



**BIRD FRIENDLY  
CHICAGO**

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## **New Cornell Lab of Ornithology Study Finds Chicago to be the Most Dangerous Light Pollution Hazard for Migrating Birds**

*Ordinance Before City Council Can Greatly Reduce Avian Mortality*

**Chicago, IL (April 1, 2019)** – In a comprehensive study conducted by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology of the impact of light from large metropolitan areas on bird migration patterns across North America, Chicago has been found to be the most dangerous city for exposing migrating birds to this growing threat. In the words of the study, “The combination of large amounts of nocturnal illumination and their location in the most trafficked air space across the US elevate metropolitan Chicago, Houston, and Dallas to the top... While all urban areas should take care to minimize ALAN [artificial light at night], our analysis indicates that actions taken in these particular cities would benefit the largest numbers of birds.”

Earlier this year Alderman Brian Hopkins (2<sup>nd</sup> Ward) introduced in Chicago City Council the Bird Friendly Design Ordinance (O2019-320). The ordinance establishes bird safe building material and design standards for new building construction in an effort to reduce bird mortality from circumstances that are considered to be “bird hazards.” It would directly address the problems highlighted by this study.

The Cornell study, titled *Bright lights in the big cities: migratory birds’ exposure to artificial light*, uses two decades of remote sensing data from weather surveillance radar and satellite sensors to identify locations and times of year when the highest numbers of migrating birds are exposed to light pollution in the contiguous United States.

Dr. Andrew Farnsworth, Field Researcher at The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and one of the leaders of the study, pointed out that “technological advances have given us more tools than ever before for gathering data on bird migration. Once birds are attracted to and disoriented by light in urban environments, they face serious hazards from the many reflective surfaces and windows they encounter. Implementing bird friendly designs that reduce the effects of these hazards can make for a powerful win-win for all stakeholders – be they building owners, homeowners, conservationists, or municipalities - in the most dangerous of metro areas in terms of artificial light exposure to migrating birds.”

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“We know these results are not something our fellow Chicagoans will be happy to hear—given all the work we are already doing to make our city more bird friendly,” said Carl Giometti, President of the Chicago Ornithological Society. “But when you combine Chicago’s location—near the areas of greatest bird migration activity—with its bright lights and its architecture that relies more and more on glass facades, you get a perfect storm of calamity, for both migrating and year-round resident birds.”

Introducing the ordinance, Hopkins noted that “over the past several decades Chicago has taken action to make our beautiful city a less hazardous place for the millions of birds that pass through here, especially during the migration season. This ordinance makes the powerful statement that as we build an ever more vibrant and dynamic city, we will do so in a way that minimizes our city’s negative impact on native and migratory birds.”

The Bird Friendly Design Ordinance is the dedicated mission of Bird Friendly Chicago, an alliance to promote a safer urban environment for birds. The ordinance builds on similar ordinances in other North American cities like San Francisco and Toronto, and it enjoys the support not only of conservation groups, but also architects such as Jeanne Gang and other design professionals.

The proposed ordinance, which does not apply to existing structures or to detached homes, townhouses, two-flats or residential buildings of six units or less, was assigned for further review to the Committee on Health and Environmental Protection, and could be brought to the entire City Council for vote as early as June of this year.

***Graphics and more information about the study can be found at this link:***

<https://mailchi.mp/cornell/release-study-lists-top-cities-where-lights-endanger-migratory-birds?e=f0b505020c>

### ***About Bird Friendly Chicago***

*Bird Friendly Chicago is an alliance of four organizations: Chicago Audubon Society, Chicago Bird Collision Monitors, Chicago Ornithological Society, and Illinois Ornithological Society. Its mission is to promote a safer urban environment for birds through improved lighting, landscaping and glass features of buildings.*

*To learn more, visit [www.BirdFriendlyChicago.org](http://www.BirdFriendlyChicago.org).*

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