



Baltimore Implementation Plan 2023

Creating a Green, Climate Resilient Future for Baltimore's Birds and Communities

Overview and Historical Context

Baltimore City has urgent environmental and community health needs. Many neighborhoods are already suffering from extreme heat, flooding, and environmental injustices. Our ecosystems are also suffering from the consequences of climate change and habitat loss.

These dire conditions exist beyond Baltimore as well. Recognizing the urgency of the moment, National Audubon Society's 2023-2028 Flight Plan seeks to protect more habitat, accelerate renewable energy, advance bird protection and environmental policies, and engage broader constituencies. Audubon's strategic plan is built around three key drivers: hemispheric conservation, climate change, and equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging. In turn, regional and local Audubon teams are being challenged to increase the scale and impact of their work to protect the planet for birds and people.

Since 2002, Patterson Park Audubon Center has worked in partnership with local nonprofits, community members, schools, and organizational partners to achieve successes in education, conservation, and neighborhood revitalization. While this work helped to conserve and restore natural ecosystems focusing on birds and their habitats for the benefit of Baltimore communities, much of our work has occurred in southeast Baltimore. To create a healthier Chesapeake Bay and a city where birds and people thrive, we recently completed a strategic plan to expand Audubon's impact in Baltimore.

From February – July 2023, Audubon staff in Baltimore undertook a collaborative process with their regional and national Audubon colleagues and community partners to develop a local implementation framework. Utilizing the drivers set by National Audubon Society's strategic plan, this new framework aims to achieve a citywide impact on birds and communities while fostering equity and welcoming more voices into Audubon.

The result is an ambitious conservation plan that will seek to increase investments in and deployment of natural climate solutions to create a more equitable and climate resilient city. We will partner with community and environmental organizations to advance the city's climate resilience through conservation and green infrastructure projects designed to increase bird habitat, capture carbon to slow climate change, foster a healthier Chesapeake Bay, and create and restore publicly-accessible green spaces. We will also seek to build capacity within communities of color so that residents might become more active in greening projects and

advocate for increased climate resilience investment in their neighborhoods. Going forward, we will let go of the name Patterson Park Audubon Center and embrace a citywide scope of work. The strategies that follow were developed with input from local non-profit organizations, community leaders, foundations, and public agencies.

Bird Habitat and Climate Resilience

Audubon's mission is to protect birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow. Understanding that the collective health of birds reflects the health of our planet, one key goal is to create a greener, more sustainable Baltimore, where increased and improved bird habitat also addresses issues in environmental justice neighborhoods. In the face of climate change and habitat loss, we sustain ourselves when we protect what birds need to survive.

Like many urban areas across the country, Baltimore is experiencing climate-related impacts, creating challenges for birds and people. However, studies show that these impacts are not equitably distributed across cities as a legacy of past redlining policies. For example, low-income residents of color are at a higher risk of experiencing heat-related illness and stress. Nature-based solutions – such as green infrastructure to manage storm water, decrease ambient temperatures, and increase tree canopy cover – provide opportunities to help both people and birds. An essential part of the ecosystem, birds serve as pollinators, disperse seeds of many plants, and feed on various insects, rodents, and other small animals, naturally keeping those populations in balance. Healthy green spaces not only help to reduce the urban heat index but also provide food sources, clean water, and nesting sites for birds.

In 2023, the Office of Sustainability, which resides in the City's Department of Planning, is leading an update on its Climate Action Plan and its Disaster Preparedness Plan. Both of these plans will likely call for an increase in healthy habitats across our city to address climate-related issues. Restoring forests, meadows, wetlands, and other bird habitats will help to remove excess carbon from the atmosphere while cooling neighborhoods and reducing flooding during storm events. While large areas of native habitat are essential, smaller biodiverse green spaces carry important value; in fact, data from the U.S. Forest Service show that a series of smaller patches within a community is more effective in cooling it than one large patch. Pocket parks can also provide shrub and ground layers of native plants that birds need to survive, and researchers from the Baltimore Ecosystem Study report forest interior bird species are successfully nesting in Baltimore's smaller forest fragments. Restoration of large areas as well as smaller habitats in our city benefits birds and people in the fight against climate change.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designated Baltimore as an Urban Bird Treaty City in 2015, recognizing the need to restore our landscape with habitat needed by migratory birds. The Audubon Mid-Atlantic blueprint, finished in 2022, dares to think outside the traditional conservation mindset, naming urban areas as priority landscapes for birds. Indeed, they are. Just as biodiverse green spaces play an important role in cooling our communities and reducing stormwater runoff to the Chesapeake Bay, proper plant species selection and maintenance practices also enable them to contribute to a buffet for birds to forage for food and nesting opportunities. In a city of many hardscapes, green spaces soften and beautify our neighborhoods. If we design these biodiverse landscapes in partnership with communities, this increases the neighbors' investment and stewardship in the spaces, bringing together local expertise with our bird expertise.

