THE COHABITATION KIT

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AN EXPLORATION INTO HOW DESIGN CAN BRIDGE THE DIVIDE BETWEEN ANIMALS AND HUMANS IN URBAN SPACES

PARSONS INTEGRATED DESIGN SP. 24

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PROJECT SUMMARY

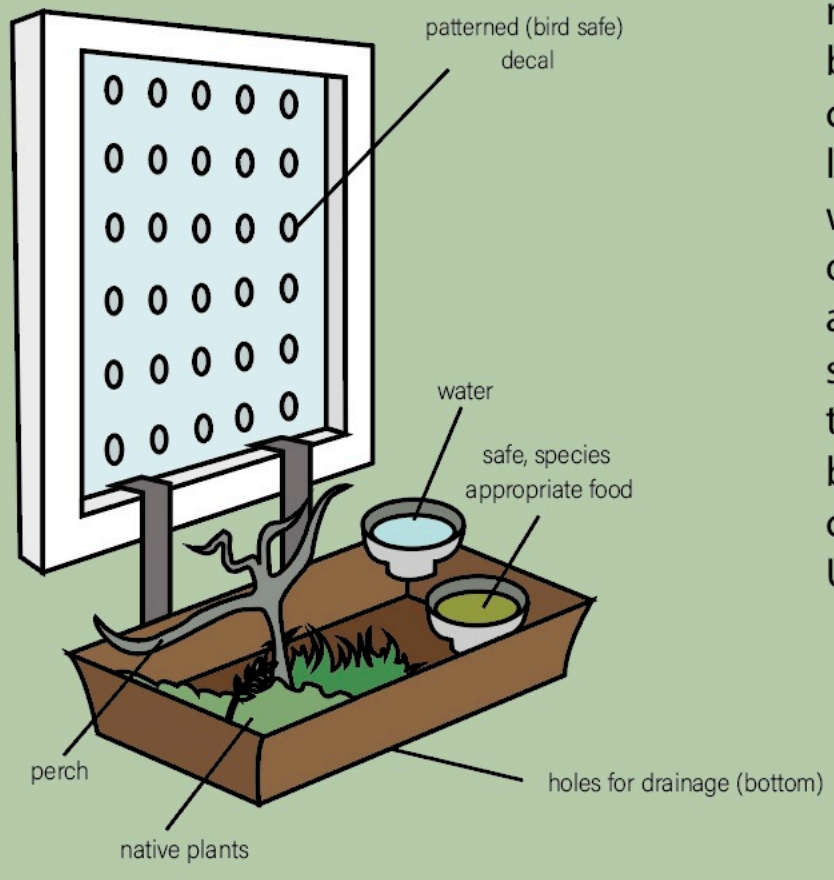
The Cohabitation Kit seeks to encourage peaceful interspecific coexistence with widlife within urban environments as part of a larger mission to cultivate urban symbiosis between animals and humans. The first version of the Cohabitation Kit begins to address this theme specifically by approaching the problem of avian deaths, most particularly during migration along the Atlantic Flyway on the East Coast. Each year in New York City alone, an estimated 250,000 birds are killed due to light pollution and tall buildings. Designers, architects, and wildlife scientists alike have worked towards finding solutions, such as with bird-friendly glass. For example, a major inspiration was Martin Avila's Symbiotic Tactics project, which aims to achieve coexistence with animals and insects that are typically regarded as repulsive or unwanted. In a city where many people reside in multi-level or high rise buildings, the cohabitation Kit takes inspiration from these professionals, innovators, and their own cohabitational projects to enable the regular citizen to make their own windows more bird friendly, as well as to reconnect with the available natural world in a hectic, urban space.

The kit functions as an attachment to a window, and comes with a booklet designed to introduce a fun and meditative practice of observing birds, plants, and any other form of urban wildlife outside of one's window., The attachment is made of a lightweight wire frame with plant bedding so users are encouraged to plant native plants, such as wildflowers or berries, edible for the birds. There will be dishes for seeds and water, as well as a perch, in the physical kit. The accompanying booklet lists information and pictures of the birds in New York City, with a section for logging observations made. In the back of the book will be meditations and poems relevant to birdwatching or engaging with nature in the midst of chaos, so that people who use the Cohabitation Kit also feel it has enriched their own, human lives. Coloring pages are included as well, as a way to additionally appeal to children and families who mamke up the expected demographic.

