

Birds Gone Crazy! Coming Soon To A Window Near You.

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

It isn't uncommon, this time of year, to find the windows of your house, or any shiny reflective surface around the house, being attacked by a bird. They will spend hours pecking at the surface, flying at it, leave for a few minutes and then come back to start the process all over again. This routine may last a few days, it may last a few weeks.

What we've got going on here is nothing more than testosterone out of control. As the hours of daylight increases at this time of year, birds get into the nesting state of mind. Most birds establish nesting territories that they control. The size of this territory comes down to how much food is available as food availability is the critical factor. When the bird, usually the male, that is holding this territory sees another bird, it will attempt to drive it out. It doesn't matter that this other bird is actually its reflection, it will go to great lengths to drive it away. I've seen birds attack windows, mirrors on cars, shiny new BBQ grills or anything where it might get a hint of its own reflection.

You can try to ride it out and just wait for a few weeks to pass. Once the birds get further into the nesting season the testosterone levels generally subside enough so that they are less aggressive. To break the cycle you have to keep the bird from seeing its reflection. The best way to do that is to tape some cardboard to the outside of the glass that it is attacking. Putting anything on the inside of the glass won't help as the reflection that it is seeing occurs in front of that. The bird may move to an adjacent window so you may have to do multiple windows. The new semi clear film that is supposed to help prevent bird collisions isn't likely to help as the bird will still see its reflection. I would suggest that you keep this up for two to three weeks just to make sure that you break them of the habit.

These window attacks are most often by things like robins and cardinals, sometimes wrens. But we have additional testosterone induced behavior which can be even more annoying. There is a situation involving woodpeckers and involves an activity known as drumming. Woodpeckers announce the territory that they will protect, and to also try to impress the females, by finding an item that will resonate well and then hammering on it with their beak very quickly. If they decide to do this on a metal chimney, gutter, or flashing, it can sound like machine gun fire!

In normal woodpecker feeding, the pecking they do is very slow and deliberate. It is meant to chip away at wood to get into food sources. Drumming is done as fast as they can and as loud as they can to serve as a warning to other male woodpeckers to stay away. Before you are tempted to take drastic action, let me remind you that all woodpeckers, in fact all birds except house sparrows, starlings and pigeons, are protected by state and federal law. Shooting the woodpecker, while tempting, is not an option. About all you can do is step outside and try to scare the bird away, hoping all the time that he will find your neighbors house a better place to show off!

Ultimately these annoying events last just a few weeks in the spring. While they can be quite unsettling and even startling, they can also be quite fascinating if you understand what they are doing and why. If you have children in the house, you can take the time to talk with them about how the birds are protecting their territory, or whatever conversation along that line you want to have. But please be patient and tolerant and we'll move past this into the dog days of summer soon enough!