

Presentation to City of Regina Council on MN22-1 Regulate the Non-essential (Cosmetic) Use of Pesticides

March 16, 2022

I am speaking today in favour of City Council's motion to undertake a review of the regulation of non-essential (cosmetic) use of pesticides.

I am a member of Regina's Bird Friendly Cityⁱ team, which comprises members of Nature Regina, Nature Saskatchewan, concerned citizens of Regina from the scientific community, as well as other wildlife organizations.

As one of only nine "Tree Cities of the World", Regina has created an urban forest that is home to a vibrant bird community; Wascana Park alone has 276 different speciesⁱⁱ. Many of Regina's residents are avid bird watchers and become citizen scientists by participating in such programs as Project FeederWatch in the winter and the Big Backyard Bird Count in February, the five-year SK Breeding Bird Atlas, Owl surveys and more. Members of Nature Regina have participated in the Audubon Christmas Bird Count for over 70 years.ⁱⁱⁱ Since 2010, Nature Saskatchewan has hosted an Annual Christmas Bird Count for children (CBC4Kids) with attendance increasing annually.

Nature Regina's Get Outside! Kids Club, sponsored by the City of Regina and Sask Lotteries, has introduced more than 2,000 young people to birdwatching in the last two years. The Get Outside! Preschool Club, a pilot project courtesy of funding from the City of Regina in partnership with Nature Regina, has introduced around 500 children and their parents to birdwatching at Les Sherman Park and A.E. Wilson Park this year. All of the kids have loved birdwatching! These have been some of the best nature experiences and many families are now keen birdwatchers. Nature Regina's Outdoor Adventure Guides/Wandering Wednesdays (sponsored by the Community Initiatives Fund and the City of Regina Community Grant Program) Facebook views reached around 22,000 for the Backyard Birdwatching guide.^{iv}

So now you know that many citizens of Regina love birds and as bird lovers are very concerned about them. Here's why:

In 2019, Researchers at Cornell's Lab of Ornithology and Canada's National Wildlife Research Centre found that wild bird populations in the continental U.S. and Canada have declined by 29 percent since 1970^v. In fifty years, **3 BILLION** birds have been lost – "...steep, long-term losses across virtually all groups of birds in the US and Canada."^{vi}

According to Nature Canada the five major threats to birds in Canada are:

- Habitat loss
- Pesticides and contaminants
- Invasive species and cats
- Collisions
- Climate crisis

“Industrial-scale use of chemical pesticides in agriculture and forestry pose a major contemporary threat to a large number of bird species in Canada. These poisons kill insects that birds feed on, and plants that birds, or their insect prey, feed and live on. Birds that feed on insects, especially aerial insectivores, birds that feed almost exclusively on insects while on the wing, show some of the steepest declines of any bird group.”^{vii}

Also in September 2019, Dr. Margaret Eng and Dr. Christy Morrissey of the University of Saskatchewan, and Dr. Bridget Stutchbury of York University published a study showing that widespread use of a neonicotinoid insecticide could be contributing to steep declines in songbird populations.

“... results seem to be associated with the appetite suppression effect of imidacloprid,” says Dr. Margaret Eng. “The dosed birds ate less food, and it’s likely that they delayed their flight because they needed more time to recover and regain their fuel stores.” Neonicotinoids like imidacloprid are the most widely used group of agricultural insecticides in the world. They have been shown to have toxic effects on insects, and this study adds to growing evidence that the negative impacts extend to other organisms as well. “Neonics have far-reaching effects in the ecosystems where they are released,” says Dr. Silke Nebel, Vice-President of Conservation and Science at Bird Studies Canada. “The continued use of neonics in Canada directly contributes to the decline of our bird populations, and their insect prey.”^{viii}

If you haven’t heard of neonicotinoid pesticides (or neonics), they are similar to nicotine, which is naturally found in nightshade plants like tobacco, and supposedly less harmful to humans but is poisonous to bees and many other insects and animals (including birds). They are common in many gardening products used at various stages for insect control.^{ix}

Let’s not forget when it comes to getting rid of “pests” we can let the birds here do some of the work. For a nesting pair of chickadees to produce three healthy, 10-gram fledglings by the end of their 16-day nesting cycle, they must supply 390-570 insects PER DAY for their young to survive and leave the nest.^x Flying insects make up 99% of a Barn Swallow’s diet and they can consume as many as 60 insects per hour.

Why are birds important? I’ll let David Sibley, author and illustrator of Sibley’s [bird] Guides to answer that.

‘Birds make any place a chance for discovery, they make a garden seem wild, they are a little bit of wilderness coming into a city park, and for a bird watcher every walk is filled with anticipation. What feathered jewel might drop out of the sky next?’

I hope this review reaches the conclusion that the city needs to move away from the use of non-essential cosmetic pesticides and that “non-essential” does not end up with a narrow definition.

Mayor Masters and Councillors, I ask you to vote in favor of MN22-1 Motion to Regulate the Non-essential (Cosmetic) Use of Pesticides.

Respectfully submitted,
Elaine Ehman

ⁱ [NatureCanada-BirdCity-V5.pdf](#)

ⁱⁱ [Nature In Wascana | Wascana Centre](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Birding | Nature Regina](#)

^{iv} [Get Outside! | Nature Regina](#)

^v [Bird Populations Declining Fast Across North America - Emagazine.com](#)

^{vi} [Manuscript fig \(cornell.edu\)](#)

^{vii} [Major Threats to Birds in Canada | Birds Canada | Oiseaux Canada](#)

^{viii} [Neonics Harm the Birds AND the Bees | Birds Canada | Oiseaux Canada](#)

^{ix} [Neonicotinoid pesticides | The Great Sunflower Project](#)

^x [A Chickadee’s Guide to Gardening: How to Create Habitat for Birds in Urban Settings - Ecological Landscape Alliance \(ecolandscaping.org\)](#)