

Successes and setbacks Fighting House Sparrows

By Larry Hyslop



House sparrows, house finches and gold finches at my back yard feeders.

Time for my annual report regarding my battles against house sparrows. Last winter was bad, house sparrows dominated the bird feeders so much that few other birds came near. Things are better this winter, although the 50-60 house sparrows in my yard each day is still a challenge.

Let me start with the strategy that did not work. A large spruce near the feeders is home for these house sparrows year around. When I walk outside, they do not fly off but merely disappear back into the spruce. For \$10, I bought bird netting meant to be draped over fruit trees to protect them from birds. The spruce tree being so big, I draped this net over the closer side of the tree.

It barely intimidates the sparrows. They merely move higher in the spruce above the netting. They may not spend as much time in the spruce tree but when the sun is out, the top of the tree is full of house sparrows.

Now for what barely works. I added a tray feeder with sunflower seeds since someone said house sparrows will not eat sunflower seeds, Ha! There have been times when the tray has contained more house finches than house sparrows but lately, I notice more times when the tray is full of only house sparrows.

Last winter, house sparrows tore holes in the thistle seed socks and took all the seed so I had no gold finches in the yard. This winter, I do have gold finches. For \$4, I bought a thistle seed feeder and cut off the perches to $\frac{1}{2}$ "- $\frac{3}{4}$ " in length. The short perches were fine for gold finches, but too short for house sparrows to stand on. But lately I have seen house sparrows figure out they do not need to stand on the perches, but merely hang from a perch with one foot while they grab seeds. I have even seen a few house sparrows flutter in place long enough to grab a seed, as if they were hummingbirds!

For \$12, I bought a thistle seed feeder where birds must hang upside down to gain access to the feeder holes. On its first day, gold finches happily fed hung upside down. House sparrows landed on its long perches but could not figure out the locations of the seed openings. But within the last few days, I have seen house sparrows happily feeding on thistle seed while hanging upside down, using an outstretched wing to balance against the tube.

Last year, I bought a feeder for \$8, which has no perches. Birds must cling to a vertical rim to feed. A plastic tube closes off the feeder except for a single narrow opening. The house sparrows love it although only one at a time can feed. This feeder contains the cheapest seed mix I can find and hangs back away from the other feeders. It seems to satisfy some of them, as they fight over which bird gets to

grab a seed or two before another one pushes in for their turn. They easily empty the feeder but it takes all day.

So the house sparrows are still here and doing fine. Instead of controlling them, I seem to be providing them a training center. My efforts are turning out house sparrows even better at foraging for bird seed. Yippee! Email me at hyslop.nv@gmail.com and let me know how you are doing in your battles with house sparrows.

Elko Daily Free Press, "Nature Notes", 1/25/2013

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