

For the Birds

Last summer we were entertaining friends at the cottage when a little bird, an oven bird, to be exact, collided with our picture window on our cottage. His neck was unfortunately broken. Our feathered friends are not only a wonder and a delight but many are important controls for insect pests. A world without these birds would be a world overrun by bugs. I decided to find out more about how to prevent or minimize these and other sad avian deaths. My research into human-caused bird mortality yielded the following information.

Many millions of birds are victims of window collisions around the world and our songbird populations are in steep decline. Birds don't see glass; they see the landscape reflected. At night, they may fly into windows that are lit so keep shades drawn at night or keep lights away from the windows where possible. Awnings hung over picture windows or patio doors, vertical blinds or sheers, strips of metallic ribbon hung in front of the windows, decals and sun catchers will help. Decals need to be numerous and placed fairly close together to be effective. Screens hung outside the glass window will reduce mortality. Placing bird feeders closer than 2 feet or greater than 10 feet away from windows will reduce bird collisions. In spite of these efforts, you may find a bird stunned on the ground after a collision. Place an injured bird in a shoe box or similar dark container for a few minutes to rest and recover, avoiding unnecessary handling of the bird. Don't try to give it food or water. Release it into the wild as soon as it appears awake and alert. Technically, it is illegal to handle a migratory bird without a permit.

On another bird related note, bird feeders not properly maintained can spread disease among birds. Some of the common diseases are *mycoplasmal conjunctivitis*, similar to pink eye in humans which has become particularly troublesome to house finches, *salmonellosis*, a salmonella bacteria affecting finches and house sparrows, *aspergillosis*, a type of fungi and *avian pox*, a virus affecting many birds including songbirds which is spread by mosquitoes and subsequently host feeder birds. Among other things, these diseases weaken birds, making them more vulnerable to predators and severe weather. To keep your bird feeder clean, empty it and brush out, then submerge it in a 10 % solution of bleach for 3 to 4 minutes. Dry completely before refilling. Do this about every 2 weeks. Any moldy food and also wasted seed below feeders should be disposed of. Also, continuing to feed birds in spring, summer and early fall can attract bears so it's best to put them away until late fall. Hummingbird feeders hung during spring and summer should be taken indoors at night and when you are away from home.

Other causes for bird deaths are house and feral cat predation. Cats are estimated to kill up to 350 million birds in Canada every year and are implicated in population declines and extinctions of several species. House cats should be kept inside or at the very least equipped with a bell collar when outdoors. By capturing roaming feral cats getting them spayed or neutered to lessen their numbers over time, you are doing a kindness for our birds. For more information about a local online organization dedicated to reducing the feral cat population, Google '*Minden Cat Angels*' or contact Don Kerr at 705 457-6923

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