

Keep Local Birds Healthy

ONE OF THE SWEETEST OF OUR local birds is the little House Finch (HOFI in the ornithology world). He is the small bird with the red head and front; the female has brown/beige speckles on her front. The male perches himself atop a tree and sings to his lady love and charms us all with his beautiful repertoire.



You may have noticed that some of these little HOFIs looked sick this past summer/winter. Since 1996, a highly contagious conjunctivitis virus has been spreading across the United States killing tens of thousands, if not more, of HOFIs. Their eyes will puff up badly and you'll see them try to shake the secretions from their eyes. Eventually the secretions glue their eyes shut so they can't find food, and they starve to death or become prey. It's so hard to see them suffer. See this link for pictures: <http://my.pdlink.com/~rlougren/disease.htm>.

Bird feeding has become very popular, but we are killing our little birds with kindness. We all need to be more responsible and clean our feeders every month: wash them well with a 10% bleach solution, rinse, let dry, and then refill. Birdbaths need to be washed weekly with a 10% bleach solution and rinsed out before refilling. If we all do our part, we can do much to prevent this disease from spreading.

I would also like to plead with people not to put out millet and corn bird seeds, as these seeds attract the aggressive House Sparrows (HOSPS) that have come to Eldorado and are killing our Bluebirds and other little native cavity nesters. Please put out only black oil sunflower, safflower, and thistle seeds. Our native birds love these seeds and the HOSPS do not, so it will help to discourage them from staying around. Also, if you have a nest box and know that you don't have the time to monitor it properly to prevent HOSPS from reproducing in them (or prevent HOSPS from killing any other little native bird inside), then please take the box down. Our little native birds will be just fine.

Bluebirds don't eat seed, only berries and lots of bugs, so please, no pesticides. Bluebirds love water, so keeping a fresh, clean birdbath will keep Bluebirds coming around along with their cousins, the Robins! Let's all do what we can to ensure that our native birds will be around for our children and our children's children to enjoy.

—Claudia Daigle