

Best Bird Practices



The following information and tips are measures that can be taken to promote the well-being of birds in our community. Under each section, there is also a list of resources where more information can be found.

Cats

Domestic cats are one of the deadliest threats to birds. A 2013 study showed that domestic cats kill between 1.3 and 4 billion birds every year in the U.S. alone!

- Section 18 of Dorval’s By-Law No. RCM-74-2019 requires that owners not allow their cats to roam outside the boundaries of their property unless the cat is accompanied or leashed. More information about regulations surrounding cats can be found by clicking [here](#). Details about the City’s service agreement with Contrôle animal Vaudreuil-Soulanges can also be found there.

If you are a cat owner, here are some measures you can take to reduce the risks your cats pose to birds:

Consider keeping your cat indoors! This is ideal for birds and can also reduce certain risks for your cat such as infections or vehicle collisions.

Train your cat to wear a harness and leash. There are also wireless cat fences or other cat-proof fencing that they are not able to jump over to limit the area they have access to in your yard.

Don’t allow your cats out during fledgling season, or when baby birds are learning to fly.

Put a bell on your cat’s collar or purchase a bright “collar sleeve” that is highly visible to birds to place over your cat’s collar. One brand of these sleeves reports that it has been found to reduce bird deaths by 87%!

You can find more information about measures you can take to keep birds safer from cats on the following websites:

- [Audubon Society](#)
- [QuébecOiseaux](#) (French only)
- [Le Nichoir](#)
- [Dbird.org](#)



Window Collisions

Window collisions can be caused in the daytime as birds see reflections of trees or greenery in the windows, or when it appears to be a clear space that they can fly through. According to the Government of Canada, between 16 and 42 million birds die from window collisions each year. Some measures that can be taken to make windows more visible to birds are:



- Delay washing windows in the spring or fall, as “dirtier” windows are less reflective.
- Avoid having excess glazed surfaces and windows, such as glass walkways, clear balcony railings, and windowed courtyards.
- Cover windows with an external pattern to make it more visible to birds, such as visual markers, decals, window films, tape, cut-outs, or paints. Special “blinds” made of paracord can be purchased or made and hung in windows.

- When installing visual markers, consider the following, taken from Environment and Climate Change Canada’s website:

Coverage	Spacing	Surface	Size	Contrast
The pattern should be applied across the entire glass surface	No spaces should be greater than 5 cm between the pattern either horizontally or vertically	The pattern should be on the outside surface of the window	Each part of the pattern should be at least 5 mm wide	The colour of the pattern should be easily seen and contrast well with the reflected vegetation

- As will be mentioned in the section on light pollution, **light pollution** at night can pose serious problems for migrating birds and should be reduced.

You can report a bird-building collision worldwide by reporting the collision at birdmapper.org, or by downloading the app. This helps compile statistics on collision frequencies, which can be helpful for Nature Canada, FLAP Canada, and a city’s “Bird Team”. A new feature called the *Bird-Friendly Building Survey* helps track the evolution of bird-friendly buildings.

You can find more information about measures you can take to reduce the risk of window collisions or report them at the following websites:

- [Government of Canada - FAQ on bird collisions with glass windows](#)
- [QuébecOiseaux](#) (French only)
- [Audubon Society](#)
- [Le Nichoir](#)
- [Birdmapper.org](#)
- [FLAP Canada](#)

Light Pollution

Most birds migrate twice a year, and at night they use the night sky to guide them. Excessive lighting at night can confuse them and cause them to hit windows or circle aimlessly as the light disorients them. Some measures that can be taken to reduce light pollution are:



- Limit lighting to where it is required for safety or security and use motion sensors or controls when possible. Aim exterior lighting downwards.
- If constructing a new building or converting to new lighting, avoid over-lighting with newer, brighter technology. Avoid bright, white lights as well, with lighting of less than 3000K.
- Pay particular attention to reducing exterior lighting, spotlights, floodlights, or atrium lights during migration periods. The full spring migration period is March 1 to June 15 and the full fall migration period is August 15 to November 30. Turn off nonessential lights from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. during these periods as much as possible. You can sign up for migration alerts of peak migration activity with <https://birdsafeca.com/migration-alerts>.

Reducing lighting will also save energy and money from reduced electricity usage and help reduce your home's carbon footprint.

You can find more information about measures you can take to reduce the harmful effects on birds of light pollution at the following websites:

- [FLAP Canada](#)
- [QuébecOiseaux](#) (French only)
- [BirdCast](#)
- [Audubon Society](#)



Bird-Friendly Gardens

The choices we make in yards and gardens can have an impact on bird health. Here are several actions that can be taken to support birds in your garden:

