

Bird Safety Corner

There are many potential pests which can affect your birds, particularly rodents and insects. Ants are discussed in another column. Pests can scare your birds (particularly at night), eat their food, carry disease, and directly harm them. This column will outline some of the ways to keep them under control without also harming your birds.

Rodents

Mice and **rats** are common in homes, especially if there is available food, such as the food in your birds' cages and on the ground around the cages. Since they are primarily nocturnal, your first clue to their presence might be night frights, especially in cockatiels. Look around for their little pellet droppings. Keeping the areas around the cages clean can help, but sometimes the only solution is to trap or kill the rodents for your birds' safety.

Most **rodenticides** are blood thinners that cause the rodent to fatally bleed to death. Bait traps can be safely placed in homes with birds if the bait is sealed inside the traps with openings large enough only for rodents to enter. The traps should be placed only in areas to which birds have no access and are not safe around larger birds who could crack open the traps. You must monitor the traps and surrounding areas to be sure rodents are not biting off pieces of bait and leaving them outside the traps. Remember that rodents who eat bait and die outside may be consumed by raptors, killing them as well, so many of these products are being outlawed.



Glue traps are not toxic, but they are **NOT SAFE** to use around birds, who can land on the traps and get stuck. The glue can injure eyes, beaks, and oral cavities and cause feather damage. Small birds have died on glue traps used indoors, like the budgie in this picture. Glue traps used outside have injured and killed many wild birds. If you find a bird stuck to a glue trap, peanut butter will dissolve the glue safely. Soapy water can then be used to remove the peanut butter. Very lightly sticky insect traps (see below) are not

usually sticky enough to injure birds. **Live traps** can be used to trap rodents, which then must be driven large distances away to keep them from returning. It is difficult to capture enough rodents to eliminate an indoor rodent problem, however. Old fashioned **mouse traps** are actually the safest way to rid a house of mice, though someone has to handle the mouse, who might not be killed outright. Mouse traps must be placed in areas your birds cannot access, such as the garage, or must be placed inside boxes or cages that birds cannot get into. They could injure or kill curious birds (is there any other kind?).



Insects

Pantry moths are one of the most common insect pests bird companions encounter. They are not directly harmful to your birds, but can be quite annoying. They reproduce in bird food, and their eggs can already be in purchased food. Freezing the food may or may not kill the eggs. There are several approaches to controlling pantry moths. **Killing them outright** is easy, and with their high reproduction rate, may keep the population under control, which is generally the best you can hope for. **Pheromone traps** are available and



inexpensive. They are sticky traps that attract the moths with pheromones. Touch the trap to make sure it's not sticky enough to hurt a bird, and keep the traps away from birds. They are very effective, but keep in mind that they are dying a slow painful death since they stick to the flypaper and try desperately to escape, often ripping off legs and wings. My favorite way to kill the moths is with an **electrified bug swatter**. The moths are killed instantly when they hit the electrified element, and it enables you to get moths in hard to reach places. They are inexpensive and easy to find online and in stores. It's like having a portable bug zapper. They don't

leave stains like squashing the moths on your walls does. Plus you can work on your backhand! I keep several around the house. Purchase smaller amounts of food, particularly in the summer months, and **store food in tightly sealed containers**. Keep in mind that these insects are not harmful to your birds if ingested. One of my cockatiels actually loves snacking on the larvae, which look like little white worms!

Fruit flies are not dangerous to birds, but are annoying. They show up when there is rotting fruit, so your best bet is to remove fruit before it spoils, especially in the summer. They can be trapped, if need be, in **fruit fly container traps** which you can buy or easily make (just search online for methods). **House flies** can carry disease and can lay eggs on cage bottoms. **Directly killing** them or **releasing them outside** is safest for your birds. **Fly traps** are usually too sticky to be used safely around birds. **Mosquitoes** carry a variety of diseases, including West Nile virus, which can sicken or kill your birds. There are no mosquito-deterrent products safe to use



around birds. DEET and citronella are dangerous to use around birds. **Kill any mosquitoes** inside your home. Inspect and patch all window and door screens. Avoid keeping windows and doors open without screens. If you take your birds outside, do not take them out at dusk and dawn, when mosquitoes are most common. **Cockroaches** can carry disease and can be difficult to eradicate. Keeping your home

clean and free of food debris will help, but if you live in an apartment, you may have them regardless of how clean your place is. Interestingly I found on a pet roaches forum (yes, such a thing exists), that the best food to feed roaches is parrot pellets! **Boric acid** or **diatomaceous earth** can be sprinkled around baseboards, but birds must be kept from walking through, breathing, or eating these substances. **Baking soda and powdered sugar** mixed in equal parts and spread around floors and counters is non-toxic and effective. There's always the **Roach Motel** (a sticky trap) for minor infestations. You might need a **professional exterminator** for cockroaches, and you will need to remove your birds during treatment.

Regular **indoor spiders** are not generally harmful to birds and will eat insect pests, so it's best to leave them alone unless they get out of hand. **Earwigs** are beneficial outside and occasionally get in the house. They are not harmful to birds, though many people are disconcerted by them. **Dog and cat fleas** will not bother your birds, but you must use caution if you have to rid your house of fleas. Most flea products are toxic to birds, so consult an avian veterinarian for advice on how to handle the situation.

Finally, do not use mothballs, peppermint oil, or any other products with essential oils or solvents to kill pests around your birds. Be very careful with any chemical pest control products. Mechanical methods and direct removal/killing are safest. If your bird does eat an insect, it's generally ok. Wild parrots do eat insects. Free protein!



For more info, go to **How to Get Rid of Things** (www.getridofthings.com/pests) or click on the name of the pest above. Obviously ignore the solutions dangerous to birds, as detailed above, but this website provides a wealth of information about all kinds of pests and how to control them.

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