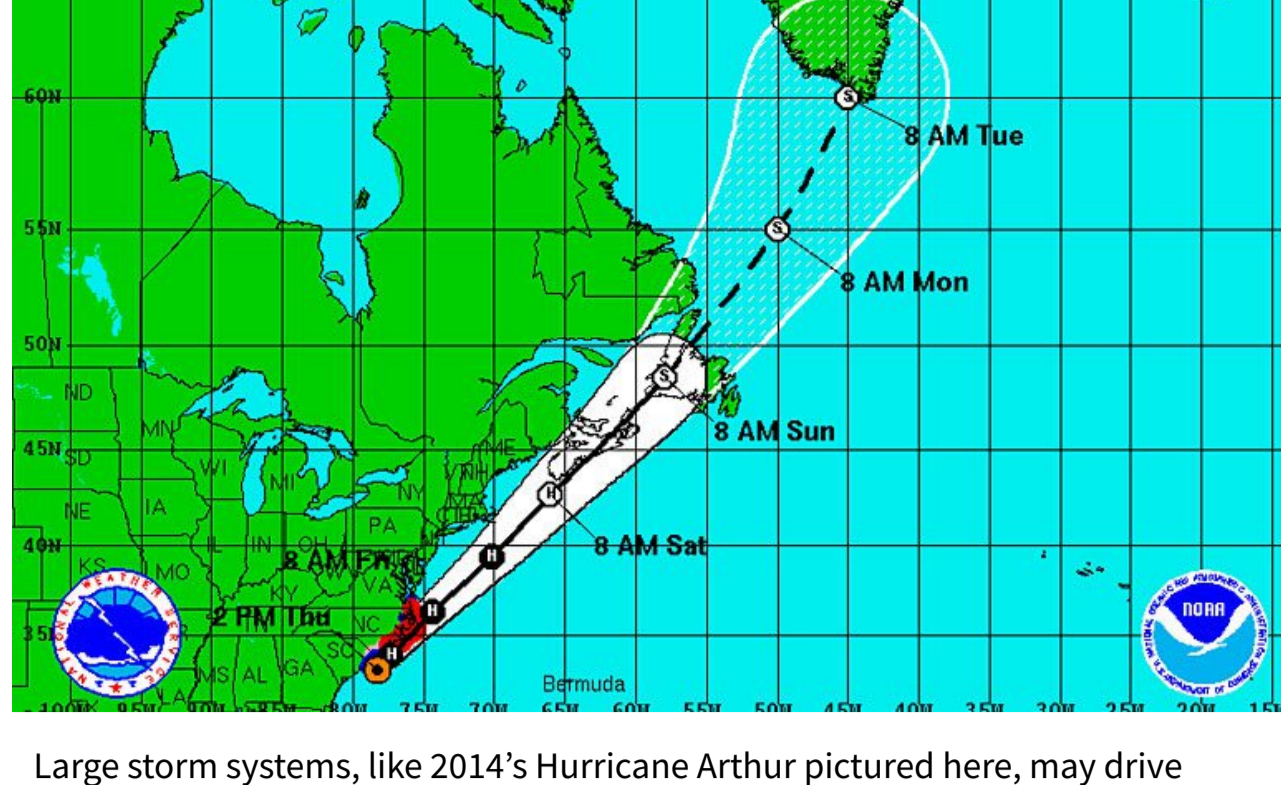


How Do Hurricanes Affect Migrating Birds?

Each year, migratory birds cross the Gulf of Mexico during hurricane season. Most birds wait for favorable winds and weather before starting a migratory flight, so seldom strike out over water during a hurricane, but some birds may be well offshore when a storm begins. Although migrants have enough fat (fuel reserves) to make the 600-mile Gulf crossing in favorable winds, they may not have enough energy to survive if they have to fight against headwinds.



Large storm systems, like 2014's Hurricane Arthur pictured here, may drive some birds far off-course.

Before and after flights, when migrants have higher than normal food requirements, they may have problems finding safe supplies of food in areas devastated by storms. Resident birds in hurricane areas also suffer when their food supplies, such as fruits and berries, are stripped from trees and shrubs. Like migrants, they may wander to other areas in search of food. Preserving critical coastal habitats is essential for these birds. It's also crucial for them that we enforce strict regulations to prevent hazardous materials from leaking or spilling during storms and floods.

Large storm systems may drive some birds far off-course. Strong-flying birds often move ahead of the storm, carried by the winds at the forefront of the weather system. Brown Pelicans, Magnificent Frigatebirds, and other oceanic birds have been recorded far inland, sometimes more than a thousand miles from the coast, after hurricanes. Some of these birds may find their way back; others, unable to deal with the unfamiliar terrain or to find appropriate food in freshwater, may die.



