

City of Richmond Hill
Bird Team Training Manual



BIRD FRIENDLY
CITY
RICHMOND HILL
CERTIFIED BY NATURE CANADA

April 2024



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Purpose of this manual

Welcome to Richmond Hill's Bird Team: **Bird Friendly Richmond Hill!** This training manual provides important information for understanding how the Bird Team fits into the City's Bird-Friendly program, and how members can take action to help achieve our shared goals of protecting birds and their habitat. You can refer to this manual at the beginning of your involvement, to help train new members, and at any point when you might need a refresher!



Bird Friendly City program

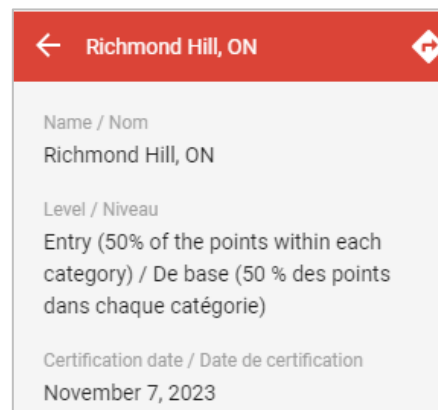
What is the Bird Friendly City (BFC) program?

BFC is a nation-wide program of [Nature Canada](#) to certify towns and cities based on their commitments and achievements related to:

1. reducing threats to birds in their municipality
2. protecting and restoring natural habitat
3. increasing climate resiliency
4. actively engaging their community through education and outreach

There are 3 levels of certification:

1. **Entry status**
- at least 50% of possible points are achieved
2. **Intermediate status**
- 65%-80% of possible points are achieved
3. **High status**
- more than 80% of possible points are achieved



More specifically, a Bird Friendly City is a community where:

- Key threats to birds are effectively mitigated;
- Nature is restored so native bird populations can thrive;
- Residents are actively engaged in admiring and monitoring local bird populations;
- Organizations are creating events to protect birds;
- Progressive municipal policies are created to protect urban bird populations; and
- A Bird Team has been created to oversee and lead these initiatives.

This short [video](#) provides a good description of the program.

Is Richmond Hill a Bird Friendly City?

Yes! Richmond Hill was [certified](#) as an entry-level Bird Friendly City in November of 2023.



What is Richmond Hill doing to protect birds?

- Protecting, enhancing and increasing Richmond Hill's urban forest canopy (and bird habitat) through implementation of the City's [Urban Forest Management Plan](#) and updated [Environment Strategy](#)
- Planting, protecting and restoring native trees and woodlands on public property through the [long-term restoration program](#) and [Community Stewardship Program](#)
- Regulating the planting, maintenance and removal of trees on private property through the [City's Street Tree and Tree Preservation By-laws](#)
- Planting and protecting pollinator habitat, including habitat for birds, through the Mayor's Monarch Pledge, Bee City certification and various [pollinator projects](#)
- Reducing threats from domestic cats through [animal control by-laws](#)
- Encouraging bird safe design and reduced light pollution in new developments through the [Sustainability Metrics Program](#).
- Working with Bird Friendly Richmond Hill, a bird team made up of community volunteers to help raise awareness about threats to birds and how residents can play a role in protecting them.



Bird Team Basics

What is the Bird Team?

One of the requirements for municipalities to earn BFC certification is to form a Bird Team made up of community volunteers. The City of Richmond Hill's Bird Team is called **Bird Friendly Richmond Hill** and supports the City's bird-friendly goals and initiatives, with an emphasis on community outreach and engagement of residents and businesses. The Bird Team also helps the City meet Nature Canada requirements for annual reporting and evaluation, and for re-certification every 2 years.

More information is provided in the [Terms of Reference](#) including membership and meeting protocols.

What is the mandate of the Bird Team?

There are three general objectives that form the mandate of the Team:

- (1) addressing and mitigating key threats to birds in their city,
- (2) protecting and restoring natural habitat and increasing climate resiliency in their city, and
- (3) conducting community outreach and education.

The City of Richmond Hill has active programs related to objectives (1) and (2); where applicable, the Bird Team can support these programs. The Team's primary role, however, is captured in objective (3) – to raise awareness in the community about

- threats to birds and how residents & businesses can help reduce them;
- habitat protection and restoration, and how community members can help; and
- citizen science, how it helps with bird conservation, and how residents can participate.

What is the relationship between the Bird Team, the City, and Nature Canada?

Nature Canada sets the requirements for Richmond Hill's Bird Friendly certification.

