

Birds + Windows = Nasty Collisions, Springtime Hazard

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Spring's arrival brings an array of exciting bird-related events, including the return of our beloved songbirds. Along the way, birds suffer from cat attacks, habitat loss, and pesticide poisoning, to name just a few hazards. But, surprisingly window collisions are the number one killer of birds. Why, what can you do to help an injured or stunned bird, and how can you prevent these nasty accidents?

According to Dr. Daniel Klem of Muhlenberg College, who has done studies of window/bird collisions for over 20 years, glass kills more birds than any other factor, well over 100 million birds per year.

Here are some likely scenarios explaining why:

- Birds see reflected images of trees and clouds in the windows and fly right into them, thinking there is nothing there.
- Birds flee from predators, or birds that chase each other such as two, territorial hummingbirds. These birds are even more likely to collide with windows because they are in a panicked state. They may just be stunned and will recover, but, more often than not, these birds are left with severe internal injuries and death.
- Birds attack windows, seeing their reflection on the other side. They mistake this reflection for a rival bird and will repeatedly hit the window, trying to chase the "other bird" away. This often happens with birds such as male cardinals. Although this behavior can be irritating to the people inside, it doesn't usually result in the injury or death of the bird.

How to help a stunned bird

If you find a victim of a window collision:

- Gently pick it up with a pillowcase or dishtowel and place it in a shoebox or similar box. Once you have it in the box, handle the bird as little as possible.
- Place the box in a dark, safe place like your garage, bathroom, or mudroom. If it is cold outside, bring the box inside.
- The bird may recover in as little as a few minutes. Release it outside as soon as it recovers, when it is standing upright and alert.
- If the bird does not recover within a couple of hours, call a local wildlife rehabilitator or nature center for help.

Prevent window collisions

If you have a house or work in a building with windows of any kind, a bird has probably hit your windows. Basically, if you see branches or sky reflected from your window when you look at it from the outside, the birds are seeing it, too. Often, the victims are small birds, such as finches, which usually go unnoticed or fall prey to predators before they are noticed. How can you help to protect the birds in your yard or at your workplace?

For tinted windows: At the Boonshoft Museum, we have a large installation of tinted windows in our lobby; the tinting easily reflects the image of trees, resulting in at least 10 birds a year hitting the glass. To reduce this problem, we have just installed “Window Alert” stickers (www.windowalert.org). These clear stickers are placed on the outside of the windows; while they are not easily seen by the human eye, birds can see the ultraviolet light reflecting off of them. This reflection alerts the birds that something is in front of them. The stickers are easy to install, are fairly affordable, and come off when needed.

For non-tinted windows: If you don’t have tinted windows, you can use black hawk silhouettes, spider web stickers, or you can even put an “x” on the outside of your window with black mechanical tape to achieve the same result.

Here are a few other strategies you can try to help prevent window/bird collisions:

- Relocate your feeders and birdbaths further away from your windows.
- Break up the external reflection caused from your windows by using stickers, colored plastic wrap, or even spray streaks of spray snow on the *outside* of your window.
- Hang items on the outside of your window such as pie plates, old CD’s or strips of aluminum.

Even more ideas, along with a wealth of information relating to this topic, can be found at Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP), a Toronto-based non-profit (www.flap.org).

For realted calssroom project suggestions, visit the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at www.birds.cornell.edu to learn about Project FeederWatch as well as the Golden-winged Warbler Atlas Project, the Great Backyard Bird Count, and Urban Bird Studies, among others. Also, make sure children know what to do if they find an injured wild bird outside; the “Need Help?” section of the website for the National Wildlife Rehabilitator’s Association (www.nrawildlife.org) has loads of information on what to do and whom to contact.

Kids can help, too

Getting children excited about birds and other wildlife can be a huge asset in protecting our wild species. Here are some activities to get them involved in helping birds:

- Hang feeders outside your classroom window and conduct a bird study with your class throughout the year. Participating in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s Project FeederWatch is a great way for kids to get involved. They also offer the Golden-

winged Warbler Atlas Project, the Great Backyard Bird Count, and Urban Bird Studies, among others. Go to www.birds.cornell.edu for more information.

- Encourage your school or facility to install “Window Alert” stickers on the outside of the windows. If you let your school administration know how important this would be for education and conservation, they may want to get involved.
- Educate your children on what to do if they find an injured wild bird outside. They should always try to put babies back in the nest and take any injured birds to a licensed rehabilitator. Visit www.nwra.org for more information.
- When doing a lesson on wildlife conservation, connect the lesson to the wildlife in your area. For older students, they can do their own research and design their own solutions to local problems. Window collisions, cat predation, pesticide use, and habitat loss is going to be an issue in almost every Ohio county.

