



February 9, 2022

HB0387: Pesticide Regulation – Transfer to Department of the Environment.

Position: Support: HB0387

The Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS) asks that the House Environment and Transportation Committee give a favorable report of **HB0387** and move it to the full House.

MOS supports this bill as it would move pesticide regulation from the Department of Agriculture (MDA), which lacks expertise on toxics, the environment, and health, to the Department of Environment (MDE). Furthermore, pesticides are not used only in agriculture, but also have many household, institutional and commercial uses. MDE has the requisite expertise and broader purview. The bill would also require consultation with MDA and the Department of Health (MDH), allowing all three stakeholders to have input to the regulation of pesticides.

The impacts of pesticides on birds are well known. The subject first came to the notice of the public in 1962 with the publication of Rachel Carson’s book *Silent Spring*, which detailed the ravages of DDT on wildlife, birds, insects, domestic animals, and humans. **Most of us know how DDT led to precipitous declines** in the populations of such birds as the Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, and Brown Pelican. **Since the ban of DDT, all have recovered** and been removed from the federal Endangered Species Act.

A study published in 2020 documented that increased use of neonicotinoid pesticides in the United States **led to statistically significant reductions in bird populations between 2008 and 2014**, with annual declines of grassland birds of 4%, and insectivorous birds of 3%. Other bird species declined annually by 2%¹. Neonicotinoids are toxic to birds, and at sub-toxic levels negatively affect reproduction. Fortunately, the retail sale of neonicotinoids has been banned in Maryland.

In another case, The **Environmental Protection Agency’s 2016 Draft Biological Evaluation of Chlorpyrifos** with reference to endangered species **found that chlorpyrifos was “likely to adversely affect” 97 percent of all taxa, including 93 out of 110 bird species.** Only five birds received a “no effects” determination, and this was based on the fact that these birds are already extinct. Chlorpyrifos was also found to affect 100 percent of the 30 designated Critical Habitats for birds.² Just last year, chlorpyrifos was banned in Maryland.

As the above examples, pesticides present a profound threat to our bird populations, and the need for regulation is evident. Millions of pounds of pesticides are used annually in Maryland.³

¹ Li, et al, Neonicotinoids and decline in bird biodiversity in the United States, Nature Sustainability, Vol 3, December 2020,

² Environmental Protection Agency, Biological Evaluation Chapters for Chlorpyrifos ESA Assessment, update January 18, 2017, <https://www.epa.gov/endangered-species/biological-evaluation-chapters-chlorpyrifos-esa-assessment>

³ <https://mda.maryland.gov/plants-pests/Documents/MarylandPesticideSurveyPub.pdf>


Pesticides are one of the many threats that have led to significant decline. **North America has lost 3 billion birds, 29% of its total bird population, since the 1970s.⁴ The diversity of bird species and their habitats are under increasing threat. Unless concerted efforts are taken in the near future, Maryland will lose some of its greatest assets** – healthy natural systems and the wide range of birds, plants, and other wildlife that they support. Maryland risks economic impact as well as a decrease in quality of life. An estimated 900,000 residents and non-residents enjoy birding in the state. While Marylanders generated \$483 million from wildlife-watching activities in 2011, the Total Industrial Output (TIO), which includes, direct, indirect, and induced effects, was **over \$909 million, produced 10,807 full- and part-time jobs, and generated \$88.4 million in state and local tax revenue.** Nationally, Americans who watch and feed birds contribute \$41 billion to the nation’s economy every year.⁵

Birds provide invaluable ecological services in areas of pest control, seed dispersal, and pollination. The immediate threats to their survival and a disruption to our symbiotic relationship with them are matters of great importance for a variety of reasons.

MOS is a Maryland-based volunteer organization of some 1800 members, with 15 chapters in Maryland. We are devoted to the study and preservation of birds and their habitat.

We believe that the public and wildlife would be better served by having MDE regulate pesticides in concert with MDA and MDH. Hence, we ask for a favorable report from House Environment and Transportation Committee and that the bill be moved to the full House.

Sincerely,



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⁴ Rosenberg, et al, Decline of the North American Avifauna, Science, vol 366, issue 6461, pp. 120-124, 4 October 2019, https://www.nature.com/articles/s41893-020-0582-x.epdf?sharing_token=TwNbvZyrX1n4QIfj2HmPBdRgN0jAjWel9jnR3ZoTv0N4PZQFH5HC7r5H_V_CgW15l19rgpP3DlxTv3M3POqS1vPe1EMulrhi3fFHh7TbM5u_P9EHR5GroosUkx_srsJ-CnTj7UA5-AzhakRooNYwyO4XDABrYZisZQsbEQK7KMORwEcvv9LREGfy9iXHNNe0K9jZSLr354vUdqH_tmehW1NO6uwN3PKva_DJNztR4-xc%3D&tracking_referrer=www.theguardian.com
<https://science.sciencemag.org/content/366/6461/120>

⁵ US Fish and Wildlife Service, Economic Impact: Birds, Birdwatching and the U.S. Economy, November 16, 2017, <https://www.fws.gov/birds/bird-enthusiasts/bird-watching/valuing-birds.php>