

Wild Birds

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Wild Bird Control Measures for Pastured Poultry Flocks

Wild birds are considered to be a nuisance since they eat and contaminate water and feed. In addition they can transmit parasites and diseases to your flock, resulting in an economic impact to your operation (Figure 1). In a pastured poultry operation, it is almost impossible to completely prevent wild birds from coming into contact with your flock. However, it is possible, to deter them and reduce the chances of them coming in contact with your flock. In this fact sheet we will discuss the measures you should take to reduce wild bird occurrences on your pastured poultry farm.

Understanding Bird Behavior

Birds, like all animals, must meet basic needs to survive, including space to fulfill their ecological needs, food, water, and shelter for roosting and nest building. Wild birds will search for a site that can accommodate them. Take a moment to assess the situation and observe what is flying around your farm. We will discuss every basic need and address how to deter wild birds.

Space

Place your pastured poultry housing as far away from trees and shrubs as possible. Many communal bird species, such as the wood thrushes, like to roost in shrubs. Roosting sites create large quantities of bird droppings that can be consumed by your flock. Diseases such as the Fowl pox, Newcastle disease, among others (Table 1), can result from your susceptible pastured poultry coming into contact with wild bird feces. Raptors like to roost on tall trees where they can remain unnoticed; so if your pastured flock is near such a tree, they may be at risk of attack from an avian predator. Remember to lock up your flock every evening to prevent predation by owls and other predators.

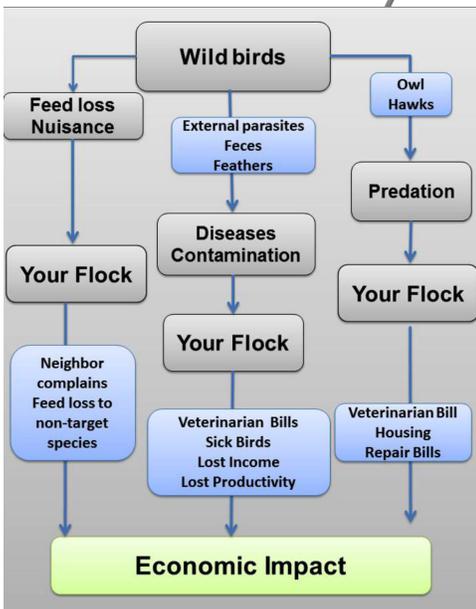


Table 1. A Short List of Diseases and Parasites That Can be Transmitted from Wild Birds to Poultry

Disease	Pathogen	Symptoms
Mycoplasmosis	Bacteria	Tear Secretions, nasal discharge, swollen joints, breast blisters, coughing and decreased egg production
Salmonellosis	Bacteria	Dehydration, birds appear to be sleepy, decreased appetite, weight loss, white diarrhea, pale and shrunken comb/wattles
Fowl Pox	Virus	Coughing, sneezing, rales, discharge from eyes, scabs on face, stunted growth
Avian Influenza	Virus	Coughing, sneezing, loss of appetite, diarrhea, blue comb/wattles, bloody discharge from nostrils conjunctivitis
New Castle Disease	Virus	Watery discharge from nostrils, gasping, facial swelling, paralysis, decreased water/feed consumption leading to a drop in egg production
Coccidiosis	Parasite	Reduction in bird growth, diarrhea with bloody droppings
Mites	Parasite	Weight loss, drop in feed consumption and egg production. Anemia in severe infestations.
Fowl Tick	Parasite	Blood-stained lacerations where ticks fed on the body.
Roundworms	Parasite	Decrease in feed consumption, stunted growth.



Food

Consider limiting the time that your flock spends beneath fruit or nut trees, as these trees may attract wild birds. Limit feeding to the inside of the coop to deter wild birds from gaining access to the feed. To prevent bird feces from falling into a feeder, consider investing in a feeder cover. To further deter wild birds from eating your expensive chicken feed, purchase pelleted feeds, as they are often too large for wild birds to eat easily. However, keep in mind that young birds in your flock may require crumbles. Store your feed in aluminum containers with lids to prevent access by wild birds and rodents. Remember to clean feeders at least once a week as a means of disease control and good management. Dispose of egg shells, carcasses and manure in a hot compost pile so that you will not attract vultures.

