

For the average person, birds don't fall into the same category as cockroaches and rodents. Yet certain birds can cause the same problems as these other common pests, from causing structural damage to threatening the environment of care. Bottom line: Birds are unwelcome guests, and growing flocks around a health care facility should prompt corrective action.

In health care environments, where patient safety comes first, birds are unwanted because they threaten patient, visitor and employee health. Molted bird feathers can cause respiratory infections, and bird droppings can

stand how the law protects birds. In most states, every bird species will be legally classified as "protected" or "unprotected." These classifications are imposed and enforced by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and by the state's environmental protection department or similar agency.

The feral pigeon (also called the rock dove), house sparrow and European starling are the only "unprotected" bird species in the United States. All three are common nuisance birds, partly because they adapt so well to urban environments. Their nesting, roosting and feeding habits contribute to their pest status, as they regularly damage proper-

attached to a site. If a stubborn bird problem does require a relocation effort, health care facilities should plan to contact their state environmental protection office for guidance and work with a trained pest management professional who will have the appropriate skills and regulatory knowledge for success.

The four behaviors

Studying behavior is the key to developing a plan of action for pest birds such as feral pigeons, house sparrows and European starlings. Professionals will look for one or more of the following four behaviors to learn how best to control any bird problem:

1. Loafing/socializing. Often, birds reside on a property for no other reason than to mingle with other birds. Since these birds have no permanent stake in the property itself (e.g., as nests or a food source), they are the easiest to remove.

2. Feeding/eating. Health care facilities attract birds because they offer easily accessible food sources. Pest birds eat much of the same food that humans do, so outside dining areas, waste removal areas and even poorly secured trash cans can provide a food source. Birds also need water to survive, and poorly drained liquid from a recent rainstorm or an overwatered flower bed can fit the bill.

3. Roosting/sleeping. When birds rest or sleep, they prefer to do so on flat surfaces—like typical roof ledges. Roosting birds often mean destructive droppings.

4. Nesting/breeding. Nesting birds will lay eggs and raise their young on the property. Nesting birds are the most challenging to manage, as they will keep trying to return to the site, even in the face of numerous deterrents. Pest management professionals always recommend preventing birds from nesting.

Ongoing IPM

An ongoing Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program supports several Environment of Care standards required for accreditation by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health-care Organizations (JCAHO). Additionally, nursing homes and long-term care

FOR THE BIRDS

Protecting a health care facility from
infestation of /COMMON PEST FOWL/

● ● ●
by Zia Siddiqi

spread infection. Birds carry approximately 40 viruses and 60 parasites and are associated with histoplasmosis, encephalitis, salmonellosis, cryptococcosis and other illnesses.

A bird infestation also can damage the structure of a health care facility. Bird droppings are so acidic that they corrode metal and commonly deface building exteriors. What's more, feathers and nesting debris clog drains and gutters, and birds can even pose a fire hazard to buildings when they carry burning cigarettes back to their nests. Birds that perch on the roof can also pose a threat to infection control if their dried droppings or ectoparasites, such as fleas or lice, enter the HVAC system.

Understand the law

Before attempting bird control at a commercial facility, it's critical to under-

stand how the law protects birds. In most states, every bird species will be legally classified as "protected" or "unprotected." These classifications are imposed and enforced by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and by the state's environmental protection department or similar agency.

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ty and can transmit serious diseases. Unprotected birds can be captured and removed legally without a permit at any time of the year and by any means, as long as other laws—pesticide regulations, firearm ordinances and trespassing laws, for example—are not violated. But there are various complications associated with these regulations. Property owners can capture individual pigeons, sparrows and starlings if the birds are causing damage, but the birds typically cannot be taken off the property without a nuisance wildlife control permit. Property owners must apply for these permits, which are typically granted by the state. Moreover, local municipalities may also require permits of their own for pigeon control.

For all of these reasons, relocating birds should be a last resort. It's best to deter birds before they become too

facilities that receive Medicaid and Medicare payments must institute an effective pest management program to comply with local health departments' environment category concerns.

