



## When the Music Died (Songbirds)

Where have all the songbirds gone? Many meadows are silent. Bird **habitats** (*places where creatures live*) have been bulldozed, flooded or poisoned. Since the mid 1980's, the numbers of songbirds in North America has been **declining** (*going down*). Scientists point to several possible reasons.

Climate change may be one of them. Millions of songbirds migrate. Often they die as they fly through places where storms or hurricanes are blowing. Many places where they nest are near water, where rising sea levels threaten their habitat. Changes in temperature may also affect where birds build their nests. Another reason may be pollution. Many of the lakes in the United States are so polluted that people are warned not to eat fish from them. Farmers often use large amounts of **pesticides** (*chemicals that kill insect pests*) and **herbicides** (*chemicals that kill weeds*), which poison the birds, too. Crop planting itself affects bird habitats. Planting just one crop across a large area reduces available bird habitats, and flooding fields to **irrigate** (*provide water*) them often prevents birds from nesting. Many songbirds also lose their habitats to people building homes.

What can be done to bring back the birds? Some cities are planting gardens that provide mini-habitats where birds can find food, water and places to nest. But much more is needed. In many places, people are turning their backyards into habitats for birds by planting trees, setting out trays of bird seed, providing water for drinking and bathing, and even building birdhouses. You can help by keeping cats indoors and turning off outside lights during peak migration periods. This helps prevent birds from crashing into buildings because their internal radar is disrupted. Students in many states are making their own backyards a bird-friendly place. Some schools are planting flowers, trees, and shrubs where birds can feed and nest. Perhaps your class could make a welcoming habitat for birds right on the school grounds!

### Questions for Research

- Which birds live in your area and what do they need to thrive?
- How has your town provided habitats for songbirds?
- What kind of damage are pesticides and herbicides causing to birds?
- What challenges may be associated with birdfeeders?

### Research Ideas

Songbird hedges, hummingbird gardens, birdfeeders