

Integrated Pest Management in the Home: Have Birds Become a Bother? Facts about Birds¹

Katherine Allen, LuAnn Duncan, Nelly Nelson, Lisa Hamilton, Judy Corbus, Karen Stauderman, Faith Oi, Jim Davis, and Shelly Johnson²

Filling birdfeeders and watching the feathered visitors can be an enjoyable pastime. Although most birdwatching is usually a good experience, all birds, even bird species that people generally like, can become a nuisance if they are unwanted, if they damage property, or if they spread disease. Birdfeeders, spilled food, uncovered trash cans, and improperly managed compost piles are common attractants for unwanted birds. The Integrated Pest Management (IPM) in the Home Series is intended to provide answers to frequently asked questions from the public. This publication provides information to educate homeowners on appropriate ways to deal with nuisance birds.



Any bird can become a nuisance in large numbers if they are unwanted or cause damage. Credit: *Bird Barrier*, used with permission.

What problems can birds cause?

Some examples include:

- Bird nests in chimneys can result in fire hazards.
- Birds can damage rigid foam insulation, wood siding, or other building components.
- Bird droppings (fecal excrement) are slippery, unsightly, and unsanitary. They can cause electrical equipment to malfunction and can reduce pond water

quality and damage flower beds, paint, and other surfaces.

- Nuisance birds can drive off desirable birds at feeders or compete for nest sites.
- Certain species are known to harass people and pets, especially when nesting.

Birds are protected in the USA and Florida.

Although many species of birds could be considered a nuisance in Florida, there are protections for most birds. Native birds are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. It is prohibited to pursue, hunt, take, capture, kill, or attempt to take, capture or kill, or possess any native bird, nest, or egg. Thus, you can only remove nests of native birds after they have been abandoned and if no eggs or young are present. This does *not* apply to birds introduced to the United States, including pigeons, house sparrows, starlings, and Eurasian collared doves. Please refer to the [Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918](#) and [U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service List of Birds](#) for more information.

Why are birds nesting, roosting, and/or gathering near my home?

Food, water, and shelter are common attractants for all birds. Birdseed will of course attract them, but many landscape plants, too, can provide food. Birdbaths, ponds, water features, or standing water can attract birds to drink or bathe. Trees as well as common house features such as ledges, rafters, beams, cavities, eaves, shutters, outdoor light fixtures, and unsealed attics are common locations for roosting and nesting. Infrequently used equipment can also create attractive roosting or nesting places for birds.



Nest in dryer vent; only remove nests when they are abandoned and no eggs or young are present.

Credit: *Bird Barrier*, used with permission.

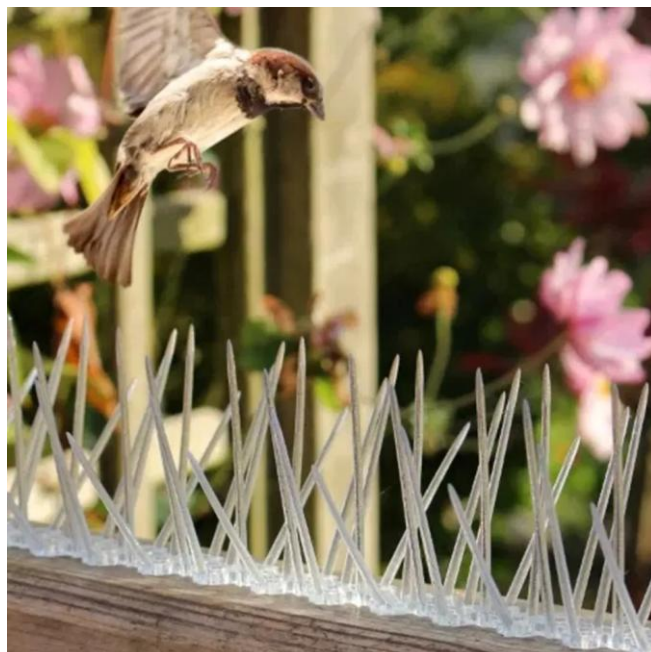
How can I make my yard less attractive to birds?

Remember, you cannot choose which birds come to your native plants, birdbath, or feeder. If you do not want to attract birds to your yard:

- Eliminate potential food and water sources.
- Cover fruit bushes and trees with nylon netting.
- Remove vines on walls or fences.
- Consider plant varieties that do not produce berries.

Your neighborhood might have food or water sources that are beyond your control. If so, very likely birds will gather nearby and will sometimes appear in your yard. Usually, if specific attractions are missing in your yard, passing birds will move on quickly and not linger or assemble in great numbers. If you do see large groups of birds or notice birds remaining in your yard longer than a few moments, check your space again and eliminate sources of food, water, and shelter that could attract them, bearing in mind that the house itself may be the culprit. (See the subsection “How can I make my house less attractive to birds?”)

Note: While motion-activated sprinklers or timed inflatable scare devices may work in the short-term, birds become habituated to these devices over time, thereby reducing their effectiveness.



Repellent spikes can make a house less attractive to birds. Credit: *Defender Bird Spikes*, used with permission.

How can I make my house less attractive to birds?

