



THE CARBON OFFSET BIRD PROJECT: WHAT, WHY, AND WHERE?

Some folks have actually suggested that birding is bad for the birds! Here's the reasoning: as we pursue our interest, enjoying birds, and even racing around Ohio (or the region or the country) building our bird lists, we are also burning fossil fuels—lots of them—that add to greenhouse gas emissions. Scientists believe that these greenhouse gasses are long-lasting, global, and have already affected bird habitats and migratory patterns negatively.

What can we birders do in response to such an argument?

We should not guilt-trip each other and stop birding, but we should do something to address the issue itself.

A new **Carbon Offset Bird Project** (COBP) is an experimental effort that should allow us birders, voluntarily, to offset our birding-related carbon emissions, those that come from our birding. The funds would be used to secure quality bird habitat—in our case vital migratory bird habitat in Ohio.

This project is modeled loosely after other carbon offset programs involving air or vehicle travel, but is the first specifically tailored to birders and birds at a bird watching event. And it will be launched at September's **Midwest Birding Symposium**.

THE ISSUE

Average per-person gas emissions in the United States are 27 tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) per year. (World per-person averages are closer to 5.5 tons.) To understand the magnitude of that number, one ton of CO₂ may be emitted when an American:

- _ Travels 2,000 miles in an airplane
- _ Drives 1,350 miles in an SUV
- _ Drives 1,900 miles in a mid-sized car
- _ Runs an average household for two months
- _ Has a computer on for 10,600 hours (442 days).

At the same time, there is a growing movement at both the corporate and individual levels toward offsets: mitigating our remaining footprint by reducing or displacing the CO₂ we help emit, in some other place or by some alternate method.

There are numerous carbon-offset programs already under way, involving laudable mitigation and renewable energy campaigns. These often include carbon reforestation projects in developing countries, renewable energy projects in the United States (e.g., solar or wind), and renewable energy and energy efficiency projects in developing countries.

But the Carbon Offset Bird Project (COBP) at the Midwest Birding Symposium is intended to offset a particular behavior with a *particular local solution directly related to our birds*.

THE CARBON OFFSET BIRD PROJECT

First, a few basic principles:

- Participation is encouraged, but is totally voluntary.
- Participants will be encouraged to offset 100 percent of their individual bird activity-related emissions.
 - If successful, the COBP could serve as a model for other Ohio festivals, bird clubs, and even supporting companies to make a difference for birds and combat CO₂ emissions.
 - If successful, a broader COBP might eventually be launched nationally, acquiring and securing valuable local habitat for nesting, migrating, and wintering birds of many species.

HOW IT WORKS

Using our special travel-calculator at the MBS (similar to existing applications in use by other carbon offset organizations) participants will have the opportunity to calculate their bird-related carbon footprint, measuring the impact of travel to and from the MBS and on field trips during the event. The calculation will reveal the pounds of greenhouse emissions released and will assign a monetary value to offset those CO₂ emissions. In our case, it's \$20 per ton. (The figure of \$20 per ton of CO₂ is an amount slightly higher than many current offset formulas, but it is probably justified given other CO₂ emissions that come from ongoing activities in preparation for and, especially, during the MBS at Lakeside.)

INFORMATION ON THE CALCULATORS

These particular calculators for the MBS have been developed from established standards for air and automobile travel. They are simple and are reproduced here so that MBS attendees can “pre-calculate” their mileage contribution for attending the MBS:

Round-Trip Air Travel (*per person*)

Short Range <400 miles	Medium 400-1,500 mi	Long 1,500-3,000 mi	Extended 3,000+ miles	Air total
0.12 tons \$2.40	0.23 tons \$2.60	0.65 tons \$12.50	1.24 tons \$24.80	

ROUND TRIP AUTO TRAVEL (PER PERSON)							
SINGLE DRIVER							
	100 - 200 MILES	200 - 400 MILES	400 - 600 MILES	600 - 800 MILES	800 - 1,000 MILES	1,000 - 1,200 MILES	CAR TOTAL
COMPACT CAR	.049 TONS \$1.00	.098 TONS \$1.95	.147 TONS \$2.90	.196 TONS \$3.90	.244 TONS \$4.85	.293 TONS \$5.85	
MID-SIZED CAR	.098 TONS \$1.95	.196 TONS \$3.90	.293 TONS \$5.85	.391 TONS \$7.80	.489 TONS \$9.75	.587 TONS \$11.70	
SUV, TRUCK, VAN	.138 TONS \$2.65	.261 TONS \$5.20	.391 TONS \$7.80	.522 TONS \$10.40	.652 TONS \$13.00	.782 TONS \$15.60	
ADDITIONAL PASSENGERS							
SMALL CAR	.049 TONS \$0.50	.098 TONS \$0.95	.147 TONS \$1.45	.196 TONS \$1.95	.244 TONS \$2.40	.293 TONS \$2.90	
MEDIUM CAR	.098 TONS \$1.00	.196 TONS \$1.95	.293 TONS \$2.90	.391 TONS \$3.90	.489 TONS \$4.85	.587 TONS \$5.85	
SUV, TRUCK, VAN	.138 TONS \$1.35	.261 TONS \$2.60	.391 TONS \$3.90	.522 TONS \$5.20	.652 TONS \$6.50	.782 TONS \$7.80	
ADDITIONAL DONATION							\$
FULL AIR AND CAR TOTAL							\$

As you see, the offset costs can be very modest, but the collective impact of, say, 1,000 participants at MBS could be significant.

At the MBS, these calculator forms will be provided with the registration packets so that attendees can participate.

All offset contributions (valid donations to the extent allowed by law) will be acknowledged in writing and by receipt at MBS. All participating contributors at MBS will also get a special COBP logo-sticker to attach to their binoculars or ID badge, showing their involvement in the project.

The Ohio Ornithological Society has generously agreed to match the COBP funds raised at the MBS in September to help this effort make a bigger, more valuable impact.

INFORMATION ON OUR SELECTED OHIO PROJECT

The offset funds collected will be used to expand **Meadowbrook Marsh**, currently 113 acres of marsh, woodland, and meadow in Danbury Township, close to the center of MBS activities at Lakeside. This offset project means securing more valuable habitat next to the current marsh and pond, habitat that is important to waterbirds and songbirds alike. (In fact, there will be trips to Meadowbrook Marsh during MBS so that participants can visit and experience exactly where their offset fund will be going.)

Past funding for Meadowbrook Marsh has been impressive, as have the partnering institutions that have secured this locale. You can find details here:

http://danburytownship.com/MeadowbrookMap_Final_021010.pdf

and here:

www.danburytownship.com/land.html

SOME FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Since the Carbon Offset Bird Project is in its launch cycle, there will also be questions to ask participants at MBS to help measure how this effort is being received. This will let organizers know what participants think about COBP, whether it has merit, and whether it could be expanded.

Perhaps COBP is an idea whose time has come—a real, 21st-century conservation vision where carbon offsets equal bird habitat acquisition, a true win-win for the environment, for the birds—and for birders.

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