

Nuisance Birds

In addition to attracting rats, overfeeding birds can also attract nuisance birds such as pigeons, crows, seagulls, and starlings. These birds are scavengers and frequently return to places where there is a reliable food source.

Nuisances created by birds include:

- **Feces accumulation.** Bird feces are acidic and can damage property and vehicles. Build up of bird feces is smelly, slippery and unappealing to look at. Bird feces can also carry diseases.
- **Some birds are bad neighbors.** They can spread trash and feathers and their feces can cover lawns, roofs, cars and lawn furniture. Large flocks of birds create noise nuisances.
- **A perceived overall lower quality of life.** Homes and neighborhoods become less enjoyable when there are large populations of nuisance birds.



Hundreds of pigeons on this roof are flocking to a neighborhood bird feeder. Neighbors in this community suffer from property damage caused by the birds and rats as well as noise and odor nuisances.



Take Responsibility Be a Good Neighbor

When feeding wild birds please do so with care and consideration of your neighbors. Feed birds in such a way that does not create nuisance or rat problems in your neighborhood. In King County it is the responsibility of property owners to prevent conditions on their property that provide a home or food source for rats.

RESOURCES

Rat problems

Public Health—Seattle & King County
www.kingcounty.gov/rats

Report rat problems to Public Health 206-263-9566

King County rodent regulations
www.kingcounty.gov/boh/code/title-8

Pigeon nuisances

WA Dept of Wildlife: Living with Wildlife Domestic Pigeons
<https://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/00628>

Crow nuisances

WA Dept of Wildlife: Living with Wildlife Crows
<https://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/00611>

Public Health 
Seattle & King County

Public Health—Seattle & King County
Environmental Health Services
Rodent Prevention Program
206-263-9566

Available in Alternate Formats

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Bird Feeders and Rats

What You Need to Know



Photo by Craig Nash www.peregrinestridlog.blogspot.com

“Bird feeders are good for providing food during times of scarcity, but food for wildlife should come primarily from native sources such as plants.”

The National Wildlife Federation

Feeding birds can attract rats!



Rats are frequently seen traveling through neighborhoods along fence tops and telephone lines in search of food. There are many different food sources commonly found in residential backyards, including improperly stored garbage, tree fruits, pet food, food waste in compost bins, grass seed, chicken feed and bird seed.

Bird feeders are very popular in King County and provide many hours of enjoyment for people who love to watch birds. However, if you feed birds expect to see increased rat numbers around your home. Bird seed easily spills out of feeders onto the ground, and it is impossible to remove all of it. Rats are good climbers and frequently access bird feeders hanging in trees. Rats are attracted to bird seed and will return often for this favorite food.



Bird seed is the food source for this young rat.

IMPORTANT!

If you have an active rat infestation, you must remove bird seed for trapping and poisoning efforts to be successful.

Tips to deter rats from your bird feeder

Bird feeder placement

- Place feeders four feet off of the ground and 8 feet out and away from any branches, fences, or other objects that rats may use to jump on to feeders.
- Use a “squirrel proof” feeder with a tray and a baffle that will prevent seed from spilling on the ground.



Seed selection and filling feeders

- Do not overfill the bird feeder with seed. Fill it with the minimum amount of seed that the birds might completely consume in a day.
- Do not leave any bird seed in feeders overnight. That is when rats are most active.
- Use a seed blend for the types of birds you are feeding. Seed blends that contain a lot of filler seeds and grains (millet, milo or sorghum) tend to end up on the ground where it attracts rats.



Storing bird seed

Rats easily chew through plastic containers. Always store bulk bird seed (and other pet foods) in a metal container to eliminate rodent access.



Sick birds at the feeder

Birds that feed in large groups are particularly susceptible to a number of diseases. Crowded bird feeders can stress birds and spread disease.

Diseases spread at bird feeders

- **Salmonellosis** is the most common bird feeder disease. Infected birds shed the salmonella bacteria in their droppings and via bird-to-bird contact.
- **Avian pox virus** is common in house finches. Infected birds may have wart-like growths on their legs, face, or feet. The virus is spread by direct contact with infected birds, ingestion of food and water contaminated by sick bird or contact with contaminated surfaces like dirty bird feeders and bird baths.
- **Aspergillus fungus** (mold) grows on damp feed and in debris under bird feeders. Birds inhale the fungal spores and the fungus spreads to their lungs and air sacs.
- **Trichomoniasis** is a disease caused by a parasite that causes sores in birds mouths and throats and can be fatal.

Preventing disease at bird feeders

- **Give birds space.** Spread feeders to avoid crowding and over-stressing birds.
- **Clean up waste.** Remove droppings and old seed. Mount feeders over a hard surface if possible to make cleaning easier.
- **Clean your bird feeder regularly.** Soak feeders in a bucket with 1 part bleach to 10 parts water for 10 minutes.
- **Use fresh food.** Don't use moldy or damp food.