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Over the course of Project Green Challenge so far, I've found that my college is doing pretty well on working on sustainability issues. They have a growing green energy supply, are working on measures to limit water wastage, and have many well-insulated buildings, some of which are heated and cooled with geothermal heat pumps. Their [website](#) is pretty transparent about what they are working on and what they need to improve on.

However, they aren't doing a great job with a pretty specific issue that I am passionate about, which is protecting bird life on campus by preventing window collisions. I am taking a class about birds this semester, so we pay closer attention to bird life in our area, and one thing we keep noticing is dead or stunned birds who hit a window on one of the college's buildings. I can find no mention of the problem online, and the only actions the college seems to have taken are applying a few hawk decals to one building, a method which is [ineffective](#), having periodic high-pitched beeps to deter birds from the outside of the library, and having a periodic loud bird call, either a distress call or a bird-of-prey shriek, play on the outside of the athletic building. The last two methods are probably more intended to deter nuisance birds like house sparrows and starlings, but those methods are ineffective as well, since birds can [quickly get used to the noise](#) and ignore it. These sounds only deter students from studying and spending time outdoors in these areas, preventing them from connecting with nature.

Window collisions are an important environmental issue to combat. They are the [second biggest](#) man-made cause of bird deaths, after outdoor cats, and kill up to [1 billion birds](#) a year in the US. Overall, the US bird population has declined by almost [3 billion birds](#) since 1970, which means 1 in 4 birds are gone. This is a huge problem, since birds are very important to many different ecosystems. Undoubtedly, a major cause of this decline is habitat loss, which limits the number of birds the remaining ecosystems can support. However, direct deaths from man-made causes, like outdoor cats and windows, are also vital to combat to restore bird populations, and the college can make a difference by applying some surprisingly simple techniques.

Birds collide with windows because they see reflections of the sky, ground, and foliage and don't comprehend that it is solid. The [recommended way](#) to stop this is by putting patterns on the outside of the window, which, to the bird, look like solid material around gaps too small to fly through. These patterns need to be quite close together to be effective-- 2" to 4" inches apart. Dots and lines are commonly used, and a [number of companies](#) are working on materials that are as unobtrusive as possible to those indoors.

New York City has been making strides in protecting birds from window strikes. Their [Local Law 15](#), passed in 2020, requires new structures to have safer windows for birds. The city also has a [bird collision reporting site](#) which, thanks to many reports by everyday people, has helped the local Audubon chapter find trends in the data about vulnerable bird species and dangerous buildings.

Grinnell College is on an entirely different scale than New York City, but some of their methods could be implemented here. I made a [Google Form](#) for people to report the locations of window collisions on campus, and once I return to campus, I will put up flyers with QR codes linking to the form inside entrances to academic buildings. With more conclusive data about where window collisions are taking place on campus, we can make a convincing argument for the college to make adjustments to fix particularly problematic windows.



Caption: Report window collisions at bit.ly/GCbird!
Let's protect birds on campus.

