

Preventing Unwanted Bird Nests

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

I've already started getting phone calls about birds nesting around the house. While there are a few things that you can try to do to prevent this, ultimately, the desire to nest by birds is very strong and you may not be able to deter them from their primal urges. I also need to point out that except for House Sparrows, pigeons and European Starlings, all of these bird species are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act which means that once the nest has eggs or young in it, it is protected. Prior to that time, you can tear it down to your hearts content, but be persistent. It may require removal activities twice a day for several weeks!

To date, all of the nesting activity has been by the House Finch. House Finch males are a rosy red color while the females are a grayish brown with brown stripes down their sides. House Finches love to nest in hanging planter baskets or in the bottom curve of decorative wreaths. If the wreath is on your front door, this can be a real challenge. If they are nesting in a hanging basket, just try to avoid watering right on top of the nest and it will likely be okay.

I've seen homeowners weave an intricate web of fishing line across the open space of the wreath to try to exclude the female from her nest building. This may or may not work. Sometimes the better solution is to remove the wreath from the door during the nesting season or move it somewhere else on the side of the house where it will be less bothered. While House Finches will nest anytime from mid March through August, most of the activity is going to be from now through the end of June. After the end of June it is unlikely that new nesting attempts will be made.

The other species that I receive a lot of calls about is Barn Swallows. Barn Swallows build the mud nest stuck to a vertical wall. This may be somewhere up under the eaves, perhaps on the ledge at the top of a picture window or even on top of a porch light fixture. Once they have a nest built with eggs or young they will swoop incessantly at you or anyone who is near the nest. While this may seem threatening, keep in mind that this bird weighs only about 2/3 of an ounce and is all bluff. They honestly can't hurt you.

Exclusion is about the only way to stop them from building a nest on your house. Foam blocks on top of a porch light will work. Scent based deterrents simply don't work as most birds have a very poor sense of smell and the Kansas wind wouldn't allow strong enough levels of vapors to build up anyway. Sound or ultrasound deterrents honestly don't work either. Visual deterrents, such as reflective mylar strips tacked up in the area of interest can sometimes work, but I emphasize sometimes. A simple platform can be mounted on a wall, under the eaves, in an area that is less obtrusive. Contact me for nesting platform plans.

I'll sometimes have homeowners bemoan the fact that they've put bird houses up all over their property but the species just don't use them. The simple fact is that many species of birds won't use bird houses because it's not their nature. Species that use bird houses are what we refer to as cavity nesters. This includes species like House and Carolina Wrens, Chickadees, and Purple Martins as well as all of our woodpecker species. But the size of the house and the entrance hole must fit their needs.

Ultimately, I encourage tolerance of our avian neighbors. They will be in the nesting season for just a few months. The presence of a nest can be a great opportunity to share the excitement of nature with children and grandchildren. But please, don't feel threatened by these tiny little winged marvels!