

# Dropping like flies

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This article is not about the small flies, like fruit flies, but the regular-sized flies that show up hitting the walls and windows indoors — the ones homeowners often find themselves chasing after with a fly swatter. The most common flies in this category are the house fly (*Musca domestica*) and the green bottle fly (*Lucilia sericata*).

## Description

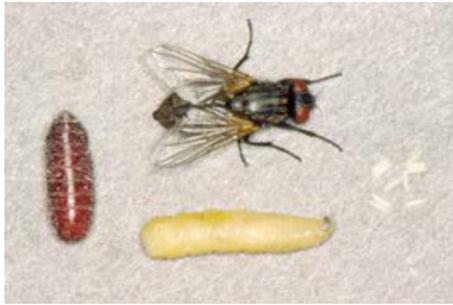
House flies and green bottle flies are approximately 1/4-inch long with red eyes and transparent wings. The house fly has four dark stripes on the thorax and a dull, checkered abdomen. The green bottle fly is entirely colored with metallic hues from yellow-green to blue-green. It is very beautiful, even for a fly.

## Behavior

House flies and green bottle flies are common pests where food is prepared and readily accessible. They are drawn to kitchens in homes, restaurants and food processing facilities by odors of food and garbage. These food sources, if sizable, may be suitable for breeding, or the flies may simply feed on them for energy and nutrients. House flies and green bottle flies are active during the day and will frequently rest on floors, walls, ceilings and windows in buildings.

## Feeding and food sources

Adult flies feed with sponging mouthparts that are saturated with their



House fly with different stages: egg, larva/maggot, pupa/puparium, adult (magnified).



Blow flies are shiny, metallic green, blue, bronze or black (magnified).

saliva to aid with pre-digestion. They feed on moist, decaying organic material, which may include garbage, dead animals, wound dressings, fresh feces and urine, flower nectar, and on a wide variety of human foods and beverages.

## Effect on human health

They transmit pathogens on their bodies and from their saliva as they fly back and forth feeding on garbage, sewage, animal feces, carrion and human

foods. Both species are known to transmit numerous bacterial and viral pathogens causing cholera, salmonellosis, typhoid fever, dysentery, plague and a variety of intestinal parasites.

## Life cycle

Flies undergo complete metamorphosis (egg, larva, pupa, adult), and their larvae are called maggots, which are legless and worm-like. The female house fly lays clusters of small, elongated, white eggs in moist, warm, organic material — which primarily includes animal feces, manure and wet garbage. The green bottle fly is a blow fly, and it deposits its eggs mainly on freshly killed animals and on garbage that contains meats and animal matter.

At room temperature, maggots hatch after a day and burrow into the food material. Maggots grow to maturity after a week and migrate to drier locations to pupate. They enclose themselves in a heavy-duty capsule called a puparium. Transformation to the adult stage may take about a week; then a new adult breaks through one end of the puparium.

Adults can live up to three weeks. The time required to complete the life cycle is dependent on environment factors such as temperature, humidity and food resources. Under optimal conditions, house flies and green bottle flies can complete their life cycle from egg to adult in 7–10 days.

## Management

The greatest impact on preventing or reducing numbers of flies is to identify and eliminate attractive breeding sources.

When the weather warms up, it will be difficult to control the fly population outdoors, but there are some things people can do to minimize fly infestations indoors:

- Do not leave foods or ingredients unattended on counters or tables for long periods of time. Cover or return to storage areas or refrigerator immediately after use.
- Preventive measures include weather stripping windows and doors, replacing screens, and proper trash management.
- Use well-sealed trash receptacles indoors and outdoors. Place outdoor trash receptacles a good distance away from the home or building.
- Regular or frequent disposal of garbage — particularly in summer — also helps to reduce attraction and numbers of flies in the vicinity of the home.
- Remove/clean residues from trash receptacles, compost bins and pet waste equipment so flies are not attracted to the building.
- A multitude of green bottle flies inside the house may indicate a dead animal carcass in chimney, wall void or crawl-space — which requires inspection, removal and sanitation of area.
- Mechanical control involves trapping or killing flies with sticky traps, fly paper, a fly swatter or by electrocution devices. Make sure to discard the bodies so not to get secondary pests such as carpet beetles.
- To kill a single fly, wait until dark or close the blinds, turn on a light in a small bathroom, which will draw the fly into the room to make it easier to swat.

