

Pilon, Janet

Subject: Hamilton: a Bird Friendly City

From: Bird Friendly Hamilton Burlington <birdfriendlycityhamburl@gmail.com>

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Subject: Hamilton: a Bird Friendly City

Will you support Hamilton being a Bird Friendly City?

Hello Mayor Horwath and members of City Council,

First off, I'd like to congratulate all of you on your newly elected and re-elected positions. This new Council leaves me hopeful of good things to come for our city.

I am a long-time Hamilton resident and I am writing today to introduce you to, or re-introduce you to, our not-for-profit group called **Bird Friendly Hamilton Burlington** (BFHB). We formed in December 2020 in response to a great new program launched by Nature Canada, called [Bird Friendly City](#) (BFC), which seeks to certify municipalities across Canada for efforts they have made to be bird friendly. The BFC program is supported by Environment and Climate Change Canada, and other national partners such as [FLAP Canada](#).

Bird Friendly Hamilton Burlington is a team of dedicated volunteers and community partners, who are working towards ensuring our environment is a safe haven for wild birds. Our team consists of representatives from Green Venture, Hobbitstee Wildlife Refuge, Six Nations Wildlife, BurlingtonGreen, Hamilton Naturalists' Club, and citizens like myself who care about birds.

In 2021, our BFHB team documented all the bird friendly actions undertaken in our city over the years by the City of Hamilton, businesses, schools, community groups, individual residents, and our BFHB team, in accordance with the 25 categories of Nature Canada's BFC scoring "rubric." Similarly, the Burlington contingent of our team did the same for Burlington. We submitted applications for both cities to Nature Canada in early 2022.

You may have heard that Hamilton was officially certified as a Bird Friendly City by Nature Canada in April of 2022, becoming the 6th certified city in Canada, with Burlington following soon after as the 7th! **In all, 18 municipalities across Canada have now been BFC certified, with more to come.**

In recent news, several Canadian municipalities, including Hamilton and Burlington, were [further recognized by federal Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault](#) at the COP15 UN conference on biodiversity in Montreal, for their newly acquired Bird Friendly City status.

We are hopeful that our current mayor, city council, and city staff will recognize and support this Bird Friendly City certification for Hamilton, to help maintain it and keep moving forward.

A Council resolution of support for Hamilton being a Bird Friendly City would be of great help, as it is a requirement of the BFC program. *(Please note that Burlington City Council unanimously endorsed Burlington's BFC certification in April 2022 through a Council resolution).*

Although we have been certified as a Bird Friendly City, there is still more work we need to do to maintain this certification and advance to a higher level. **Hamilton has only achieved entry level status.** This means that we have met or exceeded the minimum standard with regards to reducing threats to birds in our city, protecting and restoring natural habitat, increasing climate resiliency, and educating the public. **Re-certification is required every 2 years.**

Why help birds?

Bird populations are rapidly falling across North America and beyond; a major study reported that **North America has lost three billion birds over the last 50 years.** Many of the species are ones that we can observe in our cities and towns, and have fallen victim to habitat loss and degradation due to urban sprawl and development, declines in insect populations, predation by outdoor pets, light pollution and window collision, and disturbance of nesting or roosting sites.

Hamilton has a diversity of birds visiting us or passing through each year (around 280 species!). Hamilton is adjacent to 3 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) as designated by Birds Canada. There is a very active and knowledgeable birding community in the Hamilton area, and birders come from afar to view our wild birds. The local ecotourism factor of birds should not be underestimated.

Not only do bird sightings and birdsong contribute positively to our mental health and get residents out for exercise, but birds also provide essential services such as pollination, insect and rodent control, and the dispersal of seeds. It is in our best interest to help them. Living in one of the most biodiverse regions of Canada, we feel it is our responsibility to act as responsible stewards to the local flora and fauna.

Hamilton's progress to date:

The City of Hamilton has already taken a number of initiatives that are considered bird friendly:

- Established a “no-roam” by-law for cats which helps to reduce the impact of cat predation on wild bird populations
- Established a leash by-law for dogs which helps to mitigate disturbance of birds from humans and their pets in natural areas

- Protected natural lands and greenspaces, and implemented nature-based climate solutions such as tree planting and wetland restorations
 - Restored the former Upper Ottawa Street Landfill Site to be suitable nesting habitat for Bobolinks (a threatened species)
 - Prohibited pesticide use on private property
 - Has initiated a Biodiversity Action Plan (*please note: Bird Friendly Hamilton Burlington is not a part of the Biodiversity Action Plan*)
 - On February 19, 2021, the City of Hamilton voted yes to move ahead with a strategy to reduce single use plastics. Plastic waste harms birds
 - On November 12, 2021, the City of Hamilton voted to hold the city's urban boundary
 - Hamilton has a public transit system with over 32 bus routes, urban and rural bike routes, and a bike share program, which helps to reduce CO2 emissions in our atmosphere and also helps to reduce the number of birds who become injured and/or die from collisions with vehicles
 - Was designated as a Bee City and continues to create new pollinator habitat alongside Hamilton Pollinator Paradise Project and Butterflyway Hamilton
 - Has several accessible bird watching locations including Bayfront Park, Chedoke Trail, Cootes Paradise Sanctuary, Dundurn Castle, Hamilton-Brantford Rail Trail, Hamilton Cemetery, Urquhart Butterfly Garden, and Windermere Basin
- In addition, the efforts of several organizations have contributed greatly to Hamilton's bird friendly status, such as Hamilton Naturalists' Club, Cootes to Escarpment Eco-Park System, RBG, Green Venture, Environment Hamilton, Hobbitstee, Hamilton Conservation Authority, and BARC, to name just a few.

