



Important Facts about Habitat Loss and Birds



Catch the Migration Sensation

International Migratory Bird Day is May 8th

You may know that more than 300 species of birds nest in the forests of North America, but did you know that...

■ More than 85 percent of forest habitats have been permanently destroyed or logged in the United States?

■ Two out of every three woodland species in the central United States have declined in abundance during the past 30 years?

■ Ninety-nine percent of the original forests in the eastern United States have been cut, and the forests that regenerate or are replanted are often of lower quality for Neotropical migratory birds?

■ More than 75 percent of riparian woodlands in the West have been destroyed, and that this loss has caused several bird species to be placed on the federal Endangered Species List?

■ Most forests in the midwestern United States have been lost—for example, 99 percent of mature oak forest and beech-maple forest in Michigan, 96 percent of bottomland forests in Missouri, and 72 percent of northern hardwoods in Minnesota?

■ In eastern Montana, about 90 percent of the trees in wooded draws have been removed?

■ Most woodlands in eastern United States are less than 100 acres in size, and this allows parasitic brown-headed cowbirds and predators easy access to the nests of Neotropical migratory birds breeding there?

■ Ninety-eight percent of the longleaf pine forests along the southeastern coastal plain have been replaced?

■ Only 5 percent of the original old-growth forests of the Cumberland Plateau in Tennessee remain today?

■ Nearly all of the temperate rainforests of Oregon have been logged?

You may know that the grasslands of North America harbor dozens of unique species of birds found no place else in the world, but did you know that...

■ Although more than 400,000 square miles of tallgrass prairie once covered the United States (15 percent of the lower 48 states), 95 percent of those grasslands have been permanently destroyed or converted to agriculture?

■ Three out of every four grassland bird species in North America have declined in abundance during the past 30 years?

■ Ninety-nine percent of the Palouse Prairie in the Pacific Northwest has been lost to agriculture?

■ More than 90 percent of sagebrush habitats in the Southwest and Intermountain West have been overgrazed, and that cattle grazing usually results in significant degradation of nesting habitats for birds?

■ Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, and Indiana have lost more than 99 percent of their prairies during the past 150 years, and with those prairies went upland sandpipers, dickcissels, and bobolinks?

■ In Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas, only 5 percent of the once widespread coastal prairie remains?

■ Most remaining grasslands in the East and Midwest are fragments so small that brown-headed cowbirds and predators can readily parasitize or destroy nests of birds nesting there?

■ Ninety-four percent of native grasslands in San Diego County, California have been developed?

■ Properly reclaimed strip mines can provide excellent habitat for many grassland species?

■ Land management practices such as fire suppression, grazing, and water regulation have created a massive invasion of exotic grasses and shrubs on millions of acres of native grasslands and steppe in western North America?

You may know that healthy wetlands provide clean drinking water for cities and towns everywhere, but did you know that...

■ More than 50 percent of all wetlands in the contiguous United States have been drained or filled since the time of European settlement?

■ The bottomland hardwood forests of the South have declined by more than 75 percent?

■ Scientists know relatively little about the breeding ecology of many species of wetland birds, such as rails and shorebirds?

■ More than half of all original barrier island vegetation and coastal wetlands in the United States have been destroyed or altered, thereby depriving birds important resting and feeding sites during migration?

■ The midwestern states have been particularly hard on their marshes and swamps—Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa and Missouri have drained more than 90 percent of their original wetlands?

■ Ninety-four percent of inland wetlands have been drained in California, but Alaska has retained more than 90 percent of its original wetlands?

■ Most western states have destroyed one-third to one-half of their wetlands during the past 100 years?

■ There are 30 to 70 percent fewer king rails, Virginia rails, soras, lesser yellowlegs, and black terns today than there were only 30 years ago?

■ More than half of all the areas identified as critical for endangered species are contained in wetlands?

■ The North American Waterfowl Management Plan has protected, restored, or enhanced more than 15 million acres of marshes, potholes, and forested wetlands in Canada, the United States, and Mexico between 1986 and 1996?

Finally, you know that birds are fun to watch, but did you know that...

■ Spruce budworms cause millions of dollars in damage each year in northern and western forests, but that five out of every six budworms are eaten by migratory birds?

■ Birds are good indicators of the health of the environment, and that population declines of peregrine falcons and ospreys in the 1960s alerted us that the pesticide DDT was harmful to all animals, including humans?

■ In 1921, biologists estimated that, through insect control, birds saved farmers and timber owners \$44 million in losses?

■ Homes in neighborhoods with large trees for birds cost less to cool and heat, and are worth more than similar homes in neighborhoods without trees?

■ Agricultural areas, such as orchards, with woodlots nearby usually have more birds than areas without woodlots, and that birds have been shown to consume 95 percent of the tree-damaging codling moths in those orchards?

■ Many tropical birds, and birds that migrate to the tropics during the winter, are important for the pollination of many valuable species of flowers and trees?

■ By eating thousands of leaf-damaging insects each day, birds in the Ozarks allow commercially valuable white oak trees to grow faster than they would if birds weren't in those forests?

■ Birds save the timber industry tens of millions of dollars in timber damage each year by consuming wood boring insects?

■ The blue jay is one of the “Johnny Applesseeds” of the bird world, playing an important role in dispersal of acorns, and hence oak trees, in the Midwest?

■ Raptors, such as Swainson's hawk, red-tailed hawk, and great-horned owl, provide a natural control for rodents that destroy crops and infest grain supplies?

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