IPM recognizes that facilities attract birds because they provide conditions that facilitate bird behavior. IPM programs emphasize methods that address the cause of the bird infestation, such as access to food and flat ledges, versus the symptoms—the birds themselves.

IPM emphasizes nonchemical techniques for bird management and recommends chemical treatments only when other methods fail or are inappropriate. In such instances, professionals should use targeted treatments on specific birds in defined areas to prevent any adverse impact on the surrounding environment.

The three most common bird control techniques are repellents, relocation and exclusion.

An effective repellent makes birds uncomfortable. The more uncomfortable birds are, the less likely they'll be able to stick around. Repellents fall into three categories: physical, chemical and electronic.

Physical repellents are the most common tools to control birds and ideally should be used as preventive measures before a bird problem develops. A few examples include: bird spikes and bird netting, both of which can effectively discourage birds from roosting on roofs; electrical shock devices that can be positioned along roof ledges; and piano wire that is strung in lines of two or three along posts. Professionals can position these tools in ways that do not de-

tract from the ambience of the building.

When repellents do not discourage an infestation, relocation might be necessary. As its name suggests, relocation simply means removing the birds, usually using nets, and their nests from the property. As noted earlier, only trained and certified professionals should attempt to relocate birds. Even though federal and state laws do not regulate management of pest birds, experienced professionals should execute all management efforts in an



Repellents such as bird spikes (LEFT) and piano wire (RIGHT) can help keep pest birds at bay.

environmentally sensitive manner.

The third common bird control technique—exclusion—prohibits birds from nesting on the building. Open areas under HVAC units are common nesting sites, since they provide shelter from the elements. Netting off these openings with either nylon or mesh will prevent birds from nesting there. It's important to remember that only 100 percent exclusion will prevent birds from nesting.

To help prevent bird problems before they start, managers should focus on the sanitation program around the building. Trash cans should have covers and be tightly sealed whenever possible. If the facility includes an outside dining

area for staff or guests, managers should include it on the sanitation schedule for regular cleaning. Preventing birds from accessing food and water will decrease the chance of infestation.

Though it does not occur often, birds can find their way inside. In such cases, professionals can use trapping techniques to remove pest birds and relocate them outside.

Finally, up-to-date records of the pest and bird management programs are a useful reference for subsequent bird management efforts. Documentation should outline the problem birds, nesting sites and treatment methods used. Facility auditors typically will not review the bird management records, but if they find evidence of a bird problem at a facility, they will want to see documentation of a plan to control the problem and prevent future infestations.

Turning them away

An effective and eco-friendly bird management program will protect patients, staff and visitors from the health risks of a bird infestation, while maintaining the facility and upholding the health care environment.

While birds might not be considered pests, when it comes to health care facilities, they should be turned away—just like cockroaches and rodents. ■



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CANADA GEESE REQUIRE / SPECIAL MEASURES /

Canada geese also can be a problem at health care facilities. In the past 50 years, Canada geese have become increasingly urbanized and greatly expanded their population. This is combined with the fact that the majority of the goose population no longer migrates—"resident" Canada geese can pose a major problem if they decide to nest on or around a health care facility.

Like pest bird management, Canada goose management begins with a survey of the property to determine why the geese are there. Canada geese are primarily terrestrial birds but are more likely to inhabit a property if there is a water source, such as a lake or pond, nearby. Large grassy areas also will make a health care facility more conducive to an infestation.

Thus, managers should determine if the facility includes a "safety zone," usually a pond or lake; natural

predators like foxes or dogs; food sources, such as grassy areas; or nesting sites. These elements will help professionals determine the best treatment techniques.

Canada goose management also uses an integrated program of control methods. Professionals might use habitat modification, predator decoys, canine control, relocation or hazing control, which employs methods such as laser lights and distress calls.

Even though the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service recently relaxed its restrictions on goose management, the law still requires licensed professionals to implement all control methods to ensure that geese receive ethical treatment.

Health care facilities with a Canada goose problem should seek professional help to survey the problem and execute a program that adheres to all regulations.