Staff from Richmond Hill's Sustainability section:

- work with the Bird Team to develop materials, activities, campaigns, etc. that support requirements and the City's environmental goals
- can act as a liaison between the Bird Team and Nature Canada if needed
- can assist the team's Chair/Co-Chairs with administration if needed

Nature Canada requires an annual report be submitted by the City's certification anniversary (November 7). Certification renewal is required every two years. The City will work with the Bird Team to meet these requirements.

While there is no established funding arrangement from Nature Canada or the City of Richmond Hill to support the Bird Team, staff can assist the Bird Team in exploring options (e.g. community-level grants).

The Bird Team is not an official Council committee or an Advisory committee; as such, commenting on City plans or policies is beyond the Team's scope.

Bird Team logo

Nature Canada has provided an official BFC Richmond Hill logo for use on materials and promotions related to Bird Team activities that support the program. The logo can be resized as needed but should not be changed or manipulated in any other way. Use of any other Richmond Hill or Nature Canada logos must be approved by City/Nature Canada staff.



Bird Team t-shirts

The City has provided the Bird Team with branded t-shirts. These are intended for dedicated Bird Team members to wear during outreach or citizen science activities. The Bird Team chair/co-chairs will distribute shirts to members as needed.



Key Messages and Talking Points

Since the Bird Team's main objective is public outreach, it is important that all members have a similar understanding of the issues and use similar messaging in education materials and activities.

Key Messages

1. Birds play an essential role in healthy ecosystems and resilient communities.
2. North American bird populations have dropped by more than 25% in the last 50 years. Human activities, especially in urban areas, are major factors in this decline.
3. Richmond Hill residents and businesses can take action to protect birds and their habitat.

Talking Points to Support Key Messages

The following points can be used to explain why birds matter, how they are threatened, and what people can do to reduce threats and protect birds.

1. Why do birds matter to our environment and our community?

Birds contribute in many ways:

Environmental

- biohazard and pest control
- seed dispersion
- pollination
- nutrient cycling
- connections within the food web



Community

- recreation opportunities for community members
- health and well-being boosts
 - [studies](#) show that seeing, hearing, and being around birds has positive impacts on humans
- economic boosts
 - approximately 14.5 million Canadians participated in wild-life related recreation activities (Statistics Canada, 2021)
 - migratory birds tourism market is projected to reach US \$35 billion by 2032 (Future Markets Insight)



2. What are the major threats to birds?

According to Nature Canada, North American bird populations have dropped by more than 25% in the last 50 years. Human activities, especially in urban areas, are major factors in this decline.

Habitat degradation and loss

- Human expansion and urbanization have greatly reduced the habitat and space available for successful breeding and survival of birds.

- As natural areas have been converted for human purposes, the use of pesticides has increased. Chemical pesticides and contaminants degrade habitat and reduce available food for birds.

Climate change

- Increases in extreme weather and invasive species can contribute to habitat loss.
- Changes in climate patterns (e.g. earlier & longer springs) can affect phenology (timing of annual cycles for plants and animals), which can impact bird migration, mating, nesting, and feeding.

Light pollution and window collisions

- 25 million birds die annually from collisions with glass in Canada alone.
- Over 90 percent of collisions are caused by residential homes and low-rise buildings.

Cats

- Roaming cats are thought to account for up to 75% of all bird deaths in Canada.
- Each year in Canada, cats kill between 100-350 million birds.

3. What can we do to help protect birds and their habitat?

A great first step for anyone is to learn more about birds:

- Go birding and learn about the local environment. Richmond Hill has many [parks](#) that offer accessible trails for birding. See our [Resources](#) section for birding links.
- Join the Bird Team (by emailing GreeningtheHill@RichmondHill.ca).

The BFC program aims to address key threats through coordinated, science-based action.

Habitat degradation and loss

- Start or volunteer at a [Community Garden](#)
- Attend a [Community Stewardship event](#) (tree planting, nature webinar, etc.)
- Add [native plants](#) to residential and non-residential properties
- Participate in [citizen science activities](#)
- Be a conscious seller/consumer! When selling/shopping for items such as coffee, chocolate and paper products, look for [certifications](#) that help protect bird habitats.

Climate change

- Reduce your carbon footprint: drive less; use clean, renewable energy sources; use energy-efficient appliances and practices; be a responsible consumer; eat local
- Visit RichmondHill.ca/ResilientRH to learn more about local climate action

Light pollution and window collisions

- Prevent birds from flying into glass windows (see Appendix 1 for window treatment options)
 - Place houseplants away from windows
 - Refrain from cleaning your windows
 - Place bird feeders less than 0.5 metres (1.5 ft) away from windows

Cats

- keep cats indoors
- put a bell on your cat's collar
- use a leash when taking your cat outdoors

Outreach to residents

Through coordination and collaboration with the City, the Bird Team can engage Richmond Hill residents in a number of ways. Remember to use key messages in outreach materials and activities! City staff can help share or develop resources.

