Audubon International

Fact Sheet

Clear the Way for Birds

Flight is a magnificent means of transportation, but not without its dangers. For many birds, a journey across the skies ends with a deadly collision with windows, vehicles, cell towers, or high-tension wires. According to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the number of birds killed as a result of aerial collisions each year in the U.S. alone is estimated to be *in the billions*.

Have you ever been startled by the dull *thud* as a bird smacks the glass? If you have, you're not alone…and therein lies the significance of the problem. Millions of us all over the world are hearing that fateful sound and it will take the involvement of millions of us to reduce the number of collisions. Fortunately, greater awareness of the problem and improved solutions can help to reduce the number of bird deaths that occur each year.

The Problem with Windows

Bird collisions with windows occur both day and night, in all seasons, and in cities, suburbs, and rural areas. The problem occurs when birds don't see the glass, generally because it mirrors trees, shrubs, or sky, but sometimes when transparent panes appear to offer a passageway through a building.

"Observations and experiments over more than 30 years have revealed that birds act as if clear and reflective panes are invisible. They attempt to fly to habitat seen through a clear glass corridor or to vegetation or sky mirrored in reflective panes," says Daniel Klem, Ph.D., Professor of Ornithology and Conservation Biology at Muhlenberg College in Pennsylvania. "The result is that there is no time of day, season, location, window orientation, or weather condition in which birds are able to elude the hazard."

Among Klem's conclusions from years of research is that *bird density in the vicinity of windows* is the best predictor of the number of fatalities at any one site. That spells trouble for birds at feeders, where food is abundant and reflective windows are usually nearby.

There are several options for reducing or eliminating bird strikes. According to Klem, none are universally applicable or readily acceptable for all structures. The solution must fit the problem.

Reducing Collisions

1. Investigate:

If you've found dead birds, heard the thud of a bird hitting glass, or noticed a faint white impression of feathers on a window, take a closer look. Go outside for a bird's eye view of your windows and evaluate the situation. Is the glass reflective? Is it transparent, but offering birds a false impression of a passageway through a building? Are feeders too close?

2. Choose a solution:

Place bird feeders either very close to (within 3 feet) or far away from buildings (a minimum of 33 feet). Birds cannot build up enough momentum to injure themselves when flying to and from feeders that are very close to buildings. Conversely, when birds take flight quickly from feeders that are further from buildings, they are less likely to collide with windows.

3. Alter the window's appearance.

- ❒ Try hanging a mobile, wind sock, or strips of fabric to the outside of the window.
- ❒ Use an attractive window film, such as one that gives the appearance of glass etching or sandblasting to reduce reflections.
- ❒ Paint or stencil the window with soap or wax.
- ❒ Cover the window with garden protection netting or a screen.
- ❒ Hang multiple bird silhouettes on the outside of the window to break up the reflection.
- ❒ Replace standard windows with non-reflective glass, such as stained or frosted glass.
- ❒ Abstain from nighttime lighting, especially in taller office buildings that are not used at night. During peak spring and fall migration, dim or extinguish rooftop display lighting and lobby lights after 11pm.
- ❒ Draw drapes and close blinds, when possible, when window transparency is a problem.

Songbirds may collide with taller building during migration, or strike windows while chasing mates or defending territories

4. Check your success:

Periodically look for dead birds. You may need to try multiple solutions before finding the best one for your situation. Birds will sometimes appear stunned after striking a window, but will eventually recover and be able to fly again. If you find a bird that has hit a window, gently place it in a cardboard box or paper bag and keep it in a quiet, undisturbed area indoors. Check the bird every 20 minutes or so to see whether it appears to have regained strength and may be ready for release. Once the bird has recovered, release it outside. If the bird is unable to fly, contact a local wildlife rehabilitator for assistance.

Resources

Chicago Bird Collision Monitors (CGCM), www.birdmonitors.net**,** rescues migratory birds injured from striking buildings and works to mitigate the risk of bird-building collisions by educating the public and working with building managers and architects to find solutions.

Cornell Lab of Ornithology, www.birds.cornell.edu/programs/AllAboutBirds/ *All About Birds* is an excellent online resource for identifying and attracting birds. Visit the page titled, "Why Birds Hit Windows — And How You Can Help Prevent It" for Cornell's tips for reducing bird collisions.

Acopian Center for Ornithology, https://www.muhlenberg.edu/academics/biology/acopiancenterfororn ithology/, is a great resource for the most up to date research. Visit the page titled, "Birds and Windows" for resources specifically on bird strikes.

The Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP), www.flap.org, is working to inform Canadians and Americans about the dangers of buildings to migratory birds. Information on its Bird-Friendly Building Program is online. To reduce window reflections, FLAP recommends a window treatment from 3M: *3M™ Scotchcal™ Perforated Window Marking Film 8171, a 4-5 mil vinyl film that adheres to the exterior surface of a window. Thousands of small perforations in this covering allow ample light to pass through the window to the interior, while substantially reducing the window's exterior reflectivity and transparency, the two characteristics that cause birds to collide with windows.* For details, visit the FLAP website.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, https://www.fws.gov/birds/bird-enthusiasts/backyard/bird-problems.php**,** provides a number of fact sheets on Backyard Bird Problems.

International Migratory Bird Day, https://www.migratorybirdday.org/, celebrates the incredible journeys of migratory birds between their breeding grounds in North America and their wintering grounds in Mexico, Central, and South America. The Web site offers information about numerous events and provides educational information.

Bird Strike vs. Intentional Hit

Each spring, we get many phone calls from people who report that birds are intentionally and repeatedly flying into their windows. This type of bird strike rarely results in death, but it can be annoying and puzzling. This type of intentional strike occurs predominately during spring mating season, when birds are establishing a breeding territory.

Birds may attempt to drive off intruders of their own species—even if the intruder is a mere reflection of themselves—to keep the invader out of their turf. A reflective window is always to blame for this behavior. Try one of the solutions above for reducing the reflection. The situation generally improves after nesting is underway.

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