

SUMMARY

If not done properly, feeding and watering wild birds can negatively impact their health and welfare. The best approach is to attract birds to your property by creating natural "bird-friendly" habitat. However, if you do artificially feed and water birds, it is essential to follow the ABC's described to address common avian health problems associated with this activity. For a more detailed discussion of this topic visit the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative's webpage at http://www.cwhc-rcsf.ca/technical_reports.php and download the document **Strategies to Prevent and Control Bird Feeder Associated Diseases and Threats**.



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**STRATEGIES TO PREVENT AND
CONTROL BIRD FEEDER ASSOCIATED
DISEASES AND THREATS**

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STRATEGIES TO PREVENT AND CONTROL BIRD FEEDER ASSOCIATED DISEASES AND THREATS

Bird feeding by property owners is a popular year-round activity providing supplementary food to wild birds. However, it can increase the risk of spreading diseases. Prevention and control of disease and other threats to wild birds being fed by the public lay in the hands of the people feeding birds.

What You Can Do - The ABC's of Bird Feeding

- **A**void the unintended consequences of feeding that result from predation or trauma.
- **B**e vigilant, observant and conscientious by ensuring you have the capability to recognize, report and prevent the common diseases that can affect birds you attract to your yard.
- **C**ontact reduction - Create circumstances that decrease contact between uninfected and infected birds and/or with contaminated environments by:
 - a. Making bird-friendly habitat in your yard to decrease the need for supplemental feed to attract or nourish birds.
 - b. If you feed birds, use proper feeding techniques and hygienic feeding practices.

Avoid Unintended Predation and Trauma

- Place bird feeders < 3.5 metres from cover
- Have an unobstructed view around bird feeders
- Place fencing or barriers around low level bird feeders
- Keep domestic cats indoors, on a leash, or in a kennel. If this is not possible, cats should wear an anti-predation collar
- Use guarded feeders or install guards to discourage predators
- Regularly clean beneath feeders
- Feeders should be placed either > 10 metres or < 1 metre away from windows, building walls, and vehicles and put decals on windows or attach streamers outside them to prevent bird collisions

Be Vigilant with Surveillance - Recognize the Diseases

- Early action is critical to stop a disease outbreak
- Report sick or dead birds to your local federal, provincial or territorial wildlife agency and to your local CWHC regional centre which helps them understand and protect wild bird health
- Signs of disease: Difficulty swallowing/breathing; drooping; regurgitating food/water; swollen neck/throat; lethargy; thin; fluffed up feathers; difficulty/inability to fly; matted and wet feathers around the face and beak; puffy or extremely swollen eyelids with red tissue covering the corners of the eyes; fluid draining from the eyes/nose; rubbing eyes; accidental collisions; shivering/convulsions; incoordination; thin; diarrhea; rapid death with no apparent illness



Contact Reduction

The best way to prevent the transmission of diseases while feeding and watering birds is to reduce the rate of contact between unaffected and infected birds and/or with environments contaminated with pathogens.

- Provide "Bird friendly" gardens to attract birds to yards and parks in a sustainable, pesticide-free manner by using a diverse variety of regional native plants, including meadow or uncut grass, dense shrubs, hedge rows or thickets, mature stands of trees and dead trees, to meet the birds' needs for nutrition, breeding, protection from predators, and shelter from harsh weather
- If you do feed birds, do it in a manner that protects and promotes bird health by following these recommendations:

a. Remove bird feeders and artificial water sources during outbreaks of disease

- In the case of a summer disease outbreak, the bird feeders and artificial water sources should remain down until the first frost and cold weather
- In the case of a winter disease outbreak, the bird feeders and artificial water sources should remain down until insects emerge and the weather is consistently warm

b. Maintain hygiene:

- Empty bird feeders and artificial water sources twice a month to clean and disinfect them with hot, soapy water followed by a 2-3 minute soaking in a solution of 1 part bleach to 9 parts water and subsequently rinsing them and allowing them to air dry prior to refilling with bird seed or water
- Monitor bird feeders regularly to remove and dispose of any uneaten wet or moldy seed
- Clean up spilled seed underneath bird feeders that might attract unwanted wildlife

c. Protect your health:

- Wear gloves while cleaning bird feeders and artificial water sources and wash your hands well with soap and hot water when finished

d. Choose the right feeder:

- Use easy to clean feeders made of plastic, steel, or glass
- Select small feeders, these deter large gatherings of birds and empty quickly which prevent uneaten seeds from getting wet or spoiling
- Use feeders that do not allow birds to perch in or on the food to avoid contamination
- Avoid feeders with sharp edges or points that could cause injuries
- Choose feeders designed to only allow select species to feed. This reduces contact among species, a key strategy to prevent the exchange of pathogens among species
- Ensure feeders are guarded to prevent predation and attraction of non-target wildlife species, like rodents

e. Placement of feeders:

- Place at various heights and at widely separated locations to distance the birds from each other, reducing contact rates between them to minimize the potential for disease transmission

f. Feed the right food the correct way:

- Ensure bird food you use is high quality
- Verify it contains no "filler" seeds such as milo, red millet, flax, oats, rice and wheat that are generally not eaten by birds
- Only feed cracked corn in small amounts at a time to prevent problems with spoilage and contamination because it easily soaks up moisture



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