

Bird Safety Corner

Car Safety, Part 1

There are many reasons why you might take your bird with you in the car, including to the vet, to a pet sitter's house, to a bird club meeting, or even just for an outing. It's important to know how to transport a bird so both you and your bird arrive safely at your destination.



Noise distraction can be a big issue with some birds (nothing like stating the obvious!). An **ear-piercing shriek** can startle the best of drivers, potentially causing an accident. Plan ahead by providing your bird with **tasty treats** or a **favorite toy** to distract her. **Playing music** your bird likes might also help to keep the noise to a minimum. Be aware that a **hawk flying overhead** or anything else that resembles a predator, such as those **orange balls** suspended on high wires, can precipitate screaming, so try to block all overhead views.

Physical distraction is a major issue with transporting a loose bird. Many people enjoy having their bird on their shoulder or seat while driving, but this is highly dangerous for both you and your bird for many reasons. A bird screaming from the back seat can be startling enough. A bird sticking its beak in your ear and shrieking at the top of its lungs is a sure fire way to drive into a pole or worse!

Any animal moving around a vehicle can distract the driver, especially one which can get itself into a lot of trouble, like a bird! The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that your risk of being in a crash doubles with looking away from the road for only two seconds. Several states, including New Jersey, Hawaii, Arizona, Maine, and Connecticut, have already passed and are enforcing **distracted-driving laws** aimed at preventing drivers from having animals on their laps or outside of carriers while driving.

Here are several more reasons a bird loose in a car is dangerous.

Car stops suddenly. An object in motion tends to stay in motion. If you hit the brakes (or another object) at high speed, your bird will hurtle forward and hit the **windshield**. Bird dead. Remember that we wear seatbelts to keep from hitting the windshield! The bird will not have time to spread its wings to slow its forward momentum if you brake suddenly.

Airbag hits bird. Airbags exist to cushion us firmly in our seat in case of sudden deceleration. Airbags expand at up to 200 mph when they sense a crash. Sitting within 10 inches of an airbag is considered dangerous to an adult human. Even humans sitting properly often sustain skin burns or even cracked ribs when an airbag goes off, though this is obviously better than crushing the chest on a steering wheel or going through a windshield. Any bird on a person's chest or lap when an airbag goes off will be **crushed** to death against their person. Simple as that. Most cars also have side airbags now, as well, so there are multiple sources of danger for a loose bird. Airbags have been known to injure small children not properly restrained. What do you think they'll do to a bird? Also be aware that airbags give off a considerable amount of corn starch or talcum powder when they inflate, which could choke a bird in close proximity.



After the accident. There are many ways a bird can be injured or escape after an accident. A disoriented driver may forget that their bird is loose in the car and **open the door**, releasing the bird. Bystanders or emergency personnel who open a door from the outside may also startle the bird, causing it to fly away. A bird can escape through a **broken window**. In a serious accident, the bird may get **injured** in the rescue operation if not already injured by the accident itself. There may even be opportunity for someone to **steal** the bird. Remember that even the tamest of birds may not react as expected in the chaos of an accident. If you are injured or unconscious, you may not even be aware at the time that your bird is gone. If you need to be transported to the hospital, rescue workers are not likely going to take a free flying bird, but they may stop to take an animal carrier.

In Part 2, we will learn the best ways to safely transport a bird.

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