

Lights Out To Save Migratory Birds!

Worldwide movement will raise global warming awareness and save migratory birds' lives.

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Posted: March 27, 2008, 12:26 p.m. EST

The American Bird Conservancy says that the Earth Hour 2008 movement will help to save migratory birds.

On March 29, 2008 the world is going dark.

Businesses, communities and individuals from 24 cities around the world – including Chicago, Atlanta and San Francisco – have committed to turning out their lights from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. in support of Earth Hour 2008, a movement emphasizing the need to take action against global warming. In addition to promoting a healthy and efficient living environment, bird conservationists say the demonstration will help save birds as well.

“Turning out your lights will save energy, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and benefit migratory birds during spring migration,” said Karen Cotton, the collision campaign manager at the American Bird Conservancy (ABC).

Birds have evolved to navigate by starlight, but light pollution produced by cities interferes with this instinct, according to a press release from ABC, an organization dedicated to conserving American wild birds and their habitats.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimated that nearly 900 million migratory birds are killed in collisions with buildings each year. The city lights disorient the birds, especially in low cloud cover and inclement weather, and gravitate toward lit structures.

Although Earth Hour will greatly benefit spring migratory birds, which travel between March and June, Cotton said effort need not be limited to this one day.

“Everyone can help by extending their participation in Earth Hour to include turning out unnecessary lights for the duration of the night, particularly during periods of spring and fall migration,” she said. “If you live in an apartment building or work in an office building, talk to the building management about turning off exterior flood lights from night time until dawn and encourage residents to draw their blinds at night.”

Other lights out initiatives have taken place across the country. In 1999, the Chicago Audubon Society launched its “Lights Out” program, the first “top-down” program aimed to aid in bird conservation during spring and fall migrations. According to the Audubon’s website, for 5 months of the year that migratory birds fly through the area – mid March to June and mid August to October – Chicago buildings dim their decorative lights.

“We estimate 10,000 birds a year [are saved],” said Judy Pollock, director of bird conservation for the Audubon Chicago Region.

Cities with similar programs include New York City, Detroit, Minneapolis, St. Paul and Toronto.

Visit the Earth Hour website for more information about its mission and impact.