

How to Keep Birds at Bay in Food Facilities

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Birds might seem harmless, but don't be fooled; they can cause serious issues for your business. As the regulations surrounding food manufacturing facilities continue to become stricter, and with the rules taking a new focus on birds specifically, proper bird exclusion and control is more important now than ever.

Whether they're roosting or nesting on overhangs, rafters, roofs, or just flying nearby, pest birds have the potential to cause serious damage to your facility and pose a significant risk to your operations. According to the International Association of Certified Home Inspectors, birds cause tens of millions of dollars in damage every year to machinery, automobiles, roofs and ventilation systems. What's more, their droppings can expose your employees, customers and product to more than 60 dangerous diseases; damage or destroy inventory and food products; and, cause equipment failure.

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To help prevent birds from having a negative effect on your facility, partner with a reliable bird management company that offers effective bird management solutions. Also, educate yourself and your employees about bird biology, behavior and treatment.

Common Pest Birds

The solution to any pest bird problem should be tailored to the type of species involved. All but three species are federally protected, so knowing what species you are dealing with is important. The most common bird species include pigeons, European starlings and English sparrows.

- Pigeons are found in nearly every city and more often in rural areas. More than 50 diseases are associated with pigeons, and their droppings and nests. As pigeons gather in large numbers, they leave behind a great amount of droppings that can be carried into your facility by foot and other means, creating a serious health concern.
- European Starlings tend to gather in large roosting flocks and can be found in the nooks and crannies of your facility. They are known to carry more than 25 diseases and can be easily identified in warmer weather by the yellow appearance of their bills – during cooler temperatures, their bills appear blue-black. They cause the most problems in spring and winter.
- English Sparrows are also extremely common throughout the United States. Associated with more than 30 diseases, they are the most prolific breeders of all bird species. They prefer to nest in protected areas in or near buildings, and their droppings can deface exterior walls and pavements. Their coloring ranges from black to brown.

Pest Bird Behavior

Identifying the behavior exhibited by the birds on your property will help you determine how to remove the pest birds, address the conditions attracting them to your facility and prevent them from returning. Birds on your property are likely gathering for one of four reasons:

- Loafing – Some birds stop at facilities to socialize with each other. Deterrents, repellants or relocating techniques can be used to discourage loafing birds.
- Roosting – Because birds prefer to roost (or sleep) on flat surfaces, they can often be found on roof ledges. Unlike loafing birds, roosting birds are not as easily discouraged with repellants and relocation techniques.
- Feeding – Birds may also come to your facility seeking food and water. Some species, such as pigeons, prefer grain, seeds and fruit, but will also consume

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human food, garbage and animal matter. Birds that have been feeding may show a strong dedication to the site, and may prove difficult to mitigate with simple deterrents or relocation efforts. Repellents are rarely successful in feeding situations.

- Breeding/Nesting – Birds may also select your facility as their home to raise young. Breeding and nesting birds are perhaps the most difficult to manage since they display the highest degree of dedication to an area. Often, total exclusion is the only effective solution in preventing these birds from returning to your property.

“Hot Spots”

Several areas of your facility may be considered pest bird hot spots, or areas conducive to bird behaviors. These areas include outdoor break areas, ledges and roofs, and elevated rafters. Consider taking the following actions to make your facility less attractive to birds:

- Remind employees not to feed loitering birds and keep break areas clean and free of food debris. Sanitation is a part of every good bird mitigation plan and helps ensure that your bird remediation activities will actually work. Implement a stringent sanitation routine that includes regular cleaning of interior and exterior areas.
- Birds often perch on ledges, nest under rooflines and bathe in or drink standing water. To reduce the likelihood of rooftop bird activity, ensure your roof is in good condition, with good water drainage. Also, repair leaky HVAC units.
- Birds can access cracks and crevices as small as $\frac{3}{4}$ inches wide and use cavities as nesting sites. Also, fine airborne food particles can accumulate on structural elements, such as rafters, attracting birds. Work with your bird management provider to conduct frequent inspections around your facility.

Control Methods

In bird management, there is no one-size fits-all solution. Effective management programs are tailored to the facility and situation at hand. Sometimes a combination of methods is required. While every situation is different, there are three common techniques you should be familiar with:

- Relocation is used for nesting birds and involves physically removing birds from the property. Relocation solves the immediate problem quickly, but does not address the underlying reason birds are attracted to your facility.
- Deterrents/Repellants can be used for loafing or roosting birds and make birds uncomfortable with an area. They come in various forms, including

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- tactile deterrents, sound deterrents, visual deterrents and odor deterrents.
- Exclusion is also suited for nesting birds and uses netting or other materials to completely block birds out of defined areas. Exclusion also includes sealing openings in exterior walls. Exclusion is the most effective source of bird mitigation because it alters the architecture in a way that prevents birds from finding a suitable location for their activities.

Bird problems can get worse with time. Getting a professional involved early will help you minimize the risk, time and costs associated with bird mitigation, and benefit your operations overall. A professional can help design a good plan for your facility.

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