

# Giving our Winged Friends a Much Needed Break

During lockdown, noise pollution decreased and birds got louder. Is that true and how did the former impact the latter?

## **Did you know that too much noise can kill birds?**

Noise pollution may detain birds from finding a mate or hearing an enemy entering their territory. In fact, male birds sing to find their mate. With too much noise, female birds cannot hear the “love” song being sung. As a result, birds need to sing louder to overlap noise from the city. If they do not find a mate, their breed could slowly, and eventually disappear.

Studies have also proven that birds in big cities with a lot of noise pollution give birth to tinier birds with fewer feathers. Research on blood analysis of urban birds also showed that birds are way more stressed. <sup>1</sup>

In a meadow in Les Diablerets (17.10.2020), a Moineau Friquet is very sensitive to noise, enjoying the silence of the surroundings.

Photo: Marion



## **Why did we hear more birds during lockdown?**

There are multiple reasons. The first reason is that the birds learnt how to sing much louder than the noise in the city. This habit hasn't simply disappeared when the lockdown started and noise pollution lessened<sup>2</sup>. Another reason is that the lockdown that took place during the spring of 2020, people likely opened their windows more often. You may not have noticed it, but you were probably more attentive during your walks. Today, the time spent out is often under stress and people hurry to get to places. You are either on your way to work, walking your dog or exercising. You have your mind full of “Where do I have to go next?”

<sup>1</sup> 6Medias(lepoint.fr, [https://www.lepoint.fr/societe/la-pollution-sonore-affecte-aussi-les-oiseaux-28-01-2018-2190276\\_23.php](https://www.lepoint.fr/societe/la-pollution-sonore-affecte-aussi-les-oiseaux-28-01-2018-2190276_23.php), published 28.01.2018)“la pollution sonore affecte (aussi) les oiseaux.”

<sup>2</sup> Kathleen Schuster (dw.com, <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-lockdown-gives-animals-rare-break-from-noise-pollution/a-53106214>, published 16.04.2020) corona virus gives animals rare break from noise pollution

or “Will I catch my bus?”. You probably do not pay attention to your surroundings. However, during lockdown, your only reason for going out was to go out (except for when you had to go get groceries). Because of that, your mind was clearer and you were more aware of your surroundings so you were more likely to hear birds<sup>3</sup>.

### **Did birds move into nicer homes during lockdown?**

Normally, birds tend to build their nests safely higher up in trees. However, during lockdown, a lot of places were deserted thanks to people staying indoors. You may have seen nests in peculiar places. For example, a friend saw a nest on a cord attaching a boat to the port. In normal circumstances, this clearly would not have been possible with boats constantly moving in and out of ports. This is a great example of how deserted some places were during the quarantine. There are other places though, which lost their birds. Places where birds normally reside are often quiet natural places like woods or parks. While streets with expensive shops were rarely visited by people during the quarantine, parks and forests were good places for a walk. This disturbed these winged animals and made them move to more deserted places, like ports.

### **Did some birds migrate to cities?**

Birds are more likely to move out of cities, and not the contrary. But is that also the case with deserted cities?

We tried to look up the number of birds in Geneva before and after lockdown, and found, unfortunately, nothing. So, we will try to answer the question ourselves. As we mentioned, you heard “more” birds during lockdown. This is not due to the fact that there were more birds, but because there was less noise pollution to cover their chirping. We think it is more likely that birds came out of their usual hideouts, and not that new birds came into the city. That would also explain the fact that you saw “more” birds. In fact, you did not. The birds simply chose to show themselves more, especially

A pigeon, in the city of Biel, trying to escape behind fences and flee from the works and passers-by.

Photo: Marion (22.10.2020)



in the morning hours, according to research done by “Biorxiv”<sup>4</sup>. The website “le temps” also said that even when cities were deserted, some species could not move there, simply because it was not suitable for them.<sup>5</sup>

### Will this noise pollution break have a durable impact?

A magpie on a tree, fleeing the ambient noise of the city and enjoying the peace and serenity of the Diablerets mountains.

Photo: Marion (17.10.2020)



After lockdown, noise pollution set back in and perhaps became even worse. There are some clues which are clear examples of how much the break from noise pollution benefited birds. According to some articles, the ornithologists witnessed more numerous and healthier hatchlings born during the lockdown. On the other hand, the overall bird population dropped in big cities with a lot of noise pollution. That demonstrates how much noise pollution impacts birds.

### What can people do in their everyday lives to help birds ?

In her article, “Etimes ”, Sadhana Rajkumar known as the sparrow savior, proposed that we have a one-day lockdown every week<sup>6</sup>. This idea may be very beneficial for the environment, nature and birds but it is very unrealistic. Many people cannot work from home, and some prefer to enjoy their weekends outdoors. Thus, a one-day lockdown will probably not be manageable.

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<sup>4</sup> oscar gordo Lluís Brotons, Sergie Herrando, Gabriel Gargallo(biorxiv.com, <https://www.biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.09.25.313148v2.full>, published 25.09.2020) “rapid behavioural response of urban birds to covid-19 lockdown” look up under conclusal/results

<sup>5</sup> Pascaline Minet (letemps, <https://www.letemps.ch/sciences/letre-humain-nest-oiseaux-chantent>, published 13.04.2020) “Quand l’être humain n’est pas là, les oiseaux chantent.” Text under “le printemps, une période active”

<sup>6</sup> Sindhu Vijayakumar(timesofindia.indiatimes.com, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/spotlight/during-the-lockdown-birds-break-human-distancing/articleshow/74977657.cms>, published 04.04.2020) “During the lockdown, birds break human distancing”last paragraph, last sentence

While being outdoors, people could be a little more careful. For example, we could talk a little quieter and keep to designated paths. All in all, there is not much we can do to help birds except for such little, seemingly unimportant gestures.

So, please, be aware of our winged friends.

**Ecole Moser - Ambre, Marion et Eva, 13 ans**