

Roosting Starlings are a Nasty Problem

Have you heard Grand Island has a problem with European starlings? The city has 50,000 unwanted residents roosting in several nearby pine trees and causing a mess with the constant accumulation of droppings under the roosting site. Officials have contracted with U.S. Wildlife Service to get rid of the birds. Pyrotechnics have been discharged over seven days to harass the birds so they will roost somewhere else—preferably outside the city limits. So far, it hasn't worked. Is cutting the trees down the last resort?

The starling is one of three unprotected species of bird in Nebraska. Pigeons and English (house) sparrows are the other two. 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 were introduced into New York in 1890 from Europe. They are common roosting birds in the urban and suburban environment. They are also smart and highly adaptable, capable of finding shelter and roosting sites in, on and around buildings.

Many people simply call them blackbirds because of their black coloration. In spring, the starling plumage 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. Starlings often roost at night in large numbers in tall dense trees where they feel secure. During the fall and winter, they are often seen flying in huge flocks as they fly to and from feeding sites, like corn fields. Feces accumulate under roosting sites and cause distress to people who live or work near them.

Control

Droppings from starlings can cause disease, but people become most annoyed by the large number of droppings beneath roosting sites. Common complaints from roosting starlings include 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.

Frightening devices can be effective in reducing starling roosting, but persistence is required. The habitual nature of these smart birds makes this less likely to be successful if the effort is half-hearted, as the



European Starlings

folks in Grand Island have found.

Thinning or pruning trees might be the best option here. Starlings like to roost close to other birds, so if there are fewer roosting sites, they may feel less secure in the open canopy. This coupled with persistent pyrotechnics, may prompt them to move to a new location. Cutting the trees down is a permanent solution to the problem, but thinning the trees just might work. (BPO)

Cats in the Neighborhood Can be a Nuisance, Harmful to Local Wildlife

People who enjoy wildlife, gardeners and homeowners often call asking, "What can I do about the cats in my neighborhood. They get into my yard, use my garden as a litterbox, spray my deck and scare away and kill birds at my feeder?" There aren't easy answers, but here are some suggestions:

1. Talk to your neighbors. Ask them to keep their cats indoors or at least under their control when they are outside. If you own a cat, keep it indoors. The American Veterinary Medical Association strongly encourages cat owners to keep their cats indoors in urban and suburban areas. Some people build enclosures for their cats or train their cats to use a harness or leash.
2. You can try spraying intruding cats with a garden hose. This is only an effective deterrent



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if the cat gets sprayed with water every time it comes into your yard.

3. Do your best to protect wildlife in your yard. Locate bird feeders and baths several feet from bushes and vegetation where cats can hide. On the other hand, a dense shrub or planned brush pile can help provide cover for birds hiding from predators.
4. Gardeners report some success with chicken wire placed on top of the soil to prevent cats from using gardens as litter boxes.
5. When all else fails, humanely trap the cat and take it to the Humane Society or call Animal Control. If you decide to set a trap, check with Animal Control for regulations on trapping animals in urban areas. Avoid setting out a trap at night because you could end up with non-target animals (a skunk is not a nice surprise!). Check the trap hourly. If you know who the cat belongs to, let the Animal Shelter know so they can contact the cat's owner after you have dropped it off.

It is the responsibility of pet owners to prevent cats from being a nuisance and a threat to local wildlife. Don't blame the cats in your neighborhood for doing what comes naturally. Keep your cat and local wildlife safe. Keep peace with your neighbors. Keep cats indoors.

Cat Facts

- If you put a bell on your cat, it will still kill wildlife. Belled cats learn how to silently stalk their prey, and wild animals don't associate the ringing of a bell with danger.
- Studies show that even well-fed cats kill wildlife. The urge to hunt and the urge to eat are controlled by different parts of a cat's brain.
- Wildlife that seems to have escaped a cat attack, may have not escaped injury. The animal may still be doomed, either from bacteria or viruses in cat saliva or from internal injuries. (SC)

UNL Beekeeping Programs for 2004



Dr. Marion Ellis, UNL Bee Specialist has announced there will be several learning opportunities for people interested in bees and beekeeping.

Bees and Beekeeping Program

Saturday, March 6, 9 a.m.–noon, Prairie Building, at Pioneer Nature Center, Lincoln. Participants will be introduced to the world of bees and beekeeping.

Cost: \$5/person, \$10/family. Registration deadline: March 3. Register at the Pioneers Park Nature Center (west end of Pioneers Park) or Parks and Recreation Main Office, 27 & A Streets or call 441-7895. Payment is required with registration. Payment can be made by cash, check or credit card (credit card limited to \$10 or more).

Beginning Beekeeping Workshops

Monday and Tuesday, March 22 and 23, 6:30–9:30 p.m. at the Lancaster Extension Education Center, Lincoln. Everything you need to know to get started in beekeeping. Learn basic bee biology, behavior, hive location, honey plants and important diseases that limit honey production.

On Saturday, April 3, there will be an additional hands-on lab session at the ARDC, near Mead, Nebraska. Participants will learn practical techniques on handling and installing packaged bees, harvesting honey and assembling hives.

Cost: \$15 will include refreshments and reference materials. Please pre-register to ensure enough reference materials. To register, call the Lancaster County Extension Office. Questions? Contact Barb Ogg, 441-7180.

Beekeeping Update: A Program for Beekeepers

Saturday, Feb. 28, 9 a.m.–noon at Lifelong Learning Center, 601 East Benjamin Avenue, Norfolk. This program will update beekeepers on disease and pest control strategies and bee management strategies. There will be plenty of time for questions and answers. No registration is required, but please pre-register by contacting Tom Hunt at (402) 584-2863.

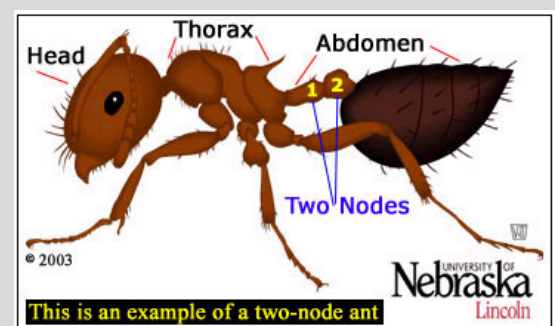
Value-Added Products Workshop

Friday and Saturday, June 18–19, 8:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. at the ARDC Research and Education Building near Mead. This workshop will provide detailed instruction in the production and marketing of value-added products and focus on comb honey, creamed honey and mead production. A distinguished team of experts has been assembled to make this an outstanding educational opportunity.

Cost: \$35, includes three meals, refreshments and a workbook. Send registrations to Marion Ellis, 202 Plant Industry Building, Lincoln, NE 68583-0816. Questions? Call (402) 472-8696.

Ants on the Web

Before choosing a treatment to control an ant problem, use this new Web site resource to help you identify the type of ant you have. Visit lancaster.unl.edu/enviro/ants (BPO)



This is an example of a two-node ant