

Birds and Glass Window Collisions

by Sally Cureton

One problem many Massanutten houses present to wildlife is the large glass windows we love to view our mountain through. According to the National Audubon Society, it is estimated that as many as 1 million birds are killed each year in the United States as a result of a collision with such windows. The primary problem is that the birds don't see the glass, are trying to escape a predator and fly right into the window. Another problem is that they may be trying to get to something on the other side of the glass.

There are several possible solutions that have been proposed. The first and easiest one to consider is feeder placement. A bird feeder that is within three feet of the window (or even attached to the window) works well because the birds don't have enough distance to reach full flight speed. Likewise, placing a feeder more than 30 feet from a window reduces risk because the birds have more opportunity to realize that the reflected image is part of a house.

Another solution is to use white or light-colored window shades, blinds or drapes. When these are closed or drawn, much of the transparency of the window is reduced as well as the mirror effect. Sometimes decals or objects placed on or in front of windows can break up the mirror effect and make a transparent window more visible. It doesn't have to be the image of a hawk, anything that will help them to realize that going in that direction won't work as an escape route. Covering just a part of a window is better than nothing.

If using a silhouette let it hang loose so that it will stand out more and will move around in the wind. If a predator silhouette remains motionless, plastered to a window, other birds soon figure out that it isn't a threat. Another possible solution that sometimes works is to hang streamers of shiny, reflective plastic ribbon or strips of black garbage bags in front of windows. If it moves and glitters, it will deter a bird from going in that direction.

Another alternative, that I have not seen used, is bird netting. This allows the birds to bounce away before hitting the glass, and really doesn't obstruct the view. The bug screens that some of us have are also very helpful and obviously work quite well to cut down on reflections in the glass.

The primary dangerous time for the birds is during migrations (Spring and Fall) or breeding season (Spring). If we can make a few changes for just a little bit, it can transfer into a big difference for them. If you should find a bird on your deck or in your yard that has hit a window and appears to be stunned, it is best to place them in a safe place outdoors, somewhere high to protect them from predators. When they regain their senses, they will fly off. Sometimes these little fellows need all the help we can give them.