

My battle with House Sparrows

By Larry Hyslop



House sparrows fast emptying the clinging feeder

Perhaps it is a tad obsessive, but as much as I enjoy feeding wild birds each winter, I dislike feeding house sparrows. These introduced, aggressive birds take over feeders and reduce the number of native birds using them.

My situation is worse for two reasons. I live at the north edge of town where neighbors have horses, offering prime house sparrow feed and creating a large sparrow population. A large spruce tree in my back yard offers sparrows a winter refuge and perfect access to my feeders.

So this year, I set a number of feeding rules. None of these deter sparrows but together, they kind of, almost, if I sort of squint when I watch them, slow down the sparrows and allow other birds a little more access to the feeders.

First, no perches. I offer thistle seed in a seed sock. Sparrows still eat from it but they must cling to its side and I see only one or two birds use it at a time. This feeder seems to work the best. I purchased a “clinging feeder” where birds cannot stand on a plastic ring around the base but must cling to this ring to access seeds. Also, I closed off three of its four feeding ports so only one bird can feed at a time. Other birds like finches generally feed one at a time so this does not hamper them. But house sparrows have no problem clinging to this feeder and even with only one port, they empty it in two days. My third feeder is actually supposed to be squirrel proof since a metal mesh surrounds the feeding tube, although we have no tree squirrels in my neighborhood. I covered the wire mesh with heavy paper and cut out openings at each seed port and above each port. My idea was that birds could only use it by hanging upside down. An article on the Internet said house sparrows would never hang upside down. It does receives the least sparrows although they use it by simply clinging to the bottom edge of the seed port holes.

Second, no mixed seeds. Although bags of mixed seeds are cheaper, they offer “trash” types of seeds that most birds ignore but house sparrows love. My failed upside down feeder holds white safflower seeds, a seed type I had heard sparrows do not care for, but not true. The clinging feeder holds black sunflower seed, which sparrows love. They would love the thistle seed if they could get to it easier.

Third, gimmicks. Last winter I built a contraption of hanging fishing line meant to mimic a product called “Magic Halo” that is supposed to deter house sparrows since they do not like to approach a feeder past hanging wires. It worked for a while, but they got used to it. It may have cut down the number of feeding sparrows and I need to construct another one. I may also get out an old platform feeder and cover its platform with a plastic mesh that sits above the platform surface. House sparrows

like to scatter seed with their bills as they eat and the mesh means they can only reach in and pluck up individual seeds.

Will any of these gimmicks, seed types and feeders eliminate house sparrows from my back yard? Of course not but maybe, just maybe, they will slow down the onslaught of those dang house sparrows.

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