

## Dealing with Roosting Birds

There are only three unprotected species of bird in Nebraska: starlings, pigeons and English (house) sparrows. All other birds are protected by either federal migratory bird laws or are game birds and fall under the jurisdiction of state game laws.

Starlings, pigeons and English sparrows have a number of things in common. All of them were introduced into North America from Europe. They are also the most common roosting birds in the urban and suburban environment and highly adaptable, capable of finding shelter and roosting sites in, on and around buildings.

Pigeons, also known as rock doves, were introduced into North America in 1606. They roost under bridges, in barn rafters and on building ledges. The rock dove was the first bird domesticated by humans, first raised for meat and later as message carriers. Although wild, the pigeons found in urban areas today are used to living around people. Pigeons are a health concern because their droppings are associated with histoplasmosis — a respiratory infection caused by people inhaling fungal spores that have grown on pigeon droppings.

The European starling was first introduced in New York in 1890 and has spread across the continent. In spring, the plumage of the starling is black with iridescent tints of green and purple and the bill is yellow; in winter, the bill is dark and the plumage is lighter and speckled.



House sparrow



European starling

Starlings often roost in large numbers and are often seen during the fall and winter flying in big flocks as they leave and return from feeding sites, like corn fields, to communal night roosts. Feces accumulate under roosting sites and cause distress to people who live or work near them.

The English house sparrow was introduced to North America in the middle of the 19th Century and is now found throughout the United States. House sparrows live near humans. Large flocks are frequently seen in trees and

hedges, or under the eaves of buildings, where they build their nests.

### Control

Roosting birds rarely cause damage, but their accumulated droppings can be annoying to people when the birds congregate in large numbers. Common complaints about roosting birds

include: odor, noise and the defacing of public areas and sidewalks.

The most permanent type of control is called **habitat modification**. This includes understanding why birds congregate in specific areas and changing the environment to discourage birds from roosting, nesting and feeding in those areas.

Habitat modification includes:

- Bird netting, used to prevent birds from flying to specific locations. It can be anchored to the outside of buildings or used inside buildings to prevent perching on rafters and other horizontal surfaces.
- Modification of ledges to prevent pigeons from perching on them. One method is to fasten wood or metal at a 60° angle over the surface so birds will slide off when they land. Another method involves the securing of wire spines, called porcupine wire, to ledges which make ledges less suitable for nesting or roosting.
- A barrier, constructed of parallel lines of monofilament line or stainless steel wire strung through eyelet screws a few inches above the roosting

## Environmental Focus



### Chicken Feathers Can Now be Used in Air Purifying Filters

The U.S. raises more than nine billion chickens for food annually so the poultry industry produces lots of feathers. USDA researchers have been searching for new uses to turn this waste into a resource that chicken producers can sell. So far, chicken feathers have been used to make strong, less-dense plastic composites for products like car dashboards and boat exteriors. Feathers have also been made into paper. Combined with wood pulp, feathers increase the number of times the fibers can be recycled.

Possibly, the biggest

market for chicken feathers is air purifying filters, especially for those with allergies or asthma. Currently, most filters are made from wood pulp fiber which can screen out particles as small as 10-20 microns. Feather fiber can screen out five micron particles, thus catching and trapping even more specs, dust and dander.

Already patented, the technology has been licensed to three companies, with two pilot plants already turning feathers into fiber.

Source: USDA-ARS Environmental Quality Laboratory, Beltsville, Maryland. (BPO)

surface. Place the eyelets no more than 18" apart for the entire length of the barrier to keep the lines taut.

- Thinning or pruning trees used as a roosting sites by starlings. Starlings like to roost close to other birds. If you thin trees so there are fewer branches, they will feel less secure in the open canopy and move to a new location. This technique is most cost effective in urban locations with a history of roosting problems.

**Frightening devices** can also be effective in manipulating bird concentrations. The keys to a successful operation of this

kind are timing, organization, persistence and diversity.

The best way to get rid of roosting birds is to carefully evaluate the situation and use habitat modification along with frightening devices. Poisons for controlling these nuisance birds are available only to licensed pesticide applicators so working with a pest control professional who specializes in bird control, may be helpful.

