

BIRDS

FACTS ABOUT BIRDS

- Birds are some of nature's most beautiful creatures, captivating our attention with their stunning colors and varied songs.
- The size of birds can vary widely: African ostriches, the tallest bird, can reach a height of nine feet, while the Bee hummingbird, the smallest bird ever, is only two inches long.¹²²
- Of the roughly 11,000 different species of birds, nearly 40% are declining in population.¹²³
- In the French countryside, bird populations have declined by a third in the last 15 years.¹²⁴
- The overall population of seabirds has declined by 70% in the past six decades.¹²⁵
- Birds inhabit the most remote places on Earth; a previously unknown “supercolony” of Adélie penguins has been discovered recently in the Danger Islands in the Antarctic, where the effects of both climate change and human activity are less pronounced than in other parts of the world.¹²⁶
- The Passenger pigeon's rapid extinction was shocking; its population declined from 2 billion to zero in 40 years.¹²⁷



WHY WE NEED TO PROTECT BIRDS

Role in the Ecosystem: From dispersing seeds¹²⁸ and transferring nutrients¹²⁹ through their migratory patterns to scavenging decomposing animals to prevent the spread of disease to humans,¹³⁰ birds often have numerous and vital roles in their ecosystems.



Ecosystem Services: Birds play an important part in agricultural production by eating unwanted pests from both crops and livestock, helping to prevent the depletion of crops.¹³¹ Birds also provide cultural services, exemplified by birds' central roles in art, national pride, religion, and as pet companions.¹³²

Economic Contribution: The global market of goods and services from temperate and boreal forests is valued at \$1.3 trillion. Birds retain an indispensable role in preventing the outbreak of pests and helping with the spread of seeds.¹³³ In the United States alone, bird watching brings in annual revenue of \$40 billion and supports around 860,000 jobs¹³⁴.



Uniqueness: In addition to being social creatures, birds have been observed to exhibit intelligent behavior;¹³⁵ for instance, Carrion crows in Japan have been seen placing nuts on roadways and waiting for car tires to crush them open! Even more remarkably, the African grey parrot has been observed to use its speech to make and deny requests for food and other things.¹³⁶

THREATS TO BIRDS

Habitat Loss: Agriculture has the biggest negative impact of all human activities on birds, threatening 74% of the 1,469 species at risk of extinction. In North America, nearly 290 million acres of grassland habitat has been converted for agricultural use, displacing and threatening the survival of a variety of bird species.¹³⁷

Deforestation: Deforestation caused by logging impacts 50% of the threatened species of birds. In Latin America, for instance, approximately 85% of endangered birds have been negatively impacted by large-scale logging operations.¹³⁸

Invasive species: Invasive species, such as cats and rats, have driven 70 species of birds to extinction. Additionally, invasive species have played a role in the decline of 50% of all threatened bird species.¹³⁹

Climate Change and Severe Weather: Over the course of this century, climate change will become one, if not the, biggest threat to the well-being of birds. To cite one prominent example, reductions in rainfall limits the food available to birds.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, oceanic birds are by far the most threatened group of birds, due in large part to the fact the rising sea temperatures will submerge their nests and habitat.¹⁴¹

Plastic and Pesticide Pollution: Birds are threatened by plastic on both land and water,¹⁴² often confusing indigestible plastic for small bits of food. Even worse, pesticide pollution¹⁴³ is the leading cause of grassland bird decline.¹⁴⁴ Because birds are migratory, they are threatened by both plastic and pesticide pollution wherever they go.

HOW TO HELP BIRDS

- Turning off the lights in your home or office to prevent birds colliding with the window¹⁴⁵
- Continue to advocate for additional land protection for birds under the Endangered Species Act in the United States¹⁴⁶
- Avoid using any and all pesticides or insecticides: not only can birds ingest these harmful chemicals directly, but recent research has also shown that these products can remain in the soil for months after their use.¹⁴⁷
- Do not litter your plastic; instead, the plastic should be properly recycled. Additionally, removing plastic litter when you see it to prevent birds from ingesting it.¹⁴⁸
- Take our [pesticide pledge](#).
- Check out our [Species Profiles](#) for up-to-date advocacy actions.
- Check out all of Earth Day Network's [resources](#) to help Protect our Species.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ARTICLES/BLOGS/READINGS

BirdLife Data Zone - *The Guardian*

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/apr/23/one-in-eight-birds-is-threatened-with-extinction-global-study-finds>

This article gives facts and figures on birds species that are and endangered.

Fate of the Passenger Pigeon Looms as a Somber Warning - *Yale University*

https://e360.yale.edu/features/fate_of_the_passenger_pigeon_looms_as_a_somber_warning

This article chronicles the story of the last passenger pigeon and tells what lead to their extinction

New Study Doubles the Estimate of Bird Species in the World - *American Museum of Natural History*

<https://www.amnh.org/about-the-museum/press-center/new-study-doubles-the-estimate-of-bird-species-in-the-world>

This article talks about a new study that found there are nearly 18,000 bird species worldwide, which is twice as many as previously thought.

VIDEOS

The Bowerbird's Grand Performance! | Life Story - *BBC*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1XkPeN3AWIE>

The Bowerbird puts on a show to impress the female but will it be good enough?

STORYTELLING

TEDx Talk: The Fascinating Intelligence of Birds - *Auguste von Bayern*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uLp0C6G_w

Did you know that despite expressions such as "bird-brain", birds are very intelligent creatures? To demonstrate this, Auguste von Bayern brings Dohli, a jackdaw who is very close to her, on stage to be the first corvid ever to appear in a TEDx talk. She goes on to explain how certain bird species can innovate, reason, and even make novel tools to accomplish their goals - all with Dohli watching (and complaining!) first from her shoulder, and then from the back of the auditorium

OTHERS WORKING ON THIS ISSUE

American Bird Conservancy

<https://abcbirds.org/>

The American Bird Conservancy is the Western Hemisphere's bird conservation specialist — the only organization with a single and steadfast commitment to achieving conservation results for birds and their habitats throughout the Americas.

REPORTS

How Many Kinds of Birds are there and Why Does it Matter? - *George F. Barrowclough, Joel Craft, John Klicka, Robert M. Zink*

<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0166307>

Study on declining bird species and the impacts their absence has on their ecosystems.