



When it Comes to Your Restaurant, Birds are Unwelcome Diners

When most people think of pests, birds don't immediately come to mind. After all, many of us have bird feeders around our homes and gardens. But Dr. Ron Harrison, an entomologist and training director at Orkin Inc., says certain species of birds, if left unchecked, can damage your business as much as an infestation of flies or rats.

Why are birds a problem? "Not only can a bird infestation discourage potential customers — it can be difficult to enjoy a meal on a patio overrun by pigeons, for example — but birds can also cause expensive property damage," Harrison says. That's because the acid in bird droppings is highly corrosive and can damage building exteriors and machinery, and debris from nests can clog drains and gutters.

"Birds have also been known to return to their nests with smoking cigarettes, which can set the nest and, subsequently, the building on fire."

Birds can also pose a health risk to your customers and staff. Harrison says birds carry ectoparasites, such as mites, which can migrate to humans and cause disease. In addition, their molted feathers can cause respiratory problems and their droppings can cause serious infections.

So how can you protect your customers from the harm and nuisance of birds and your business from a bird infestation? "First, you must identify the species of bird causing the problem," Harrison says. "To be effective, bird control programs must be tailored to the specific bird species and situation. In restaurant environments, pigeons, starlings and house sparrows are the most common pest birds."

According to Harrison, the hot spots for bird problems are the roof, ledges and outside dining areas. Pest birds will begin to congregate in these places for one of four reasons, on which the suitable treatment strongly depends.

Loafing/socializing. Some birds will be on your property for no other reason than to socialize with each other. Because they have not taken up permanent residence at your property, they often can be repelled or relocated with relative ease.

Feeding/eating. Especially in a restaurant setting, birds will come to your establishment for food and water. Even though the very nature of an outside dining area makes the elimination of food and water virtually impossible, it is still very important to make sure that all food debris and standing water is promptly removed. Pay special attention to HVAC units on the roof, which can leak or perspire and leave additional standing water.

Roosting/sleeping. Birds prefer to roost on flat surfaces, which is why they will often be found on roof ledges. Unlike loafing birds, roosting birds cannot be discouraged with minor repellants and relocation techniques.

Nesting/breeding. Finally, birds might build nests on your property to raise their young. Nesting birds are very difficult to eliminate; the nests must be removed or destroyed, and 100 percent exclusion is needed to prevent them from returning to your property.

The successful man is the one who finds out what is the matter with his business before his competitors do.
— Roy L. Smith

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Harrison says that once pest management professionals determine the reason the birds are on your property, they can next choose the appropriate treatment option. He says repellent, relocation and exclusion programs are the three most common bird control techniques.

Repellants. There are a range of repellants, including physical, chemical and electronic types. Netting and ledge treatments, which are placed along roof ledges to prohibit birds from perching, are common physical repellants. Chemical repellants include gels and sprays that can give a bird the feeling that its foot is stuck, and electronic repellants can give the bird a slight shock. All repellants are designed to make birds feel uncomfortable on your property.

Relocation. Pest management professionals may suggest relocating bothersome birds. These trapping programs may rely on glue boards or netting to catch the birds. Since birds are environmentally sensitive pests, ethical treatment and careful handling must be taken.

Exclusion. Exclusion is a technique used to prevent birds from nesting at your establishment. Many birds will make nests under HVAC units, where they receive shelter from the elements. In this case, netting is used to block off the entire area around the HVAC unit, making it impossible for it to be penetrated. In severe cases of infestation, an even larger area must be netted off — sometimes as big as the building — which can be very expensive. The bottom line: Stop birds before they nest.

“While the likelihood of birds invading the interior of your establishment is small, such an occurrence is not unheard of,” Harrison says. “Pest management professionals can counsel you on the best method to remove the bird, usually by trapping the bird and relocating it to the outdoors.”

Harrison says that unlike some pests, bird treatment and prevention programs need to be conducted in the safest and most bird-friendly manner possible. “Nevertheless, just because birds are a part of the natural environment does not mean that they must be part of your restaurant environment.” For more information on pest management, visit www.orkin.com/commercial.

*Worry about being better;
bigger will take care
of itself. Think one
customer at a time and
take care of each one the
best way you can.
— Gary Comer*