

June 28, 2018

Testimony to the Washington, DC Council on Bill 22-234, the “Leaf Blower Regulation Amendment Act of 2017”

Submitted by Eliza Cava (Audubon Naturalist Society Director of Conservation), Janet Bogue (ANS Member & Volunteer), and David Cottingham (ANS Member & Volunteer).

Presented at July 2nd hearing by David Cottingham.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the Council on Bill 22-234, the “Leaf Blower Regulation Amendment Act of 2017.” The Act would ban the sale or use of gasoline-powered leaf blowers in the District of Columbia beginning in 2022.

On behalf of our over 10,000 members and supporters in the greater Washington, D.C. region, the Audubon Naturalist Society (ANS) hereby submits testimony on the aforementioned bill. ANS commits itself to inspiring residents of the greater Washington, D.C. region to appreciate, understand, and protect their natural environment through outdoor experiences, education and advocacy. The history of our organization is grounded in the Audubon movement of the late 1800s, and many of our members are dedicated birders and naturalists. Because of this commitment, **our staff and supporters support Bill 22-234 for the reasons described below.**

Washington’s parks, gardens and rivers host 340 species of birds. From Mister President and The First Lady, the iconic bald eagle pair nesting at the National Arboretum, to DC’s official bird, the Wood Thrush, singing on summer nights in Rock Creek Park, Washington’s birds are gifts to our eyes and ears. They are also essential to healthy ecosystems, not least as pollinators and dispersers of plant seeds and a check-and-balance on insect populations, including pest species.

Birds vocalize to warn of danger, recognize their own species, defend their territories, find mates, stay in contact with their young, and find their way during migration. Birds also need to hear predators coming, and some birds, such as owls, use sound to find prey. This dependence on sound makes birds especially vulnerable to acoustic impacts. Recent peer-reviewed scientific studies have shown that where there is loud, human-caused noise, many bird species suffer. Struggling to hear and be heard, they are less protected from predators and less able to find mates. Their stress hormones are elevated, with poor consequences for their health and reproductive success. Research has found that many species of birds have tried to change their voices to be heard above the roar of human activities -- or simply have abandoned noisy environments.

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Scientists have documented declines in bird numbers, bird diversity and bird nesting success in environments with elevated, non-natural noises.¹

When we drive out and drown out birds, we suffer, too. It would be hard to imagine a hearing at which residents complained about too much birdsong. In fact, some schools in Britain use recorded birdsong to enhance students' concentration, while a children's hospital in Liverpool uses birdsong – what the poet Shelley called “a rain of melody”²-- to reduce stress for their young patients.³ If we reduce unnecessary noises like those of gas-powered leaf blowers, birds and people will share the benefits.

The National Park Service, a critical District landowner and stakeholder, provides the following information on the impacts of noise on other non-bird wildlife on their website at

https://www.nps.gov/subjects/sound/effects_wildlife.htm:

Research shows that males of at least one frog species are adapting to traffic noise by calling at a higher pitch.⁴ This could be problematic for the females, because they prefer lower-pitched calls, which indicate larger and more experienced males. Human-caused noise has produced similar results in multiple bird species.⁵

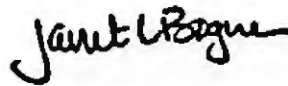
In general, a growing number of studies indicate that animals, like humans, are stressed by noisy environments.⁶ The endangered Sonoran pronghorn avoids noisy areas frequented by military jets; female frogs exposed to traffic noise have more difficulty locating the male's signal; gleaning bats avoid hunting in areas with road noise.⁷

For these reasons, Audubon Naturalist Society supports the passage of Bill 22-234 and urges the Council to also support this legislation.

Sincerely,



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¹ Catherine P. Ortega, “Effects of Noise Pollution on Birds: A Brief Review of Our Knowledge,” *Ornithological Monographs* No. 74, The American Ornithologists' Union, 2012; and Nathan J. Kleist et al., “Chronic Anthropogenic Noise Disrupts Glucocorticoid Signaling and Has Multiple Effects on Fitness in an Avian Community,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 2017.

² Percy Bysshe Shelley, “To a Skylark”

³ Marc Henshall, “Can Birdsong Really Help You Relax and Concentrate?” soundmattersblog.com, 2016; and Stephen Moss, “Birdsong: The Cure for All Ills?” *The Guardian*, August 24, 2010.

⁴ Parris, K. M., M. Velik-Lord, and J. M. A. North. 2009. Frogs call at a higher pitch in traffic noise. *Ecology and Society* 14(1): 25. [online] URL: <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol14/iss1/art25/>

⁵ Barber, J. R., Crooks, K. R., & Fristrup, K. M. (2010). The costs of chronic noise exposure for terrestrial organisms. *Trends in ecology & evolution*, 25(3), 180-189.

⁶ Shannon, Graeme, et al. "A synthesis of two decades of research documenting the effects of noise on wildlife." *Biological Reviews* 91.4 (2016): 982-1005.

⁷ Id at 5.