

BIRD FEEDING & UNWANTED URBAN WILDLIFE

By Kirsten Held

Editor Note: Kirsten is working with the BBC Conservation Committee to track down the extent of this problem in the Baltimore City/County area, and potentially further abroad.

You love feeding the birds in your backyard. You have installed a stunning array of houses, feeders, and suet baskets. The Chickadees and Tufted Titmice are ecstatic. But so are the rats and squirrels. The joy of seeing birds up close is wonderful indeed, and the conservation benefit of bird feeding has never been more important. But as conflicts between humans and wildlife increase due to burgeoning human populations and climate change, complaints about rats and squirrels grow and we begin to take our birdfeeders down.

Have you received complaints from the neighbors, the city or county health departments about rats or squirrels? BBC has learned of two such complaints; one ~~that~~ resulted in an administrative hearing and a Baltimore County order for the homeowner to remove her birdfeeders. We are monitoring complaints.

Have you taken your feeders down or not installed any in the first place because you might attract rats or squirrels? Although rats can carry disease and must be dealt with aggressively, and although squirrel problems might extend to the creatures nesting in your house or damaging your electrical wires, the difficulties with rats and squirrels can be solved without you having to simply stop feeding the birds. Look for an article in this issue of Chip Notes for ideas.

IF YOU HAVE HAD ANY COMPLAINTS OR PROBLEMS REGARDING BIRD FEEDING, PLEASE CONTACT KIRSTEN HELD AT THE BALTIMORE BIRD CLUB (kirstenheld71@gmail.com) WE CAN HELP RUN INTERFERENCE WITH NEIGHBORS AND RESPOND TO COMPLAINTS DIRECTLY AND ARE VERY INTERESTED IN TRACKING HOW OFTEN SUCH ISSUES ARISE

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS WITH BIRD FEEDING

By Kirsten Held

While feeding birds is a rewarding experience, problems can arise with rats and squirrels. These creatures cause problems, big and small. Rats carry disease and must be dealt with aggressively. Squirrels might eat too much of your bird food or might nest in your home or damage electrical wires. Rest assured that problems with rats and squirrels can be solved. Here are some practical solutions.

RATS: If bird feeding has brought rats, the first thing to do is to temporarily stop feeding and clean up any food that has fallen on the ground. Second, have the rats exterminated, especially if they have taken up residence in your home or that of a neighbor. Once their dens have been eliminated, feeding can resume with some easy and inexpensive measures. The most important step is to keep the feed from falling on the ground. Install a catch basin under hanging feeders and regularly rake up any spillage. Pay attention to how long it takes the birds to eat the food you put out and don't put out more than the birds will eat in a day or two.



SQUIRRELS: If you or a neighbor has a squirrel infestation or you find that the squirrels are eating too much of the bird feed, there are several solutions. Safflower seed is said to be unattractive to squirrels, while birds love it. In my experience, it depends on your particular squirrel population. When I tried safflower seed, my squirrels loved it. So I tried bird seed mixed with hot chili oil. The birds are unaffected by the hot oil, and in my case, this was extremely successful. I put out the “hot” food and watched as the squirrels took one sniff and headed for the hills!

If you are able to invest in some new feeders, this is the most effective method of keeping squirrels away. I purchased new feeders and my husband made it his personal mission to build a pulley system with a peanut tray where the squirrels couldn't reach the food but the Blue Jays and Red-bellied Woodpeckers could eat to their hearts' content.

I also purchased several squirrel busting feeders, a double wired suet cage, a peanut feeder which is perfectly weighted to snap shut when a squirrel attempts to access it, and another weighted tube feeder for the highly sought-after fruit, nut, and sunflower mix. These feeders have worked exactly as advertised and were worth every penny.

I have successfully weathered the squirrel problems we had in our neighborhood, which included a complaining neighbor and, frankly, some real anxiety on my part that I might have to give up feeding birds in order to restore good neighborly relations. My parents had a rat issue and they had to go the extermination route and temporarily suspend feeding. I purchased new feeders for them, and today, both my mother and I have successful bird feeding operations that bring us joy and satisfaction. If you have had similar issues and have had success or failure with possible solutions, I'd love to hear about it. Please email me at kirstenheld71@gmail.com. Look for periodic updates to this information as I learn about other people's experiences.