**Disease Prevention for Birds**

**Segment for Week of Feb 21, 2022**

This is Julie Callahan bringing you information on shore friendly living and gardening from the Master Gardeners and Virginia Cooperative Extension.

Towards the end of last year [sick and dying birds](https://www.usgs.gov/news/updated-interagency-statement-usgs-and-partners-continue-investigating-dc-area-bird-mortality%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) were documented in several states in the Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, and South. The main symptom was swollen, crusted-over eyes in fledglings of blue jays, robins, grackles, and several other species.

Biologists, wildlife agencies, and conservation organizations, including the National Wildlife Federation, recommended that folks proactively take down bird feeders and baths, places where birds congregate that could be contributing to the spread of whatever was causing this mysterious illness.

Thankfully, according to the latest update from the [Cornell Wildlife Health Lab](https://www.ithaca.com/news/ithaca/cornell-experts-not-overly-alarmed-by-mysterious-songbird-sickness/article_ae73fa12-efc6-11eb-9a3f-ef82b40e923f.html), it seems this bird mortality event has subsided without significant impact to bird populations overall. However, though several diseases and pathogens have been ruled out, after much testing we still don’t know exactly what the cause of this outbreak actually was.

With this information in mind, it should be ok to put your feeders and bird baths back out in the yard. Take these steps to prevent disease before birds become sick

• At least once a week, rake up waste food, husks, and other accumulated material below feeders on the ground.

• Avoid crowding birds by providing multiple feeders, spaced apart rather than clustered together.

• Use feeders that don’t have sharp points or edges. Bacteria and viruses on contaminated surfaces can infect healthy birds through even small scratches.

• Clean and disinfect feeders at least once every two weeks, and more often if you observe sick birds.

• Do not dispense food that smells musty, is wet, looks moldy, or has fungus growing on it. Discard any food that has had any contact with rodents.

• Disinfect the storage container and food scoop that may have come in contact with spoiled food.

• Every day, rinse birdbaths and replace the water. Twice a week scrub them with a plastic bristle brush and mild dish detergent, and rinse thoroughly before refilling.

• Tell your neighbors who feed birds about these precautions. Birds move among feeders and spread diseases as they go.

For more information or for answers to your questions, contact your local Accomack or Northampton County Extension Office. Call 757-678-7946 or 757-787-1361. You can also follow the Eastern Shore Master Gardeners on Facebook.