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Controlling Roosting Birds

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service

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controlling ROOSTING BIRDS

Developed cooperatively by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service.

Several species of birds called "blackbirds," including starlings, gather together after the nesting season in flocks. These flocks may gather in large numbers and roost in trees and, if left alone, can grow larger and become an annual occurrence. The principal complaint against these large flocks arises from their irritating noise, filth in roosting areas, and significant damage to the trees. Trees may start to die after two or three years of having birds roosting in them. The birds also play a role in the spread of parasites and diseases to man and domestic animals.

The use of scaring devices has proven successful in dispersing these roosts. Persistence and proper timing are essential. It is impossible and undesirable to kill all the birds in the roost; the idea is to disperse the flock to areas where they are not a problem.

ROOST SIZE - Before beginning a scare program, determine the size of the roost. It is not necessary to know how many birds are in it but the area it covers must be known so you can estimate the need for men and equipment.

TIMING - Be in the roost and ready to start the program before the birds arrive each evening; i.e., at least an hour before dusk. When the birds arrive they should have enough light to find an alternate roost. If it is too dark, the birds will simply flutter from one tree to another.

PERSISTENCE - Carry out the scare program until dark, when the birds can no longer see to enter the roost. Continue the program the second, third, and possibly the fourth evening. Three evenings are usually adequate, but be prepared to be there the fourth day if the birds were still eager to roost on the third evening.

Frightening Devices

Crackershells and Distress Cries -Two very effective scaring devices. when used in combination, are shotgun crackershells and recorded starling distress cries. Both are commercially available. Crackershells are fired from a 12-gauge shotgun and travel up to 100 yards before exploding like a firecracker. They should be fired into approaching flocks of birds to break up the flocks before they enter the roost. Every shooter should be provided with at least 100 crackershells each evening. It may be beneficial for shooters to have a box or two of light bird shot also since the scare effect will be intensified if a few starlings are killed. Bird shot also will help keep the gun barrel clean. It is best to use a gun with an open choke and clean it after each evening of shooting.

Recorded starling distress cries should be played over a loud speaker in the roost. A police car loud speaker is excellent. The cries need not be used constantly. Play the recording for about 15 to 30 seconds each minute until the birds begin to come in too fast for the shooters to handle. The most critical time is just at dusk when the birds try to dive into the roost. At this time play the distress cries constantly.

Personnel - It is best to recruit police officers to do all the shooting. They are experienced with firearms, can be supervised, and give the program a professional bearing. They also can be relied upon to return the second and third evenings. If a roost is one street on a block, three shooters should be enough. For an entire block or all four streets, six or seven shooters are needed. Some should be positioned on the perimeter to intercept incoming flocks and one or two in the immediate roost area. If the birds enter the roost from one or two directions, post more shooters on those sides. The men inside the roost will not be shooting from a great distance, so they may be more effective with more bird shot than They may not do as crackershells. much shooting early in the evening as those on the edges, but as dusk approaches they will do more shooting.

PUBLIC RELATIONS - It is best to announce roost dispersal programs in advance and explain the reason for it and the method to be used. Persons interested in birds will be glad to know that the program emphasis is on dispersing the roost rather than killing the birds. Keep the tone professional. People may become angry if they see shooters joking and laughing about their marksmanship.

LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY-Check state and local laws before conducting a scare program. Starlings are not protected by Federal law. However, the native blackbirds are protected but may be shot when they are causing damage to agricultural crops, shade trees, or ornamentals.