

## **Birds Are Pecking at My Windows – or at Anything Reflective - and Are Driving Me Crazy!!!!**

When I lived in southeastern Pennsylvania, a sure sign of spring was a robin who spent most of every day for weeks, sitting on the windowsill and loudly pecking at one of my living room windows. This was enough to drive me crazy! And other birds, such as cardinals, also do this. These birds will often sit on the edges of car doors and peck away at side view mirrors or on the rims of wheels and peck at hubcaps. So what is causing this?

Generally this behavior is seen only in spring through early summer. They are seeing their reflections and are reacting with aggressive and physical behavior. Their territory includes your house or car and they are defending it from a 'rival.' Remember, birds do not know about or understand mirrors and how they work. They do not recognize what they are seeing is actually themselves. What they see are rival birds encroaching on their territory. Before we laugh at what we might think is stupidity or 'birdbrains,' consider this. When the first human being looked into still water and saw his/her reflection, I wonder what the reaction was? My guess is complete confusion and possibly even fear. And I wonder if that human being fell into the water to 'get' that 'other' human being?

I have found several solutions that work for me. At that window in Pennsylvania, long strips of aluminum foil attached to the outside of the window did the trick. Not overly attractive but it did provide conversation: "Linda, is that aluminum foil dangling from your windows???" But I was much more interested in stopping that infernal LOUD pecking than how that window looked to others. We now live in central Illinois and we have sliding glass doors which lead to our deck and every spring we have a very energetic robin and also a cardinal who sit on the deck and peck away at that glass. My husband Cleon came up with a good solution – he put the throw pillows from the sofa and chairs on the floor and leaned them against the glass. They are taller than either bird and eliminated their reflections. We had to leave them there for a month but that took care of the relentless pecking

If a bird is pecking away at your side-view mirror or hubcap, move your car. Birds are territorial and even though some birds defend a large territory, they are most aggressive close to their nest. Moving your car should decrease or eliminate it. You can also cover the mirror with a towel or lean something against the hubcap – just remember to remove everything before you drive off.

The answer to all of this is to eliminate the reflection they are seeing. If you can do that, the pecking should immediately stop. And whatever method you use has to stay in place for some days – even weeks. Birds do forget in time but in the short term they will check the spot to make sure the 'rival' has not returned. Remember, this is serious business for the bird and you will do him/her a great favor by breaking this habit. While he is busy fighting his own reflection he may be completely unaware of a real threat to his mate or their nest.

### Our Friends Matt and Dana vs Mrs. Cardinal

Matt and Dana live just outside St. Paul, MN, and their yard is home to a pair of Northern Cardinals. They have large shrubs planted outside one of their windows - an ideal nesting site for these cardinals. One day in spring, the female started hurling herself against that window - repeatedly. And she was inexhaustible in her determination and single-mindedness to attack the bird she was seeing in the glass. This went on all day for days with no end in sight. In desperation, Matt texted a video with sound and I just could not believe what I was seeing - and hearing.

This was not pecking, but incredibly loud THWACKS over and over and over. In the video, I could actually see her gather herself, and then hurl herself at the pane of glass. And Matt said he and Dana could hear this 'thwacking' all over the house. And it was driving them both CRAZY!!!!

When faced with this problem, you must get rid of or at least distort the reflection/image the bird is seeing. I told Matt about our success with pillows and aluminum foil. He chose the foil. He did not use strips but crumpled up a large square so the foil itself would not cause a reflection. He then smoothed it out a bit and taped it to the window. Because this cardinal was so persistent and so aggressive, I advised him to leave the foil in place several weeks. Generally, a week or so of not seeing the 'rival' is enough for the bird to lose interest, but this female was more aggressive than any cardinal I have ever seen. Matt left the foil in place for a month and it worked. The bird never hurled herself at that pane for the rest of the season although it is my guess she will be back at it next year unless she changes her territory. And cardinals generally stay in their territories for life. But this time, Matt will be armed and ready - with foil and tape!

Matt and Dana's pair of Cardinals in 'their' shrub just outside the window. Notice the flat crests - a sign of aggression. These birds are ready to attack their 'enemy'.

*Photo by Matt Frey.*



If you run into problems with birds, remember - this is an opportunity for you to think about altering your way of life a bit - maybe become a bit more tolerant. And the rewards are great. It is so wonderful to look out your window and see birds living their lives right in front of you - courting, singing, eating, raising their young. Cleon was sitting at his desk early one spring morning when something tapped his window. And there looking right back at him was a male Baltimore Oriole. What a wonderful way to start the day and I can promise you, Cleon is not hanging aluminum strips at this window - he wants the oriole to come back!