Community events

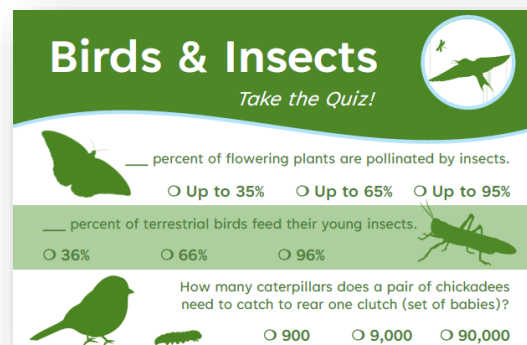
- An educational booth at public events (like Councillor barbecues, festivals, etc.) is a great way to meet other community members and even recruit more Bird Team members.
- Simple games and giveaways will help draw visitors to your booth.

Community hubs

- Public spaces such as libraries, community centres, and arenas can be great venues for setting up educational posters and distributing postcards or brochures.
- Some popular community spaces such as malls, grocery stores, restaurants and cafes may also be willing to host these materials. Be sure to check with owners/management first.
- *Please contact a City BFC representative to coordinate outreach through schools.*

Educational materials

- Converting important information into visually attractive and user-friendly materials – whether in print or online – is often an essential component of outreach.
- Bird Team members can check with City staff for available materials to borrow or use and can collaborate to create new materials when needed.
 - Please note that material created by the Bird Team does not necessarily represent City of Richmond Hill endorsement. Always check with City staff before using a City logo.



Social media campaigns

- Social media can be useful for raising awareness about upcoming events and providing links to reliable information sources.
- It also helps develop a network of like-minded people both within and beyond Richmond Hill.
- Bird Friendly Richmond Hill social media includes:
 - Facebook - /BirdFriendlyRichmondHill
- Richmond Hill's Sustainability section social media includes:
 - Facebook - /GreeningtheHillRH
 - Twitter/X - @GreeningtheHill



Outreach to businesses and building owners

Local businesses and building owners can play two roles in creating a more bird-friendly community: they can adopt bird-safe features into their buildings and properties, and they can influence residents' attitudes and behaviours through their products and customer interactions.

Note: the term "bird-friendly" often refers to a broad approach for protecting birds and their habitat, while "bird-safe" is often applied to specific design standards and practices.

What is a Bird-Friendly Business?

A business may be considered bird-friendly if it:

- Sells bird-friendly products ([certified](#) BF coffee & chocolate; feather friendly DIY, etc.)
- sells products that support healthy bird populations and habitats (wild bird food, bird boxes, native plants and trees, etc.)
- Has bird-safe windows or lighting
- Actively protects or enhances bird habitat (e.g. planting native trees, pollinator gardens)



Bird Team members should make a note of any bird safe businesses they come across to help the City maintain an up-to-date list for our Bird Friendly Certification purposes.

How can the Bird Team encourage more businesses to be Bird-Friendly?

- Express interest in bird-friendly products.
- Educate businesses on bird-safe practices (see Appendix 1).
- Encourage building owners to make their buildings (more) bird-safe.
- Promote businesses in Richmond Hill that are already bird-friendly.

What are simple, low-cost ways businesses can be more Bird-Friendly?

- Move indoor plants further away from windows (to prevent attracting birds to the greenery and decrease the likelihood of window collisions).
- Reduce the amount and intensity of artificial light at night.
- Place bird feeders within ½ meter from windows.
- Consider proximity of landscaping near windows (i.e trees) and use plant species native to Ontario in landscaping plans.
- See Appendix 1 for ways to prevent window collisions.



Citizen Science opportunities

Citizen Science is the participation of volunteers in scientific monitoring and research, contributing observations to better the understanding of the natural world. This is a great opportunity for the Bird team to take the lead in organizing and leading teams and community groups in participating in these important activities.

Bird Collision Monitoring Programs

Bird collision monitoring seeks to document bird-window collision incidents to identify factors that contribute to collision risk, and to support interventions that prevent collisions.

