

**Artist Statement**  
**Bird and Butterfly Habitat Series**  
By Albert Rhea

Birds and butterflies are key indicators for the measurement of biodiversity loss. According to a study the populations of birds or butterflies living in open habitats have been negatively affected by the loss of field and shrubland habitat. Conversely, species which live in forests have been favored. Progressive loss of open natural spaces such as scrublands or fields has had a negative effect on populations of birds and butterflies common to these habitats. Experts attribute the decline in birds and insects more broadly to loss of habitat, climate change, and increased exposure to toxic pesticides.

Urbanization – forming the cities that now house half the world’s population – has wreaked havoc on native bird and butterfly populations. A 2014 Study that examined data on bird and native plant populations in 54 cities worldwide found that urban areas had only 8% of the bird density as rural areas (species per km<sup>2</sup>) and only 25% of the native plant species. Native plants are the foundation of habitat for many native insects, who in turn become the food supply for native birds. Replacing native landscapes and plant material with paved urban developments has rippling ecological repercussions.

Pesticides Effect on Birds and Butterflies. In the 1960s, Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* was groundbreaking in its revelations about DDT and its impact on the environment, particularly bird and butterfly populations. As a result, DDT was banned in the US, but today other equally toxic pesticides in the same organochlorine category are still heavily used today. While most of the above pesticide research has been focused around farmlands, the landscape industry is not to be overlooked! The EPA estimates 30,000 tons of pesticides are applied on American lawns every year! Instead of dousing our properties with chemicals, we can use them to reclaim habitat for bird and pollinator populations.

Biodiversity – from native plants to beneficial insects to bird populations – is at stake, and the easiest way to initiate change is right at home. Study land use policies near you and be alert for habitat destruction. Ask yourself, “How are birds and butterflies faring in my community”.