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BIRD CONTROL

by

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Urban Bird Control Program
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We started our program in 1967 primarily because of an economic problem in the downtown area of Wichita. We had about eight square blocks of businesses which were not getting any business because people didn't dare go downtown in the evening unless they wore their rain hats and rain gear, and I mean this literally.

We were called upon by the city fathers to do something about this. We called upon George Halazon and relocated the birds. They were very persistent. We used exploders and shotguns. Just to give you some idea, we expended somewhere around 30,000 rounds of 12 ga. ammunition along with the exploders we set up on top of numerous buildings. We reloaded our own shells and used light loads on most of the birds.

We found it necessary to persuade the starlings with more than the use of an exploder alone. We found they would virtually sit right on the exploder. Of course, they had been nesting in these places for several years. Complete control took about three weeks because the birds had established this pattern. As others have already mentioned, we learned that when the birds come in, it is important to get on them. Don't wait until tomorrow--do it today.

We relocated the birds and moved them all out of town. We had several of the residents complain that we moved some out into the trees in their yards. They were a little unhappy. This was a governmental project for the entire county, so we had to go out and move the birds out of the backyards. We thought we could do this by using the same methods used in the downtown area. But, they were much easier to move the second time than they had been the first time.

This program has come a long way now to where we have a starling-free downtown area. I mean that it is literally free of starlings. To keep it that way, now, we do spend but very little time.

We are well-accepted by the community as a whole with our shooting program. It would probably scare a lot of you fellows if you were to see us going downtown with a rifle with a scope on it. We use what we call a little .22 shotgun. They quit making some of them now and I hated to see that because they were chambered for .22 bird shot, bored to about the size of a .38. Now, we have to buy smooth bores. Considering that we shoot somewhere in the neighborhood of 10,000 rounds per year, they do wear out. However, we have used the 870 Remington and Wingmaster which have had 20,000 rounds fired through them. We take good care of them.

In 1968, I banded several of our starlings in the area and received results from Galveston, Texas. One of our birds was unfortunate enough to meet death down there, apparently from a game protector.

This is a problem I think we are going to have to all work together on. Our area birds move to Texas. You folks from Canada--your birds come down to see me and the birds in our area just last summer raised two families. One egg a day was laid up to seven days in most nests and an average of four or five per nest were hatched. Since they raised two

families last summer, I am sure this increased the population in Texas. Hopefully some of our local birds went to Texas too. I hope to send even more down there.

We have done a lot of experimentation and we plan to study their habits a lot more and do a lot more towards control.

Another thing we have found is that at different times of the year, apparently the birds react to different treatments. There isn't a big difference but there is a slight difference. This is my observation on some of the local birds and some of the birds which come in. Apparently along in September, it seems that the number of treatments it takes to move these birds varies a little bit.

We have worked in several feedlots. I have used Starlicide and frankly, I like it real well. It has done a wonderful job for us in feedlots and to my knowledge we have had absolutely no secondary poisoning associated with it. The only problem that I have had is that we would like to get it raw and mix it ourselves. We have had a little trouble getting it this way. We prefer to mix our own because the starlings are a creature of habit. If they get in the habit of eating pellets that is all they want to eat. We get into some areas where we have hog feeders who are feeding cooked slop or cooked garbage and the starlings won't touch pellets. So we have got to go with whatever the birds are eating. We have had wonderful success as far as the whole area is concerned. Cooperation has been excellent. People realize what a problem it was before our control efforts. Had we not had the severe problem before, I think we might have had a little more resistance to control measures.

We shoot the scouts now in our downtown area. Before I came here I shot about 30 myself and I think my men had shot about 60 of what we call scouts. So far, that is the way we have been able to keep them out of our area--by killing these few bachelor birds as they come in before they have had a chance to bring larger flocks in.

We have a large area approximately five miles from the downtown area which is in the center of a populated area with big roosts which we are concerned about now. We have relocated them from downtown into a flood control area about two years ago. We can relocate them again but we will just move them into another area which won't help a whole lot. We are sure we must eventually reduce their number or continue moving them about. We have control methods to reduce the population, but have not used them up to now. We feel that sometime soon someone is going to have to consider a population reduction program.

