



** This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/danger-near-the-bird-feeder>

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Danger near the bird feeder? K-State wildlife expert urges caution

Feeding birds may have unintended consequences, says Ricketts

K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. -- Bird feeders are a great way to enjoy nature without leaving your front porch, and many homeowners understand the joys of seeing multiple bird species frequent the feeders.

But Kansas State University wildlife specialist Drew Ricketts said bird feeders also can attract predators and other wildlife into your yard.

For example, racoons are seven times more likely to enter the yard and deer are two times more likely if you have a bird feeder.

"Carnivores, such as coyotes and red foxes and those sorts of critters, are at least one and a half times more likely to be in yards with bird feeders," Ricketts said.

"Folks often times are inadvertently attracting critters to the yard, and that can cause problems that don't have anything to do with the bird feeder. One of the things that I would suggest to those folks is to think about how they might be contributing to that situation by having food available in the yard." Ricketts said.

At least once a year, Ricketts said he gets a call from people who are wanting to know how to get rid of a hawk that is hanging around their yard, preying on birds. He said there is nothing you can do because an increase in a prey species often leads to an increase in a predator species.

"Feeding birds is something people do for themselves and it might have unintended negative consequences." Ricketts said.

According to Ricketts, bird feeders allow such predators as domesticated cats and hawks, to take advantage of the condensed hunting grounds around the feeder.

Even though we worry that birds are hungry during the winter, feeding birds may also have unintended consequences for the birds that are eating it.

According to Ricketts, birds don't need to be fed in the winter. A study that looked at birds' reproductive performance showed that birds being fed in the winter time hatched chicks that weighed less and had a lower survival rate than birds that did not have access to feeders.

Ricketts said concentrating birds in one area around a feeder can also be a hot spot for parasites and diseases. Two examples from scientific studies show an increase in diseases like avian pox and infections of lice and mites.

For those who want to keep birds coming around, Ricketts suggests washing bird feeders thoroughly every 24 hours with 10% bleach, and rinsing them well to remove the bleach odor.

More information on managing common wildlife animals in Kansas is available online from [K-State Research and Extension](#).

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FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
K-State Extension Wildlife Management, <https://www.wildlife.k-state.edu>

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