

## BIRD WINDOW COLLISIONS AND WHY IT MATTERS



Angelina and Katrina, Students from the TVDSB HELP Environmental Leadership Program Met at Westminster Ponds ESA recently with Brendan Samuels to learn about the importance of retrofitting windows with Feather Friendly Tape to discourage bird impacts.

By: Angelina FosterdelMundo,  
Katrina Hope-Ede, and Breyanna Griffin

HELP Environmental Leaders Program June 2021

The polarizing sound of a bird hitting a window is all too familiar to us: Most likely a bird has had an interaction with a window at your home. In fact, the average structure kills 2-10 birds every year according to Brendon Samuels, a member of the London Environmental Network and a student who's completing his PhD in biology at Western University. Recently, students from TVDSB's Grade 10 H-ELP (Environmental Leaders Program) had the opportunity to interview Brendon and Skylar Frane, another member of London Environmental Network, helped us make our school building at the Westminster Ponds ESA bird-friendly by applying 'Feather Friendly Tape' window markers to prevent future collisions. On a side note, students of the HELP program witnessed 3 likely fatal bird strikes on this building since the beginning of February. Considering that students have been learning from home for a large portion of this time and that they are often out and away from the building when they have been learning at school, the total number of bird strikes on this institutional structure located near excellent habitat is likely far higher.

A bird that hits a window is often regarded as "dumb" or "not bright" but that simply isn't the case. It is important to put into perspective that birds have been around for approximately 60 million years, while modern-humans have been around for approx. 200,000 years. Additionally, very large-scale development and city growth didn't really begin until the industrial

revolution and colonization, giving birds barely any time to adapt to a strange new landscape. A bird will hit a window due to its inability to distinguish the reflection of vegetation and inside potted plants from outside flora, making houses close to natural areas an even bigger threat. Also, birds can be lured by the beaming glow of home light fixtures. During nocturnal migration, birds confuse this light with the luminosity of the stars and moon, which is essentially their compass, especially when cloud cover is low. Migratory birds such as the American Robin, Indigo Bunting and Rufous Hummingbird travel over thousands of kilometers in unfamiliar land; they are often tired, hungry, and unaware of the hazards causing them to be at the highest risks of window strikes. Furthermore, "there are individual species that are thought to hit windows more than others; white-throated sparrows, for example a type of song-bird, dark-eyed juncos and oven birds," said Brendan Samuels, yet the reason for this is unknown but as this is an emerging concern, there's hope that they'll be more studies appearing in the literature in due time.

There are a wide range of solutions to combat this dilemma for commercial and industrial buildings and many organizations like the London Environmental Network, collaborate with local businesses as a guiding hand to create bird-friendly infrastructure. In order to make glass visible to birds, we need to modify the exterior of window and door panes by either adding window film and markers, ceramic frit, attaching screens, nets, or shades on the outside, utilizing acid-etched patterns, or by building with UV or frosted glass. Window films and markers, which is what was added to the Thames Valley District School Board Environmental Education Centre, one of the three current structures being managed by ReForest London at Westminster Ponds, is a popular and cost-effective choice among businesses.



Brendan Samuels Applying Window Markers to the ReForest London Huron Building - Current Home of TVDSB's Westminster Ponds Environmental Education Centre and the HELP Environmental Leaders Project Classroom. Note how enticing the very obvious reflection of vegetation in the windows might appear for our feathered friends.

in applying this window treatment to their property buildings. Generally speaking the application is economical and simple enough to apply with tools most have at hand. That said, there are many other easy solutions available that can be done individually by home and business owners, churches and even school groups without the assistance of an environmental organization. Simply purchasing a roll of window markers and decorating the outside of windows, adding lines of strings outside your windows, drawing vertical or horizontal lines that are two inches apart, or even getting creative and making your own bird-friendly design will all work to defer bird strikes against your glass surfaces. Unfortunately the common practice of adding decals of bird silhouettes to windows is not effective. Birds, used to flying through small spaces, adjust their flight path slightly to navigate around these silhouettes but do not redirect completely so they'll most likely just attempt to go around it and smash into the window a few metres away. Using bright colours, including white, when marking your windows is ideal as it creates a brighter contrast on the glass than darker ones. To add to this, you can also move your bird feeder as close to a window as possible so if a bird takes off from it and hits the window it won't be as critically stunned. Finally, turning off unnecessary lighting, especially outdoor lighting in the evening is crucial to reduce light pollution and give birds a clear look at the stars and moon, in an effort to keep them on the right path of migration.

A bird hitting a window can seem very minuscule and it's reasonable for one to question if these treatments are productive and if we should be spending our energy and resources on a more large-scale ecological crisis. One of the biggest points Brendan Samuels mentioned was that we don't

contributing to biodiversity loss and in the words of Brendan, "it [biodiversity] is the basis of human civilization; biodiversity loss erodes life on this planet that we all depend on."

Many are unsure of what exactly to do once they see a bird hit their window. If it is still alive, place it in a paper bag or cardboard box with holes in it and then put it in a dark, quiet, warm room away from disturbances, contact your local wildlife rehabilitation facility for further instruction. Salt Haven Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Centre is an excellent source of information, instruction and support for residents in the Middlesex area. If the bird unfortunately passed upon impact, report the incident on [birdmapper.org](http://birdmapper.org). Reporting these deaths is important as the data can be used to determine hotspots and properly plan appropriate interventions that involve updating municipal building codes and improving public awareness.

Birds are an intelligent species that exhibit excellent communication, navigational skills, architectural talents, balance our ecosystems and so much more but they are being disturbed by human development. Fortunately, there are numerous solutions right in front of us and many more on the horizon. It is our responsibility to band together as a community and take-down the "dumb" bird narrative, make small modifications to our homes, report window strikes, and demand our provincial-wide and nationwide building codes be updated; find the petition on [flap.org](http://flap.org). In order for these stunning creatures to be safe and flourish for our future generations to enjoy, we need to wake up to the reality of rapidly declining numbers and take greater responsibility to ensure our properties are bird friendly, and that critical habitat is preserved.



Brendan Samuels and Skylar Frane Applying Window Markers to the South Side of the TVDSB Building at Westminster Ponds.

### Do You Have A Disability?

Are you looking for employment?  
You may qualify  
for assistance. Call...

Mon - Fri, 9 am - 4 pm    Oxford   Middlesex   Elgin

**519-539-5730    1-866-225-0105**

[www.empsol.ca](http://www.empsol.ca)    [info@empsol.ca](mailto:info@empsol.ca)