

When I was here as a boy, 60 years ago, there were more birds. Why are there so few birds, now?

That is truly a very difficult question to answer. There are many factors to take into consideration: the time of the year you came here (both times), short and long term weather conditions (both times), population densities of people and predators (both times), availability of food and drinking water (both times), and frequency of alien visitation rates to Earth (ok maybe not that last one).

In 1978 there were 61 birds listed on the California Department of Fish And Game list of Bird Species of Special Concern, today there are 74 with 5 added to the list that are no longer found in California.

I can think of several things which may effect bird and animal populations.

We live in a densely populated area; 60 years ago there were far fewer people here. Along with increased amounts of people comes increased land use. Unfortunately often our use for land makes it unsatisfactory for animals. The more places that we build to live in, the more habitat we take away from animals. Highways and parking lots are great habitat for cars, not for animals; in the same vein salt marshes are great for animals, salt ponds not so very much. People also use lots of water; the water that we use gets put back into the ecosystem, often with things like prescription medications added to it.

Over the course of the last half century human interactions have changed much of the world. We have put untold amounts of an untold variety of chemical toxins into the environment. We did not do this with malicious intent, we simply did not know better; as an example, dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) was very good at killing mosquitoes and lowering the incidence of malaria, unfortunately it was also very good at indirectly killing birds. We use chemical pesticides and fertilizers to produce highly nutritious food for ourselves and the rest of the world; those same chemicals are often not the most nutritious things to add to the environment.

The people of the world need lots of stuff from food and water to a myriad of consumer goods. All of our stuff needs to be transported to where we need it to be, we need to be transported to work and play. Many of the things we own are powered by electricity. Most of our transportation and electrical generation utilize fossil fuels, burning fossil fuels adds green house gasses to the environment which in turn makes the world warmer. As the climate changes animals need to move to find habitats that are more suitable to their needs.

We have done some damage to our planet; however we are learning the error of our ways and are beginning to fix what we have damaged. I do not know exactly why there are fewer birds here today then there were 60 years ago; however, I have a feeling that it has something to do with our presence here.

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