Free Hummingbird Poster Download

Can I Do Anything To Help The Birds?

Birds and hurricanes have coexisted for millennia, and given the chance, healthy bird populations rebound from the effects of such natural disasters. Unfortunately, humans make this difficult for some birds because we have destroyed so much natural coastal habitat, and so nowadays hurricanes pose greater threats to vulnerable bird populations than they once did. Working to preserve and restore as much coastal habitat as possible, to minimize toxic spills and leaks during storms by enacting and enforcing strict regulations, and to keep bird populations healthy year round are our best strategies for minimizing the long-term effects of hurricanes on birds. Providing food and water for birds after hurricanes can also help birds who lost food resources in a storm, or who may need a little extra fuel to continue their migrations. If you find a bird in trouble, [contact a local wildlife rehabilitator for help](#).

FIND OUT MORE

For more about the effects of hurricanes on birds—and the birds' coping mechanisms:

- [Flyways for Flyweights: Small Birds Capitalize on Weather Patterns During Epic Migrations](#)
- [How the Puerto Rican Parrot Survived the Devastating 2017 Hurricane Season](#)
- [Backpacking Ospreys: Following Their Migration](#)
- [Whimbrel Survives Tropical Storm But Is Shot in Caribbean](#)
- [Hurricane Birding—an eBird Primer](#)

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11 Comments

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Joann Pasco 6 years ago
As a result of Irma, here near Tampa, we took our birdfeeder down. So many things to still do we have not had a chance to put it back up 😊😊 See them flying back & forth from conservation area to next group of trees nearby! GOT to get it up tomorrow!

This comment was deleted.

Joann Pasco 6 years ago
JCluvsTrump!! I am NOT a bird killer!!! Have been feeding them all my life!! I am 83 years old. Belong to bird study with Cornell Univ. for years. Do you count birds every day??? MEAN reply 😊😊😊

JCluvsTrump → Joann Pasco 6 years ago
That is a lot of counting! How do you possibly keep up?

Olivia Hopson 4 years ago
next person to comment is gae

Cat Hawblitz 4 years ago
I'm really concerned this year in 2019 here in Owen County, KY. We have 118 acres of land...mainly forested and have ALWAYS had hundreds of hummingbirds as well as finches, four types of owls, whip-poor-wills, poor-wills, bluebirds and so many others. This year, there is only ONE female hummingbird at our feeders, NO whip-poor-wills at night, no meadowlarks, only ONE pair of bluebirds (we put out bluebird houses each year). We NEVER used any sprays, weed-killers and nothing that would harm birds, nor do we have any close neighbors. It's very secluded. We do still have our screech owls and a few Great Horned Owls, but heard only ONE barn owl last year. Something is WRONG, and I don't know if it's the many storms that occurred in other places earlier in the season or some type of poison in the atmosphere or just climate change. It's very alarming!! We've also noticed almost NO toads, NO box tortoises this year, no crayfish in our creek and many suddenly "missing" outdoor friends. :(Something is terribly wrong, and I don't know if it's climate change or the storms in other areas. No one on our road uses ANY sort of spray or weed killer. It's scary and totally ABNORMAL for this area. I was curious as to whether others in Kentucky are seeing the same phenomena. It's a sad time indeed. :(

Buzzina Bethie → Cat Hawblitz 4 years ago
I live in Panama City, Florida. We were hit hard by Cat 5 Michael. We have always had many hummingbirds, this year, I only saw one female, and that was a one time event. I am very concerned that the hummers got caught in Michael, as it hit us Oct. 10 and came up the Gulf from Central America. We have all the other birds, but hummingbirds and butterflies are not here this summer.

Kimber timbers 5 years ago
:(Poor cheep cheeps. I hope they have a safe migration and can avoid any danger from the hurricanes (that are more intense due to human caused global warming... :/).

She of Penultimate Pulchritude 6 years ago edited
Hurricane Harvey had me worried about Rufous Hummingbirds that migrate across the Gulf to Mexico. I wonder if we will see fewer Rufous h-birds next spring here in the Pacific Northwest. Is anyone checking on the impact of hurricanes on these tiny birds? I can't imagine how they would survive if caught in this weather.

Donna Jagielski Kutzer 6 years ago
My sister saw a couple pelicans flying over Varna Il last weekend.

Parrotzilla 6 years ago
I am so amazed at how most of the aviary birds weathered the storm in their outside aviaries. To me, this is a miracle!

Josee Noel 6 years ago
You guys have everything right on...let's all work together to bring back their habitats and the Garden of Eden will follow.

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