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A wake-up call

One of the many pleasures of living in this part of the country is watching for and enjoying the sights and sounds of common birds that make their homes here. That's why this news from the National Audubon Society is so troubling: We're losing our birds.

The Audubon report -- available at www.audubon.org -- notes that 20 American bird species have fallen to half their levels of 40 years ago because their living space is disappearing. Sprawl, climate change, large-scale farming and invasive species all contribute to the decline, particularly of meadow birds such as the Eastern meadowlark.

In the South, the society reports, familiar species are waning. In North Carolina the list includes the common tern, Eastern meadowlark, field sparrow, loggerhead shrike and Northern bobwhite. In South Carolina it includes the Northern bobwhite, the field sparrow, the Eastern meadowlark, the little blue heron, red-winged blackbird and loggerhead shrike.

The Audubon Society was careful to say it doesn't anticipate extinction of most of these birds. But the drop-offs are well-documented and alarming. The society's members have conducted an annual Christmas Bird Count for more than 100 years, giving birders and researchers a valuable resource to gauge the health of bird populations. Other studies have also shown declines in birds.

Carol Browner, former administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency and now chairman of the board of the Audubon Society, says the decline is a warning. "We are concerned. Is it an emergency? No, but concerns can quickly become an emergency."

The report should refocus attention on proposals to help preserve green space in North Carolina and perpetuate the habitats where common birds nest and flourish. The Land for Tomorrow campaign (online at www.landfortomorrow.org) proposes a \$1 billion bond issue to provide \$200 million a year for five years for river buffers, parks, forestland and other purposes that preserve our state's natural heritage. Legislators should heed the warning sent by our missing birds and pass a bond issue to help save what's left.

Want to see and hear the birds?

Hear any of the common 20 species in decline on the [Audubon Society Web site](#).