

OPINION: Don't feed the birds!

Ever noticed the signs stating "Don't feed the birds."? I've seen people literally sitting or standing at in front of the sign **while** feeding birds.

Is it because in this day and age we are so saturated with information that we have a sort of "attention fatigue"? Or is it a case of walking by something so many times that you no longer notice certain things – sort of blinders caused by familiarity?

Regardless, there is also a group of people that actually **do** see the sign, but don't understand why it's a "thing." Or that not only is a thing, but it is more than a request – it's against the **law**.



"Oooh, really scary!" you may sarcastically say. "Are the bird police going to come and give me a ticket or arrest me?"

I've never in my life heard of anyone getting a fine for such a thing. Perhaps this is another reason that people continue to "feed the birds" in spite of the signs, in spite of the law, in spite of the fact that in some areas you can be fined.

While feeding the birds has become a tradition and common past-time for parents and their children, it is actually harmful, even destructive. "Say, what?"

While the intention is a well-meaning one, it is not only illegal to feed the birds, but it is not good for them, for us or the ecosystem.

Disease, bacteria, fungus and parasites

When birds gather in one place they, of course, continually drop feces on the ground, saturating the area over and over again. That makes popular feeding spots a breeding ground for diseases, funguses, and bacteria that can actually be harmful to humans – more than 60 kinds.

One that is particularly nasty is St. Louis Encephalitis, an inflammation of the nervous system. While symptoms as tame as a headache or fever in healthy, young people more serious cases can result in coma or paralysis. With the elderly, it can be fatal. How it is transmitted is by another harmful critter – the mosquito. Mosquitos feast on anything and everything and search for targets by sight, odor, and heat – three things that a flock of birds will register off the charts for. A mosquito bites and infected bird then you and now you have one of many possible diseases, including St. Louis encephalitis.



Candidiasis is a yeast or fungal infection from pigeons that affects your breathing, attacks the intestines, the mouth, skin, and the vagina – yes, it's the same exact one that affects women.

Other yeast/fungal infections from pigeons are **Histoplasmosis** and **Cryptococcosis** which not only attack the respiratory system, but even the central nervous system.

Birds flying to the area that feeding is going on at or overhead will drop feces on the people, the ground and any water sources. Whether fresh or dried they are harmful.

Other diseases and parasites include the familiar E.Coli., Salmonellosis, Bed Bugs, West Nile Virus, and over 50 more. Many of these diseases are transmitted through bird feces as well as physical contact. Suffice it to say, that where there are birds there are many health hazards. Attracting them to homes, buildings, parks, etc. means that they can contaminate food sources, water supplies, other animals, including you.

Harmful to the bird you are trying to “help”

What is usually on the menu is leftover stale bread from home. Even if someone justifies this one by saying they are bringing seeds or nuts, they are still subject to the above-stated reason.

Birds are not all created equal and each has its own particular digestive system adapted to specific foods, but being hungry and well, an animal, it will often eat what it is in front of it anyway. Most breads are so deficient in nutrients that if you look at the label you'll notice that it has to be “enriched.” It will be higher in sodium than anything else, e.g. vitamins, fat, carbohydrates, protein, etc. and those things will be in such dismal amounts that ducks, pigeons and geese have been found with bone deformities.



In essence, it is junk and harmful junk at that.

Now, can you imagine having it all day long or as the primary source of food? In many parks and ponds that are popular with people, birds eat bird all day long. People someone likely came before you and will come after you and these little bird bellies will fill up.

Even worse is stale, old bread – mold may be present whether you see it or not and many bread molds are actually toxic to birds. Any bread that is left behind in the water or on the ground will eventually get moldy anyway.

Lastly, birds may become desensitized to humans or reliant on us. Unfortunately, there are some bad apples in society and some people would like to do birds harm. A bird that has been desensitized will come a lot closer to people than it would

naturally, placing them at risk to those bad apples.

Even the “good apples” make birds reliant and birds may simply not go hunting for nutritional meals. Since chicks learn from their parents, an entire generation may be affected adversely.

Destructive to the Ecosystem

The local ecology can be set off balance – when one species within that system thrives at a level far beyond what it is supposed to a number of bad things happen. With a population explosion among birds, the other things that birds feed on get devoured in an equal amount. When there is no feed from humans, those that don’t linger around and wait or more humans will head out for other food sources until humans return.

A massive abnormal population of birds means anything that is on their menu is going to be ravaged by drawing resources away from other species taking food from them. In addition, the large population of birds will draw predators to urban areas that perhaps wouldn’t normally come to them.



In some species – like ducks and geese – popular spots can actually delay their winter migration. The food will be so attractive to them that they will not leave for the winter on time.

Bird populations don't usually mingle. That means birds will transmit bird diseases that may not be harmful to their own species, but disastrous to others. Such close unusual contact leads to outbreaks of avian-based illnesses like Avian Bird Flu which can have devastating consequences.

Closing

So the decision to feed the birds comes down to whether your desire to have fun with your children or decision to do something because you **feel** it is an act of generosity and kindness is more important to you than the truth and damage that it actually does.

Your backyard may be alright, – the Audubon Society offers some guidelines – but feeding them at popular public spots is not. This is the reason why there are signs posted asking people not to feed the birds.

If you care about the birds, don't feed them.