In this way, **the Kit aims to assist in reconnecting people with the joy and comfort of the natural world, offering a brief reprieve from the hectic, man-made saturation of the city, and most importantly, to remind people that wildlife can exist and live alongside human beings in urban environments.**

PROJECT GOAL

The Cohabitation Kit seeks to: introduce a basic symbiotic or cohabitative relationship between humans and non-humans in urban spaces; to remind people to consider the interconnectedness between human beings and the natural world, and the way we affect that world; and, as part of a larger project, to open urban design towards animals as well as people, in order to find ways to coexist fairly with non-humans in an increasingly urbanized world.



THEMES AND TOPICS OF INTEREST

- interspecific cohabitation
- coexistence
- urban wildlife

AUDIENCES/COMMUNITIES

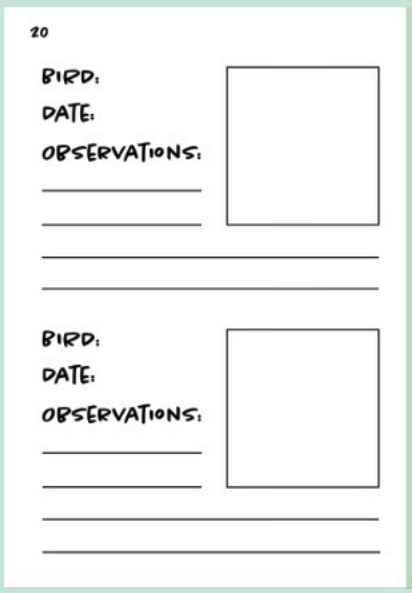
The first version of the Cohabitation Kit is primarily aimed for people who live in an urban environment in America, though it is adaptable for suburban or residential homes as well. It also may be more appealing to families with children as children in particular would likely enjoy, and have the time for, watching the birds interact with the kit outside the window. Obviously, it is also designed with birds in mind, specifically wwarblers and sparrows, as they make up a large portion of the birds who regularly fly through big cities on the Eastern Coast of the United States.

LEFT: first draft of kit design

After our midterm class presentations, I received feedback that I should work on making my product more fitting for the *CO*-habitational element -- in other words, to consider how the product could be made more beneficial to the people who own it as well as the birds.

To address this criticism, I incorporated an accompanying booklet as well. Within this booklet, I decided to include a brief field guide, a logging journal, nature-related poems and meditations, and coloring pages. The purpose of the booklet is to encourage active engagement with the birds in the kit as well as with the larger natural world often overlooked in the city. In a hectic, urban environment, the interaction with nature is also meant to serve as a reprieve from the stimulation and the hustle -- a reminder to be present and to consider the way our actions have an impact on the world around us, with the practice of stepping away from an individualistic perspective.

In this way, I hoped the booket's role in the kit would help to benefit the people who use it, not just the birds.