Tips to reduce wild bird occurrence in pastured poultry

- Avoid having bird houses, feeders and baths
- Limit food and water to your flock only
- Avoid placing your birds in areas where there is standing water that may attract wild birds or wild waterfowl
- Check the security of the pens or coop; make sure they do not have holes
- Use nipple drinkers
- Monitor your poultry behavior to determine if birds of prey, or other predators, are making them nervous

Water

Water tends to attract many wild birds. Cleaning your waterers every week is a key procedure to avoid many diseases. Limit water access to that of only your flock. As a closed water system, a nipple drinker will prevent wild birds from accessing water and will prevent fecal contamination. When selecting a site for your pastured poultry housing, do not place it close to a pond to reduce the risk of wild waterfowl coming into contact with your flock.



Shelter

All birds need shelter for roosting and nesting. Unfortunately, wild birds may target coops and other farm buildings as suitable accommodations. To avoid this problem, check coops daily for signs of nest building or roosting and destroy any nests before they are fully constructed. You can prevent wild birds from roosting in your pastured poultry housing by locking up your flock at night. Your physical presence during this routine will disrupt any birds and encourage them to find a roost elsewhere. You may need to bird-proof your housing to prevent birds from sneaking in to roost in the evening or build a nest. Safety nets can be placed on

the ceiling to prevent pigeons from building a nest. Additionally, you can set up porcupine wire around ledges of buildings and coops to prevent birds from roosting there. You can also try owl decoys or balloons with big eyes painted on them to spook some wild birds away from your farm and prevent them from coming back for a time (decoys will lose their effectiveness over time as birds become accustomed to them). Keep in mind that if birds have not sheltered at your farm for very long, then they will move on and find another shelter elsewhere. You may need to rotate your control methods to obtain the best results.



Diseases Transmitted By Wild Birds

Wild birds can carry many diseases and parasites, which, when passed on to your birds, can result in the death of your flock. Some of the most common diseases and parasites transmitted from wild birds to chickens are listed in Table 1. Many of the diseases like the Mycoplasmosis spp., Fowl Pox, and New Castle Disease cause death or stunted growth in chickens as well as a decrease in egg production. This means that these diseases will not only impact the welfare of your birds, but will also have an economic impact on the profitability of your poultry business. These diseases can be transmitted by different methods which may include feathers, droppings as well as bird to bird contact. Imagine a scenario where a flock of sparrows that have Fowl pox fly by and then roost on your pastured poultry equipment. They eat and defecate on the feeders that are next to the coop. This natural behavior of the wild birds can infect your flock. If your flock presents with any symptoms then you need to act quickly to avoid contamination to other chickens as well as wild birds. Keep the phone number to your closest poultry veterinarian or diagnostic lab in your records so that you can contact them for a timely diagnosis.

Birds of Prey

Not only can wild birds be a nuisance, transmit diseases, and create many other problems, but they can also be a danger to your flock. Raptors, or wild birds of prey such as owls, hawks, vultures, eagles and falcons, are opportunistic predators that feed on smaller birds as well as other small animals. Bird feeders and bird baths attract rodents and birds which can, consequently, attract raptors. Raptors may attack during the day or at night, depending on the bird species they are hunting. Owls attack during dawn and nighttime. They fly quietly, have excellent eye sight, very good hearing, and strong claws. Owls attack by using their talons to remove the neck or head of their prey. Falcons and Hawks prefer daylight hunting, using their keen eyesight from tall vantage points. Any animal that is within the reach of the raptor can be an easy target. Raptors are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (16 USC, 703-711). Therefore, they cannot be captured, handled or killed without a valid permit. Consequently, you will need to take different approaches to deal with raptors. Remove wild bird feeders, baths, and houses from

your property. Place your flock's feed and water inside the coop to discourage the presence of wild birds as prey and raptors as predators. Observe your birds; if a persistent falcon or hawk is flying around the property, then secure your flock in their coop. Make sure your coop does not have any holes through which raptors may enter. If possible, install bird netting or a solid roof to prevent entry by birds of prey. Another option is to place scarecrows around your operation, although their effectiveness is diminished over time unless they are moved or repositioned periodically. Many of these practices can help deter wild birds from coming into your operation. If you have tried to reduce the number of losses due to raptors and you are unsuccessful, never take justice into your own hands. Having a wild bird in your possession or harming these birds is illegal and will result in costly fines, perhaps even jail time. Instead, contact your local US Fish and Wildlife Services office to work out a legal solution that will benefit your business.

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