

BirdNotes

from Sapsucker Woods

Interpreting and conserving the earth's biological diversity through research, education, and citizen science focused on birds.

Making Your Windows Safe for Birds

You hear a loud thud at your living room window. Looking up, you see a few tiny feathers stuck to the glass.



Bird-window crashes are an all-too-common phenomenon. These collisions usually involve small birds, such as finches, that fall unnoticed to the ground. Sometimes the birds are merely stunned and recover in a few moments. Often, however, they die. The number of birds killed by collisions with windows is staggering—estimates range as high as 100 million per year.

Does this mean that you should stop feeding birds? Not at all. It means that if you notice birds striking your windows, you should take steps to eliminate the problem.

Some Solutions

- Move feeders to new locations. Usually bird strikes occur at just one or two windows. Moving feeders away from them may solve the problem entirely.
- Place feeders closer to the glass. If a feeder is just a foot or two from a window, panicked birds may still fly into it, but they probably won't have enough momentum to injure themselves.
- Alter the windows' appearance. If you don't want to move your feeders, or if relocating them

doesn't solve your problem, you'll need to alter the appearance of the offending windows. But to do this, you'll need to figure out why the collisions are occurring. Ask some questions. Are birds confused because the window is reflecting the landscape behind it? Is the glass so transparent they think it isn't there? To find out, you'll need to get a bird's-eye view.

Take a Bird's-Eye View

See-Through Glass

Go to your feeder and look at your window. Can you see through it? If so, the birds can, too. Is there a plant or something else inside the house that might be attractive to birds? If so, try moving it. Is there another window on the opposite side of the house, creating the illusion of a fly-through passage? Try making your windows less transparent by changing the lighting inside the house—pull a shade or open or close a door.

You can also make glass less transparent by taping paper or cardboard to the inside of the panes. This is unsightly, but it's a good temporary measure until you can find a better solution. Commercially available hawk silhouettes are effective at deterring window strikes, as long as you use several. They work not because they look like hawks, but because they break up the window's appearance. Another possible solution is to put up a commercially available



decal that is a replica stabilimentum or white zig-zag from the center of an orbital spider's web. It is thought that spiders create the highly visible zig-zag so birds and large insects will avoid flying into and destroying their webs. Note: Do not attach objects directly to thermopane windows without consulting the manufacturer.

Reflective Windows

Windows that mirror the outside habitat present a different problem. If you see branches or sky reflected in the glass when you look at your windows, you'll understand why the birds are confused. In this situation, changing the lighting inside

Netting is another solution. It won't obstruct your view, and birds will bounce off

the house or fastening objects to the inside of the glass won't help.

Instead, you'll need to alter the window's appearance by placing something on the outside. As a temporary measure, you can rub a bar of soap on the window (the streaks can be easily removed).

Other solutions suggested by participants in Project Feeder-Watch include attaching strips of paper or cardboard to the window, hanging ribbons, streamers, colored string, festive garlands, or even mobiles in front of it.

One California FeederWatcher was determined to put an end to bird

collisions at her home. She criss-crossed her big picture windows with dead tree limbs. She claims success.

Screens and Netting

Another solution is to place some kind of screen or netting over the window. This won't obstruct the view—in fact, birds will continue to fly into the window. They should, however, bounce off relatively unharmed. One FeederWatcher from Montana says she hasn't had even one window strike since stretching black fishing net over her windows. At the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, we installed fruit-tree netting, pulling it tightly over the large picture window next to the bird-feeding garden. The result? No more injured birds.

Treating Dazed Birds

Birds don't always die when they strike windows. Sometimes they fly away, apparently unharmed; other times they fall to the ground, stunned. If you find a dazed bird, take it inside where predators can't reach it and place it in a dark container such as a shoe box. The darkness will keep the bird quiet while it revives, which should occur within a few minutes, unless it is seriously injured. Release the bird as soon as it appears awake and alert.

Some Related Topics

Home windows aren't the only flying hazard birds face, of course. A couple of other dangers include blind collisions with tall buildings and towers. Migrating birds can even be attracted to building and tower lights. For more information on these topics, go to the following web sites: <<http://towerkill.com>> and <<http://www.flap.org/>>.

Summary and Reminder

You might not always see or hear birds striking your windows. Check the ground below your windows periodically. If you find dead birds, move your feeders or modify the windows. Birds face plenty of natural dangers. Let's not subject them to unnatural ones.

Enhance Your Enjoyment of Birds and Help Promote a Better Understanding of Them

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