



HOW TO HANDLE BIRDFEEDER PESTS

There are several birds and mammals that most backyard naturalists consider pests around the bird feeding station. Most nuisance critters – squirrels, raccoons, possum, deer, starlings, blackbirds, grackles, house sparrows – can be controlled by restricting access to feeders or changing to a different seed.

Feeder Access Restriction

You can prevent mammals from raiding your bird feeder if you locate it properly. Pole mounted or pole hung feeders should be placed at least 10' away from a "launching pad" because squirrels can jump about 8 - 10' horizontally. Then, in order to prevent mammals from climbing the pole, you must fit it with a baffle. There are can-shaped baffles, conical-shaped baffles and flat circular baffles. The can-shaped baffles seem to be the most effective. Baffles should be placed at least 5' off the ground to prevent squirrels from jumping over them and accessing the feeders. There are oversized baffles to prevent raccoons from climbing feeder poles, too. If you put your feeder in a tree, the only way a hanging-feeder baffle will be effective is if it is large enough to cover the whole feeder and the feeder is hung at least 8-10' from the tree trunk, or other "launching pad".

Controlling Pests with Bird Seed

Grackles and blackbirds are such voracious eaters and arrive in such numbers that they can empty your sunflower seed feeder in one afternoon! The good news is that neither bird likes safflower seed. Safflower is a white oil seed similar in size and shape to black oil sunflower seeds (refer to What Type of Seed do Birds Prefer"). To rid your backyard of these pesky birds, replace your sunflower seeds with safflower seeds in your feeders until late fall when most blackbirds and grackles move further south for the winter. A side benefit of using safflower seed is that most squirrels do not like the bitter taste and they, too, will stay away from the feeder!

If starlings and house sparrows are the problem, it is probably because you are using a mixed seed. Both these birds prefer the millet found in most mixes. You can eliminate starlings and house sparrows by switching to safflower seed as well. If starlings are a problem on your suet feeder, purchase an "upside down" suet feeder. Woodpeckers and other desirable birds have no problem feeding upside down, but starlings cannot hang on very long in that position, making them less of a nuisance.

Feeders

There are several different feeders on the market now that are designed to eliminate nuisance mammals and birds. Some feeders have cages around them to allow only smaller birds access to the seed inside. Some feeders close when the weight of a squirrel lands on the perches. There are also feeders with domes that can be lowered so the larger birds and squirrels cannot get inside.

If you are having trouble with pesky creatures in your backyard, talk to the "backyard bird feeding experts" at Wild About Birds. We've got baffles, critter proof feeders and specialty seeds that can help you eliminate unwanted birds and mammals from your bird feeding station.