

Feeding wild birds benefits both us *AND* the birds!

Wild bird feeding is one of the most popular interactions we have with wildlife...

Interacting with birds has been shown to decrease our stress levels¹. It also is a daily source of connection to nature for people who live in urban settings.



...and it benefits the birds too!

Many non-game bird populations are declining worldwide². One reason is habitat destruction. Feeding wild birds, and creating a bird friendly yard, helps support their conservation.



Research has shown us that wild birds that are feeder-fed are less stressed and more physically fit than birds that are not provisioned.³

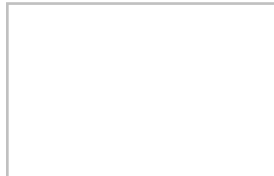
References

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2. Rosenberg et al. 2019. Science 366(6461):120-124
3. Wilcoxon et al. 2015. Conserv Physiol. 3(1)
4. Loss et al. 2013. Nat Commun. 4:1396

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PREVENTING DISEASE AT BIRD FEEDERS



Diseases are natural within wild bird populations...

Even so, your own actions can help limit the spread of disease within wild bird populations. Bird feeders attract many birds to a single location where possible transmission of disease between birds can occur. By being proactive you can help to limit the impact bird feeders have on the spread of disease within feeder bird populations.

What are some signs of a sick bird?

A sick bird could have obvious signs of disease, such as red, swollen eyes (Conjunctivitis) or lesions on its facial skin or legs (pox), or not. Instead, its behavior may be an indicator. Is the bird sitting still with its eyes shut and feathers fluffed out? Can you walk up to it without it flying away? These are signs of a lethargic, stressed bird and it could be sick.

Common diseases that occur naturally in bird populations but can spread more easily at bird feeders stem from:



Bacteria: infections include Salmonellosis and Conjunctivitis. Salmonellosis can be deadly for birds and is spread through contact with infected poop. Conjunctivitis, a result of a *Mycoplasma* bacterial infection, is more common in finch species and causes red, swollen eyes. Both diseases contribute to lethargic behavior.



Viruses: infections include Avian Pox, which produces lesions on bare parts of a bird's face and legs. It is highly contagious and spreads through surfaces that infected birds have touched. Avian influenza is also a viral disease.

Avian Influenza "Bird Flu"

There are many types of influenza, some of which primarily infect birds. Ducks, geese, and shorebirds are more commonly infected, with the virus targeting respiratory and digestive tracts. The virus is spread from contact with saliva and feces. Though influenza in wild birds typically causes only mild symptoms, it is when infected birds are sources of viral transmission to commercial poultry farms that there are many mortalities.

Though the threat of bird flu to backyard feeder birds (& people) is often minimal, people who keep chickens, geese, and ducks should be cautious. To minimize transmission potential between wild birds and your backyard poultry, consider taking down feeders temporarily until the threat passes.

...but hobbyists can

#FeedSmart to help prevent disease with these simple tips!

TIP 1

REGULARLY CLEAN FEEDERS

The most effective way to clean bird feeders is a combination of washing with dish soap and then soaking them in a 9:1 bleach solution (i.e., 9 qt water to 1 qt bleach) for fifteen minutes. WBF1 recommends at least bi-weekly cleaning. To make this process easier, switch feeders out as they are cleaned so there is always a clean and dry feeder as a backup.



- Clean feeders away from where food is prepared and always wash your hands!
- Allow feeders to completely dry prior to refilling, as damp bird seed promotes mold growth that can harm birds.

TIP 2

CLEAN BIRD BATHS

Clean water features with the same solution from Tip #1. Water in bird baths should be replaced daily, year-round, to prohibit algal and bacterial growth.



TIP 3

CLEAN AREAS UNDER FEEDERS FREQUENTLY

Removing feces and moldy food from under feeders will help reduce disease transmission.

TIP 4

KEEP CATS INDOORS

Cats can contract and transmit diseases from wild birds. But also it is well documented⁴ that cats are a large source of annual wild bird mortalities. It is safer for your cat, for you, and for the birds to keep cats inside.

TIP 5

DO NOT TOUCH OR HAND-FEED BIRDS

If you find a bird that could be sick, call your state wildlife agency or wildlife rehabilitator and follow their instructions. Always wash your hands after handling anything that you may believe to be contaminated.



Bird feces collects more readily on flat platform feeders compared to cylinder feeders. This can contribute to higher transmission of diseases like Salmonellosis. During an avian disease outbreak, it is safest to take these platform feeders down temporarily. After several weeks, put the clean and dry feeders back up!