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Law to Protect Birds in Flight Takes Wing at City Hall

San Francisco may become the first city in the nation to develop quantifiable standards to help protect millions of migratory birds from crashing into untreated plate glass windows on future buildings. New legislation that sets standards for bird-safe buildings was passed unanimously on Tuesday by the Board of Supervisors. The Board approved the Ordinance which will be headed to Mayor Lee for signing into law as an amendment to the City Planning Code.

The amendment was proposed by the Planning Department after discussions with Golden Gate Audubon Society and the American Bird Conservancy as a way to reduce the hundreds of millions of bird deaths that occur every year in North America through collisions with plate glass windows.

According to Mark Welther, Golden Gate Audubon Executive Director "San Francisco is situated right on the Pacific Flyway, which is a major bird migratory route in the Western Hemisphere, and at least 400 species of birds live in or migrate through the City. Biologists, animal care providers including the City's Animal Care and Control, the SPCA and Audubon members have reported injuries and deaths to birds annually due to window strikes, including the fledglings of the beloved Peregrine Falcons that have nested in downtown San Francisco in recent years."

San Francisco's proposed law is modeled after successful programs established in Chicago, Toronto, and New York and is based on the latest research done by the American Bird Conservancy and Dr. Daniel Klem of Pennsylvania's Muhlenberg College. The City's Standards for Bird Safe Buildings goes beyond other legislated efforts in that it specifies where the controls apply and what needs to be done to make the building "bird-safe". The Ordinance would apply to new buildings and major retrofits where glazing is being replaced. Glass on the lower 60 feet of these buildings would have to be "fritted," netted, stenciled, frosted or otherwise altered to be less reflective. Exterior screens or grids or ultraviolet patterns visible to birds could also be used. "The alternatives for window treatments range from inexpensive screens to new energy-efficient glazing." Welther said. "The Standards would also apply to building features, such as glass skywalks or windbreaks on buildings near sensitive habitat areas, such as San Francisco Bay or Golden Gate Park."

The Standards encourage voluntary efforts to reduce risks to birds, including participation in the Lights Out program, through which building owners and tenants can save money and protect birds by turning out unnecessary lights.

"The San Francisco Board of Supervisors is showing national leadership on this tragic wildlife issue. Up to one billion birds die each year in building collisions

nationwide. San Francisco is acting responsibly by helping to reduce those preventable deaths” said Dr. Christine Sheppard, Manager of the American Bird Conservancy’s Bird Collisions Campaign.

According to AnMarie Rogers, Manager of Legislative Affairs with the San Francisco Planning Department, “The goal of the Standards is to identify harm-reduction measures early in the building design process so developers are not surprised by the issue of bird/building strikes later when design changes are more expensive. The Ordinance provides architects with flexible tools allowing for variety and creativity in reducing risks to birds, while also producing economically viable designs. By enacting the Ordinance, the City of San Francisco can demonstrate that it is possible to build a City that works for people and is compatible with the natural world.”

About Golden Gate Audubon

Golden Gate Audubon has been dedicated to protecting Bay Area birds, other wildlife, and their natural habitat since 1917. We conserve and restore wildlife habitat, connect people of all ages and backgrounds with the natural world, and educate and engage Bay Area residents in the protection of our shared, local environment. Golden Gate Audubon is sustained by contributions from 10,000 members and supporters throughout San Francisco and the East Bay. To learn more, visit www.goldengateaudubon.org.
