

The Fallacy of “10 Good Things For Birds”

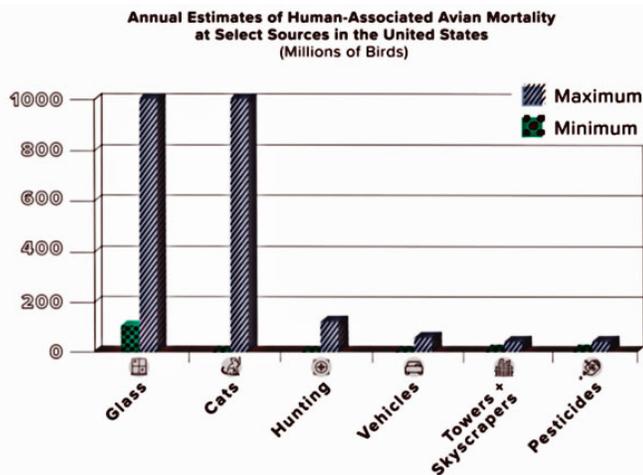
A doctor would never counsel his patients like bird organizations advise homeowners.

A two-packs-per-day smoker visits his doctor. The patient asks, “what can I do to extend my life.” His doctor will tell him that he should eat right, exercise, and take his blood pressure medicine, but **“if you don’t stop smoking nothing else you do will really matter.** The other good things cannot make up for the deadly consequences of smoking.”

Bird organizations do the opposite. They give homeowners a list of “ten good things to do for birds.” They should say **“stop killing birds in your yard – control cats and prevent window collisions.** All the other “good things for birds” cannot make up for 1.25 billion bird deaths caused by cats and home windows.” (2-6 per home annually.)

The typical advice to homeowners listing “good things for birds”— such as installing a nest box, providing water and cover, counting birds, buying shade grown coffee - will do little or nothing to increase bird populations as long as the yard is killing birds.

As the graph below makes clear there are only two steps we can take in our backyards that really will save birds. control cats and prevent window collisions. A yard includes a home’s windows.



Even if the list of “good things for birds” includes “prevent window collisions,” a list delivers the false message that all of these “good things for birds” are equally effective. In fact only two, controlling cats and preventing window collisions, will prevent bird deaths. Very few lists even mention controlling cats and preventing window collisions.

Doing something is not better than nothing. Promoting “participation” instead of preventing bird deaths undermines the very mission of bird organizations. If bird clubs offer easy options to their members, they will choose them -- instead of controlling their beloved cats and or spending \$50 to prevent window collisions. It is infinitely more important to save birds than to make members happy.

The authors of a major study on bird mortality finished with a call for ecologists to “demonstrate leadership” in preventing bird deaths. “Leadership” means telling our members and the public the truth – we have to start and premise all our yard management on stopping bird deaths caused by our cats and windows.

Like the smoker’s doctor we must deliver the blunt message – **“first of all, control cats and prevent window collisions. Nothing else you do will make any real difference.”**

A yard that kills birds cannot be “bird friendly” no matter what else is done in the yard. Homeowners must start by preventing bird deaths..

Jim Cubie
Policy and Outreach
Ornithology Center at Muhlenberg College
Jimcubie1@gmail.com