



IMPORTANCE OF WILD BIRD HYGIENE IN THE GARDEN

Whilst it's important to look after the birds, it's just as essential to look after the areas you feed the birds in your garden. Like any other animals, different species of wild birds can be affected by different diseases, if the necessary hygiene measures are not followed.

If you have a large number of birds attracted to your garden, the best way to help them is to focus on prevention of the disease. Here are some potential signs of diseases to look out for, as well as things you can do to keep your garden as clean as possible, preventing further spread of disease.

HOW CAN DISEASE SPREAD?

Many bird diseases are transmitted by droppings. If contaminated droppings of one bird get mixed with food, the other birds will be at risk of picking up that disease. Other species of animals (such as rats) can also contaminate birds' food and that's why it is important to guard against both sources of infection in your garden. Make sure you thoroughly clean your feeding area for mouldy food and droppings.

WHAT ARE THE COMMON SIGNS OF DISEASE?

Although exact symptoms vary between diseases, and reaching a diagnosis requires veterinary input, but if you keep your eyes open to the following signs, you will be alert when an individual bird is suffering from some form of disease. General signs are:

- Affected birds often appear lethargic and reluctant to move away from the feeding station.
- They may appear fluffed-up and show difficulty in swallowing food or water.
- They may also allow you to approach them and pick them up, something that a healthy bird would never do.

CAN WILD BIRDS BE TREATED?

Unfortunately, by the time it is possible to catch a sick bird for treatment, it is likely to be too late to help them. Treating sick birds without first capturing them is not advisable because there is no way of ensuring that medicines will be taken only by affected birds or in the correct doses. This means that it is far better to take preventative action to stop an outbreak occurring in the first place.

THE RSPB, DEDICATED TO CONSERVATING WILD BIRDS AND WILDLIFE SAY:

"Whatever you feed birds with, good hygiene around feeders and bird baths is important all year round, but particularly so during the summer months. The warm weather can make bird food go off more quickly, and can provide ideal conditions for harmful bacteria to proliferate".

TOP HYGIENE TIPS

- Keep the bird feeder/table and surrounding area clean and free from droppings or mouldy food. Mouldy food can provide a breeding opportunity for microorganisms which may make the birds ill.
- Amount of food in your feeder is important. If the food you put in it takes days to clear, this means you should reduce the amount. Ideally, bird tables should be swept clean each day to remove droppings and any uneaten food.
- Location of the feeder can protect it from the reach of other animals such as rats. Hanging feeders or bird tables are preferable. Try to avoid putting the food directly on the ground. Avoid placing a bird table under a tree in which birds perch or roost, since it soon becomes heavily contaminated with droppings.
- The ground beneath feeders should be kept clean by regular sweeping and disinfected through the use of an appropriate disinfectant. You can move your feeding stations to a new area every month to prevent droppings accumulating underneath.
- Clean and wash your bird feeders regularly, UK Pet Food recommends using a commercial disinfectant which specifies it is active against avian influenza (used at the manufacturers recommended concentration) followed by rinsing and air drying before being used again.
- Water Containers should be rinsed out every day, particularly during the warmer months. After washing, allow it to dry before filling in with fresh water again.
- Bird Baths need to get cleaned and washed thoroughly every now and then, to prevent microbial contamination or droppings accumulated there.
- Our Personal Hygiene is also important. Wash your bird feeders outside of your house and use utensils separate from the ones in your kitchen. Always wash your hands before and after handling bird feeders, sick or dead birds in your garden.