



Camp Compass students attended the Birds, Careers, and Conservation Youth Workshop at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology last summer. Photo by Marilú Lopez Fretts. [Download image.](#)

Community-Driven Study Targets Noise and Appreciation of Birds and Nature

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Allentown, PA, and Ithaca, NY—A unique noise pollution study has been launched by Allentown's [Camp Compass Academy](#) in conjunction with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in Ithaca, New York. The project has two ambitious goals: to change the way science is experienced by those in underserved communities, and to collect relevant data that can improve the quality of life for both humans and birds in these same communities.

"At Camp Compass, through our pursuit of nature, we have shared hundreds of 'no noise experiences' with children" says founder John Annoni. "Time spent with a lack of noise creates a deep awareness and hunger for those special moments."

The noise study is also being conducted by community-based organizations throughout the United States and Mexico. Representatives from all organizations chose noise pollution as the topic they wanted to study. The overarching goal is to create a continental community science project and then take it to the international level.

"This community science project is very different from anything we've done before," says Karen Purcell at the Cornell Lab. "It is being developed by underserved communities collaborating with the Lab on an equal footing—it's the difference between a project that is imposed on people from the outside and a project that takes shape from within a community—a project that's personally relevant and better reflects the cultural and economic realities of African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and other underserved communities."

During this first year of the three-year effort, Camp Compass is gathering information and working out the details of the project through surveys, community conversations, and an innovative research technique called PhotoVoice in which participants answer research questions using photography from their community. That information will be used to develop a special app that records and measures neighborhood sound levels. The app, to be developed at the Cornell Lab based on community input, will even allow the user to indicate how they are affected by the level of noise. The data will be stored at the Cornell Lab and be open to all communities.



Cardinals are found in Pennsylvania year-round. Their whistles and songs can be affected by noise pollution. Photo by Brian E. [load image.](#)

The community participants will also be creating "sound refuges" where people can go for a little peace and quiet and to connect with nature—particularly birds. Numerous studies have shown that noise pollution is bad for human wellbeing and that connecting with birds and nature has very positive effects. Likewise, studies have found that noise pollution harms birds, creating changes in their behavior and reducing their reproductive success. Birds are a superb indicator of the health of the environment. If birds are being affected by noise, then people are, too.

"The project will have an impact far beyond our own students," Annoni says. "We want to change the health and knowledge of the entire community here and beyond. It's an honor to be trusted to help oversee this initiative as a teacher, leader, and community member."

"As a scientific institution, the Cornell Lab is trying to understand what we need to do differently to include more voices in science," Purcell explains. "This is not just about getting a paper published. It's about benefitting the participating communities—increasing the wellbeing of both humans and birds."

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