For more information about these nuisance birds, visit [lancaster.unl.edu](http://lancaster.unl.edu) and search for "Dispersal of Blackbirds, Crows, and Starlings from Urban Roosts." (BPO)

## Creepy-Crawlies in your Cereal

Soni Cochran  
Extension Associate

I knew the box of cornbread mix in my pantry had been in there a long time. I opened the tightly sealed packaging and breathed a sigh of relief — nothing crawling in the cornmeal. I poured the mix in a bowl and added milk. It didn't take long before brown beetles started floating in my future cornbread. I never even saw them when I looked in the box. I tossed the mix out. I'm pretty tolerant, but can draw the line at eating something that "moves."

### Items Susceptible to Infestation

Pantry pests are common in Nebraska. Dried food products that are often subject to insect infestations include: flour, cereals, cracked grains, cake mixes, crackers, powdered milk, macaroni, cured meats, dried fruits, nuts, popcorn and spices. Other items such as pet foods, seed displays, ornamental corn, dried flower arrangements and ornaments made from plant parts may also become infested.



Dermestid beetles (larvae shown) are very common in Nebraska. Often called carpet beetles.

All stages (egg, larva, pupa and adult) of pantry pests may be present at the same time in infested products.

### Prevention

Follow these procedures to help prevent infestations.

- Be alert, because insect infestations usually start from infested food items and/or plant materials brought in from other sources.
- Buy dried food in package sizes that can be used up in a short time. Don't store food products over two to four months, if possible. Use older packages before newer ones and opened packages before unopened packages.
- When purchasing packaged foods, be certain that contain-

ers are not damaged and seals are intact. Check the packaging date to make sure food is fresh. Packages with clear plastic or wax paper coverings should be checked for insects.

- Store dried foods in insect-proof containers such as screw-top glass, heavy plastic or metal containers. This prevents entry or escape of insects.

Cardboard, paper, or plastic wrappings don't prevent insect infestations.

- If you store dried foods in your freezer, it keeps pests from developing.
- Keep food storage areas clean. Don't let crumbs or food particles accumulate. This is also important where pet foods and bird seeds are stored.



Indian meal moths feed on a large variety of food products.

### Management

**Inspection.** Use a flashlight or other light source to carefully examine all food storage areas and food products. Be thorough; generally insects are present in foods that are seldom used or in undisturbed storage areas. Don't forget to check pet food and bird seed storage areas.

**Discarding infested food items.** Toss out all infested food items; however, the insects should be killed prior to disposal to prevent reinfestation of areas near the disposal sites. Wrap the food items tightly in plastic wrap or bags and place them in the freezer for three or four days to kill the insects. Do not use heat or microwave treatment prior to disposal because 1) insects can escape during transfer of food products to pans to eventually be put in the oven, and 2) it is often not possible to put the entire package in the oven due to fire hazards.

**Thorough cleaning.** Remove all food packages, utensils, dishes and other related items from kitchen and pantry cabinets. Vacuum all spilled and loose food crumbs and particles present in cabinets, on shelves and in cracks and crevices. Scrub cabinets and storage areas

using soap and water.

### Freezing Treatment.

Insects infesting ornaments and decorations made from plant products or seeds can be killed by placing the items in a freezer for three or four days.

If you suspect you have pantry pests, you can bring your pest into the extension office for identification. It is important to know what pest you have because certain pests prefer certain types of dried foods. Knowing a little about the pest can save you time when you need to look for the source of the infestation.

**Insecticides.** Pantry pests can be controlled **without** insecticides by following the steps above. There are nontoxic traps that can help you deal with Indian meal moths. These traps are laced with pheromones and attract the male moths (who don't realize the sticky traps aren't a female moth). These traps are available in at least one hardware store in Lincoln.

### For More Info

To learn more about pantry pests, visit [lancaster.unl.edu](http://lancaster.unl.edu) or stop in the extension office and pick up NebGuide (G-1130) "Insect Pests of Stored Foods in Kitchen and Pantry." (SC)