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CULTURAL AND PHYSICAL METHODS FOR MANAGING PROBLEM BIRDS

Donald F. Mott

Although chemicals now available (or that soon should be) appear to be the answer to many bird problems in agricultural crops, it is appropriate to also review some of the cultural and physical methods currently in use.

In preventing bird damage to crops, a number of things should be considered prior to planting the first seed. In an area of perennial bird damage, it is advisable to coordinate planting with other growers for it is usually the earliest or latest maturing crops which receive most damage. If feasible, do not plant crops preferred by birds near areas they frequent. Fields near trees or marshy areas are extremely vulnerable to bird damage because these areas are used by birds as roosting, loafing, and escape cover. Harvest the crop as soon as possible. Bird damage in the southern part of this country is sometimes severe when inclement fall weather or work scheduling postpones the harvest until flocks of migratory blackbirds arrive. Early harvesting and subsequent use of artificial dryers have alleviated many damage situations. Delay fall plowing until after all crops vulnerable to birds are harvested. This practice provides alternate feeding sites (such as grain stubble), thereby making it easier to protect other crops from damage. Along these same lines, planting lure crops (such as millet) to divert birds from higher valued crops can reduce the overall cost of bird damage. In larger fields, it is a good idea to skip a row in the center of the

field when planting in order to provide access for properly placing frightening devices and to facilitate baiting within a field.

Certain varieties of grain have inherent qualities which make them less attractive to birds. For example, grain in heads with long awns and corn in tight husks are less available to birds. Some varieties of grain sorghum with high tannic acid content have been shown to be less preferred by birds, to be palatable to livestock, and to have yields comparable to nonresistant varieties.

A variety of frightening devices are available for use in scaring birds from crops. Gas operated exploders, .22 calibre rifles, shell crackers, rope firecrackers, recorded bird distress calls, and synthesized sound (Av-Alarm), which reportedly disrupts the bird's means of communication, have all been used to scare birds. For best results, the following procedures should be employed:

1. Begin scaring when the crop first becomes vulnerable and the first birds appear. This is most important in preventing birds from establishing a feeding pattern.
2. Frighten during the periods of the day when birds attack the crop. This is usually from sunrise through mid-morning and again in late afternoon.
3. Use a combination of scaring devices. Visual and auditory devices used together often complement each other.
4. Move the devices regularly so that the birds will not become accustomed to the origin of the stimulus.

5. Be persistent. Satisfactory results may not be achieved the first day but continued effort should be fruitful.

Netting the entire crop may be the most practical solution with high value crops (such as grapes, blueberries, and cherries) if serious damage warrants the expense. Several brands of polypropylene and nylon netting, which provide years of service with reasonable care, are now on the market.

Some of the material presented in this paper was excerpted from Mitchell and Linehan (1967). Additional information on the use of various types of frightening devices is discussed in their publication.

Literature Cited

Mitchell, R. T. and J. T. Linehan. 1967. Protecting corn from black-birds. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wildlife Leaflet 476. 8pp.