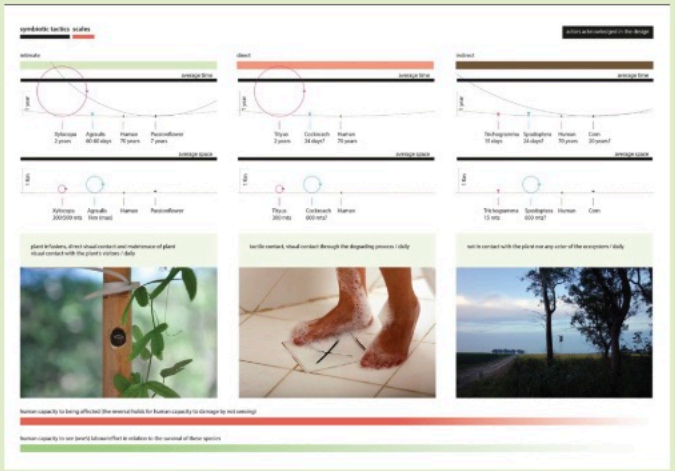


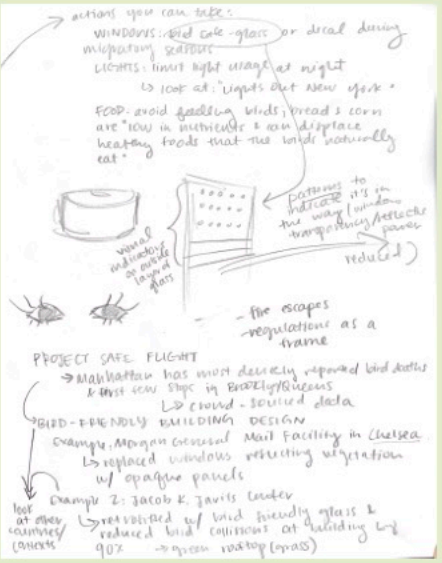
PROCESS

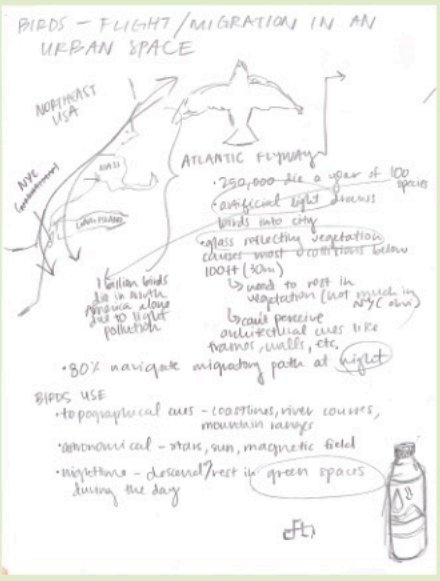
The Cohabitation Kit was born from an interest in non-human design. My research began with looking into a variety of animals considered urban wildlife: rodents, birds, insects. Gradually, I honed in on the birds after researching the ways their essential migratory patterns are disrupted by light pollution and high buildings in cities like New York. This spurred me to try to find ways design could be utilized to aid these birds, as well as urban wildlife in general -- I asked myself: In what ways can WE adapt to live alongside wildlife with minimal disruption of the ecosystem? How can we use design to approach coexistence with animals in a hospitable way in an urban environment?

I took inspiration from related projects and texts like *Designer and Goldcrest* by Erik Sandelin, the renovation of the Jacob K. Javits Center which decreased its bird deaths by 90% with the implementation of bird-safe glass, and Martin Avila's "Symbiotic Tactics" series, which aims to create a series of products to serve both people and wildlife frequently considered repulsive and unwanted (such as scorpions).

These questions and inspirations influenced my ideation towards a product that bridged the gap between the human world and that of the birds, and could be accessible to the average person. I landed on the idea of a plug in, like a window sill flower bed -- something easily attachable and affordable, built to accommodate the birds.







OUTCOMES

After a few conversations with my professor, Evren Uzer, and some influence from the Ottoman-Era Turkish birdhouses, I tweaked the first design. The final result adopted more birdhouse characteristics than the original design, as the booklet address the human side of the symbiosis while the physical kit is constructed with the birds in mind. That being said, the project cannot be deemed totally complete and successful until the kit is used in practice by a sample of the target demographic: the birds themselves. This will take a more complete construction of the kit, shown below, and some time in order to collect data on the kit's success with the birds.

However, among my human sample group, several of my peers and professors reacted to the kit positively. Many people remarked on their personal disconnect from the natural world, and their subsequent desire to engage with the kit, or at the very least, the principles behind the kit. In this way, the mission of introducing a reminder to engage with nature and the envionment was successful. I would also say it was successful in its goal to start a conversation about cohabitational design. I would add vinyl bird-safe stickers for glass windows, a migratory map, and possibly an audio element to potentially enhance the design.