

THE GULL

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MAKING BAY AREA BUILDINGS SAFER FOR BIRDS

BY ILANA DEBARE

Noreen Weeden stood before a conference room of two dozen architects and pointed to a slide of a Peregrine Falcon on a downtown San Francisco window ledge. “Over 300 million birds are killed in building collisions each year in the United States,” she said quietly. “More birds are killed by building collisions than any single source other than cats.”

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Weeden, conservation project manager for Golden Gate Audubon Society, was speaking at a professional-development class for architects on bird-safe building design.

The training sessions—co-sponsored by GGAS and the American Bird Conservancy—are the latest initiative in a long-running campaign by Golden Gate Audubon to address the deadly hazard of bird-building collisions.

The root of the problem lies in birds' inability to detect clear glass, which has become increasingly popular as a building façade in urban areas.

Many birds see a glass wall as open air, especially if it is reflecting trees, sky, or water. Urban nighttime light intensifies the problem by attracting migratory birds—which often navigate by the stars—into tight downtown corridors where collisions are likely.

But there are a variety of ways to reduce these hazards, from technological fixes such as textured glass that is visible to birds, to behavioral fixes like dimming office building lights at night.

Golden Gate Audubon is drawing on all these approaches in one of the country's most comprehensive local campaigns against bird-building collisions.

GGAS started in 2009 with a Lights Out for Birds public education campaign, collaborating with City of San Francisco staff, PG&E, and commercial building owners



American Kestrel with San Francisco office buildings.

GGAS has started offering training in bird-safe building design to Bay Area architects.

and managers. The message? *Turn out lights or draw shades at night during spring and fall migration.*

From there, GGAS worked with San Francisco planners to pass Standards for Bird-Safe Buildings in 2011. These standards—which are mandatory for new construction in areas next to parks, water, or other open space—require design measures that will reduce collisions. GGAS collaborated with Oakland city planners to enact similar building guidelines there in 2012.

Volunteers with GGAS's conservation committees continually monitor new development proposals in San Francisco and the East Bay, submitting comments to improve bird safety. Recently, GGAS members met with architects for Uber to give input on its proposed new headquarters at Mission Bay.

"Uber's concept was transparency, and they initially wanted the building to be completely transparent," Weeden said. "Now they are looking at innovative ways to apply fritting [texture] to the glass, which would make it both safer for birds and more energy-efficient."

GGAS's newest initiative is training for architects. The hour-long seminar was developed by American Bird Conservancy, and is certified by the American Institute of Architects for continuing-education

credit. GGAS adapted the curriculum to reflect West Coast buildings, materials, and landscapes and now offers the training free to local architectural firms.

"The goal is for architects to recognize hazards to birds in the built environment, and apply the best practices to prevent building collisions," Weeden said. "Architects are creative problem solvers. We present the problem, show them some ways it's been addressed, and provide an opening for them to find other ideas that will work for their new buildings."

HOW YOU CAN HELP

During spring and fall migration, turn off lights or draw shades at night. Tell friends, co-workers, and building managers about our Lights Out for Birds campaign. This year's spring campaign starts on February 15: Info at goldengateaudubon.org/lightsout.

Know any architects? Let them know about our free bird-friendly design class! To schedule a class (minimum 20 people), please email nweeden@goldengateaudubon.org.

Tell your U.S. Senator and Congressperson to support H.R. 2280, which would make federal buildings less hazardous to birds. Find more info at www.audubonaction.org/bird-safe-buildings-fact-sheet.



Bird-safe building guidelines can save the lives of songbirds like Townsend's Warblers.