



Solutions to Common Backyard Bird Feeding Problems

Squirrels

Squirrels get hungry too, but those cute furry critters not only eat up all the seed, but they also can potentially damage or destroy your feeder. Our solution: Feed 'em or defeat 'em.

Divert squirrels from your bird feeders by giving them their own feeder. Fill it with food such as peanuts and corn, and that should keep them happy. If you want to feed the squirrels, be sure to place the food in a platform tray or nut box away from windowsills and doorways—you don't want to invite these creatures to chew through your screens or doors. And, keep their food away from your bird feeding stations.

Squirrel Solutions

Offer Safflower

- Safflower is a small, white seed that is high in protein and fat. Many favorite backyard birds - including jays, cardinals, chickadees, House Finches, doves, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, titmice and White-breasted Nuthatches - savor safflower. Blackbirds, grackles and squirrels typically do not.
- Start by offering safflower gradually, mixing it with the seed or seed blends you currently provide. Over time increase the amount of safflower until you are offering straight safflower. The seed looks and tastes different from other bird seed, so it may take your birds some time to adjust.

Squirrel-proof Feeders

- If you want to keep these critters from devouring your best bird food, try a "squirrel-proof" feeder. Squirrel-proof feeders, such as our Fundamentals Squirrel-proof Feeder and our Eliminator, are designed to keep squirrels from reaching seed.

Squirrel-resistant Setups

If you want to keep squirrels from bothering your existing bird feeder setup, there are many things you can do:

- Place a baffle on your feeder pole above or below the feeder. Stove pipe-type baffles can deter squirrels when the baffle is placed underneath the feeder, and the feeder is above 5 feet high and 8 feet to 10 feet away from other objects.
- Dome baffles must be large enough to cover the feeder and keep squirrels from accessing the feeder when it is hung on a pole or in a tree. The feeder should be hung 8 to 10 feet away from other objects.
- Try an On-Guard™ wire mesh cage around your existing feeders. This cage is designed specifically to fit the Wild Birds Unlimited Seed Tube feeders, peanut feeders, and suet cages and can be fitted to smaller tube feeders.

Squirrel Facts:

- Squirrels spend a lot of time eating, and they eat more than their body weight in food each week.
- These rodents have two sharp incisors that make it easy for them to gnaw through nuts (these incisors can also chew through many feeders!)
- Squirrels can jump from four to six feet vertically and eight to 10 feet between objects.
- They can cling to objects with the toes on their back feet—this lets them hang upside down and use their front paws to stuff their faces.
- Squirrels can smell food from great distances which makes it easy for them to detect bird food.

Keep Your Backyard Birds Healthy

If you love watching birds, then you want to make sure they return to your yard again and again. If they find a relatively safe habitat with fresh food and water, chances are they will come back - frequently. There are several things you can do in your yard to ensure the health of your backyard birds.

A Guide to Healthy Bird Feeding

- Provide multiple feeding stations in different areas of your yard. When birds crowd at feeders, they can become stressed and more vulnerable to disease.
- Clean your feeders frequently.
- Keep seed fresh and dry and always provide food in a feeder, not scattered on the ground.
- Regularly clean the area underneath your feeders by disposing of hulls. Ask us for tidy feeding solutions.
- Move feeders periodically to lessen the concentration of bird droppings.
- Place feeders 10 to 12 feet from bushes so cats and other predators can't surprise birds at the feeders.
- Disinfect your feeders with a 10% bleach solution if your feeders are moldy or you find a dead bird that has not been killed by a predator.
- Provide fresh water and clean your bird bath regularly.
- Always wash your hands after filling or cleaning your feeders.

Common Bird Diseases

- *Salmonellosis* (sal-muh-nel-LOW-sis)

This is a common disease among feeder birds. The bacteria can spread when healthy birds eat food contaminated with droppings from infected birds.

- *Trichomoniasis** (trick-oh-mo-NYE-uh-sis)

A single-celled organism causes this disease by producing lesions in the upper digestive tract of primarily doves and pigeons. Infected birds sometimes become unable to swallow and starve.

- *Aspergillosis** (as-per-jill-OH-sis)

The *Aspergillus* fungus (mold) grows on damp seed and in debris beneath feeders. Birds inhale the fungal spores, and the fungus spreads through their lungs and air sacs causing bronchitis and pneumonia.

- *Avian Pox**

The virus that causes irregular wart-like growths on birds' legs, feet and faces can spread by close contact among birds.

