

Loss of bird habitat is on rise, need protection

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A 2019 study by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology reported an almost 30 percent drop since 1970 in the number of birds in the United States and Canada: “All told, the North American bird population is down by 2.9 billion breeding adults, with devastating losses among birds in every biome. Forests alone have lost 1 billion birds.”



The researchers described the decline in our bird populations as “staggering.”

Among the hardest hit are the birds that we often see: sparrows, finches, warblers, and blackbirds. “We are not even able to keep our common birds common,” one observer commented.

A follow-up study completed in 2022 by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative not only confirmed the Cornell Lab’s results, it reported that the bird population decline may be even more severe than feared: The populations of more than half of all North American bird species are plummeting; ninety different species — including the rufous hummingbird, chimney swift, and wood thrush, all birds that were common in our area not long ago — have lost half of their breeding populations.

What is happening? Loss of habitats, the rising use of pesticides on farms, and climate change are all cited as major factors in the bird population decline.

“Even if you are not a birdwatcher, the loss of birds impacts you,” explains science reporter Chris Baraniuk. “Birds regulate ecosystems by preying on insects, pollinating plants and spreading seeds — by excreting them after eating fruit, for example. We all rely on healthy ecosystems for breathable air, the food we eat, and a regulated climate.”

Our woods are quieter now. For those of us who were alive in 1970, more than one out of four birds have vanished.

But researchers believe that we can stave off mass extinction of North American bird populations and even reverse the decline if we act to address each cause.

Larger patches of forest are especially critical to the many of the migrating forest songbirds of the Northeastern U.S. We need to protect bird habitat so that our forests are, once again, filled with the extraordinary sights and sounds of birds.

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