

Lights Out Bird Migration Walks

By Emily Halderman

I want to share some information on the Lights Out Bird Migration walks, because the Akron Zoo is looking for volunteers! I'd like to ask if anyone in your organization (or even not in your organization) would like to volunteer this fall and walk downtown Akron with the Akron Zoo Keepers to collect injured or perished birds as part of this citizen scientist initiative, during the fall bird migration.

Background

As you are likely aware, birds migrate during the night throughout spring and fall. Many birds can become confused and accidentally fly into artificially lit sky scrapers, during their journey, causing them to become injured or perish.

Many large cities have "Lights Out" programs, in which the city will dim their lights to help the birds more easily navigate and avoid window strikes. This has been helpful in Chicago and Toronto, especially.

Cleveland started a "Lights Out" monitoring program for the first time last year, in which volunteers will walk around the city buildings in the morning, to collect birds which have perished, or send injured birds to a rehabilitation center. This is important to collect data and statistics. Regrettably, I hear they are finding a lot of birds. Perished birds are sent to the Cleveland Natural History Museum for studies, and the injured birds are sent to rehabilitation centers.

Lights Out Akron/Canton

This is the first year organizations are monitoring Akron and Canton bird window strikes. During the spring migration, we found a bird or several birds each day. I'm happy that two were alive and rehabilitated! I've attached a photo of a yellow bellied sapsucker success story! She chipped her little beak and was able to be released from the rehabilitation center. Regrettably, we found several beautiful woodpeckers, a Tennessee warbler, a cuckoo, a sora and others who did not make it.



Generally, a zoo keeper will meet with volunteers and we walk around downtown Akron. However, we really need more volunteers! It is helpful when a team is comprised of several numbers for safety and documentation. We barely had enough coverage this spring, and this fall, we don't have enough volunteers to help cover all the days we want to walk.

Since this is the first fall we are monitoring bird strikes, we really don't know what to expect for the numbers of bird strikes. We only started monitoring fall migration last week and I'm happy to report no birds were found so far. So our walk went quickly.

We meet at 5am at Akron U and finish around 7am. However, our walks are becoming a little shorter, as we have identified the few areas where we continue to find the birds. I generally have walked 3 - 5 miles in the morning.

Injured birds will be sent to Stark's Park's new building for rehabilitation.

The fall migration is starting now, and will last through the end of October. Volunteers may volunteer weekly, or as much or little as they like. In the spring I volunteered 4 days a week, but this fall I'm volunteered 1 day a week. Most people volunteer 1 day a week. Basically, we walk and carry nets and bags. If we find a dead bird, we document our findings. The zoo keepers will transport the birds to the appropriate place after our morning walks, if we find any. We then post photos and info on our Lights Out Akron/Canton facebook group, so we can see what each daily group has found and share information.

Volunteer Contact Information

If anyone you know would like to help volunteer for this initiative, you can contact Shane Good, at the Akron Zoo! I've attached his information below.

If you or anyone you know has a few more questions on what it is like to volunteer, you are welcome to contact me, too!

Any help is appreciative. And if a person cannot walk weekly, has a vacation scheduled, needs to miss a week, that's okay! The Akron Zoo has been very flexible, kind and understanding to work with.

Shane Good

Director of Collections Management, Akron Zoo

s.good@akronzoo.org