Audubon's Baltimore team has experience in avian food webs, small park habitat design, and thoughtful partnerships and community relationships to support these strategies. We will build upon a decade of successful collaborations with Baltimore-based organizations to help the city advance its sustainability goals, bring greater investments to environmental justice neighborhoods, and support the restoration of existing, larger-scale public habitats. We will also use data and science to educate policy makers and community leaders about why greater investments in green infrastructure, renewable energy, and other climate resilience efforts are needed in Baltimore. Our local team will be supported by Audubon's regional and national conservation, science, and policy experts, and we look forward to implementing a conservation plan that Audubon might replicate in cities across the country.

Cross-cutting Approaches for a Better Baltimore

The future of Audubon's work in Baltimore will build on its strengths to provide for the needs of birds and communities. We have a people-oriented approach which allows us to build thoughtful partnerships and participate in coalitions that support both our strategic goals and community needs. We believe this approach improves our ability to meaningfully lead in Baltimore.

We have historic roots in supporting locally-driven efforts and engaging communities where they are in their journey of understanding birds, climate, and environmental justice. We have built a deep and authentic relationship with the Latino/a/e community, which our partners say differentiates us from other environmental groups in Baltimore. With our commitment to all Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, we believe we can create sustainable change.

We lead with an equity lens, recognizing historic and current systems in place that impact individuals and communities disproportionately.

We utilize the tools of education, policy change, partnership, and conservation action, such as habitat restoration, to achieve our goals and reduce environmental disparities for communities in Baltimore.

Goals, Strategies, and Tactics

The Audubon Context

Audubon's work in Baltimore will help to advance our vision for a Mid-Atlantic region of healthy ecosystems, where birds thrive and all people have access to nature and a voice in environmental matters. This way of working upholds Audubon Mid-Atlantic's values of teamwork, partnership, meaningful relationships, and intentional inclusion of those previously excluded from environmental conversations.

A key to our past success has been the strong partnerships that we have built with dozens of schools, agencies, and organizations. Our shared successes were possible because of our diverse missions and authentic relationships. Through the future work of Audubon in Baltimore, we expect to foster additional partnerships in order to achieve our goals via our new strategies. In many cases, the tactics include collaboration with at least one partner. Audubon will continue to lead on some projects and take a supporting role in others.

Our work will contribute to National Audubon Society's milestones for its new, ambitious strategic plan. Increasing and improving green spaces in Baltimore will help reach our Habitat Conservation milestone for *a vast, connected network of conserved lands and waters, ranging from Canada to Chile, that provide passage and safe haven for migratory and resident birds*. Collaboration with Baltimore partners to contribute to our Natural Climate Solutions milestone that creates and protects our *forests, wetlands, and grasslands, which are critical to storing greenhouse gases while providing healthy bird habitat*. Finally, we will work toward the Community Building milestone to *improve the world for birds and people* by cultivating advocates to help reach our Policy milestone for *conservation and climate initiatives with solutions equal to the scale of the challenges we face*.

Goal: Create a greener, more sustainable Baltimore, where increased and improved bird habitat addresses climate issues in environmental justice neighborhoods.

Strategy 1: Work with coalition and community partners to create and sustain publicly-accessible, bird habitat.

- Tactic 1: Develop a GIS map to determine baseline, prioritize, and track progress toward achieving this goal. Determine, obtain, and analyze the social and environmental data needed to make decisions about priority neighborhoods for Audubon's work in the city.
- Tactic 2: Conserve and maintain priority urban forests, meadows, and wetlands. Example partners include Baltimore City Recreation & Parks and Baltimore Green Space. The U.S. government's Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool and our GIS map will inform geographic prioritization, and we will support efforts to engage nearby residents to increase public capacity for management of these existing habitats.
- Tactic 3: Work with community organizations to co-create a matrix of public pocket parks with layered habitats in Baltimore neighborhoods to decrease urban heat island effect, absorb stormwater runoff, remove excess carbon from the atmosphere, and increase bird nesting and foraging opportunities; leverage current partners' relationships for Audubon value-add to their restoration projects. Example partners include Blue Water Baltimore, Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake, Southwest Partnership, and ReBUILD Metro.
- Tactic 4: Provide technical expertise to climate resilience and restoration projects. This work will bring Audubon's national habitat restoration and natural climate solutions expertise to local projects. By also bringing our team's experience in authentic partnerships and community-centered planning and design, we will also help to create projects that respond to neighborhood needs. Such work will support local capacity building to advance additional climate justice efforts.
- Tactic 5: Provide expertise for habitat stewards on project development and maintenance, based on the science of food webs that support birds' needs for nutrition and nesting. Work with landscaping professionals and BIPOC leaders to share this information with their networks.

