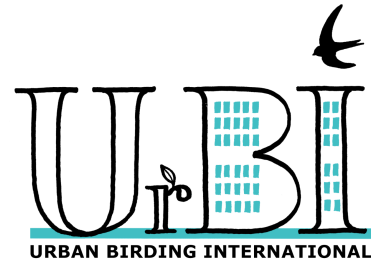


# Towards bird-inclusive cities

Report of Urban Birding International Symposium 2025

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*In the summer of 2024, Piet van der Werf took part in a city excursion in London, led by Dave Clark. This special encounter would ultimately lead to the urban birding symposium that Piet and Loeka Jongejans organized in Amsterdam on September 25 and 26, 2025. The guiding questions of this exchange were: what are the main issues facing urban bird groups, and how can these groups, which often rely on volunteers, support each other?*

## Symposium Day 1: Keep the common birds common

The first day of the Urban Birding International (UrBI) Symposium 2025 took place in the Main Hall of Pakhuis de Zwijger. The audience of approximately 150 people was diverse: about half consisted of members of local and international nature organizations, there were scientists, policy officers from various levels of government, and a few representatives from the construction and consulting sectors. This broad composition underlined the interdisciplinary nature of the meeting.

The panel discussion was moderated by VWGA member Chantal van Binsbergen. She was able to connect the speakers, topics and the audience in a natural way and led a lively and constructive exchange. Many topics were discussed during the panel discussion, ranging from infrastructure and light pollution to the interaction between birds and humans. The statement “Keep the common birds common” was mentioned as a guideline for urban bird protection. Each speaker brought their own perspective to the table:

- Jesper Toft from DOF Copenhagen pointed out the importance of monitoring in nature-inclusive construction, not only during the design phase, but also in the following phase, in order to assess whether measures are actually effective. Without this follow-up, he argued, nature-inclusive construction remains merely a nice idea.
- Hany Alonso from Spea Lisbon presented compelling examples of citizen participation. He explained how public campaigns in Portugal have contributed to the preservation of important bird areas. He emphasized that involving residents in counts and observations is an effective way to increase awareness and engagement. As an example, he mentioned the inventory of urban roof breeders by residents. After all, this is a place that only the residents themselves can access.
- Peter Stimmler from LBV Bayreuth highlighted the scale of the problem of glass collisions. Every year in Germany alone, millions of birds are killed by collisions with glass facades, particularly on medium-height buildings in green environments. He showed that relatively simple measures—such as applying special patterned films—can reduce mortality by up to 90%.
- From the London Bird Club, Dave Clark brought the human dimension into the debate. He spoke about the increased interest in birds since the coronavirus pandemic. According to him, real protection of urban nature does not come from regulations, but from social engagement: “Protection comes from the bottom up, not from the top down.”
- Finally, Ewout Huibers from the VWGA Amsterdam emphasized that birds, like humans, need not only a home, but also food and shelter: a complete ecological

infrastructure. He also argued that banning festivals in cities makes no sense if they are then moved outside the city, where birds are even more vulnerable. He encourages citizens to count and report birds in parks because this data can assist in the process of (not) issuing permits for festivals.



Photos of the Urban Birding International Symposium 2025. Above: Panel discussion with experts from five European cities on the first day in Pakhuis de Zwijger, Amsterdam. Below: Group photo of participants of the second day.

## **Symposium Day 2: Monitoring in cities**

The second day was devoted to in-depth discussion and practical application between about 30 participants. In the morning, VWGA member Frank van Groen led an urban birding excursion that took us past various examples of ecological management, from nesting stones for swifts and house sparrows to areas with native vegetation. The excursion made it clear that even in busy parks there is room for species such as kingfishers, tawny owls, and song thrushes, provided that management and design are carefully coordinated.

After the excursion, presentations were given by Jeffrey Brand of the Dutch BirdLife partner Vogelbescherming Nederland (VBNL) and Jip Louwe Kooijmans of the Sovon Dutch Centre for Field Ornithology. Brand showed that collaboration with the business community around nature-inclusive construction is becoming stronger. Louwe Kooijmans presented recent developments in urban monitoring and emphasized the importance of uniform data collection in order to reliably track trends. Such data collection, he showed, could be relatively simple and straightforward for everyone to participate.

The lunch that followed provided an opportunity for informal conversations and further acquaintance between the speakers from the previous evening and representatives of nature organizations (Birdlife International, Natur & Ėmwelt a.s.b.l. Luxembourg, the Hellenic Ornithological Society, Latvijas Ornitoloġijas biedrība, Interreg, Natuurpunt Antwerpen, Gierzwaluwwerkgroep Amsterdam), education (HvA Spatial Urban Transformation), government (city ecologist for the municipality of Amsterdam), and businesses (Vivara Pro, Blauwhoed). The meeting was relaxed, substantive, and unifying. The combination of a field excursion and a substantive program proved to be particularly effective.

## **Conclusion: the power of international cooperation**

The UrBI Symposium 2025 confirmed the power of international cooperation between urban bird working groups. The exchange of knowledge and experiences provided valuable insights into the similar struggles European cities are facing, as well as into the ways in which urban birding networks urban environments can contribute to improve biodiversity. This led to the following recommendations:

- European cities are facing similar problems such as urbanization, more events and loss of green space. At the same time, we can also learn a lot from each other in terms of solutions: targeted measures, citizen participation, and policy can strengthen urban ecosystems. The UrBI Symposium 2025 marked the beginning of an important international network that should be maintained with a returning meeting.
- Data and monitoring form an important foundation for policy decisions. Setting up uniform urban counts can help to make data internationally comparable.
- For the structural prevention of glass collisions, it is necessary to include the causes and solutions in building regulations and public tenders.
- Education and public awareness must be further strengthened, including through campaigns that highlight the value of birds in the city.

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