- *Mycoplasmal Conjunctivitis**

This disease is caused by the microorganism *mycoplasma gallisepticum* and is transmitted by direct contact, airborne droplets or dust. Birds contract conjunctivitis, an infection of eye membranes. House Finches are quite susceptible to this disease, and it has been identified in a few American Goldfinches.

*Cannot be contracted by humans

Preventing Window Strikes

Many birds fly into windows because they cannot see the glass. During migration, this can be particularly deadly because birds can hit windows with incredible force. Some birds fly at the window because they see their reflection and think it's another bird invading their territory.

Make your windows safer for the birds—and yourself—by following these suggestions:

- Locate feeders and bird baths 30+ feet from your windows. If you want your feeders close to your windows, move them to within one to three feet of the window, or put up a window feeder. That way, if birds hit the window when "fleeing a predator," they will not be going fast enough to harm themselves.
- Where practical, use window screens.
- Place decals, including cutouts of raptors, and leaded glass decorations in windows.
- Put vertical exterior tape strips four inches apart on windows.
- Use interior vertical blinds and open the slats halfway.
- Cover windows with soap if appropriate.
- Plant shade trees outside windows to reduce the reflection.

Finding an Orphaned Bird

Caring for an orphaned or injured bird is not an easy task and should be left to people who know how to do it best. This brochure outlines steps to be taken so that the bird has a chance for survival while you wait for assistance from a qualified wildlife rehabilitator.

Step 1:

To rescue or not?

Most baby birds do not need rescuing, so it is important to determine if the bird is truly orphaned. Fledglings might be on the ground because they are learning to fly. By "rescuing them" you might interfere with the course of nature. Keep yourself out of view and watch for at least two to three hours for the return of the mother or father bird. If no parent returns during that time, you might have found an orphaned bird.

Step 2:

What's next?

If the bird is not in danger from predators, you should leave it on the ground. If you can locate the nest, you can return the baby bird to the nest. Birds cannot smell a human scent so the parent birds will not reject the baby bird if you touch it. Predators, however, can detect your scent and it can make it easier for cats, raccoons and other predators to find the baby bird.

Step 3:

Call a wildlife rehabilitator.

If you are pretty sure you have found an orphaned bird, call a professional wildlife rehabilitator. It is illegal under federal wildlife law for you to have a wild bird – even an orphan – in your possession unless you are a licensed rehabilitator. Our staff at Wild Birds Unlimited can help you locate a rehabilitator and give you advice on what to do while you wait for the rehabilitator to arrive.

Step 4:

While you wait...

If you must care temporarily for the orphaned bird, it's important to keep the baby bird warm. You can do this by using a heating pad set on low heat, a hot water bottle or even hot water in a glass jar wrapped in a towel. In addition, create a nest-like environment for the bird so the baby bird can rest its head. Use paper towels for your nest. Other material, such as cotton, cloth and paper can catch easily in the bird's toenails. Do not use grass clippings because they could be damp and cold. Do not attempt to feed the bird.

Stop Woodpeckers from Pounding on Your House

Are woodpeckers drumming at your downspouts or rat-tat-tatting on your home? They may be trying to attract a mate or proclaim their territory. When woodpeckers are courting, it's common for them to show their availability through special flight displays, calling or drumming. Typically this happens in late winter through late spring. They may be searching for food - insects. Woodpeckers love insects, and they could be pecking away at the wood because they think insects are present. They may be trying to build a nest, although this is not common. Some woodpeckers can hammer nesting holes through siding and insulation. Whatever the reason, chances are you want to stop them. There are two main ways to do this - scare away the woodpecker or keep him from accessing the area.

Scaring Woodpeckers

- Throw a little "cold water" on the woodpecker by spraying him with water from a garden hose.
- Suspend light pie plates and metal can lids from a string and jerk the line whenever the bird appears.
- Hang bright mylar strips from the area.
- Hang pinwheels with reflective vanes to the area, and be sure they rotate.
- Place silhouettes of snakes, owls and hawks near the area so they blow in the breeze. To be most effective, play recorded calls of birds of prey.

Excluding Woodpeckers

- Cover the area with plastic or nylon netting or install a screen over the area to keep the woodpecker out.
- Create an alternative tapping surface such as a wooden box or metal cylinder in a location where the tapping will not annoy you.
- Place a woodpecker nest box over the area. If the bird is trying to create a nesting location, he may stop and use the box.