Strategy 2: Develop and implement a municipal-level policy agenda focused on natural infrastructure investments as climate solutions.

- Tactic 1: Contribute Audubon's science and conservation expertise to Baltimore City's Climate Action Plan and Disaster Preparedness Plan, advocating for nature-based solutions as a way to address environmental equity issues such as heat and flooding.
- Tactic 2: Leverage participation in coalitions such as Baltimore Environmental Equity Partnership, Baltimore Greater Regional Environmental Equity Partnership, and Greater Baltimore Wilderness Coalition to work with partners and their networks to advocate for increased/enhanced habitats that contribute to climate solutions. Work with leaders to create structure with more power to make environmental decisions, such as cabinet-level position focused on climate/environment and/or a climate/environmental committee in City Council.

- Tactic 3: Work with coalition partners and neighborhood organizations to increase funding for natural climate solutions (e.g., green infrastructure) in Baltimore’s environmental justice neighborhoods to decrease urban heat island effect, absorb stormwater runoff, sequester carbon, and increase bird nesting and foraging opportunities.
- Tactic 4: Connect with Baltimore City council members to build relationships with Audubon and partners; work together to develop bird- and people-friendly solutions to increase climate resilience, reduce carbon emissions, and increase investment in green infrastructure.
- Tactic 5: Support Audubon policy staff in advancing efforts that will reduce carbon emissions and increase climate resilience and investment in green infrastructure. Educate Baltimore residents and invite them to advocacy opportunities.

Strategy 3: Engage Baltimore communities in conservation action and advocacy to improve our city for birds and people.

- Tactic 1: Work with organizations and leaders in Baltimore communities of color, as well as local Audubon members and chapters, to grow awareness of climate-related issues and advocacy skills through workshops, community event tabling, and presentations at public meetings. Help to create opportunities to elevate the voices of BIPOC leaders and advocates on environmental matters and issues that matter to them.
- Tactic 2: Offer engagement opportunities for community members to meaningfully connect with Audubon. Seek ways to offer environmental and bird expertise at events organized by community and organizational partners. Grow list of contacts for Baltimore. Prioritize activities in majority BIPOC communities.
- Tactic 3: Contract with workforce development partners to support with our technical expertise a young adult training program; contribute hands-on conservation project management opportunities as well as knowledge and skills toward solutions for climate resilience and bird habitat.

A Note of Thanks

Audubon’s local, regional, and national staff built this framework in partnership with key local stakeholders, who offered their insights. Thank you for the time and effort that was put into celebrating the historical work of Audubon in Baltimore, dreaming for the future work, and preparing for what is feasible in the coming years. This work was supported by Jonalyn Denlinger and Laurie Latuda Kinkel as consultants.

Audubon Mid-Atlantic's Values

The future of Audubon's work in Baltimore will build on its strengths to provide for the needs of birds and communities. It is guided by Audubon's priorities to tackle climate change and address the issues birds face during migration, while centering equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging. Growing from a strong foundation of organizational partnerships, community relationships, and expertise in science and education, Audubon's Baltimore program will reorient its work toward the Audubon Mid-Atlantic regional goals of increasing habitat and enhancing climate resilience. What is good for people is also good for birds. With our collaborative and people-oriented approach, we seek to improve our city so that birds and people can thrive.

We are driven by our values:

We are united by birds. Birds center our conservation work and are the lens through which we define, align, and focus our shared efforts and enthusiasm. While our mission and vision empower us to be purposeful and focused, our values serve as guideposts, shaping our individual and collective attitudes and behaviors, and aligning us around a set of standards for how we engage with each other, our partners, and our internal and external-facing work.

We are driven to action because of our deep understanding of the environmental and social challenges faced by birds and people on this planet.

We recognize our collective power. Therefore, we acknowledge and face the realities of our work, and we are honest and transparent in our information sharing, even when this requires us to address difficult or sensitive subject matters.

We broaden our reach by intentionally making space for communities that have historically been excluded from environmental conversations, and we recognize the valuable voices, strengths, and leadership that these communities can and do contribute to our shared goals.

We listen actively with the intent of understanding different perspectives and finding common ground.

We prioritize deliberate teaming and partnerships. We believe in building community and relying on others because a team can accomplish more than an individual can alone. We believe it is important to invite the communities we aim to serve into our work.

We engage in intentional dialogue where we share stories with and solicit stories from our peers, partners, and allies. These exchanges support us as we amplify and demonstrate the value of environmental efforts, cultivate meaningful relationships, and deepen the effectiveness of our work.