

SUMMER HAZARDS & PRECAUTIONS

by Carol Highfill

Summer brings heat, vacations and the desire to spend more time outdoors. It is also the time for vacations. These seasonal changes in our lifestyles also affect our birds. Take a few moments to review some of the hazards which you should remember to watch out for.

Clip those wings - The best advice anyone can give you is to CLIP your bird's wings. It will keep him from harm when indoors, prevent his escaping through open windows or doors and keep him from flying away if outside of your home.

Indoor sunlight - Our birds like seeing the activity outside and enjoy the sunlight. If you have a cage in front of a window, be sure that there is a place in the cage with shade for your bird to go to. Beware of overheating either the cage area or the room from direct sunlight. And make sure there is water available.

Air Conditioners, Coolers - Air conditioning is safe for birds. In very hot and humid climates, air conditioning or other methods such as swamp coolers are a necessity. Just be sure that your birds are not directly in front of the air conditioning outlets where they may get a chill. If you use swamp coolers, they must also be cleaned periodically to prevent bacteria growth.

Windows and Screens - When it's hot we all tend to open a window or a door. Before you do, check that the screens are in place and in good condition. You don't want your bird flying out an open window or hurting himself on a torn screen. The best approach is to clip your birds wings.

Doors - In summer many of us go in and out of the house more often, increasing the chances of a bird flying out a door. Be sure that doors you open also have screen doors and that these automatically shut. Check the latches and closing mechanisms to be sure. And clip your birds wings.

Fans and ceiling fans - It only takes a moment for a curious bird to investigate a fan. And a ceiling fan is an accident waiting to happen for an unclipped bird. Purchase fans with a guard around the fan blades. When unprotected fans are in operation, keep your birds in their cages or in other rooms. And remember, a bird with properly clipped wings cannot reach a ceiling fan.

Food and Water - Food spoils more quickly and water grows bacteria more quickly in the heat. Remove soft foods from cages after a few hours and change the water more frequently. Dishes should be thoroughly washed. Bedding, another source of bacteria and mold growth, should also be changed once a day.

Insects and Pests - Ants, bugs, rodents and other small pests seem to be part of the summer landscape. Check and double check any products you use to get rid of them. Read the labels as most are toxic to birds. For ants, try coating an area with lemon juice. Use fly paper for insects. Or a 5% Sevin solution. I have even heard of placing each leg of a cage in a shallow dish of water. If in doubt about a product, check with your vet or someone who knows.

Pesticides and Herbicides - These can be toxic to birds. Ask your service provider what products are being used, what the ingredients are and how long they remain toxic. If you apply these products yourself, read the labels. If you have your lawn or trees sprayed, prevent exposure to your birds. Keep the windows shut and check any units which can draw outside unfiltered air into the indoor air circulation systems.

Many products sprayed on your gardens specify that the plants shouldn't be eaten for a number of days. If a product is toxic to you then it is probably even more toxic to your birds. Be sure to wait at least the amount of time the manufacturer specifies before eating the plants in your garden or giving them to your birds. And be sure to thoroughly wash them first.

Porches and the Backyard - Your bird will enjoy a visit outside. But be sure it is a pleasant experience for him. Set his cage where there is shade so the bird doesn't become overheated. Even with partial shade, don't leave him in the sun too long. And be sure that water is available. You might even spray him with water periodically to keep him cool. A dish of water with a little crushed ice in it can be placed on the bottom of the cage to provide a cool bath. Try a few short periods outside rather than a long one. If you see your bird fluffing his feathers (to cool off) or having any difficulty in breathing, take him inside immediately.

Be sure that the cage is placed where dogs, cats and rodents can't get to it. And be wary of the wild birds. They may attack the cage or just frighten your bird as they fly by. Also be sure not to put the cage near grass or plants which have recently been sprayed with pesticides. It is best to stay outside with your bird at all times unless he is in something safe like an enclosed porch.

Going out - Many of us like to take our birds with us when we visit or run errands. The birds enjoy the outing and the variety and we enjoy their companionship. Just remember to CLIP those wings. You might also use a harness. Most birds will wear them if you take the time to get them used to these devices. There are even companies now making bird diapers. These will help keep you clean when your bird needs to poop.

Automobiles - If you take your bird in a vehicle, never leave him alone with the windows closed. The temperature in the vehicle will quickly become hot enough to kill your pet. It is a good idea to bring some food, water and a first aid kit, even for short trips to the store.

Vacations - Summer is also the time when we take vacations. What do you do about your pets? Take them with you, board them with a friend or commercial facility, have a friend or pet sitter come to your home to feed and care for them? There are pros and cons to each approach. Read up on each option and make your decision wisely.

Camping - There are many things to beware of if you take your bird camping. You have no control of what animals may visit your site. Prepare for adverse weather conditions - storms or very hot days. Plan how you will keep your pets warm or cool or dry. Bring extra food and a first aid kit for emergencies.

Summer can be a fun time for all of us if we just take a few simple precautions and prepare for emergencies.