# Spring bird behaviors can be fascinating

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The 2019 spring equinox in the Northern Hemisphere is Wednesday, March 20 at 4:58 p.m. CT. By the first day of spring, some birds have already started staking out their territories and seeking out mates. Spring is when animals are focused on mating and rearing their young. When it comes to birds, some species have behaviors that may be annoying or even frightening.

## Birds attacking windows

One of the most common calls we get in spring is about birds “trying to get in homes” by banging on windows. Rest assured, the birds aren’t trying to get into your home or business. In early spring, male birds are trying to establish their territories. When you observe robins in your yard or park this spring, you’ll see males chase one another and even fight as they establish these territorial boundaries. Once boundaries are established, males are constantly on the watch for invaders.

So why are they banging on windows? They see their own reflection which they think is “an invader.” I’ve watched robins, cardinals and sometimes American Goldfinch attack their reflection in windows. Sometimes females will join in on these attacks. Small songbirds aren’t the only birds who are establishing territories. I also get calls from businesses trying to cope with crows attacking their reflections in windows on buildings and on vehicles.

What can you do? You have to figure out how to eliminate the reflection on the windows the birds are attacking. In most



A male Northern Cardinal reacting to his reflection in a window.

cases, birds have certain windows they bang against depending on where the sun hits and their territorial boundaries. You can try putting up sheer cloth, crinkled plastic wrap on the inside of the window. But if you can go outside and still see your own reflection in the window, you may have to put something on the outside. Scaring the birds won’t work and there are no repellents. Once the birds have established a nest and are raising young (yes, it will be a few weeks), the birds may not have time to bother with the window reflections. And if you had this happen last year, plan on your birds being back this year so be ready.

Some birds strike windows because they see a reflection of the landscape and try to fly through. This is not the same as

when birds attack their own reflection. To prevent window strikes, use decals, screens and other barriers to break up the landscape reflection in windows.

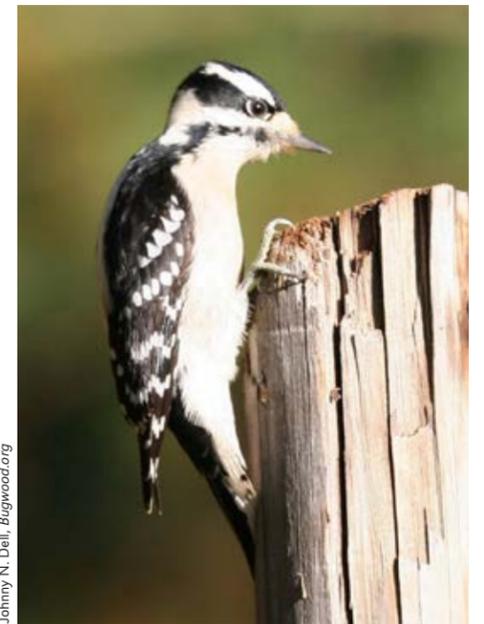
## Woodpeckers drumming

Another common complaint we get from homeowners is about woodpeckers pecking on homes. There is a difference between a woodpecker searching for food or making a nesting cavity and spring drumming. Drumming is another territorial behavior. I love the sound, but I can understand how hearing this loud, rapid and rhythmic sound on your home at 6 a.m. can be alarming.

In nature, woodpeckers prefer a tree snag or hollow tree with the “best sound.” Consider your home and how many great places there might be to make a loud drum when no dead trees are available. Gutters, flashing, chimney caps and hollow home siding can be the perfect instrument for a woodpecker to loudly announce his territory and attract a potential mate.

One spring, I had a woodpecker who decided our second floor gutter was perfect for his drumming — which started before sunrise. Of course, this was also closest to the bedrooms. Fortunately, it didn’t take much for me to get up, go outside and clap my hands and he would take off. After a few days of interrupting his drumming, he went elsewhere. Drumming seldom results in any damage on wood or paint except for maybe paint being chipped off. A woodpecker does more damage when he/she is searching for insects or excavating a potential nest site.

If you have a persistent woodpecker who chooses your home for his “drum,”



Downy woodpecker. Both sexes drum on trees but can also drum on homes.

you can try to discourage him by deadening the sources of his drumming. You can use foam, fabric or other materials to ruin the sound for him. If needed, bird netting or hardware cloth can be put over the area. The good news is that drumming is “usually” just an early spring activity and once the birds are nesting, you won’t hear it again until next spring.

If you are not sure what drumming sounds like, give me a call and I’ll do my best to imitate the sounds for you.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Nebraska Extension in Lancaster County has many resources about birds and other backyard wildlife at <https://go.unl.edu/backyardwildlife>