



WNYEA Lights Out Press Advisory

Topic: Bird Migration and Conservation in the Niagara River Corridor

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Art that Matters to the Planet

Lights Out Niagara River Corridor

Contacts:

Jay Burney: email: greenwatch100@gmail.com (WNYEA)

John Whitney: email: whitneyjohnr@gmail.com (WNYEA)

Thanks to the Western New York Environmental Alliance, the Buffalo Ornithological Society, the Western New York Young Birders Club, and the Spark Bird Project for co-sponsoring this media advisory.

April and May are the peak of Spring bird migration season in Western New York. This is a time to enjoy and celebrate the beauty and importance of returning songbirds -including shorebirds and neotropical warblers. Many of these birds are returning to the Niagara region and continuing further north. They are coming from South and Central America, the Caribbean, and coastal areas. They travel through here, stop briefly to rest and feed, or stay to breed and nest before they embark on the fall migration in September-November when they migrate to the south. Many species of migrating birds depend on the natural night sky including the stars to successfully navigate.

Unfortunately **bright light pollution** emanating from poorly located buildings and other tall structures cause birds to become disoriented and lethally collide with the structures. This is a phenomenon known as **Fatal Light Attraction**. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, this phenomenon has led to the deaths of an estimated 500 million to a billion birds annually in the United States. Turning lights out during these critical overnight migration periods is a proven life-saver for birds.

New York State has adopted a policy called "Lights Out New York." Lights Out directs State-owned and managed buildings to turn off non-essential outdoor lighting from 11 p.m. to dawn during the spring migration April 15 through May 31 and during the peak fall migration, August 15 through November 15. State agencies will also be encouraged to draw blinds, when possible, and turn off non-essential indoor lighting during Lights Out times. In addition to benefiting migrating birds, Lights Out promotes sustainability and provides cost-savings to the State. This policy should be extended to all public and private buildings, particularly those in

major migration corridors like the Niagara River Globally Significant important Bird Area which is also part of the Atlantic Flyway.

Resource Link: NYS DEC Lights Out Policy

<https://shorturl.at/DlPsv>

Resource Link: Cornell Birdcast

May 13, 2024 3.5 million birds migrated over Erie County

<https://dashboard.birdcast.info/region/US-NY-029?night=2024-05-13>

April 15, 2025 367,1000 birds migrated over Erie County

<https://shorturl.at/i1Ea1>

In addition the New York State legislature is considering legislation regarding Bird Safe Buildings and Lights Out policies.

The Bird Safe Buildings Act, [S.7098/A.7808](#), recently renamed the FLACO Act (“Feathered Lives Also Count” Act) will require any new or significantly altered state buildings to incorporate bird-friendly designs such as window and lighting standards.

The Dark Skies Protection Act, [S.7663/A5632](#) would significantly reduce light pollution in New York by requiring most non-essential outdoor lighting be covered by an external shield, be motion-activated, or be turned off between 11 PM and 5 AM.

The WNYEA endorses the passage of these laws.

The Importance of the Niagara River Corridor

The Niagara River Corridor is a critical migratory flyway for many species of birds. This is recognized around the world as a **Globally Significant Important Bird Area**, and a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance.

Resource Link: <http://www.friendsoftimesbeachnp.org/the-niagara-river-globally-significant-iba.html>

These designations have occurred because of the region's location and its critical biodiversity. This biodiversity is threatened by a variety of development factors including urbanization and sprawl, light, buildings, and other infrastructure and design contexts.

Migratory birds play an important role in this regions achieving those designations that we share with places like the Galapagos, Yellowstone, and the Florida Everglades.

During the spring migration as many as three and a half a million birds have been recorded flying through just Erie County during a single night during spring migration.

In the winter, birds from the arctic and the boreal forests of the northwest pacific make the Niagara their homes, or travel through here on the way to the Atlantic wintering areas.

During spring and summer millions of neotropical birds including colorful warblers that winter in the Amazon, migrate through this region and along the lake and river shorelines.

These birds help preserve the biodiversity of important places like the Amazon, the Arctic and the Great Lakes. They depend on places like the Niagara River Corridor for survival.

State agencies in this region, including the Erie Canal Harbor Development Authority, are part of New York State. Their Development at Buffalo's Outer Harbor including the new amphitheater and new development adjacent to the Times Beach Nature Preserve are subject to the state policy.

The Western New York Environmental Alliance encourages all state agencies, the City of Buffalo, all regional municipalities, Erie County, Niagara County to adopt Lights Out Policies to help protect birds.

Many municipalities have lights out programs including New York City, Toronto, Washington D.C. San Francisco, Philadelphia, Detroit, Toledo, Cleveland, Boston, Baltimore, and Atlanta.

Private building owners and homeowners in the corridor can also develop policies and practices that are modeled on the state Lights Out policy.

Links and Resources

Flaco Act

<https://www.nysenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2024/brad-hoylman-signal/legislators-advocates-rename-statewide-bird-safe>

NYS DEC Lights Out

<https://shorturl.at/DlPsv>

New York City Lights Out

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/new-york-city-passes-landmark-lights-out-laws/>

Audubon Lights Out Initiatives <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/project/lights-out>

Audubon Existing Lights Out Program Locations <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/existing-lights-out-programs>

FLAP (Fatal Light Awareness Program) <https://flap.org/>

Audubon Lights Out Fact Sheet <https://nationalaudubon.app.box.com/s/kh0bwzd17w00el88ygpc50wf4sh0uoii>

Lights Out Central New York

<https://www.lightsoutcnny.org/>

Cornell Birdcast <https://birdcast.info/>

Buffalo Ornithological Society

www.buffaloornithologicalsociety.org

Western New York Young Birders Club

<https://www.wnyybc.org/home>

<https://www.wnyybc.org/lightsoutcatsin>

The Spark Bird Project

www.spark-bird.org

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<http://www.friendsoftimesbeachnp.org/>