**Headline:** How to Make Your Home and Yard Safe for Hummingbirds

**Teaser:** Untreated windows can be deadly for wild birds—hummingbirds are particularly at risk.

By James M. Cubie, J.D

**Author Bios:**

James M. Cubie, J.D., is a former chief counsel for the U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee. He has played a decisive role in reforming and developing farm-related conservation programs, including 1990s-era farm bills. Cubie is the founder and former director of the Agricultural Conservation Innovation Center, Inc., once a project of the American Farmland Trust. Cubie is a consultant to the [Muhlenberg College Center for Ornithology](https://ornithologycenter.com/protectbirds/), where he advises on bird safety and native plants. He was formerly a presidential campaign speechwriter and chief counsel for the U.S. Senate. Follow him on Twitter: [@jimcubie](https://twitter.com/jimcubie?lang=en).

**Source:** Independent Media Institute

**Credit Line:** *This article was produced by* [*Earth | Food | Life*](https://independentmediainstitute.org/earth-food-life/)*, a project of the Independent Media Institute.*

**Tags:** Animal Rights, Environment, Opinion

**[Article Body:]**

Many species of birds face a deadly threat: window collisions. They cannot distinguish a clear pane of glass from the open sky, and hummingbirds, among the smallest birds, are particularly at risk. The good news is that we now understand this danger and can protect these tiny birds. We can easily create safe environments that can prevent unnecessary window-strike deaths.

Birds hit windows and die in staggering numbers. Every year, according to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, [more than 1 billion birds strike windows](https://www.fws.gov/story/threats-birds-collisions-buildings-glass) in the U.S. alone. Hummingbirds are particularly vulnerable to deadly window collisions because they are small and fragile. The smallest bird is the bee hummingbird, [weighing less than two grams](https://www.audubon.org/news/get-know-bee-hummingbird-worlds-smallest-bird). Collisions with windows at high speed are accidents from which these tiny creatures often cannot recover. Hummingbirds are [33 times more likely](https://academic.oup.com/condor/article/116/1/8/5153098) than the average bird to die hitting a window.

**Hummingbird Safety 101**

People who want to enjoy watching these birds up close need to consider the birds’ best interests. For example, if a feeder is left out too long in the fall, will it induce the birds to stay too long and die from cold? Is it necessary to buy commercial hummingbird food? What is the best way to keep ants off feeders? Is the red dye in sugar water safe? How do you secure a stunned bird for transport to a local wildlife rehabilitation center?

However, making the best choices for wild birds could be better if the yards where we feed them are true sanctuaries devoid of hazards. This means ensuring that feeders are clean, changing the sugar water often, and not using pesticides.

Hanging a feeder induces birds into an unsafe yard, creating an ecological trap. To make a yard safe, the homeowner must exclude cats and install a device or treatment to prevent birds from colliding with windows, like [bird-safe window film](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/heres-how-to-use-window-films-to-actually-protect-birds1/).

**Voracious Nectarivores**

Hummingbirds are an incredibly unique species. Named for the humming sound created by their rapidly beating wings when in flight, they fly at incredible speeds and can stop on a dime. Their breast feathers are iridescent, and they can fly backward. They are the only birds that can [hover in midair](https://www.audubon.org/news/hummingbird-flight-nothing-else-bird-world/).

“Hummingbirds embody so many opposites that their very existence seems a miracle. They are the lightest birds in the sky—and also, for their size, the fastest,” [writes](https://observatory.wiki/Hummingbirds_Are_in_Rapid_Decline) naturalist Sy Montgomery. “These tiny, fragile birds undertake perilous, long-distance migrations. The rufous hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*) flies on gossamer wings from Mexican wintering grounds to nesting areas in Alaska.”

Because of their high metabolic rate, hummingbirds are voracious. They feed while hovering or perched, gorging on nectar from flowers, including annuals and perennials, and blossoms on trees, shrubs, and vines. Their diets also include insects, such as fruit flies and gnats, and tree sap if sapsuckers and other hole-drilling birds and insects have drilled sap wells in trees.

Feeders and pollinator gardens will attract hummingbirds, particularly native plants. “Hummingbirds have evolved with native plants, which are best adapted to local growing seasons, climate, and soil,” [writes](https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/pollinators/documents/AttractingHummingbirdsFS-1046April2015.pdf) the U.S. Forest Service. “They prefer large, tubular flowers that are often (but not always) red in color.”

**Hummingbirds and Windows**

[Doug Tallamy](https://observatory.wiki/Doug_Tallamy), a leading expert on plants, birds, and insects, warned that even as native plants attract hummingbirds, we may inadvertently create “ecological traps” if we invite birds into our yards and do not treat our windows to prevent collisions.

