

COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

6. The Bird is the Word: Elevating Vancouver's Strategy

Submitted by: Councillor Fry

WHEREAS

1. World Migratory Bird Day is celebrated twice a year in North America, on the second Saturday of May and October. In 2023, these dates fall on May 13 and October 14, respectively. Additionally, the Greater Vancouver Bird Celebration takes place from May 13 to May 31; ¹
2. The Greater Vancouver Bird Celebration is organized by the Vancouver Bird Advisory Committee (VBAC). VBAC is a collaborative partnership of non-profits, artists, and other institutions, in partnership with City of Vancouver and Vancouver Park Board to assist on policies and strategies and to celebrate birds throughout the region;
3. Over 250 species of resident, migratory and over-wintering birds are regularly observed in greater Vancouver: from robins off Robson, to herons over Stanley Park, eagles in Strathcona, Stellar Jays in Shaughnessy, and nightly migrations of Northwestern Crows over East Van;
4. Vancouver is important for bird populations given our location on the Fraser River delta, a major stop along the Pacific Flyway, which extends north to Alaska and south to Central and South America. Locally, Fraser River Estuary; English Bay, Burrard Inlet and Howe Sound; Greater Vancouver Watershed; and Pacific Spirit Regional Park are considered *Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas* (a worldwide conservation initiative coordinated by BirdLife International);
5. Birds play a crucial role in the mental wellbeing of Vancouver's population. Studies have shown that the sounds and sights of birds help people connect with nature, providing long-lasting stress relief and mental health benefits. During the pandemic, birdwatching became a popular outdoor hobby due to its safety, low cost, and calming nature. ² According to researchers, regular encounters with birdlife can improve mental wellbeing for up to eight hours. ³ Furthermore, birds serve as a barometer of environmental health, serving as first responders in detecting environmental pollution, much like the figurative canary in the coalmine;
6. Birds play a critical role in our environment as they serve as pollinators, predators, seed dispersers, and scavengers. They are often referred to as "ecosystem engineers" because of their mobility, which enables them to travel long distances and connect various ecosystems. Birds contribute significantly to the natural biotic diversity of ecosystems by consuming insects and pests, reducing the spread of diseases, and enhancing the

functioning and stability of ecological systems;

7. Birdwatching is a viable tourism generator in keeping with Vancouver's green and natural brand. One birding conference, the 27th International Ornithological Congress in August 2018 brought 1300 guests and \$8 million in spending to Vancouver alone. Birding tourism across the US accounted for an estimated \$41 billion in 2016;
8. Birds in our urban environment face a number of significant threats and challenges however, most notably:
 - a. Habitat loss: including tree canopy, green space, and waterways.
 - b. Climate crisis: extreme changes to weather, ecosystem and biodiversity loss.
 - c. Invasive species: outcompeting native flora, domesticated predators like cats.
 - d. Building collisions: a top ranking causes of bird mortality, with 16-42 million birds colliding with clear and reflective glass on buildings every year in Canada.
 - e. Direct human disturbance: including pesticide use, excessive light and noise pollution, and litter;
9. Globally, cities are taking up the challenge with efforts to protect birds: putting stickers on windows, planting bird and pollinator friendly plants and trees, turning off office building lights at night to avoid migrating birds from crashing into them, and designing buildings and fenestration that are more bird friendly, as parts of comprehensive bird strategies;
10. Under the leadership of the Park Board's first Environmental Planner, the late Alan Duncan, Vancouver became the first Canadian city with a council-approved comprehensive bird strategy. The Vancouver Bird Strategy (first approved by Council in 2015 and updated 2020) ⁴ identified five conditions for native birds to thrive in the City:
 - a. Habitat: Protect, enhance and create habitats for a diversity of native birds;
 - b. Threat Reduction: Reduce threats to birds in the urban environment;
 - c. Access: Improve access to nature for residents and visitors to the city;
 - d. Awareness: Increase awareness of the importance of birds and their needs; and
 - e. Tourism: Encourage bird tourism and economic development opportunities related to birding;
11. Resulting from the Strategy, the Bird Friendly Design Guidelines ⁵ were implemented as a voluntary guide for applicants mainly on applicable Rezoning and Conditional Development permit applications. In 2017, the Guidelines were updated to include some lessons learned and to be 'encouraged' performance objectives rather than 'voluntary' strategies. Since then, staff have gained a much more detailed understanding of the strategies the industry finds are easily implementable and others which

may be more difficult or rarely utilized;

12. Despite efforts, many of the recommendations from the updated 2020 Vancouver Bird Strategy remain unfulfilled, and human settlement, habitat loss, development, and climate change are exacerbating further stress on birds in Vancouver;
13. Vancouver was among the initial cities in Canada to receive the Bird Friendly City certification in May 2021. ⁶ However, to maintain this certification, the city needs to reapply every two years. As of now, there is a risk of Vancouver losing its certification as a Bird Friendly City by September; and
14. In the last 50 years, North American bird populations have dropped by more than 25%. The 2022 edition of BirdLife International's flagship report *State of the World's Birds* warns that nearly half of all bird species are in decline, with more than one in eight at risk of extinction, and only a few years to collectively and globally address and reverse the crisis by 2030. ⁷

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Council proclaims May 13 - 31, 2023, as Vancouver Bird Celebration.
- B. THAT Council direct staff to reapply for certification as a Bird Friendly City.
- C. THAT Council affirms its commitment to the Vancouver Bird Strategy updated in 2020 including but not limited to the following specific recommendations that the Council would like to reiterate, and direct staff to review and report back on:
 - a. Bird Friendly Design Guidelines to improve building and landscape design, and in particularly sensitive zones of the city;
 - b. Updated Bird Friendly Landscape Operational Guidelines for approval by Council and Park Board to ensure the most effective bird friendly management practices in parks and other public open spaces;
 - c. Seek to work with Tourism Vancouver, Tourism Richmond, and Destination BC to incorporate Vancouver focused content into the BC Bird Trail initiative, as a means of growing bird tourism in Vancouver and the region.
- D. THAT Council affirm its commitment to the Vancouver Bird Strategy and Bird Friendly Design Guidelines in emergent and future initiatives that consider green roofs, increasing tree canopy, rewilding, greenways, country lanes, stream daylighting, bio swales, and similar urban-natural interfaces.

- E. THAT Council direct staff to report back with an evaluation of the impact of Bird Friendly Guidelines on review and permitting timeframes through the Permit Improvement Process initiative;

FURTHER THAT staff's report back includes specific recommendation as applicable to simplify and codify otherwise discretionary bird friendly guidelines that may otherwise impact review and approval times on both standard and conditional permit approvals.

* * * * *

-
1. Vancouver Bird Celebration <https://vancouverbirdcelebration.ca/>
 2. Audubon <https://www.audubon.org/news/birdwatching-bright-spot-pandemic-stricken-economy>
 3. Nature Scientific Reports <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-022-20207-6>
 4. Report: Vancouver Bird Strategy 2020
<https://council.vancouver.ca/20201209/documents/pspc1.pdf>
 5. Vancouver Bird Friendly Design Guidelines
<https://guidelines.vancouver.ca/guidelines-bird-friendly-design.pdf>
 6. Nature Canada | Bird Friendly Cities <https://naturecanada.ca/defend-nature/how-you-help-us-take-action/bfc/>
 7. BirdLife: State of the World's Birds 2022 <https://www.birdlife.org/papers-reports/state-of-the-worlds-birds-2022/>
-