

Will our love of glass cost us our birds?

By Anne Lewis

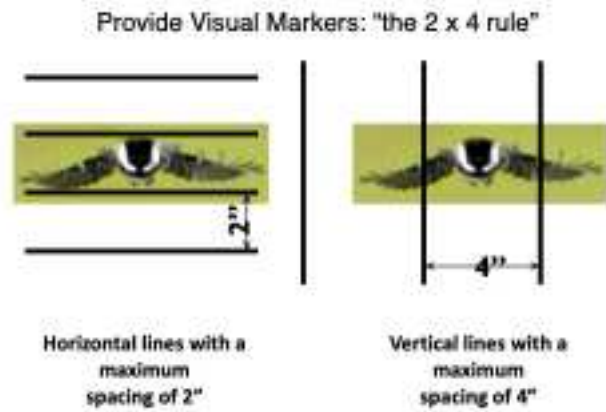
Many people have seen or heard the awful “thud” of a bird hitting glass. And though they find it distressing, most think of it as a sad accident that they can’t do much about. That is changing now, as science has documented the extent of these collisions – and discovered ways we can prevent them.

Volunteer monitoring programs, such as *Lights Out Baltimore* and *Lights Out DC*, have been documenting these collisions in their downtown areas for more than a decade, and the numbers are staggering. [Bird/glass collisions kill up to 1 billion birds every year in the US.](#) In fact, next to cat attacks, glass kills more birds than any other non-native cause. These collisions contribute significantly to the estimated loss of nearly 3 billion breeding adult North American birds since 1970, or 29% of our bird populations. Yet the building industry continues to build glass buildings because we love the look of glass and the light and views that it provides.

Happily, we can have both our glass and our birds, thanks to work done by the American Bird Conservancy (ABC) and numerous other scientists and research organizations. After extensive field testing, ABC and others have identified effective techniques to prevent these collisions, including the use of bird-friendly glass as well as the provision of architectural features such as screens or louvers that shield the glass.

Most bird-friendly glass products use one of two treatments to make glass visible to birds: an ultraviolet coating (which most birds can see but humans can’t), or a visible pattern on glass, such as small dots or thin lines that don’t diminish our view. Through field tests, science has established a rule known as the “2 x 4 rule;” that is, any pattern with a gap of 2 inches or less horizontally, or 4 inches or less vertically will prevent most bird strikes. (Recent research now suggests a gap of 2 inches or less in both directions, because hummingbirds have been known to fly through a 4-inch gap, but the 2 x 4 rule is still considered the minimum standard.)

After field testing each product, ABC assigns it a “threat factor,” between 0 and 100, based on how effective it is in deterring collisions. For example, clear glass and mirror have the highest threat factor of 100 (most hazardous), and a brick wall has the lowest threat factor of 0 (safe). A product receiving a threat factor of 30 or less will prevent 50% of bird strikes and will be considered “bird-safe.”



It's always less expensive to provide bird-safe glass during the initial construction of a building, rather than after the fact. But effective products do exist to retrofit existing buildings, including homes, and these products, too, are tested and rated by ABC. For these product evaluations, consult:

https://abcbirds.org/glass-collisions/products-database/?_paged=19

Effective products that the homeowner can install include the following:

· Traditional insect screens or mesh installed to the outside of the window with suction cups or screws.

· Press-on dot patterns or stripes. These products are not commonly found in stores but can be obtained online:

Feather Friendly: This company offers several patterns of small dots on transfer tape that are easy to install. The dots come in light gray and black. Light gray is recommended for areas where reflections are a problem; black is recommended for “fly-through” areas where transparency is the issue. Their products can be ordered at www.featherfriendly.com

ABC Bird Tape: ABC bird tape is a durable translucent tape, available in ¾” stripes and 2” squares. It can be ordered at www.featherfriendly.com/abc-birdtape

· Individual UV reflective decals:

Mourning Doves don’t see UV, so these products won’t protect them, though they will protect most songbirds. Individual decals must be installed in accordance with the 2 x 4 rule:

Birds Eye View: Small, 4 inch square translucent decals with a crystal-like pattern.

www.duncraft.com or www.windowalert.com

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Feather Friendly black dots

Window Alert: Window Alert sells UV decals in shapes like leaves and hawks. Hawk shapes are no more effective than other shapes; the birds don't recognize them in decal form, but the decals will work if installed close together.

www.windowalert.com

Acopian BirdSavers, nicknamed "Zen Wind Curtains" (Acopian BirdSavers at www.birdsavers.com). These are hanging parachute cord assemblies. They are highly effective and can either be ordered online to your specifications online or made by the homeowner with parachute cord, available at Home Depot or other hardware supply stores. The parachute cord is hung from the top of the window at 4 intervals.



Solyx Window Film:

Solyx offers six bird-friendly full-window films that are effective but might require a professional installer

To be effective, bird-safe treatments should be installed on the outside of the glass in order to diminish the reflective effect. Interior shades can be effective in some situations, but can often worsen the reflectivity, especially if the shades are solid and dark, creating a mirror. Analyzing the conditions of your window at different times of day before choosing a product will guide your decision as to what your particular hazards are. Also, not all your windows may need treatment. Generally, large expanses of glass, such as sliding glass doors, pose the greatest threat, though a small window that reflect trees can also be hazardous

Creative solutions are limitless. Some teachers encourage their students to paint the outside of their classroom windows with poster paint designs, to be cleaned off after the migration season ends. Small post-it notes can also be an effective temporary solution, and creative artists have created films that are often more attractive than the view itself!



A school project

Temporary post it notes



There is now great hope that with the many new laws being passed, scientifically proven solutions, a market for new products, and above all, a growing public awareness of the enormity of the problem, we can prevent tragic bird/glass collisions while still enjoying the many benefits of glass.