

COVID - 19 Is Helping Birds Regain Their Population



Canadian Geese migrating in a flock. Image taken from allaboutbirds.com

***Do you hear birds chirping when you go outside for a walk?
What kinds of animals have you seen from your own house, during
the Coronavirus Pandemic?***

The COVID - 19 Pandemic is helping repair and protect biodiversity all over the globe. Birds, which have been disappearing, have reappeared and are delighting their human neighbours with songs. Nowadays, they have become nature's alarm clock, waking everyone up with their sweet bird songs and chirps. Canadians have reported unusual sightings of animals. In Montreal, for example, a woman saw two turkeys taking a walk through her neighbourhood through her window. Another global example of how this lockdown is helping wildlife was found in India. Due to the huge reduction of air and noise pollution, birds and butterfly populations in India have increased significantly.

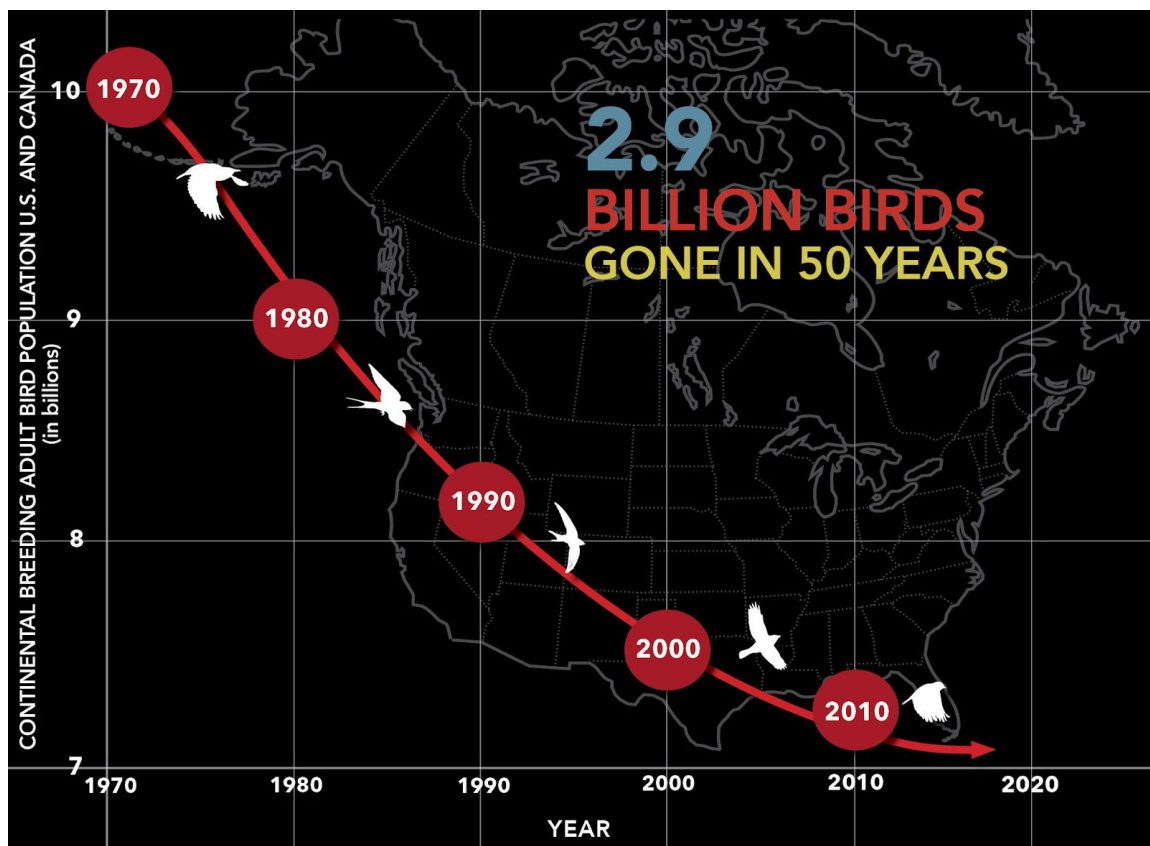
BIODIVERSITY

We take water, shelter, resources, etc. from nature. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the value of what nature provides us is around US 33 trillion dollars per year. If nature didn't provide us with all that, we won't be what we are today. Birds play a dominant role in this.

Dr Stuart Butchart, BirdLife's Global Research and Indicators Coordinator, stated, "Being widespread, well studied, and highly responsive to environmental change, birds are very valuable indicators." An example would be the Important Birds Area Protection Index. These areas represent main places where biodiversity is and can be conserved. They can also help us find where biodiversity is being lost.

LOSING AND REGAINING BIRDS

We all know that there are endangered species but did you know that many birds are critically endangered! Not many people knew this but birds have been disappearing rapidly from North America since the 1970s. Approximately 29% of the whole population of birds (more than 2.9 billion birds) have been lost and the fact is that these were common birds! Our backyard birds like the Sparrows and Blackbirds along with grassland birds, such as the Meadowlarks, have taken the biggest hits.



Graph made by Jillian Ditner was used in allaboutbirds.com to show the difference between birds in 1970 and 2020.

These feathered creatures are mainly affected by Deforestation, Air Pollution, and Noise Pollution. But now, because of this pandemic and the slowdown of the economy, birds are thriving. As a result, their habitat is much safer. Everything is being done online now, which leads to less use of paper and cutting of trees.

Since everyone is confined at home, less people are going out which means less greenhouse gases caused by vehicles. This leads to reduction in air and noise pollution which allows birds to flourish. International air transit is banned for non-essential travel which reduces the amount of noise pollution in the sky and atmosphere. Less construction is also being done, which again helps reduce the amount of noise around us and the birds.

Through a Webinar hosted by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, participants learned that birds use their voice to create different songs, chirps, and chips. They also understood that birds use this to call each other and find mates. During neighbourhood walks, an experiment was conducted to see what birds could be identified. It was found that although there were less birds during early April and more during May, by June the diversity and number of birds increased significantly. This makes sense, because the Greater Toronto Area was in emergency mode throughout May, making it easier for birds to communicate with a huge reduction in noise pollution.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL

The loss of birds can be connected to the 15th Sustainable Development Goal which is 'Life on Land'. This United Nations Goal was made for keeping the environment in mind while making global decisions. As birds are also living creatures, the specific goal of halting the loss of biodiversity (within SDG 15) refers to and includes them as well.

Nature Canada launched a new initiative of Keep Cats Safe and Save the Birds. This action plan relates cats and birds and shows that by preventing free-roaming cats, we can save them along with birds. It is scientifically proven that cats cause the most deaths in bird populations and also that these cats face many life-risks when they get out in the street by themselves. To learn more you can look at this link, <https://naturecanada.ca/news/blog/keeping-cats-safe-and-saving-bird-lives/>, as well as join the movement at this website <https://catsandbirds.ca/>.

HOW CAN WE HELP BIRDS?

This pandemic has taught us a great lesson of how we can survive without infringing in the birds' habitat. You can do many things to help protect the birds. Buying bird-baths to put in your backyard would encourage migratory birds to have a place to rest or drink water. You could also create bird feeders and hang them in your backyard or balcony. Another method to help birds is by not using pesticides or fertilizers. These chemicals are not only toxic for birds, but also for humans.

If you still want to help birds in some way, you can donate money to the organizations like Birdlife International (<http://www.birdlife.org/>) or Birds Canada (<https://www.birdscanada.org/>). They support the birds by restoring their habitat. Now you know why these magnificent feathered creatures are so important to us. Protect Birds and Preserve our Earth!