

Lights Out San Francisco!

Since 1917 Golden Gate Audubon has been dedicated to protecting Bay Area birds, other wildlife, and their natural habitats. We focus on protecting native birds and other wildlife species in the San Francisco Bay Area, particularly in the City and County of San Francisco, and parts of Alameda and Contra Costa counties. We conserve and restore wildlife habitats, connect people of all ages and backgrounds with the natural world, and educate and engage Bay Area residents in the protection of our shared, local environment.

Golden Gate Audubon and the City of San Francisco both participated in the Lights Out events in the fall of 2007 and in the Earth Hour event in the spring of 2008. These events were only for one hour each but did help in raising awareness that it is important to eliminate unnecessary lighting to save the energy resources and also to protect migrating birds.

Every spring and fall, birds migrate along the Pacific Flyway through the San Francisco Bay Area. Several migratory bird species are federally listed as threatened or endangered, needing all the help they can get along their journey. Some birds fly long distances, between Alaska or Canada in North America and Patagonia in South America. Studies indicate that artificial light disorients birds, especially the many birds that migrate at night. Since most birds migrate at night, they are often drawn off course by tall, lighted structures in their flight path. Scientists aren't sure why this happens but it may be related to the fact that among many navigational cues, birds use the stars to stay on course. Lighted skyscrapers may simply confuse them. Once in among the lights, birds seem reluctant to fly out. Sometimes they strike buildings or structures on rooftops. Sometimes they continue flying around the lighted buildings until they drop to the rooftop or to the ground from exhaustion. Ironically, common city birds such as the non-native Rock Pigeon and House Sparrow species are infrequent collision victims. These species may have developed adaptations for living among buildings unlike the migrating birds. The Lights Out program can dramatically reduce these collisions. Over 200 species of birds migrate through San Francisco; many are Neo tropical migrants such as our beautiful warblers, thrushes, and tanagers. Some are threatened bird species whose populations already show steep declines.

Golden Gate Audubon supports this proposal to expand the Lights Out program. The program will be beneficial in decreasing unnecessary night lighting in the city of San Francisco help to reduce the threat of nighttime collisions with buildings for migratory birds, conserve resources, save money, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and ultimately increase the visibility of the night sky.

Commissioners thank you for providing me with this opportunity to speak in support of the Lights Out program.

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