- Provide a clean, shallow water source.
- Plant diverse types of native species in your garden, and ideally, in clumps and horizontal layers. Birds like different heights of plants. A mixture of trees, shrubs, and bushes can be used for nesting, perching, and shelter. Dense evergreens such as junipers and cedars provide particularly good protection.
- If safety allows, leave the bottom part of the trunk of a dead tree for birds and animals to use for shelter, food, and a nesting habitat.
- Plant native species that will offer fruits and seeds at different times, to provide birds with a continuous food source during the year.
- Allow native flowers, as well as dandelions and clovers, to bloom during the early flowering season (approximately the month of May). Bees and other insects pollinate plants to produce the fruits and seeds bird rely on during winter months, as well as provide food directly to insect-eating birds. The “No Mow May” and “Dandelion Challenge” programs aim to promote this practice.
- Avoid cutting down plants, shrubs, or hedges in the fall, as they provide both food and shelter to birds in the winter months. Leaves should be left under trees or hedges as insects will spend the winter in the leaves, providing a food supply for birds.
- Respect the City of Dorval’s By-law on pesticide use, which can be consulted [here](#). Avoid using pesticides as they kill insects which are an important food source to many birds, and they can also be toxic to birds and other wildlife. The **Dorval Green Line** can be contacted for any questions about pesticide use at 514 633-4018 or at greenline@ville.dorval.qc.ca.
- Install one or more birdhouses or nesting boxes, ideally in different areas, depending on what is suitable for the species of local bird you want to attract. In the winter, birdhouses can provide shelter, and in the spring, can be used as a nesting site. It is important to thoroughly clean the house and to discard any used nesting materials after the birds have left, to eliminate parasites.

You can find more information about bird-friendly gardens or yards at the following websites:

- [Birds Canada](#)
- [Espace pour la vie](#)
- [QuébecOiseaux](#) (French only)
- [NestWatch](#)



Bird Feeders

Putting up a bird feeder can help provide food for birds and attract them to your yard, but there are some important considerations to take regarding their placement, contents, and maintenance. The following tips can optimize your birdfeeder setup:



Placement and design

- Position feeders within 3.5 metres of cover (ex: vegetation) so that birds are protected from predators or can easily escape.
- To reduce the risk of window collisions, place feeders either less than one metre, or more than 10 metres away from windows.
- Select a feeder that is covered and has drainage holes to avoid water accumulating inside. Wet seeds can pose a health risk to birds. Also avoid feeders with sharp edges or points that can harm birds.
- Choose smaller feeders, so as not to have too many birds accumulating together, as this can reduce the risk of disease transmission.

Contents

- A variety of food and seed can be used at your feeder. Black sunflower seeds and black thistle seeds are a reliable staple, along with suet, especially in the winter.
- **Do not feed bread to birds.** As described in a fact sheet from Le Nichoir, bread is not nutritious but is filling to birds, and can interfere with the proper growth and development of nestlings. If it gets wet, it can also get sticky and become lodged in a bird's digestive system.

Maintenance

- Feeders should be cleaned, and any remaining food replaced, every two weeks. This helps reduce the risk of the spread of disease, particularly from bird droppings on feeders or from leftover seeds that become damp or mouldy.

If you notice a sick bird at your feeder, it is advisable to take down the feeder for two weeks, and report this if you are participating in [Project FeederWatch](#) (from November 30 to April 1).

You can find more information about placement, maintenance, and what to put in your bird feeder at the following websites:

- [Project FeederWatch](#)

Birds Canada

- [How to keep your feeder clean to avoid health problems for birds](#)

QuébecOiseaux *(French only)*

- [How to choose among bird feeder options](#)
- [An overview on different feed options](#)
- [How to properly maintain feeders](#)

All About Birds

- [The different bird seed options for a feeder](#)
- [Information about non-seed options to offer at feeders](#)

Responsible Birdwatching

Admiring our feathered friends can range from a pleasant pastime to a more dedicated hobby but should always be done respectfully. QuébecOiseaux, Birds Canada, and the American Birding Association all offer helpful overviews of ethical bird observation. These “codes of ethics” for birdwatching help guide treatment of birds at home and in nature.



The complete guides are available online, but key tips include:

- Demonstrate bird-friendly practices, such as those listed in this document to offer safe habitats for birds and reduce risks such as those posed by cats and window collisions.
- Do not disturb, frighten, or chase birds, expose them to danger, or approach nests or nestlings. Keep dogs away from birding areas.
- Do not use recordings or imitate the voice of birds, particularly at-risk birds, and especially during periods of breeding.
- Stay on trails and use existing entrances. Do not enter private property without the owner’s permission. Do not damage vegetation or disrupt nesting areas, and do not leave any waste behind, even biodegradable waste.
- Be respectful and courteous to other birdwatchers.

Good examples of codes of ethics can be found on the following websites:

- [QuébecOiseaux](#) (French only)
- [Birds Canada](#)
- [American Birding Association](#)
- [Audubon Society](#)



Recording Bird Observations

“Community science” tools invite users to report bird observations, and can offer valuable data for ecological studies and to guide conservation decisions. They also enable people to connect with nature while reaping the health benefits!

Sharing bird observations can be done through the following free, non-commercial online applications:

1. [eBird Canada](#)
2. [Merlin](#)
3. [iNaturalist](#) – The City of Dorval has an iNaturalist profile that is accessible by clicking [here](#).

For more information on these tools and how they work, visit the Dorval Bird Committee page [here](#).

Resources

- [Audubon Society](#)
 - > Cats
 - > Window collisions
 - > Light pollution
 - > Responsible birdwatching
- [American Birding Association](#)
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- [All About Birds](#)
 - > Bird feeders
- [BirdCast](#)
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- [Birdmapper.org](#)
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- [NestWatch](#)
 - > Bird-friendly gardens
- [Birds Canada](#)
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