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Birds of the Great Plains: Family Sturnidae (Starlings)

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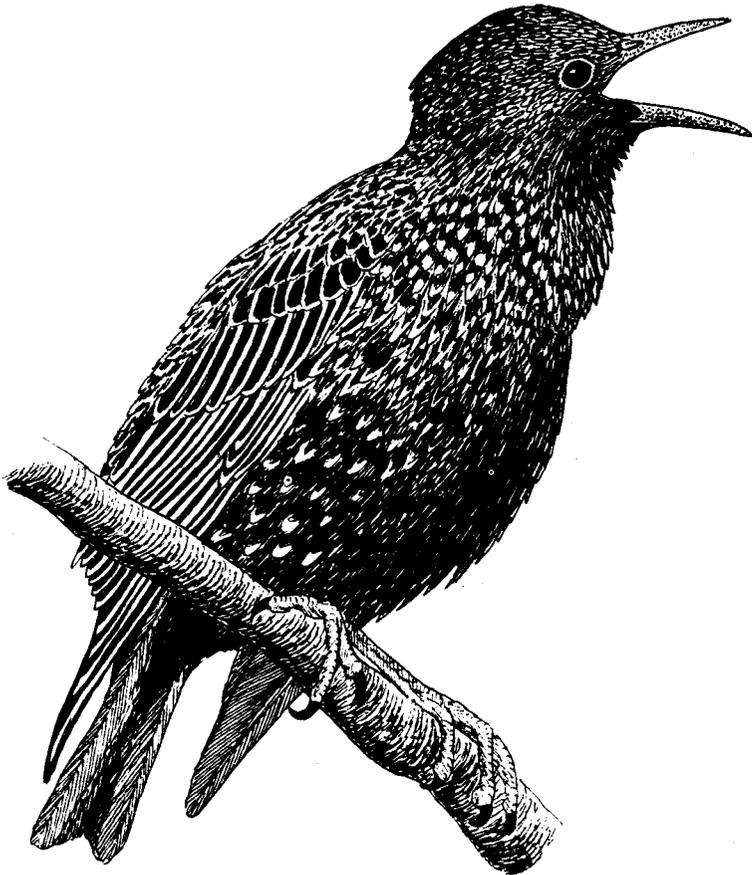
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FAMILY STURNIDAE
(STARLINGS)



Starling

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Breeding Status: Introduced in the eastern United States; now breeds pandemically throughout the region as a result of range expansion.

Breeding Habitat: The starling is generally associated with human habitations such as cities, suburbs and farms or with wooded areas having suitable nest sites.

Nest Location: Nests are in natural or artificial cavities, including birdhouses, old woodpecker holes, natural tree cavities, or other sites. Birdhouses with entrances less than 1½ inches in diameter effectively exclude starlings, but they can easily take over martin houses.

Clutch Size and Incubation Period: From 4 to 7 pale bluish to greenish eggs (19 Kansas clutches averaged 5.2). The incubation period is 11-13 days. Usually double-brooded.

Time of Breeding: In North Dakota, breeding extends from mid-April to early July, with a peak from late April to mid-June. Kansas egg records are from March 1 to June 30, with first and second clutches usually laid in mid-April and in early June. Oklahoma breeding dates are from March 16 (nest-building) to June 2 (nearly fledged brood).

Breeding Biology: Although starlings are migratory, adults tend to return in the spring to the areas where they previously bred; some females are known to have nested in the same site for 3-4 consecutive years. Territorial defense in starlings is limited to the nest hole itself and a few inches immediately around it. Pair-formation is achieved when the male locates a suitable nest site and defends it from intrusion by other birds while simultaneously singing and attempting to attract females to it. Males are normally monogamous, although a few instances of polygyny have been noted. The male sometimes helps to incubate both clutches but usually aids in the brooding and feeding of only one of the broods. Normally, both members of a pair participate in nest-building and incubation, and usually both parents assist in brooding and feeding the young. However, if either of the parents should die or desert the brood, the remaining member of the pair has been known to successfully raise the family alone. The young usually leave the nest when 21 days old and rarely remain until their 25th day. Almost as soon as the first brood is fledged a second clutch is begun; in one case the first egg was laid only a day after the first brood was fledged.

Suggested Reading: Kessel 1957; Bent 1950.