The best time to consider how to prevent birds from using your home, garage, or shed as a roosting or nesting site is before construction or renovation. To exclude birds:

- Include exterior design elements, features, and materials that minimize or eliminate potential nesting and perching locations.
- Create a physical barrier to limit prospective roosting or nesting sites by creating a physical barrier.
- Seal any opening 3/4 inch or larger.
- Install a chimney cap.

If an existing building is attracting unwanted birds, solutions include:

- Bird netting. Install a 1/4-inch screen or net mesh. Screen the undersides of rafters with nylon netting, sealing openings at all ends.
- Bird repellent spikes. Typically used in commercial properties, these are best used to protect perching (non-nesting) locations. Use spikes only in areas where people are unlikely to encounter them.
- Plexiglass, wood blocks, sheet metal, or smooth, rigid plastic. Use these items to reduce perching areas around the soffits of the dwelling. Increase the angle of ledges to 45 degrees to make them less desirable as perching areas. Close off ends that are open under eaves.
- In cases of woodpecker damage, eliminate insect infestations.

- Remove abandoned nests. Ensure nests are truly abandoned, with no eggs present. Bear in mind that all active nests of native bird species are protected by law, and if you are unsure of the age of a nest, watch it for a few days to ensure no adult birds are actively building the nest in preparation for laying eggs.

If you have a Homeowner's Association, check with them before installing deterrents or modifying your home's exterior. If you rent, get permission from the rental-management company or landlord before any installation or modification. To be effective, deterrents must be installed properly.

Note: Over time, birds become used to stationary bird-of-prey or snake decoys and frightening devices that emit sound or light. These methods may work for a short time, but they are not effective long-term solutions.

Consider contacting a professional pest control operator who is appropriately licensed, insured, and experienced with bird management, especially for large or complicated jobs. Professionals you hire should have a minimum of a general household pest license or wildlife management permit or removal certificate.) Regulations vary depending on the species and local rules. Your [state wildlife commission](#) can assist.



Install screen or net mesh to prevent birds from settling. Credit: *Bird Barrier*, used with permission.

Do birds carry disease?

Birds can be linked with mites, ticks, fleas, and flies. Use caution when cleaning up droppings in any confined area to avoid inhaling fungal spores that can cause histoplasmosis (*Histoplasma capsulatum*). Remove droppings found inside structures. Bird droppings can attract other pests, such as cockroaches or flies, so it is important to clean up thoroughly after birds have left.

How do I protect myself when cleaning after birds?

Wear protective gear. At the very least, appropriate personal protective equipment for a bird-remediation project should include:

- Disposable gloves
- Washable or disposable protective clothing (with hood to cover your head if dust can fall from above)
- Shoes or boots that can be washed or cleaned
- An N-95 mask
- Eye protection
- A P100 or HEPA mask (if you have asthma or known allergies)

Proper cleaning tips:

- Lightly dampen droppings with warm, soapy water to minimize dust and prevent contaminants from getting into the air where they might be inhaled. Use a HEPA vacuum to remove large deposits of droppings.
- Seal all disposable clothing in a bag and dispose with the cleaned-up waste or wash separately.
- Clean floors to prevent tracking throughout the house.

Remember you cannot choose which birds visit your home, but you can make it less inviting.

For more information:

- Contact your local county Extension office: <https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu>
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission: <https://myfwc.com/conservation/you-protect/wildlife/>
- How to Use Deterrents to Stop Damage Caused by Nuisance Wildlife in Your Yard (WEC326/UW371 ufl.edu): <https://journals.flvc.org/edis/article/view/120315>
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918: <https://www.fws.gov/law/migratory-bird-treaty-act-1918>
- National Wildlife Control Operators Association: <https://www.nwcoa.com/>
- Pigeons (SSWEC117/UW117 ufl.edu): <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/UW117>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service, Bird Dispersal Techniques: <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/Bird-Dispersal-Techniques-WDM-Technical-Series.pdf>
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service List of Birds Protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act: <https://www.fws.gov/media/list-birds-protected-migratory-bird-treaty-act-2023>

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² Katherine Allen, Extension agent IV, M.A., family and consumer sciences, UF/IFAS Extension Suwannee County, Live Oak, FL; LuAnn Duncan, Extension educator II, OSU Extension Mahoning County, OH; and Extension agent III emeritus, M.S., family and consumer sciences and food systems, UF/IFAS Extension Sumter County, Bushnell, FL; Nelly Nelson, Extension agent II, M.B.A., family and consumer sciences, UF/IFAS Extension Manatee County; Lisa Hamilton, Extension agent II, M.S., family and consumer sciences, UF/IFAS Extension Volusia County, DeLand, FL; Judy Corbus, multi-county Extension agent IV, family and consumer sciences, UF/IFAS Extension Washington and Holmes Counties; Karen Stauderman, Extension agent III, M.S., commercial horticulture, UF/IFAS Extension Volusia County, DeLand, FL; Faith M. Oi, Extension professor, urban entomology, Department of Entomology and Nematology; James E. Davis, Extension agent III, UF/IFAS Extension Sumter County; Shelly A. Johnson, state specialized Extension agent III, natural resources, UF/IFAS Extension, Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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