We did some experimental work with Batex several years ago using it as a contact poison. It worked quite well. It isn't labelled and we wouldn't dare use any of this now, but it is very effective on pigeons. It reduced the population of our pigeons. We try not to get into any sparrow work. There is a little of it. I don't know very much about it and I am quite experimental with it, so don't ask me any questions on sparrows.

Our starlings start coming in late fall and early winter in small flocks and accumulate into a big flock. I had one large flock that flew 50 miles to the roost and the odd thing about that was they would leave about one hour earlier than the birds which fed close to the roosting area. It is rather ironic the intelligence of some of these starlings. We have some red-wing blackbirds. I don't think they are as smart a bird as the starling. They don't learn nearly as fast what the exploder means or what the shotgun does. We use a lot of sentinel shells on our flocks. This disperses them before they have a chance to come in for a landing or if they get down in an area we get them back up quite well.

This large roosting area has a fence around it. It has some deer in it. We have a lot of wildlife there and we have to really watch when we try to do anything in the area.

We did a little work with pigeon sterilants six years ago. We didn't really have too much luck on bird control on pigeons because of the life of the pigeon. In other words we couldn't do it fast enough to satisfy the public because of the relatively large number of years required before the birds died.

Bird Control

by

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All of you in damage control know that you expect exaggeration. I have been working with Wichita-Sedgwick County Health Department ever since 1954. We started working on the cotton rat explosion with the Wichita-Sedgwick County Health Department and became well acquainted with the personnel. One day I got a call from Glen's boss and he said, "One of our county commissioners has a problem. He says he has thousands upon thousands of birds sitting in his trees. It is so bad that he can't even run his air conditioner." I took that with a grain of salt but agreed to go look. Believe it or not, we went out in the daytime and there was not a single bird there, but branches as big as one's arm were broken off of trees and the grass looked as if they had kept black chickens there. Manure was an inch thick. The house had storm doors on instead of screens in July and August, so you know that he really was suffering. We agreed to provide help. As Bill said earlier, the main thing is to know the habits of these birds and then to hit them--not with a soft stick, but hit them with the biggest stick you can and have three or four extra sticks in reserve. That is exactly what we did with those starlings. We weren't interested in killing all of the starlings, but we had to move them out because Don Cross' job if not his salary depended solely upon keeping the county commissioners happy.

The use of noise to disperse birds is not new, but we used a somewhat different pattern. We combined acetylene exploders for noise and well-trained shooters to convince the birds that the noise was detrimental. We were prepared to meet the first bird as he arrived at the roost in the evening. The exploders were adjusted to produce the maximum volume and the most rapid rate of firing. The exploders were hand held and aimed at the incoming flocks. The concussion effect was visible on the feathers of the birds. As the startled flocks wheeled to escape, the shooters emptied their guns. Light loads and No. 9-12 shot were used. The intent was not to kill large numbers of birds, just to frighten them. Some birds were killed. The birds persisted in attempting to roost in the area despite our efforts. We worked until dark. The flock finally was dispersed. The next evening the birds returned we were ready with the same procedure. The birds left early. The third night only a few stragglers appeared. No birds came on the fourth night and the flock was permanently moved from the area.

Bird management poses serious public relations problems. When the big problem of moving the millions of birds from Wichita was considered we made special plans to prevent adverse publicity. Business men in downtown Wichita were losing money because people refused to be exposed to the filth. Sanitation was a real problem. Disease was a strong probability. The situation was documented, governmental agencies were consulted, potential anti-control groups were invited for suggestions.

Our control plans called for moving the birds using the alarm call of the starling in combination with the exploders and team of shooters. The flocks of birds in such numbers as to darken the sky, arrived in the city about 5:00 p.m. The area was large. To provide the coverage we needed for the alarm calls, local radio stations agreed to broadcast the call. Stores and offices had their employees bring radios and play them at open windows.