



Esmeraldas Woodstar, Photo by Francisco Sornoza



Grassland at Antisanilla, Photo by Enrique Ortiz



WHY BIRD CONSERVATION MATTERS

for Governments

Governments seek prosperity; prosperous communities, economies, and environments are central to their missions. Bird conservation can help to achieve these objectives. Birds contribute to human health, improve agricultural production, generate millions of dollars in ecotourism revenue, and serve as indicators of environmental well-being.

However, **North America alone has lost 2.9 billion birds, or one in four birds, since 1970.** These trends parallel bird declines globally. This great loss of birds, primarily caused by habitat degradation, negatively impacts **human and ecosystem health.** Reversing these declines can be achieved through actions to improve livelihoods, create economic opportunities, and restore degraded ecosystems at a landscape level. In this way, bird conservation can help to achieve global sustainability and conservation objectives.

Mainstreaming the conservation of birds and their habitat in the design of governmental policies, subsidies and incentives, development programs, and conservation projects can contribute to goals aiming to improve people's lives, health, communities, sources of income, and environment.



Playa Dorada Santuario de Tortugas, Photo by Francisco Sornoza

BIRDS HELP COUNTRIES MEET GLOBAL OBLIGATIONS

The multiple services provided by birds and their conservation can play a central role in achieving the 2030 **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs), including **SDG #14** (Life below water) and **SDG #15** (Life on land).

Protecting bird species and their habitats will help countries meet obligations under the post-2020 **Global Biodiversity Framework** (GBF). It is anticipated that the prevention of species extinctions and the establishment of protected areas will have an even larger focus in the post-2020 GBF than in previous global goals.

BIRD HABITAT PROTECTS PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

As climate change exacerbates natural disasters and droughts, habitat conservation and restoration are critical for communities to mitigate, adapt, and be resilient. Coastal wetlands and estuaries that provide vital habitat for waterfowl and other waterbirds also protect roads, buildings, and other public infrastructure experiencing major weather events providing up to **US\$23.2 billion per year in storm protection services** in the U.S. alone.

BIRDING TOURISM GENERATES BILLIONS OF DOLLARS

Bird-related tourism generates billions in economic activity globally. In the U.S., birdwatching generates about \$40 billion annually, **creating over 860,000 jobs**.

Globally, roughly 3 million international trips are taken annually for the main purpose of bird watching. The primary international destinations for U.S. birdwatchers are **countries in Latin America and the Caribbean**.

Birdwatchers visiting Colombia spend an average of **US\$300 per day**, much more than the average tourist. Birdwatching tourism in Colombia is anticipated to be able to **generate US\$46 million annually**, creating 7,500 new jobs.

BIRDS IMPROVE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND REVENUE

Insect-eating birds are natural consumers of crop insect pests, thus offering free pest reduction services in farms. In Jamaica, coffee farms from which birds were experimentally excluded from foraging suffered a higher infestation of berry borer beetle. **Birds increased farmers' revenues by an estimated US\$310 per hectare** by reducing coffee berry borers. At a **200-ha vineyard in Spain**, birds consumed one ton of insects, larvae, and invertebrates, protecting the grape crop from these crop-eating pests. Farmers' revenues increased by improving crop yield and reducing expenses on insecticides.

Birds provide pollination of food-producing plants. In Central America, **hummingbirds and bananaquits are important pollinators** for valuable crops, such as papaya and passion fruit. Countries like Ecuador, which produces nearly **51,000 tons of papaya a year**, benefit from birds.

Crops certified as “bird-friendly,” such as coffee, can receive price premiums for producers well above the regular market value of these commodities.



Dry Coffee, Photo by Benjamin Skolnik



Wood Thrush, Photo by Mike Parr

BIRDS CONTRIBUTE TO HUMAN HEALTH

Birds can serve as **indicators of contamination problems** that trigger human health issues. In the U.S., declines in waterfowl, pelicans, and birds of prey were some of the first clues about the dangers of contamination from heavy metals and pesticides, such as DDT.

Scavenging birds, such as vultures, help prevent diseases by consuming livestock carcasses that could harm people, wildlife, and the overall environment. In Spain, declines in scavengers birds removing livestock carcasses from fields **cost \$54 million** in the loss of ecosystem services every year.

Birds can also provide warnings about the occurrence of disease outbreaks and help prevent further spread. In the U.S., **crow deaths helped health authorities** identify a West Nile virus outbreak.



Polylepis seedlings, Photo by ECOAN

HOW CAN GOVERNMENTS SUPPORT BIRD CONSERVATION?

- Incorporate bird habitat conservation in Convention on Biological Diversity reports and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs).
- Incentivize the reforestation of degraded lands with native trees that offer habitat and food for birds while providing economic benefits to farmers.
- Promote birdwatching in national and international tourism campaigns.
- Provide direct mitigation funds towards bird habitat conservation as a mechanism to protect public infrastructure.
- Conserve bird habitat to mitigate flooding and other extreme weather impacts.
- Incorporate birds as indicators to evaluate the success of conservation projects.

YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

A network of partners working on bird conservation at the national and regional scale already exists, and can advise on the relevance of birds to the governmental sector at the national, state/province, or local level.

To learn more about how bird conservation can positively contribute to your programs and projects, contact **American Bird Conservancy**, the **U.S. Forest Service**, and the **North American Bird Conservation Initiative**.

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