the endangerment of birds of prey, such as the bald eagle, and a Great Lakes Fish Advisory for humans today. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service details the recovery of the Bald Eagle on their website.

<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/eagle/recovery/index.html>

If you must use pesticides or herbicides, please always exercise caution. Judicious and prudent use of chemicals as well as always following manufacturer's directions can make the difference between controlling pests and poisoning the ground and surface water.