- Global Bird Collision Mapper (GBCM) www.birdmapper.org
- Nature Canada Bird safe buildings [Bird-Friendly Building Survey \(arcgis.com\)](http://Bird-Friendly Building Survey (arcgis.com))

Bird Monitoring Programs

Monitoring birds throughout different seasons over many years provides important information on changes in bird populations, which informs and supports conservation action.

- Project FeederWatch feederwatch.org
- The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) www.birdscanada.org/bird-science/christmas-bird-count
- The Christmas Bird Count for Kids (CBC4Kids) www.birdscanada.org/bird-science/christmas-bird-count-for-kids
- The Great Backyard Bird Count www.birdcount.org
- Project NestWatch www.birdscanada.org/bird-science/project-nestwatch
- iNaturalist www.inaturalist.org
- eBird ebird.org



Bird-Friendly Resources

Birds in Canada

- [Nature Canada](#) – Bird Friendly Cities program
- [Birds Canada](#)

Bird Identification

- [Cornell Lab](#)
- [Merlin Bird ID](#)
- [Dendroica](#)

Municipal programs

- Richmond Hill's [Bird Friendly City program](#)
- [Bird Safe Guelph](#)
- [Bird Friendly London](#)
- [Bird Friendly Burlington-Hamilton](#)

Events and Engagement

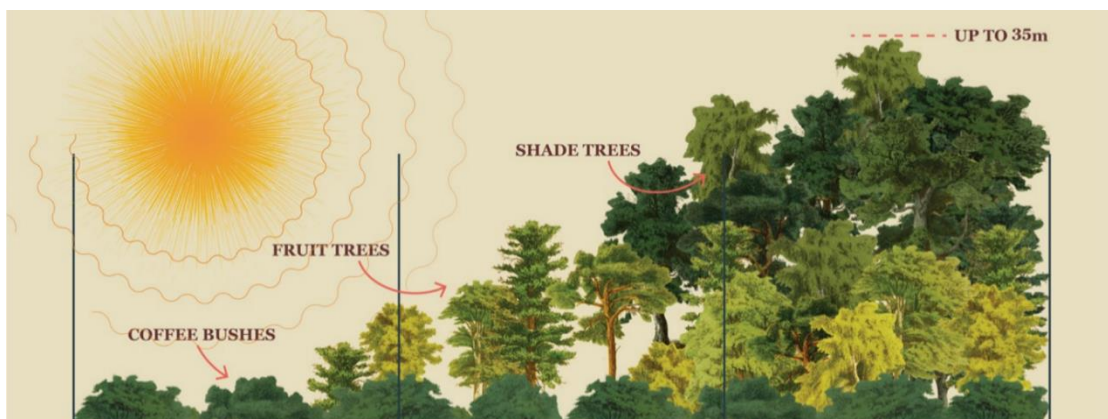
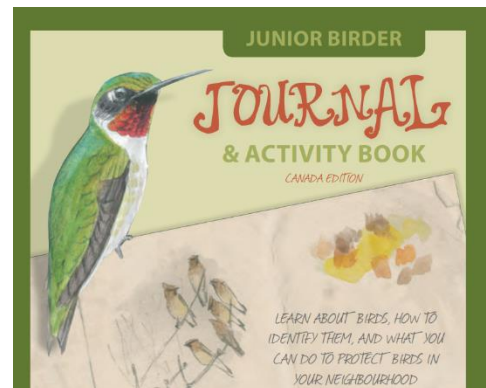
- [Toronto Bird Celebration](#)
- [TRCA Spring Bird Festival](#)
- [Nature Canada Junior Birder Guide](#)

Bird Safety

- [FLAP](#) (Fatal Light Awareness Program)
- [Bird Safe Canada](#)
- [Never Collide](#)
- [Safe Wings \(Ottawa\)](#)
- [Cats and Birds](#)

Bird Friendly Products

- [Coffee and Cocoa](#) (Smithsonian certification)
- [Wood and Paper](#) (FSC certification)
- [Hay](#) (Credit Valley Conservation certification)



Appendix 1: Reducing Window Collisions

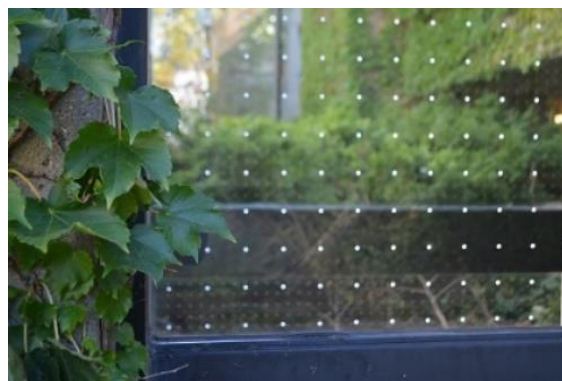
Why do birds collide with windows?

