



Brunswick Wildlife Backyard Disasters

The idea for this column came from a Sunset Beach resident whose feeders were being invaded by pigeons. He removed the food and they went away. He put the seed back so I could take a photo and possibly provide him with advice about a permanent fix. Unlike previous removal cycles, this time the pigeons did not return.

The birds missed their photo op. Still this is a good “backyard disaster” example. Removing food for a few days may be just the prescription to permanently solve your feeder problems. Do not worry about the other birds going hungry because they will quickly find additional natural food sources, where they get most of their food anyway.

Also, changing type and mix of seed or type of feeder or both may be needed to provide a permanent fix. I usually refer these problems to the wild bird stores because they provide this type of advice. In case the bad guys return, I referred the Sunset Beach guy to the Yard Bird Emporium in Calabash.

My backyard pests are large flocks of blackbirds during the winter. I remove the feeders and then replace them after a few days; however, the birds always find their way back.

A bit of advice...platform feeders are notorious for attracting bully pigeons or doves. Also, feeding birds on the ground invites avian and mammalian pests plus it increases the chances of an accumulation of moldy seed which may kill birds that eat it. Minimizing the amount of fallen seed that accumulates under my feeders by raking seeds and hulls protects the birds. It also seems to reduce my number of blackbirds.

Baffles and other devices like cages should be used to keep raccoons, squirrels, and other mammals from your feeders. Cages are wire enclosures with holes large enough for songbirds to pass through but not large enough for mammals and big birds.

Bluebird nest box disasters are another category. Snakes are good climbers and, if you place a nest box too near a tree or fence, you may attract a snake like this Yellow Rat Snake. Even with correct box placement, a baffle installed on the pole holding the nest box is a good idea.

Frequently, I see bluebird boxes without either wood or metal protective plates designed to keep woodpeckers from enlarging the hole. Note that a woodpecker has started working on the snake's box. Altered boxes, after being feng shuied, are then used for nesting by woodpeckers or other opportunistic cavity nesting birds.

Now that is ok if that is what you are trying to do. I once had eight boxes with only four having metal plates. I had a boatload of bluebirds. The other boxes were eventually renovated by Red-headed Woodpeckers, giving me a bonus experience of watching woodpecker fledglings.

A raptor preying on backyard birds is another common disaster. Two frequent predators are the Sharp-shinned Hawk and its cousin the Cooper's Hawk. The Sharp-shinned overwinters in Lower Cape Fear region. The Cooper's is a year-round resident; however, they are more numerous during migration and winter.

The photo of the Sharpie was taken in my backyard. Needless to say, the little birds were not to be seen for the next day or two. Occasionally one of these hawks makes multiple appearances and usually they take a blackbird each visit. Blackbirds are vulnerable because they forage on the ground. You likely have had or will have a similar experience.

The only solutions are to let it go and eventually the hawk will move on or to remove your feeders for a few days. Judging from the circles of feathers I lose at most three to five blackbirds per winter and fortunately none of the little guys like chickadees have been lost.

Of course, there are many other backyard disasters, like finding injured wildlife and nestlings that have fallen out of their nest, so stay tuned for another installment of backyard disasters next spring. Maybe those danged pigeons will return to get their picture taken by then.

John Ennis



This masked bandit still believes there
is a free lunch!