**‘Wherever there are birds, there is hope’: how businesses can contribute to creating bird friendly environments in cities.’**

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**Introduction**

This paper explores the need for businesses to be shifting their working practices in urban environments to take greater responsibility for the natural environment and how policy measures are influencing (or not) current business behaviours. There is a considerable amount of literature about the development of urban biodiversity along with the recognition of the complex range of stakeholders in cities but the intention here is to build on this extant knowledge to examine actions that may be taken by businesses in encouraging bird friendlier environments, citing examples of best practice and to highlight their wide-ranging benefits for different stakeholders (including the businesses themselves ( Donnelly and Marzluff, 2006).

**Background**

Connecting with nature is now generally accepted as important for human well-being and the global pandemic contributed greatly to this thinking. BBC Radio 4 played a ‘Tweet of the day’ to share the idiosyncrasies of individual bird calls or songs accompanied by an ornithological explanation made by a celebrity, like the well- known birder, Bill Oddy. So, the sharing in the natural environment and the importance of green and blue spaces for well-being has gained greater currency and combined with an acceptance of demographic change predicting most of the future global population will be living in cities (LSE Cities, 2012, Gov.uk Trends 21) there is a need for consideration of what is possible and how businesses can constructively commit.

The United Nations detailed the challenges cities face in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)for 2030 including energy consumption, food insecurity, limited open public spaces, pollution, urban sprawl, and humanity’s biggest challenge, the climate crisis (United Nations,2012). Measures in cities must now balance city dweller well-being alongside the planet’s own and for the purposes of this paper is to define city dwellers as the businesses within them (Elmqvist, 2013). The economic drive towards Net Zero (Gov.uk 2021) and upcoming UK legislation places biodiversity high on the agenda for all so biodiversity gain is now a requirement for most new urban planning initiatives and thereby has ramifications for businesses.

Challenges for the survival of birds relate to urban design and human activities and there has been a call for more strategic approaches to avoid extinction of species and generally be more accommodating of existing populations (Marzluff 2001, Beatley 2020). Exemplary policies are to be found in Canada, a country whose government announced in 2022 that they were proud to have fourteen Bird Friendly Cities, where policies have been encouraged to reduce the amount of glass in buildings, control lighting, planting of trees and managing predators as well as providing guidance on feeding and counting of numbers. The development of a certification programme for bird friendly cities is a positive move towards the broadcasting of taking responsibility (Nature Canada,2024). How businesses are influenced is less transparent but there is a wealth of literature in the topics of Corporate Social Responsibility and Business Ethics that show how there has been a paradigm shift across the world, as globalised businesses have become more aware of issues in their supply chains and smaller businesses have needed to create their own special niche (Thomas 2015). Supplement these changes with a more connected consumer (Kimmel, 2010) who may easily vocalise their concerns to huge audiences and there becomes a pressure to conform that cannot be ignored.

The proposed People’s Plan for Nature and the partnerships that are reported between the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO)and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) along with the huge citizen science project data that is collected from interested volunteers across the British Isles, shows that there is a huge collective effort to protect birds. The emphasis on the BTO website is on the importance of partnerships and collaborative efforts which seems encouraging. Yet, despite these efforts, an architectural magazine used the Freedom of Information Act to ask thirty-three Councils in the UK to declare their policy on bird friendliness and how they prevent bird collisions in their building regulations. The finding was that the councils made no specific attempt to monitor these collisions in their areas despite the BTO estimating 100 million birds are colliding with buildings leading to a large percentage of their deaths (Dezeen magazine,2022).

Searching online reveals that there is a coffee company in the UK that specifically donates to the RSPB (Bird & Wild 2024) and past personal experience informs knowledge that there are individual members of businesses/organizations that support charities in ways like the production of calendars and fundraising activities. Preliminary online searching shows that there is identification of foodstuffs in addition to coffee for example, maple syrup production but these examples are limited. Identifying the efforts made by private enterprises is challenging however and so there will be an extensive investigation of online sources to establish what urban businesses do to connect with biodiversity and bird friendliness.

**Research approach**

The research approach that is taken for this paper will focus on digital data provided by organizations using sources like their blogs and website documents in anticipation that these materials will reveal the perception of the world taken by the organization. These easily accessible sources online allow for a speedy collection of information and early content analysis. There will also be an investigation into other related materials like the High Street Task Force report produced by the Institute of Place Management (IPM) who use the model of Restructuring, Reinventing, Rebranding and Repositioning for addressing the way forward for towns and cities. Case studies are also available eg. Villegas and Garitano-Zavala (2010) and cities that have made efforts to pedestrianize. Analysis will address the specific measures taken to be bird friendlier as themes to explore for example, 24-hour lighting levels ( Geraldes and Costa,2005).

**Discussion**

The findings of the study will hopefully demonstrate the profound effects that small-scale greening initiatives businesses may adopt to benefit the urban environment. The absence of inclusion of such initiatives despite placing emphasis on partnerships and collaborations shows a lack of a holistic approach (Melles,2005). While the concern is understandably one where there is a wish not to see empty buildings like the large shops that were owned by Debenhams and the concern about footfall is justifiable (IPM 20but a more joined up approach to developments is called for and the importance of the natural world should be incorporated into business plans.

**Conclusion**

The exploration in this paper requires delving into a range of literature to interpret the move to a greener business approach and how the next stage in business responsibility is to widen thinking to the wider natural environment. By evaluating any measures taken and case study examples of bird friendly approaches in cities some practical recommendations will be made.

Essentially, if businesses want to consider their measures to be truly “green” they must consider non-human life in their sustainable practices. This need has been recognised by upcoming legislation and initiatives in North and South America by making cities ‘bird-friendly’. In the face of the global climate crisis, it is imperative that urban businesses recognise the importance of spaces for plants and animals as well as humans to mitigate the often-destructive anthropogenic impact on the climate and wildlife.

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