

Goofy bird questions



Soni Ericksen
Extension Assistant

Q. Swallows have been trying to build a mud nest above our door. How do we discourage them?

A. Of the eight swallow species in North America, barn swallows and cliff swallows sometimes come into conflict with people because they regularly build mud nests attached to buildings. Cliff swallows nest in large colonies of up to several hundred pairs; but, barn swallows tend to nest as single pairs. Four basic conditions are needed for nesting cliff and barn swallows:

1. a fresh water source for drinking.
2. an open habitat for foraging.
3. a supply of mud of the proper consistency for nest building.
4. a suitable surface for nest attachment beneath an overhang or ledge.

Assuming that nothing can be done about these first three conditions that are needed to nest, the best control tactic is altering the suitability of the attachment site. There are several ways this can be done.

1. Removal of a rough surface of a wall and/or overhang makes a site less attractive for swallows. Wood, stucco, masonry and concrete surfaces are favorable surfaces for nest attachment. Nests are rarely attached to metal. Cover attachment surfaces with slick surfaces like glass, plexiglass or sheet metal.
2. Install netting over the attachment area or hang strands of monofilament fishing line from the eaves so the swallows will bump into it.
3. Install metal projections along the junction of the wall and eave.
4. Install a concave surface under the eaves.

Nest removal should be initiated at the first sign of nest building because it is illegal to remove nests with eggs or young. Nests can be washed down with a hose. Persistent swallows may attempt to rebuild nests several times before abandoning this effort.

Frightening swallows is not effective. Repellents are not effective. An adhesive repellent used for roosting birds (Tanglefoot®) may actually improve nest adherence. The use of toxicants, trapping and shooting are against the law because swallows are classified as migratory insectivorous birds under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918.

Q. Grackles are putting droppings in my birdbath (swimming pool). Why?

A. Grackles are very tidy after the young have hatched to prevent predators from finding the nest. Fecal matter from the young birds is covered with a sac-like membrane which enables the adults to dispose of the waste easily away from the nest. Birdbaths and swimming pools are an attractive disposal site because the water reduces the smell from the fecal matter.

Q. Blue jays (swallows) have been attacking our cat and have even swooped down on us! Why are they doing this? How can we protect ourselves from these dive bombing birds?

A. Birds are very territorial when they have a nest of babies. When a cat, dog or human comes anywhere close to their nest, they see a predator that is a threat to their babies. This dive-bombing behavior is an effective scare tactic meant to drive predators away from their nest of young. Until the baby birds are on their own, you may want to stay away from the nest site. This may mean using other entrances around your house or areas in your yard. The dive bombing is very effective, but the birds are very unlikely to hurt you. Wearing a hat or carrying an open umbrella over your head may make you feel safer.

Q. My children found a baby bird that fell from a nest. Will the parents abandon the bird now that we have touched it?

A. Birds have a very poor sense of smell. The parents cannot smell human scent so the best thing is to put the baby bird back in the nest. The parents should take care of their baby again. (SE)



Tick Talk

Barb Ogg
Extension Educator

Lyme disease is caused by a spirochete bacteria that is carried and transmitted through bites from several species of ticks. Since it was first recognized in 1976, this disease has occurred in most states in the continental U.S.—including Nebraska. Wayne Kramer, medical entomologist at the Nebraska State Health Department, says that about six cases of Lyme disease are confirmed each year in Nebraska by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Most cases have occurred in southeast Nebraska.

Early signs of the disease may include a red rash which expands in concentric circles outward from the tick bite producing a “bulls-eye” effect. Later, flu-like symptoms occur which include headache, fever, chills, lethargy, and joint and muscle pain. Most of the time, antibiotics have shown to be an effective treatment of this disease—especially in early stages of the disease. There is no vaccine presently available for humans.

