

NJ experts offer ideas on how to help birds

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Special to the Record
USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

Recent news reports have been filled with gloom for bird lovers.

A study in the September issue of *Science* documented a decline of 3 billion birds — 25 percent — in North America since 1970. And the National Audubon Society reported that over 375 bird species risk extinction because of climate change.

As this year and decade draw to a close, I asked New Jersey experts for their prognoses, and how we can help birds.

David Wheeler, executive director, Conserve Wildlife Foundation: I'm still optimistic about the future of birds in New Jersey. The reason: the people reading this column. More birdwatchers than ever passionately watch, count, and provide homes and food for birds. Scientists and volunteers from CWF and other organizations have gathered

vast data on what many at-risk species need to survive. You can make a difference for birds to continue to fill our lives with their beauty, birdsong and benefits like pest control and ecotourism. Plant native vegetation and install birdhouses and feeders everywhere you can. Volunteer. Contribute to organizations that protect birds. And share your passion by letting others know how important birds are.

Chris Soucy, executive director, The Raptor Trust: Two of the biggest global threats to birds can be addressed by individuals. Glass strikes kill millions of birds each year. If birds smash into windows at your home, easy ways exist to make your windows visible to birds so they can avoid them. The house cat is one of the biggest bird killers worldwide. Cats kill billions of birds each year. Cats make good pets, but they should be kept inside. Always.

Eric Stiles, president, NJ Audubon: The decline in bird populations is staggering, but there are positive signs. Wa-

terfowl have increased by 50 percent, and raptors have doubled. With waterfowl, it's really Ducks Unlimited, whose sole focus is conservation and habitat. That success gives a sense of what we can achieve on a geographic scale. New Jersey can be a leader because so many of us watch wildlife — we have a hungry audience. We also have a constitutionally dedicated land-conservation fund and strong land-use regulation. We can become a national leader in caring for these lands.

Kathy Clarke, wildlife biologist, NJ Endangered and Nongame Species Program: It's hard to be optimistic on a continental scale. On the state level, though, I know so many extremely dedicated biologists who work to put conservation on the ground. Those who work on endangered and rare species tend to optimists while seeking solutions for tough realities. In New Jersey, we have a very special responsibility because we host international migrations of birds each spring and fall, so we are a

crucial part of the Big Picture for American birds. Here's my vote for funding: Congress has a bill pending that would fund work on nongame wildlife to prevent declines that require endangered species listing (it would use existing funds from oil and coal extraction). This would mean widespread conservation of wildlife comparable to that which pays for game management but targets many hundreds more species in New Jersey.

Don Torino, president, Bergen County Audubon Society: Like DDT and water pollution in the 1960s, warnings of bird population decline should be a wake-up call. We must do our best to combat climate change and continue to save and improve wildlife habitat, no matter how small. One important thing we can do is plant native plants in our backyards and anywhere else we can.

The Bird-watcher column appears every other Thursday. Email Jim at celebrityfarm@gmail.com.