

# Modern Car Care 07/2002: Bye, Bye Birdie

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## Bye, Bye Birdie Solve bird problems without resorting to "fowl" play

*By Tracy Charuhas*

If your carwash is beginning to look like a scene out of one of Alfred Hitchcock's most famous suspense thrillers, it's time to look into bird control.

Pigeons, starlings and sparrows may look innocent enough, but they are at the top of almost every self-serve operator's "Most Wanted" list because of the mess they leave behind. Not only are bird droppings visually unappealing, but research has shown that the feces of these three birds, and several others, carry dozens of disease-causing organisms that are harmful to humans.

These three bird types, found all over the United States, are attracted to carwashes because of the availability of water and because self-serve buildings often provide them with ideal places to congregate and roost.

In the past, some operators resorted to pulling out their shotguns and trying to get rid of them with bullets. But this method of bird control is ineffective for the most part. When one flock disappears, another will take its place and, in some states, killing certain species of birds is illegal, according to Josh Pierce, account manager for Chicago-based Bird-X.

"We try to tell people not to kill birds," Pierce says. "You want to be careful. If you go up into Wisconsin, for example, and start killing starlings and sparrows, they're going to charge you some ungodly amount for every bird you kill."

No operator wants to spend valuable time chasing birds off his property, but like it or not, keeping birds away from your carwash requires diligence. The key, according to bird-control experts, is to make your location unappealing to the birds. If they can't perch on your roof or snuggle into the little nooks and crannies of your building, they'll find someplace else to roost.

Birds are attracted to three main things, according to Bruce Donoho, owner of Bird-B-Gone, Inc. in Mission Viejo, Calif.--a food source; water; and shelter. He says bird feces, in addition to being unsightly and a potential health hazard, can mix with water on bay floors and create a potential slip-and-fall situation.

"There's a [maintenance] problem with cleaning up after the birds, but mainly it's a health issue," Donoho says. "There are 36 known diseases that are caused by birds."

### The solutions

There are a variety of bird-repelling options available to operators depending on the nature of the problem and the amount of money they are willing to spend on bird control.

Among Bird-X's best-selling products is Bird Spikes, a product that is mounted on roofs to keep birds from landing. Pierce says the stainless-steel version of Bird Spikes will last up to 10 years, and birds cannot adapt to the product.

A less-expensive option, Pierce says, is BirdProof Gel, a petroleum-based product that is applied to areas where the birds tend to congregate. The birds don't stick to the gel, but they will not stay in that location because they do not like the feel of the gel on their feet. The gel needs to be reapplied every 8 to 12 months.

In addition to carrying its own brand of Bird Spikes, Bird-B-Gone also sells Bird Net 2000 to carwash operators. Donoho says the netting is a total-exclusion product that keeps birds out of particular areas of a building.

Bird-B-Gone also sells a device that zaps birds with a mild electrical jolt when they come into contact with it. The Bird Jolt, which can be mounted to rooftops and other areas, is completely harmless to humans and animals but does keep the birds from coming back, Donoho says.

Both companies also offer systems that repel birds with sound. Bird-X's Super BirdXPeller PRO has distress calls from several bird species as well as predator calls that scare birds and cause them to leave. The unit is fully programmable, allowing operators to set the volume and the time the unit is to go off. Bird-X also offers a repeller that uses ultra-high-frequency noise to scare birds away. The noise is too high a frequency for humans to hear. Bird-B-Gone's Ultrasonic UB43 repels birds with noise and can be used in enclosed or semi-enclosed areas.

Pierce says most of the telephone calls he takes are from operators who never knew about bird control or never wanted to look into the service but have reached their breaking point. Bird-control specialists can help operators determine their particular needs over the phone.

"When they call up and they have a really aggressive bird problem, we always recommend a combination of products," Pierce says. "The worse the problem, the more likely we suggest they use visual products, roost inhibitors and sound units."

Donoho says the only real answer to heavy bird pressure is spikes and netting.

While most operators would like to control the problem by buying one low-cost miracle product such as a plastic owl, that's not usually effective, Pierce says.

"When it comes down to controlling wildlife, you can't just spend \$30 and get rid of a bird problem," he says.

### **Do birds adapt?**

Their brains may be small, but birds are very adaptive creatures, Donoho says. What scares them one day will mean nothing the next if it never moves or changes.

Pierce says that the majority of people who call him say they have tried, with no success, to use plastic owls or other visual devices to scare birds. While the products worked at first, they became useless once the birds realized they were not a threat.



"All of our products are sold on the idea of fear, and if you don't move these products they're not going to scare the birds and they're going to be useless," Pierce says.

Even sound devices will become ineffective if not used properly, Pierce says.

"You can't expect to put a product up, turn it on and have it act as a magic wand for the next six years. It's silly."

Pierce says the key is to change the sounds every few months.

"The people who are able to keep the birds away are usually the people who keep in contact with us," Pierce says. "If situations come up, I'm able to suggest to them a new way to program the unit."

Every carwash site is different, and the methods operators choose to rid their sites of pesky birds is up to them. It will take some work, but in the end it will be worth the effort. And just think, maybe one day while strolling through the park you'll be able to look a pigeon square in the eye and not resort to foul language and obscene gestures.