

Conjunctivitis in Birds



Information on Conjunctivitis

Conjunctivitis is caused by a highly contagious bacteria that primarily affects house finches, but can also affect other species like American goldfinches, purple finches, and evening grosbeaks. The disease causes them to get red, swollen, and crusty eyes. Conjunctivitis can be shared between birds year-round, but we see more of this disease during cold months because birds are visiting feeders more often. This brings the birds together and allows the bacteria to easily spread.



Adult male house finch with eyes crusted shut from conjunctivitis

How to clean your bird feeder or bath to help prevent the spread of disease

First, wash your feeder or bath thoroughly with hot soapy water to remove any dirt and debris that are on or in the feeder or bath. Once clean, the feeder or bath should be disinfected in a dilute bleach solution. A 1:32 mix is adequate if you have sufficiently removed all the organic debris before disinfecting. To make a 1:32 solution, you will need to add 1 part bleach to 32 parts water, which equals ½ cup of bleach per gallon of water. Allow the feeder or bath to soak in (or stay wet with) the bleach solution for 10 minutes. Then, rinse well and allow to completely dry before refilling. This should be done once a month at minimum, but more frequently is better, especially if you note any ill birds at your feeders. It's also important to note that the bleach dilution must be made up fresh at each cleaning as it rapidly degrades and loses efficacy within 24 hours of mixing.

What to do if you see a bird with Conjunctivitis

If you see a bird with swollen or crusty eyes, call Dane County Humane Society's Wildlife Center at 608-287-3235. We have had success using a combination of antibiotics to treat affected birds and return them to the wild once their problems resolve.

Additional Resources:

- [House Finch Eye Disease](#)