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WINTER BIRD ROOSTS IN KENTUCKY: AN INTRODUCTION OF THE PROBLEM

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When the first Bowling Green Bird Control seminar was held in the early sixties, emphasis on the blackbird problem was centered in Ohio. I believe John Beck, who is here, was one of the first peoples in the State to become involved with this situation. The problem (and it was a problem related to crop damage, primarily corn) had been building for a number of years, but it wasn't until September of 1965 that it really received national recognition. During that month, at the demand of local farmers at a meeting in Vickery, Ohio, Federal, State and local officials were exposed first hand to the problem. Prior to that time, there had been only sporadic concern regarding the bird problem principally coming from Delaware (corn), Florida (sweet corn), Maryland (corn), and Michigan and Washington (cherries).

This meeting generated enough interest that Congressional and State legislators saw fit to increase funding to allow for additional research and operational activities to help solve the blackbird crop damage problem. Much has been done since, and many of the accomplishments have been discussed at the past six seminars. He still have problems with blackbirds in crops, but we do have some tools to alleviate these problems. We know more about the kinds of damage that are occurring and a great deal more about the species that are responsible for the problem.

So, while most of the past effort has been with trying to alleviate damage that birds cause to crops, a much lesser amount has been spent working with problems blackbirds cause by their roosting habits. It has not been that people are not aware that blackbird roosts can cause public problems, but more that the problems that they cause are not of enough magnitude to result in a concerted effort by the citizens of the country to demand that an increased effort in this area be initiated. In other words, the States where roost problems occur were yet to be heard from.

However, this concern has been expressed during the past three to four years, with the result that interest in the blackbird problem has shifted from the summer crop damage situation to problems blackbirds cause with their roosting habits. The sequence of recent events has been much like that which happened in the mid-sixties: the public expressing themselves to local, State and Federal representatives, meetings of affected Individuals with politicians, and the introduction of legislation to secure funding to find solutions to the problem. Most of you know that much of this effort was centered in Kentucky and Tennessee.

The news media have provided massive coverage. However, there have been some major differences with this cycle of events. The courts have become involved; there has been talk of population reductions; demand for EISs have been common; and there has been a population reduction method available that at times is effective. We have a much stronger use regulations (FEPCA) that prevent indiscriminant use of chemicals.

Where are we today?

1. There is a great awareness of the blackbird roost problem.
2. There has been Increased funding for research.
3. There has been an EIS written.
4. There is a court decision about to be made.

The title of this morning's session deals with blackbird winter roosts in Kentucky. The speakers will concern themselves with that state, but I suggest that we could be talking about any state where blackbirds roost. The problems are the same.