

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## 3 billion birds lost since 1970

For nearly 50 years, one of the daily pleasures my wife and I have enjoyed in downtown Pottstown is watching the birds at the bird-feeders outside our kitchen window.

But we regretfully took the feeders down last week and put away our birdbath on the advice of scientists investigating the cause of a mysterious disease killing birds in Pennsylvania and a growing number of other states.

Just last week on my walks through town I saw at three separate locations dead birds on the sidewalk, something I have rarely seen in the past.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission has sent diseased birds to its animal diagnostic laboratories in Harrisburg, State College, and Kennett Square.

The dying birds have swollen and crusty eyes and neurological signs such as stumbling and head tremors.

The birds have been tested for various toxins, but no cause has yet been established.

In the meantime, the game commission advises people to take down bird feeders and bird baths because they encourage different kinds of birds to congregate, which can spread the disease.

No matter what the cause, and how widespread the avian disease may be, the latest outbreak is a manifestation of species extinction — something we've all read about but think it's just happening in Africa and Asia.

In fact, according to a 2019 study by Cornell University, the U.S. and Canada have lost 3 billion birds since 1970 — that's one quarter of the total bird population.

Let that sink in. In just 50 years, we've lost a quarter of our birds in North America.

In 1970 the U.S. population was 205 million. Today it's 331 million.

Each of these 125 million new Americans is using more of the earth's resources than our predecessors. We're burning more fossil fuels, throwing out more plastic and other trash, and paving over more virgin land than ever before.

And we're going to lose a lot more birds in the future.



Commentary by  
Tom Hylton

Researchers at the National Audubon Society predict that two-thirds of bird species are at risk of extinction because of global warming, everything from wood thrushes to Baltimore orioles.

The species face threats to their habitats from rising temperatures, higher seas, heavy rains, and sprawling development fragmenting the countryside.

Birds pollinate plants, control insects and help forests flourish.

"Birds are indicators of the health of our environment, so if they disappear, we're certainly going to see a lot of changes in the landscape," said an Audubon researcher. "If there are things changing with birds we have to understand the environment is changing for us as well."

When people ask why the school district is planting meadows in place of grass, supporting the bird population is one reason why. Meadows also support other wildlife and absorb stormwater.

Meadows, trees, and other vegetation are something we can do right here at home to protect the environment.



**BIRD FEEDERS allow us to appreciate these beautiful creatures from our homes on a daily basis. But right now they may encourage the spread of a mysterious disease that is blinding and killing our birds.**