Bird Friendly Hamilton Burlington's progress to date:

To name a few:

- **Hamilton's City Bird:** In early 2022, BFHB ran a public online poll, and the Peregrine Falcon was voted Hamilton's unofficial City Bird by Hamilton residents and those who work or go to school in Hamilton. (Selecting a City Bird earns points on the BFC scoring rubric.)

Perhaps you could support us by declaring the Peregrine Falcon Hamilton's official City Bird, which would be a great way to celebrate Hamilton's beloved Peregrine Falcons that nest on the 18th floor ledge of the Sheraton Hotel, and acknowledge Hamilton Falcon Watch's 25+ years in ensuring the safety of the Peregrine Falcon chicks that fledge from the nest ledge each spring into our urban environment

- **Fishing line waste receptacles:** In partnership with the City of Hamilton's Parks North Public Works Environmental Services, and Hobbitstee Wildlife Refuge, fishing line receptacles were installed at two locations at Bayfront Park: the boat launch and the fishway. Fishing line that has been littered or discarded in garbage cans puts birds at risk of entanglement, which often leads to injuries and/or death. The receptacles are regularly cleaned out by myself, and the

fishing line is sent to Berkley in Iowa which recycles the fishing line

- **Bird friendly plantings:** In partnership with the Community Permaculture Lab, a garden of beneficial plants to birds was established at Salvation Army's Ellen Osler Home in Dundas. We also donated a bird identification guide to be used by residents

What Hamilton still needs to achieve:

There is still work we need to do collectively, around such areas as:

- **A Council resolution & liaison:** Passing a council resolution supporting Hamilton being a Bird Friendly City (a mandatory requirement in maintaining certification), and designating a liaison from the City to act as a main point of contact for our group, for periodic communications
- **City BFC webpage:** Certification also requires that the City have a webpage available on its website that gives general information about being a Bird Friendly City. Our BFHB team can draft up webpage content for consideration by the City
- **World Migratory Bird Day:** Help us celebrate [WMBD](#) on the 2nd Saturday of each May (May 13, 2023). This can be done by social media amplification of the occasion, to help raise awareness of this special time of year, or supporting any events we may plan
- **Bird friendly buildings:** Incentivizing new developments to adopt bird friendly building measures, through design, window markings, and landscaping to prevent collisions. The primary hazard with buildings is birds seeing reflected habitat (trees, bushes) and sky in windows and glass railings -- this mainly occurs from the ground level up to a height of 16 m (as per Toronto's and Markham's progressive guidelines)

Please note: We believe that Ontario's *More Homes Built Faster Act 2022* has impacted a municipality's ability to enforce bird friendly building design requirements, so several organizations, including Bird Friendly Hamilton Burlington and FLAP, are advocating for bird friendly building design requirements at the federal level

We hope that the City of Hamilton can lead by example by incorporating bird friendly glass into any new City buildings (as Burlington has done in recent years), and consider treating windows of some existing City buildings with readily available marking kits. (Note: bird silhouette decals aren't deemed to be effective, as they leave too many gaps of untreated glass)

- **Lights Out during migration:** Adopting a light pollution reduction strategy and supporting actions to reduce light pollution, particularly during spring and fall

migration seasons. Assist us by helping amplify our social media messaging around this topic. Ensure City-owned buildings are not leaving non-essential lighting on at night. To learn more about Toronto's Lights Out program, visit: [Lights Out Toronto - Saving Birds | BirdNote](#)

- **Tree protection:** Implementing a private tree by-law in the City of Hamilton and help protect Hamilton's urban tree canopy. Encouraging leaving dead trees (snags) standing when safe to do so, for bird habitat, and leading by example on city-owned property

Summary:

Our BFHB team is quite capable of doing a lot of the work required to maintain and possibly elevate Bird Friendly City status for Hamilton, but we can't do it alone. We need the support of the City of Hamilton in some areas. We are mindful that City Councillors and City Staff have significant workloads, and we aim to minimize any added work from the BFC program, by doing a lot of the 'leg work' ourselves where possible (eg. draft web page creation, draft Council resolution).

While the City of Hamilton has embarked on a Biodiversity Action Plan for Hamilton, which we think is great, please note that the Bird Friendly City program is a separate initiative with its own specific requirements in order to maintain certification, such as a Council resolution of support, which we hope to foster with Council soon. If we don't meet some of those specific requirements, Hamilton could lose BFC certification, which would be unfortunate.

We look forward to further discussions and working with you. Together, we can help safeguard birds and achieve the highest level of certification. This is good for birds, and good for Hamilton!

I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have. To add, we are deeply appreciative of the expression of support we have received from several city councillors thus far.

Sincerely,

Sara Shwadchuck
Hamilton Resident (Ward 2)
Co-chair, Bird Friendly Hamilton Burlington

Resources:

- Nature Canada BFC program: <https://naturecanada.ca/bfc/>
- Our website: [Bird Friendly Hamilton Burlington](#)
- Our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Bird-Friendly-Hamilton-Burlington-103900488416817/>
- Our Twitter page: <https://twitter.com/BFCHamBurl>
- Our Instagram page: [Bird Friendly Ham-Burl \(@birdfriendly.hamburl\)](#)

