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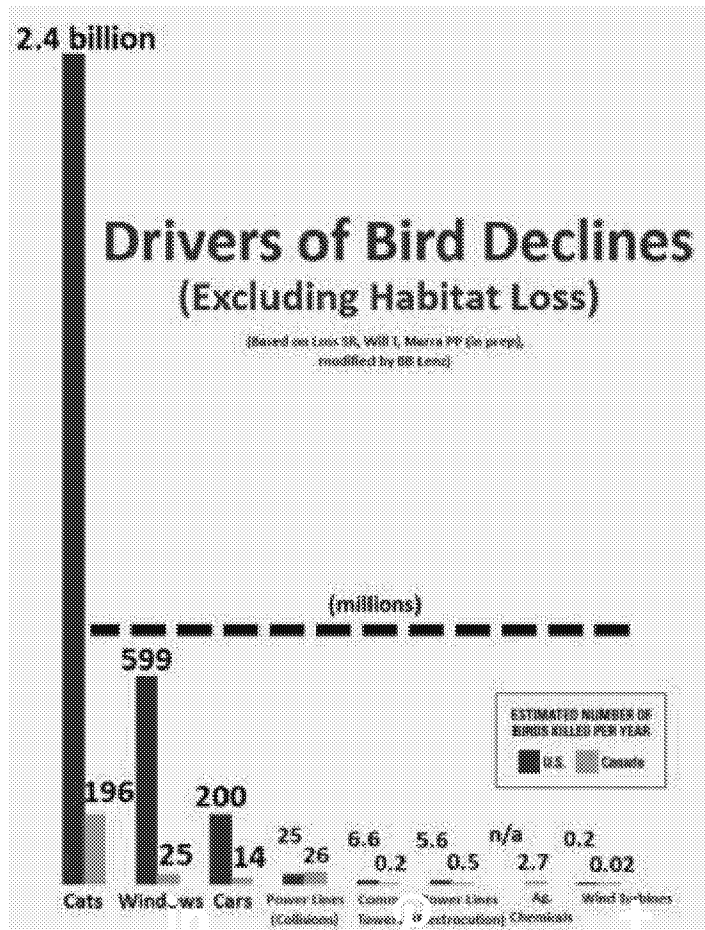
Threats to Birds

In addition to predators and other natural challenges to survival, birds face a number of massive threats due to human activity. Habitat loss may be the biggest of these threats, especially if one considers the entire history and prehistory of humankind, though few would argue that habitat loss is a serious problem. There are also many conservation groups, citizens, and governments working to protect natural areas.

It is when one moves beyond habitat loss that the magnitude of threats to birds surprises some and becomes controversial for others. These threats can be classified as indirect or direct.

Indirect threats have a number of steps between human action and the resulting threat to birds. For example, climate change: humans add greenhouse gases to the atmosphere, these gases trap heat and warm the planet, the warming raises sea levels and changes climate patterns, which leads to rapid ecosystem changes (e.g., habitat and food availability) that harm birds.

Direct threats are, as you might expect, more direct: people erect a building, a bird hits that building, the bird dies. There are



no intermediate steps. A recent study (<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1890/110251/full>) by Scott Loss, Tom Will, and Pete Marra examined non-habitat direct threats to birds in North America. These numbers, summarized to the right and discussed below, show that cats, collisions, and pesticides combine to kill BILLIONS of birds in the United States each year.

Cats

In the United States, cats kill an estimated 2.4 BILLION birds and 12 BILLION mammals... *every year*.

These numbers are shocking and your first reaction might be disbelief. If it is, that is understandable. However, a quick look at the math ought to clear things up:

- # of unowned cats in the U.S.: 60-100 million
- # of owned cats in the U.S.: 90 million

With that many cats, the cumulative impact of their hunting is bound to be significant no matter how you look at it. For example, suppose we use the mid-points of those estimates: 80 million unowned cats, 45 million owned cats that are let outside to hunt (50% of the total), and say that the average cat kills 2 birds/month. That makes 125 million cats * 24 birds/year = 3.0 billion birds/year. Cherry picking even the lowest estimates, which is not a valid means to honestly examine an issue, would still result in enormous numbers of wild animals dying at the paws of cats.

Outdoor cats also lead shorter, more difficult lives because they are exposed to a range of threats that indoor cats do not face. Outdoor cats also transmit a number of diseases to humans, including toxoplasmosis which can cause birth defects and may be linked to mental health issues.

Below you will find a many of the best sources of information so that you can continue to explore the many reasons that owned cats should be kept indoors and that real solutions need to be found to address the epidemic of unowned cats in the United States.