The most common carriers of Lyme disease in North America are the deer tick and the western black-legged tick; neither of these ticks are found in Nebraska. The Lone Star tick is found in Nebraska and has been suspected to be linked in some way to the disease because both are found in the same part of Nebraska. However, the Lone Star tick is not a good vector of Lyme disease. This inconsistency

has puzzled medical entomologists, but a new research finding has revealed a possible explanation. A new spirochete has been isolated from the Lone Star tick that may cause disease symptoms similar to, but milder than, those caused by the Lyme disease spirochete. If the symptoms are similar to those of Lyme disease, the CDC may be counting this disease as Lyme disease in error.

In effect, there may be *two* diseases—both tick transmitted—and the Lone Star tick may transmit the second disease. All of this is somewhat speculative at this point; more research is needed to confirm or disprove this hypothesis.

Lone Star ticks thrive in habitats having high humidities (i.e., wooded areas or dense grass canopies) where both small mammals and deer inhabit. Wooded areas like this are abundant in Lancaster County.

Exposure to the Lone Star tick (and other ticks) can be reduced by using the following practices:

- Whenever possible, stay out of tick-infested areas—grassy pastures, prairies and wooded areas. Also, restrict movement of your dog.
- Keep wooded or grassy and weedy areas trimmed around your property to create lower humidities. Ticks do not survive well in sunny areas of low humidity.
- When entering tick-infested areas, wear long-sleeved shirts and long trousers with tight-fitting cuffs. It is easier to spot ticks if you wear light-colored clothing.

- Use an insect repellent containing the active ingredient diethyl toluamide (DEET). Apply DEET repellent to clothing and areas of exposed skin such as hands, wrists, ankles and neck. Be aware that some individuals—especially elderly and very young people—are highly sensitive to DEET so concentrated solutions should be used with caution.

- Prompt inspection and removal of ticks reduces the risk of Lyme disease transmission. After crawling on a potential host, a tick may take up to a day to attach and feed; you may be able to find a tick before it has attached. Do not forget to inspect pets exposed to tick-infested areas before they enter your home.

- Insecticide treatment of large wood lots or pasture areas for tick control will probably not be effective in reducing tick populations. For tick control on pets, use only baths, sprays, and dips that are recommended by your veterinarian.

Note: Measures using several of these practices will be most effective in preventing exposure to ticks.



Water checklist for the landscape

This checklist will help you conserve water for lawn and garden use. Try to add these water conservation tips to your landscape and vegetable gardens.

- * Mulch shrubs, perennials, annual flowers and vegetable plants to retain moisture in the soil longer. Use shredded leaves, grass clippings or chopped bark around plants. Mulching also controls weeds that compete

- with garden plants for water.
- * Vegetables that require more water should be grouped together in the garden to make maximum use of water applications.
- * Collect rain water in a barrel or large bucket from downspouts. Use it to water container plants.
- * Use a drip irrigation system in your garden. This method uses 25 to 50 percent less water than

- hose or sprinkler methods.
- * Water the lawn during the morning hours. Avoid watering when it is windy or during the hottest part of the day. To avoid over watering, keep track of the time by setting a timer or alarm clock.
- * When purchasing plants or developing a new landscape, select low-water use plants. (MJM)

Cockroach Combat Workshop

The second annual “Cockroach Combat Workshop” will be presented Thursday, May 2, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.

It is designed for people who have little training in insect identification, biology or control methods—especially homeowners and apartment dwellers.

Speakers will discuss a multiple-tactic approach to cockroach control—including sanitation, exclusion methods,

trapping, and low risk and least-toxic control products and methods. Control techniques will be an important part of this program. A demonstration of how available products should be safely used in a kitchen setting will be included.

Presenters include Extension Educators Barb Ogg and Dennis Ferraro and Extension Assistant Clyde Ogg, UNL Pesticide Education—Water Center/Environmental Programs. Dennis

and Clyde have more than 10 years experience working with a pest control company. The public is invited to come and learn from experts!

There is a \$5 workshop registration fee that includes a copy of the *Cockroach Control Manual* written by the presenters.

To preregister for this workshop or for more information, call the Lancaster County Extension office at 441-7180. (BPO)