Scientists are still determining why hummingbirds may be more collision-prone than other bird species. Although they point to [high flight velocity and fragility](https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0144600), one factor is that they are the most popular bird to feed. Researchers have not come to any definitive conclusion. They note that these collisions may occur more frequently because of hummingbirds’ [long journeys and migratory patterns](https://birdsconnectsea.org/2023/05/31/hummingbirds-and-window-collisions/).

**A Bird’s Eye View of Glass**

These collisions occur because birds do not see windows. They do not recognize that windows are solid objects. Birds see a reflection in the window of the safe space they have been flying through. Unfortunately, windows are solid, and hummingbirds and other birds die by crashing into them.

No home without anti-collision treatment is safe for birds. Only rarely does a hummingbird fly right up to a window and stop. Often, people are unaware a hummingbird has hit their window and died. According to a [study](https://meridian.allenpress.com/wjo/article-abstract/136/1/113/498924/Evidence-consequences-and-angle-of-strike-of-bird?redirectedFrom=fulltext) published in 2024 by Daniel Klem, Jr., a professor of ornithology and conservation biology at Muhlenberg College, window collisions kill three to five times more birds than previously thought.

**Human Rationalization vs. Reality for the Birds**

“It’s not my windows; it’s the skyscrapers killing birds.” Skyscraper windows cause only [1 percent](https://academic.oup.com/condor/article/116/1/8/5153098) of window collision deaths. Forty-two percent of all window collision deaths are at residencies, while low-rise buildings, including commercial buildings, cause 56 percent.

“But don’t the good things I do for my hummingbirds outweigh the deaths from windows and cats?” Unfortunately, they do not. All the “good things” one might do for hummingbirds—like providing native plants and maintaining a feeder—do not come close to offsetting their window-strike deaths. Hummingbirds do not need feeders; feeders are for human enjoyment.

“I have never seen a hummingbird die hitting my windows. Some hit, but they just fly off.” Collisions happen in a fraction of a second, and we may not be there when they occur.

Klem’s study found that twice as many hummingbirds bounce off and fly away as die immediately. Many bounce off, leave no trace and fly away. Almost all die. We know that 70 percent of living hummingbirds brought to rehab centers end up dying. Of course, most stunned or injured birds are never noticed, or a predator eats them.

**Window Collision Prevention: DIY and Commercial Options**

Here is the good news: People can protect hummingbirds in their yards at no cost or very low cost. Garden netting over windows prevents deadly bird-window collisions. Vertical lines on windows at most 2 inches apart signal to the birds that this is not a safe place to fly. The lines can be made with strings, ribbons, or soap, or they can be store-bought.

Some homeowners do not want screens or netting over their windows. Several good commercial and DIY options minimize the impact on the view out of your windows. These options are described in a [Consumer Guide to Window Collision Prevention](https://ornithologycenter.com/consumerguide/) published by the Ornithology Center of the Acopian Center for Ornithology at Muhlenberg College. All of them have been independently tested. The guide is free and endorsed by the leading expert in the field.

The Consumer Guide includes photos of all the systems, which can be used to compare them when testing these options in homes. The guide also compares their costs and provides DIY instructions for each.

**Debunking False Safety Claims**

There is a lot of incorrect information and false advertising online. That is why the Consumer Guide to Window Collision Prevention is essential. All the options have been independently tested.

You may have read that hummingbirds are in no danger if you put your feeder close to a window or more than 30 feet away. That is half right. Closer is better, but hummingbirds hit windows other than the ones closest to where they feed. The 30-foot claim is based on a mistaken reading of a [study](https://ornithologycenter.com/30notsafe/).

Another disappointing option is widely spaced decals. The most popular choice—putting a few decals on a window a foot or so apart (as typically advertised)—does not work.

Here is a [photo](https://ornithologycenter.com/sdm_downloads/consumerguide/) showing three decals on a small window. There is a smudge caused by a bird strike. Birds are not alerted by the decals. They think the open space is large enough to fly through. In fact, it is glass. The expensive UV choice is unproven—and costly. There are many more [effective options](https://ornithologycenter.com/sdm_downloads/consumerguide/).

Turning off the lights does not make a difference. The level of light that homes emit is so low that it does not matter, and birds are not active at night.

**Conclusion**

Safeguarding hummingbirds from window collisions is a crucial step in ensuring their survival. While these vibrant, delicate creatures enrich our lives with their beauty and energy, attracting them to our homes comes with responsibility.

Creating a bird-friendly yard involves more than providing food—it requires making the environment safe. We can significantly reduce the risk of deadly strikes by adopting proven window collision prevention methods, such as netting, vertical lines, or effective commercial treatments. Hummingbirds deserve our thoughtful care and consideration, and with simple, affordable measures, we can enjoy their presence without endangering their lives. Let’s take action to protect these tiny marvels, preserving their role in nature and ensuring they thrive for generations to come.