

Don't Feed The Birds: Your Guide To Combating Avian Pests In Pet Food Processing Facilities

Highly mobile, disease-carrying pests, birds can be difficult to control in the pet food industry. These scavengers of the sky can find the perfect conditions for roosting and nesting around your facility. And if they find an opportunity to squeeze inside, your facility offers shelter and a buffet of ingredients that keeps them coming back.

Birds can quickly become attached to a particular place, meaning a few nests can become a flock's ancestral rookery in a couple years' time. Breaking this instinctual habit can be a significant challenge for pet food processing facilities.

How do you protect your facility from the threat of birds? Start by getting to know the most common avian pests, the risks they pose to your operation, and the options available to help you prevent a problem before it starts.

The Top 3 Pet Food-Seeking Pest Birds

	Size	Likely Haunts	Challenges
Pigeons	11"	Ledges, windowsills, HVAC units, pipes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Excessive droppings- Nesting in machinery- Strong homing instincts make flock removal difficult
Starlings	8"	Ledges, soffits, exhaust vents, lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Massive flocks lead to excessive droppings and noise- Nesting material clogs drains and machinery
Sparrows	6"	Covered, elevated spots	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Rapid breeders- Prone to feeding in large groups- Messy nests and can lead to structural damage.

Bird Dangers

If birds settle on your property, it can pose several risks to your people, your property and your bottom line. Given that birds are likely to congregate in ever-growing flocks, these risks have the potential to become serious, if not quickly addressed.

Health Hazards

Bird droppings, feathers and nesting materials may carry up to 60 different pathogens that can lead to illness such as influenza, salmonella and histoplasmosis, a dangerous lung disease.

Safety and Liability

Bird droppings are corrosive, capable of eating their way through building materials and the equipment they land on. They make surfaces slippery, exposing employees to possible injuries.

Tagalong Pests

Pest birds are a typical home to parasites such as mites. These parasites can be transferrable, making your employees susceptible to exposure leading to additional health risks.

Business Costs

Birds in your facility can potentially lead to lost revenue from productive downtime and just one bird in your facility can result in a failed audit.

Monitoring Your Defense: A Problem Area Checklist

Like the pets your products nourish, problem birds need food, water and shelter to thrive. Your facility offers all three, along with features that birds' instincts can't resist. These are the top bird hot spots in food processing facilities to monitor so that you can look out for signs of potential bird problems.

- Feeding Areas**
Carefully inspect storage areas and machinery where grain and other ingredients can spill over to the ground, creating irresistible attraction for birds. Another bird attractant are the trash and dumpster areas, which can provide easily accessible food sources.
- Up High**
Before they moved into urban areas, birds were nature-dwelling birds, and your grain elevators and towering structures can feel very much like home to them. Investigate exterior areas for signs of birds.
- Roofs and Overhangs**
Your facility features an array of covered roof areas that offers birds loafing and nesting areas, as well as ideal spots for building nests. Inspect these areas for indications of bird activity.
- Other Nesting Nooks**
Birds scope out cozy, protected nooks. Pay attention to openings in pipes, HVAC units, lighting fixtures and machinery. These areas provide a sense of safety needed for nest building.

Bird Control Methods: Tools At Your Disposal

From the type of bird encroaching on your space to the physical features of your property, there are many factors that bird specialists assess to determine the best course of action. With many devices available to help fight bird problems, here are a few of the tools that can help protect your facility.

Bird Exclusion

- Eliminate key biological needs, like standing water and spilled food
- Trim trees and brush away from the building, cutting off easy-access "highways" into your facility
- Caulk and seal off potential gaps
- Install door strips over entrances
- Prevent access to overhangs and nesting areas using netting, mesh and potentially spikes

Bird Controls

- Visually scaring can mimic predator features or using reflective devices to deter birds
- Audio scare devices work by replicating bird distress or predator calls, letting birds know your property is dangerous to them
- Traps can humanely capture birds, resulting in relocation away from your facility
- Chemical controls including harassment chemicals, repellants and potentially baits are possible options
- Spikes and other similar devices for perching deterrence

Emergency Plan: What To Do If A Bird Gets In

Almost every pet food processing facility is susceptible to the occasional fly-in through open dock doors, and even one bird inside can be a threat. Use this fast-acting plan to protect your facility from potential risks.

1. Food first: discourage birds from entering your most critical processing areas, particularly anywhere that product is exposed.
2. Quickly cover critical lines and equipment.
3. Make sure all doors are closed to the production areas.
4. Encourage the birds to fly out by darkening the space and opening one door or window. The light will help to naturally draw the bird out. You can also coordinate a crew of people to help herd the bird toward the opening using flashlights or laser pointers.
5. Have fast-trapping equipment on hand. Mist nets are very fine nets shaped liked oversized volleyball nets and invisible to birds. They can be put in flyways to quickly entrap an unwanted avian pest.

Bird Control and Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

Bird control is an important ingredient in the IPM program for pet food processing facilities. As we've seen, they are difficult to control and can cause a myriad of issues, so it's imperative that you work with a knowledgeable provider to develop a comprehensive, proactive plan for dealing with bird pests. When there is a plan in place and your staff is aware of the procedures and protocols, your team will be a unified force against this overhead threat.

To learn more about bird control, visit www.ifundco.com or call 800-477-4432.