

# Mecklenburg Audubon Society



## Backyard Notes: Feeding Challenges

Because you provide food for wild birds, at some point you are likely to encounter unwelcome guests. Below are some suggestions for how to deal with these bird feeding challenges.

Adapted from a web site titled 'Educator's Guide to Bird Study' by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.



### Other Birds:

While some people welcome any bird regardless of its size or appetite, others get frustrated when grackles, starlings, pigeons, or crows overrun their feeders. To discourage these larger birds, use feeders made for smaller birds, such as tube feeders with short perches and no catch basin on the bottom. Avoid platform trays and don't spread food on the ground.

### Avian Predators:

At some point you can expect a visit from a hawk, usually a Sharp-shinned Hawk or a Cooper's Hawk. At first you'll probably welcome the close-up view but if your hawk stays around and scares your feeder birds away, what can you do? The best solution is to take your feeders down for a few days. The hawk will get hungry and move on.



### Squirrels:

Though it's fun to watch a persistent squirrel finagle its way to your bird food, it's less amusing if squirrels overrun your feeders and discourage birds from visiting. You can distract squirrels by feeding them seed or dried ears of corn in a location some distance from your feeders. This tactic might not work for long, however, and sometimes attracts neighboring squirrels. You also can try "squirrel-proof" bird feeders. But we've watched one squirrel after another outwit numerous varieties.

Squirrel baffles are usually the best way to keep squirrels away from your feeders. These are simply barriers that prevent squirrels from getting to feeders. On pole-mounted feeders, baffles should be fixed in place beneath the feeder and far enough from the ground, usually 5 feet, that a squirrel cannot jump over the baffle onto the pole. On hanging feeders, a tilting baffle—at least 18 inches in diameter—should be installed above the feeder. In addition to commercially made plexiglas baffles, bird watchers have used old record albums, plastic salad bowls, two-liter soda bottles, even stovepipes. Another hint for suspended feeders: try hanging them from a three to four-foot length of monofilament fishing line instead of wire. Also, if you hang your feeder from a horizontal line, try placing lengths of plastic tubing on the line; the tubing should spin when a squirrel tries to walk on it.



### Cats:

Cats are the most numerous pet in North America. Unfortunately, they kill hundreds of millions of birds each year. Ground-feeding and ground-nesting birds and fledglings are at greatest risk. Feeder birds are also easy prey.

If you own a cat, we strongly recommend that you keep it indoors to reduce this needless loss. The American Bird Conservancy has created the Cats Indoors! Campaign to increase awareness of the problem. For more information, contact: American Bird Conservancy, Cats Indoors! 1250 24th Street, NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20037. Phone: 202-778-9666 [<http://www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/index.html>]



### Other Mammals:

If bears, raccoons, or deer become a nuisance, the best tactic is to make your feeders inaccessible with fencing. If that approach is impractical, you'll probably have to take down your feeders temporarily. Like hawks, mammals will find new foraging routes. If your mammalian visitors appear only at night, take in your feeders at dusk.