



Technology stopping bird collisions

By Dan Cristol June 11, 2016

Birds collide with glass windows for many reasons.

Most annoying is the mating season behavior in which males, often intentionally attack their reflections, mistaking them for rivals. While messy, this auto-aggression does not injure the birds. Until recently, covering the window until the end of mating season was the only solution.

Sometimes, while being chased by hawks, birds will collide with windows or walls in a desperate bid to escape. These high-impact collisions are invariably fatal, but the escapee was probably doomed to begin with. Nothing can be done to stop these rare high-speed accidents.

Office buildings and other tall structures that remain lighted at night will attract migrating songbirds from high in the sky. The imitation celestial bodies disorient feathered travelers, causing them to circle until they collide with something or fall to the ground exhausted. Cities such as San Francisco and Toronto have adopted rules that encourage extinguish lights during migration and discourage the erection of reflective buildings.

Closer to home, many birds die when they smack into sliding glass doors or large bay windows that reflect a welcoming scene of trees from across the yard. The birds are trying to reach safe habitat, cannot conceptualize transparent glass, and wind up staggering around your patio with a severe concussion or brain hemorrhage. This is especially common during migrations, when unfamiliar birds arrive and take advantage of small patches of habitat to refuel before the next leg of the journey. Any local resident birds that were susceptible to your patio glass are long dead.

Finally, when birds can see right through a glass catwalk or greenhouse they may die trying to get to the alluring landscape visible on the other side. This is a less common problem, but where it occurs, the slaughter is daily and continuous.

Altogether, hundreds of millions of American birds die each year in such collisions, including many rare and declining species. Williamsburg residents frequently send me pictures of rarities that have struck their windows, including species like Black-billed Cuckoos and Painted Buntings that I rarely see alive. Students at the College of William and Mary have recorded hundreds on campus as part of a study.

For many years there was nothing to be done about this problem, but new products are now available that really work. Most are adhesive films that reflect UV light into the visible range, making a window appear white, black or sparkly from the outside, but only slightly dimming the view from the inside. These products are inexpensive and can be applied easily to any window that you can reach from the outside. For a full description, visit birdwatching-daily.com/featured-stories/15-products-that-prevent-windows-strikes.

Last year, there was no practical solution, so simply feeling sad and admiring the beautiful little carcasses was a morally acceptable response. These new technologies have rendered such an approach unethical. If a window under your control is killing birds, and there is an easy way to stop the killing, you should do it. Read more about bird collisions at flap.org.