

MANAGING BLACKBIRD, STARLING AND CROW ROOSTS

January 2010

Damage

Red-winged blackbirds, grackles, and starlings form roosts any time during the year except for the nesting season; these species are often found together in communal mixed-species roosts. Crows tend to roost in small isolated groups except in mid-winter when they congregate in large communal roosts. When roosts are established in urban and suburban areas, the noise and unsanitary conditions created by accumulations of bird droppings can create a nuisance and a potential health hazard to residents.



Urban and suburban bird roosts in the northeast are usually dominated by starlings and grackles, and occur in August-September when the birds congregate in large numbers immediately before migration. Late summer roost sites are often composed of dense stands of young maple trees that are 35-45 feet tall. The understory is usually open and devoid of vegetation. The tree canopy is very dense with many small branches for perching.

Another type of roost is the winter roost, which is used by starlings from October through March.

This type is commonly located on buildings in cities, under bridges and in dense stands of conifer trees and may contain up to one half million or more birds.



Legal Status

In West Virginia, a permit is not required for cowbirds, grackles, starlings, crows, and red-winged blackbirds. However, it is recommended that you contact the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources to check the protective status of these species prior to initiating a control program.

Damage Control Methods

The best approach is to consider and apply a variety of safe, effective, legal and practical techniques. An integrated bird damage management program includes habitat management, harassment, and/or population management.

1. Habitat Management

Thinning or pruning of trees will remove the small branches in the canopy used by birds for perching. At least one-third of the roosts' perch sites must be removed in order for thinning to be effective. This is achieved either by removing one-third of the branches or by removing one-third of the trees. By making the habitat less attractive, the birds may move on to more suitable habitat.

2. Harassment

Bird harassment techniques are employed to frighten birds away from the problem area and direct them to more suitable roost sites. To move a roost, an integrated bird harassment program, consisting of a variety of effective, safe and legal bird control methods, is necessary.

The recommended roost relocation program consists of the coordinated application of harassment techniques (distress calls, pyrotechnics, propane cannons, reinforced with limited shooting). It is recommended to consult WS for designing a roost relocation plan specific to the damage situation.



3. Population Management.

DRC-1339 Concentrate is a restricted use pesticide for reducing offending blackbird populations. This pesticide is restricted for use only by USDA employees. The method requires several days of prebaiting to condition birds to the bait, monitor for non-target species, and evaluate safety considerations. Once prebaiting is accomplished, the toxicant may be placed on a variety of bait options, including corn, fat nuggets, rolled barley and rice. The toxicant takes approximately 24 hours to reduce the offending blackbird population. Carcasses are then removed by USDA employees and/or cooperators. DRC-1339 Concentrate is a safe effective population management solution. It is highly target-selective and causes no secondary poisoning effects on scavengers.



Summary

Blackbird roosts can be overwhelming creating a number of concerns from property damage to public health hazards. The methods selected to resolve these issues should be specific to each situation. Local laws (noise and projectile ordinances), public perception, and sound biological practices should be considered before implementing a plan. Please feel free to contact WS and speak with a Wildlife Biologist to initiate a plan that will work for the specific damage scenario.

Additional Information

You may obtain more information about managing blackbirds and other wildlife by contacting:

USDA, APHIS, Wildlife Services
730 Yokum Street
Elkins, WV 26241
1-866-487-3297
(304) 636-1785

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