Birds collide with windows and other glass features because they can't see the glass and may be attracted to something (a plant or tree, or a bright light during the night) that is reflected in the glass or is situated on the other side of it.

How can residents, businesses and building owners reduce window collisions?

To effectively reduce bird collisions with windows, the glass and/or surrounding area needs to be modified so that birds want to avoid it. This can be achieved by using:

- Visual markers (dots, lines, patterns, etc.)
 - SPACING: Separate markers by spaces no more than 5 x 5 cm (2 X 2 in).
 - This [printable visual guide](#) from BirdSafe.ca helps with spacing!
 - SURFACE: Apply markers to the exterior surface of glass.
 - CONTRAST: Make sure the markers stand out in contrast to the transparent or reflective glass surface under varying daylight conditions.
 - SIZE: A marker should be no less than 6 mm (1/4 inch) in diameter.
 - COVERAGE: Cover the entire glass surface.
 - ULTRAVIOLET (UV) APPLICATION: ensure these materials are not more than 15% reflective
- External window screens, grilles or shutters
- Ribbon or strings on the outside of the window, 10 cm (4 in) apart
- Perforated window film



Other steps to prevent attracting birds to windows:

- Move indoor plants further away from windows to avoid confusion for birds that are attracted to the foliage.
- Position outdoor landscaping features to minimize their reflections in nearby windows, which can also confuse birds.
- Reduce unnecessary lighting at night, and/or moving indoor lamps away from windows.

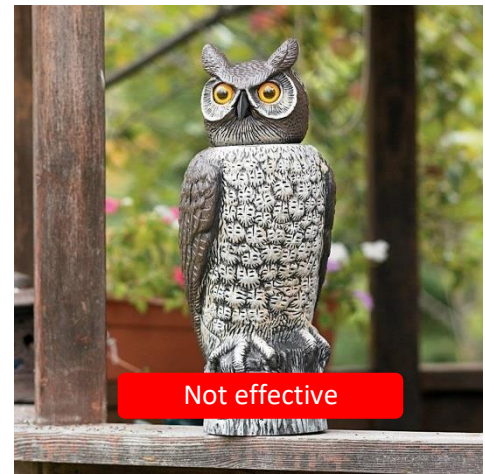
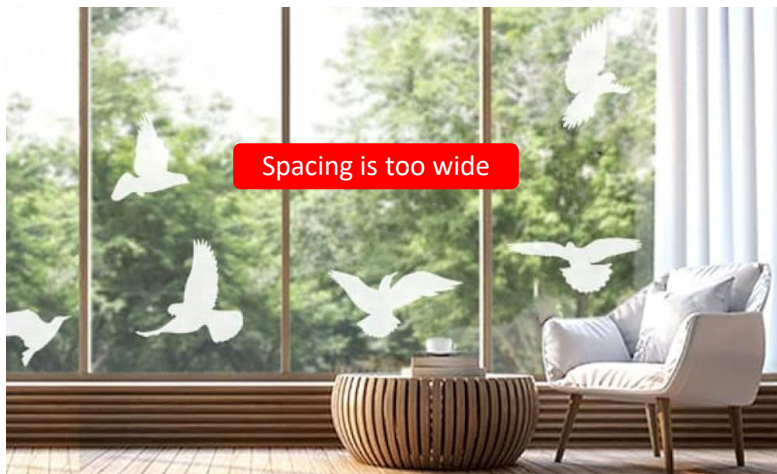
For larger buildings:

- Eliminate or reduce high-threat features, such as enclosed glass walkways, glass railings, glass corners, fly-through conditions (where birds have a clear line of sight to sky or vegetation on the other side of glass), and design traps (like windowed courtyards).
 - If reducing or eliminating traps is not possible, consider applying bird-safe treatments to reduce collisions.
- Reduce the impact of lighting on migrating birds through responsible lighting control technologies and practices.

Are there window treatments and approaches that do not work?

Yes! Some treatments that were once thought to be effective have since proven to be ineffective at preventing bird collisions. These include:

- mirrored glass
- angled glass
- tinted glass
- window blinds
- interior screens behind glass
- placing objects behind glass to deter birds
- plastic owls
- widely spaced or solitary silhouettes depicting birds of prey



Creating bird-friendly habitat with native flowers, shrubs, and trees, in combination with reducing the risk of window collisions, will help support healthy bird populations.

Bird-friendly!



RichmondHill.ca/Birds

