



## FOREWORD

Birds, by their very existence, enhance our daily lives. For many of us, it is a thrill to see the splash of a Brown Thrasher in a birdbath, or the flash of red in green woods as a tanager darts past. It is a gift of nature that such birds – which play an important role in healthy ecosystems by controlling pests, dispersing seeds, and pollinating plants – are also so beautiful and such a joy to watch. More than sixty-three million Americans are birdwatchers, injecting billions of dollars into local economies throughout the nation as they purchase birdseed, binoculars, and guidebooks and venture into outdoor environments that are made so much more welcoming by the sights and songs of birds. But, as nature’s indicators, birds are also showing signs that our environment is changing.

Human activity – particularly the burning of fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and natural gas – is sending tremendous additional quantities of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. The buildup of these gases is causing the planet to heat up and is altering the basic climate systems to which nature is adapted. There is a growing body of scientific evidence that some birds (as well as plants and other wildlife) are already responding to the changing climate.

As we explain in this report, recent studies indicate that this global warming could affect birds in many ways, shifting their distributions and altering their migration behavior and habitat, and even diminishing their survival ability. In some places, we may no longer see our favorite birds – as many as 33 states could see a significant reduction in American Goldfinches in the summer! As birdwatchers, we enjoy seeing the same birds we have always cherished in our backyards or on a favorite hike. What’s more, we understand that if a bird’s range shifts even a few miles, it can have a trickle-down effect for wildlife sharing its ecosystem.

We highlight these potential impacts not to cause alarm, but rather to inform and educate the nature-lover in us all and, we hope, to inspire action. Like other environmental problems, we *can* do something about global warming. More than forty years ago, biologist Rachel Carson warned in her classic work, *Silent Spring*, that if pesticide use continued as it had for the previous 20 years, bird populations across the nation would decline and even disappear. Spring would be silent, empty of the



call of birds. We responded then with new laws to bring about the safer development and use of pesticides. Spring still dances to the songs of birds. While there are still many concerns about pesticides, we have made great progress since Carson's day. We can make the same progress with global warming. If not, then we once again run the risk of the songs of spring being diminished, signaling a wider threat to other wildlife, ecosystems, and people as well.

Although the mere thought of trying to deal with a problem big enough to change the climate of the entire world can be paralyzing, the solution is promisingly simple – reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. We can begin at home by making energy efficiency part of our purchasing decisions. We can support adoption of better fuel economy standards for new vehicles and the increased use of clean, alternative energy sources such as solar power and fuel cells. And we can urge Congress to enact caps on emissions of greenhouse gases from major sources such as power plants.

Above all, we must recognize what our beloved songbirds are telling us – global warming threatens our own backyards, and we must begin to confront it.

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