- Cat Indoors (American Bird Conservancy) (<https://abcbirds.org/program/cats-indoors/>)



The American Bird Conservancy's Cats Indoors (<https://abcbirds.org/program/cats-indoors/>) campaign is one of the most comprehensive sources of online information about the the impacts that cats have on wildlife populations and human health (<https://abcbirds.org/program/cats-indoors/cats-and-diseases/>) while discussing why Trap, Neuter, Return/Release (TNR) is not an effective management strategy (<https://abcbirds.org/program/cats-indoors/trap-neuter-release/>) to reduce the number of unowned cats.

- Cat Wars by Pete Marra & Chris Santella (https://www.amazon.com/Cat-Wars-Devastating-Consequences-Cuddly/dp/0691167419/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1512793884&sr=8-1&keywords=cat+wars)

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Cat Wars (https://www.amazon.com/Cat-Wars-Devastating-Consequences-Cuddly/dp/0691167419/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1512793884&sr=8-1&keywords=cat+wars) tells the full story of the human-cat relationship from domestication to present day. It covers the 33 species extinctions in which we know cats have been implicated and does an excellent job discussing all of the research that has been conducted on the impacts that outdoor cats have on wildlife and human health while covering why time outside is also detrimental to cats themselves. This book is very well written and a must read if you are interested in this issue (and you should be!).

- American Medical Veterinary Association (<https://www.avma.org/KB/Policies/Pages/Free-Roaming-Owned-Cats.aspx>)



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The advice of the American Medical Veterinary Association, a group whose primary interest is the well being of pet cats, is clear: owned cats are better off inside

(<https://www.avma.org/KB/Policies/Pages/Free-Roaming-Owned-Cats.aspx>). The reasoning behind the AMVA's views is spelled out in their 2011 resolution (</images/bl/Documents/AMVA-Resolution-of-Outdoor-Cat-Policy.pdf>).

Collisions

Birds have undergone millions of years of evolution that have allowed them to fine tune the ability to fly (most of them anyway, others like the ostrich and kakapo lost their ability to fly). Humans, especially recently, have invaded the air with a variety of structures that present new challenges to birds whose lives rely on their ability to fly safely.

When a bird collides with a structure it usually ends poorly for the bird. Remember, they are all light for their size and have hollow bones. Collisions with windows kill the most birds in the United States every year, topping the list of annual collision threats:

1. Windows: 599 million birds/yr
THE PROBLEM: Glass either reflects the sky/habitat or it is transparent and birds think they can fly through it.
2. Power lines: 23 million birds/yr (electrocution kills another 5.6 million)
THE PROBLEM: Birds simply do not detect the thin power lines in their path.
3. Communication towers: 6.6 million birds/yr
THE PROBLEM: Bright lights disorient migrating birds.
4. Wind turbines: 234,000 birds/yr
THE PROBLEM: Wind turbine blades spin so fast the birds think they are flying through open sky and are hit from above/below by the spinning blade.

Nighttime lights also greatly increase the number of collisions. Billions of birds migrate each spring and fall with most of their long-distance flights happening at night. Research has shown that building lights - even those on your house contribute - disorient birds and make them fly over well-lit areas like cities. This increases the chances that birds will collide with buildings at night, during the early morning hours as they start to look for a place to land, and during the following day if the nighttime lights make it more likely that birds will land in a forest of glass, cars, and cats rather than a poorly-lit forest of trees.

The good news? There are solutions!!! Please take a few minutes to review the sites below.

You can also look for a number of actions that will get you credit in your Bird City Wisconsin application (see Category 3 (/application-criteria))!

- Bird Collisions (American Bird Conservancy) (<https://abcbirds.org/threat/bird-strikes/>)



The American Bird Conservancy's Bird Collisions Program has a wealth of online information to help you reduce collisions. This is the most comprehensive collisions resource on the internet. We recommend that you read the whole site, but want to point

out a few highlights:

✈️ **MUST READ:** ABC's recommended products (<https://abcbirds.org/get-involved/bird-smart-glass/>) to retrofit your windows or choose new ones that won't kill birds.

✈️ How to reduce collisions with communication towers. (<https://abcbirds.org/birds-communication-towers/>)

✈️ Bird-friendly Building Design: Looking for an A to Z guide to window collisions? This is the place to start.

- Songbird Saver (Identify & Address Problem Towers) (<https://www.songbirdsaver.org/>)



Tower collisions can be greatly reduced by changing the lights on the tower from constantly on to flashing. That's it. Flashing lights are just as safe for pilots, save money because they use less energy, and save birds' lives. It is a true win-win-win.

This user-friendly site/app shows you the worst communications towers in your area and helps you contact the tower engineer to change the lighting operation.

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