

PROTECTING YOUR FLOCKS FROM WILD BIRDS

Wild birds can cause a lot of trouble for poultry farmers, creating mess with their droppings & nests, contaminating feed and harbouring disease & parasites. While this has always been a concern, the risks associated with wild birds are now higher and more serious than ever. Since the December 2014 outbreak of Avian Influenza in British Columbia, the rate of spread of the avian influenza virus across the Western United States is alarming. There are now 16 US states that have detected Avian Influenza since December, including Montana. Two cases of H5 avian influenza has also been confirmed in Ontario. The spread of the virus has been linked to wild birds, which are now migrating North – into our backyards. As many as 90 species of wild birds may harbour strains of avian influenza. It is imperative that each poultry farmer takes precautions to protect their flocks from wild birds, this resource outlines some steps you can take to protect your flocks.



Coloured states & provinces indicate States where avian influenza has been identified since December.

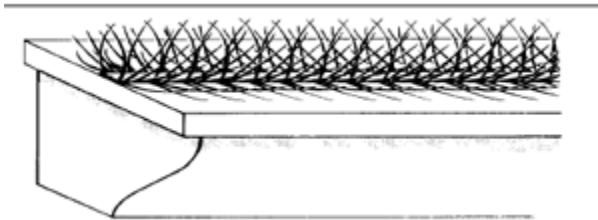
The first step is to prevent wild birds from roosting and nesting near your barn by making the area around your barn unattractive to them. Here is a checklist of preventative measures to implement:

- Avoid having trees, especially fruit trees or those with dense foliage near your barns.
- Ensure that the perimeter (at least 15 feet out) around your barn is free of excess ground cover such as long grass, weeds and debris.
- Check that all air intakes and roof openings are properly screened.
- Eliminate any openings or structural features on the barn that may provide a nesting site.
- Barn walls, roofs, floors and doors should be kept in good repair to prevent gaps that would allow entry of wild birds.
- Ensure good drainage around your barn to prevent standing water.
- Manage insect populations around your barn, as insects provide a source of food for wild birds.
- Quickly clean up any spilled feed around the barn: clean around feed bins after they have been filled and ensure auger tubes are maintained to prevent small amounts of feed from leaking.
- Barn doors should be kept closed at all times when not being used.
- If you have to have any barn doors open for a period of time, placing a flashing or rotating light at the entry point will deter birds from entering.

Once you have taken measures to prevent birds from being attracted to the area around your barn, you should complete a weekly bird check to determine if your actions have been effective. Walk around the outside of your barn, looking for nests and other signs of wild bird activity. Knock down any nests, taking care to properly dispose of nest materials away from the barn.

If during your monitoring you notice wild bird activity around your barn, you can take additional steps to move the birds away from your barn. Birds can be scared away using visual deterrents that look like predators or that display irregular movement. Flashing lights, whirling shiny items, hawk or owl figures and even balloons can be effective in frightening birds away. Birds can quickly get used to these deterrents, so to be effective you should use a variety of different devices and change them on a regular basis.

If you notice birds roosting in specific areas on your barn, try placing something on the surface that will make it difficult for the birds to find a comfortable perch. Porcupine wire, as illustrated below, can be very effective.



If you use an open water source for your water supply, you need to take action to ensure that the water you give your flock is free from wild bird contamination. Deter wild birds away from your water source, and treat your water with appropriate levels of chlorine.

Finally, the most important step you can take to protect your flock is ensuring everyone that enters your barn is adhering to strict biosecurity protocols. Many cases of avian influenza in commercial poultry can be linked to farmers bringing the virus in on their boots after stepping in wild bird droppings. Everyone entering the restricted area of your barn needs to change their footwear, being careful to ensure footwear, clothing and equipment that has been exposed to the outdoors does not cross over your restricted line.

Wild birds carrying the avian influenza virus is a reality in Alberta. While this is a frightening development, we hope it is empowering to know that there are things you can do to protect your flocks.

Sources: www.poultryhub.org (Australia)

Oklahoma State University – “Wild Bird Control in the Poultry House”