



Inspiring Conservation through Birding

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To the Mayor and Council Members:

My name is Nicole Netherton and I am the Executive Director of Travis Audubon. I am here to applaud the inclusion of the Resolution in agenda item #54 in your proceedings today, and to ask you to please pass this and other sensible measures to protect biodiversity in our communities.

Travis Audubon is Austin's oldest conservation organization, founded in 1952 when Austin had about 140,000 residents. We are concerned about birds not just for the joy they bring, but because they are bellwether species in our ecosystem. Birds tell us that we are in a biodiversity crisis. Birders in North America have been compiling community science data about birds for at least 123 years, and since 1970 alone, the data show we have lost an alarming 25 percent of their numbers. According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, that's *3 billion birds*ⁱ.

Additionally, we learned in 2022 from the Living Planet Indexⁱⁱ that also since 1970, monitored populations of vertebrates declined an *average of 69 percent*. And the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework warned this past December that the global rate of species extinction is at least *tens to hundreds* of times higher than it has averaged over the past *10 million years*ⁱⁱⁱ.

Humans have a bad habit of seeing ourselves as above or in charge of nature instead being of a part of it. Turns out the system is a circle, not a pyramid, and our survival depends on everything else, from single-celled organisms on up. We are currently playing a dangerous game of Jenga, and we don't know when the removal of one more piece will cause a collapse.

In spite of all this bad news, I have hope. The world in general is catching on that it is past time to act. I am especially heartened that even when my *country* won't act, my *city* is taking long-range goals around biodiversity very seriously.

Central Texas contains some of the most diverse, most fascinating ecosystems in North America, if not the world. I invite each of you to join me on a nature walk this spring to see this firsthand. Our unique species, habitat, and resources in this hydro-geological wonderland are astounding^{iv}. And humans are putting pressures on this complex system in ways that are hard to understand, much less predict. And because ecology is complex, *everything* in the system—fungi, plants, animals, water, air, climate, soils—is affected by our choices.

I applaud you for considering the ways that the 23 targets from the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework might be implemented in Austin's environmental policy plans. Protecting 30% of land and water, restoring degraded habitat and waterways, prohibiting the use of pesticides, encouraging the use of native plants for pollinators, encouraging bird-friendly glass and building design, increasing access to nature spaces, decreasing pollution, protecting our water supply—all of these goals will make Austin a better place for its residents, human and otherwise.

Austin is projected to have a human population of 3 million by 2030^v. You as our leaders will be facing inevitable challenges with both short-term and long-term implications, and very high stakes. As you think about these issues, I ask you to imagine yourself *as a part* of the natural system. When you make decisions, please consider our environment and its complexity just as you might consider the people you serve.

I want to imagine an Austin 100 years from now that thrives for its people, but also protects and nourishes the ecological systems and species the city depends on. I hope you will pass this Resolution in item #54, and I thank you for your work to protect and restore Austin's biodiversity.

Sincerely,



Nicole Netherton

Executive Director, Travis Audubon

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ⁱ <https://www.3billionbirds.org/findings>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/12/climate/living-planet-index-wildlife-declines.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2022/12/press-release-nations-adopt-four-goals-23-targets-for-2030-in-landmark-un-biodiversity-agreement/>

^{iv}

<https://austinwater.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=f5be4acf849546c0b2b88dbf2e4cc4a1>

^v <https://austin.culturemap.com/news/city-life/austin-areas-population-may-leapfrog-san-antonios-by-2040-forecast-shows/>