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Proceedings
Ninth Bird Control
Seminar

Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, Ohio

October 4-6, 1983

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SPONSORED BY THE
CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL RESEARCH
BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF
UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
AND
NATIONAL PEST CONTROL ASSOCIATION

WILLIAM B. JACKSON
Conference Chairman

WILLIAM B. JACKSON and BETH JACKSON DODD
Proceedings Editors

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OPENING COMMENTS

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The First Bowling Green Bird Control Seminar was held in 1962. Then, as now, it was a cooperative effort with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Pest Control Association.

Over the years some changes are evident. The number of presentations has nearly doubled. The emphasis on agriculture has declined slightly since the last seminar, but the red-winged blackbird problems have also decreased over the years. However, problems with other species are more apparent and of increasing importance. We see increased concern for airport problems, despite the decrease in numbers of publicized bird strikes. Also we have seen an increase in international concerns. Half a dozen Asian and African countries are represented in the program this year.

Current Patterns

Both our environments and our perceptions have changed. These changes impact on the pest problem and our ability to carry out management programs.

We think of pigeons as the center-city birds, and indeed some have proclaimed that it was better to have pigeons and house sparrows than no birds at all. With the advent of miniparks and other inner-city attempts at green spacing, other birds are entering these environments. Crows are now nesting in downtown Seattle and feeding on urban garbage, including lunch and snack remains of office workers and tourists.

Does this bring us problems? Such parks provide the omnipresent pigeons ever more opportunities to be fed. With the greying of America, will this population segment insist on the opportunity to feed pigeons and further enhance the survivability of these pests?

Crows are natural depredators on nests of other birds. How vociferous will complaints be about crows robbing or destroying nests of "nice" birds, like robins? What can (or should) be done about it? All are protected species and a part of these mini-ecosystems.

New Traps and Devices

Electromagnetic devices made their bizzare entry into the rodent control field a decade ago and finally were ordered off the market by EPA as non-efficacious. (Clearly distinguish such devices from ultrasonic devices that operate on an entirely different principle and which do have a role in rodent control.) Just recently a new electromagnetic entry has become apparent.

The "Invisible Cat" marketed by Monty's International Distributing Co. of Texas) is making claims for both bird and rodent repulsions; we'll consider only the bird functions here.

To document its efficacy, two campus installations were made last week. You can determine for yourselves the efficacy of these devices. One installation was in the bell tower atop Hayes Hall for the pigeon population; the other along the enclosed corridor between Moseley and University Halls (east side) where house sparrows are roosting in the thick ivy vines. (Editor's Note: The installations have remained in place to December without any noticeable effect on either bird population. The manufacturer stated initially that a circuit chip in these devices was defective. More recently he has indicated that certain engineering problems need to be worked out before further production of units will occur. We will look forward to continuation of these tests when the properly constructed equipment is available.)

Also out of Texas, a pneumatic trap prototype (Rodent Control Systems, Dallas) will be demonstrated at the conference. Its development has required a breakthrough in air systems design and technology. While traps for rodents employing this design will be the first to appear on the market, hopefully pigeon and sparrow devices will soon follow. Such traps will have the advantage of speed and low engineering maintenance costs.

Ultrasonics

Ultrasonics, too, have been touted for bird repellency. Unlike rodents, the hearing range of birds is considered to be similar to that of man. Thus birds do not hear in the ultrasonic range, and such signals would not be expected to be sensed by birds.

Despite this, anecdotal information exists about the effectiveness of ultrasonic devices in removing birds from structures. None of the installations I have seen provides evidence of their effectiveness. However, adequate field test data have not been presented on either side of the issue.

Old Chemicals - New Format

Fenthion (queletox) is a useful lethal tool for bird control. It is both effective and selective. Unfortunately, in recent years it has been limited to the Rid-A-Bird perch (in the U.S.). Now we are to see a new use adaptation (BCF #1) that will facilitate selective treatment of surface areas for control of birds roosting on structures.

New Chemicals - New Uses

With greater use of new rodenticides out-of-doors, safety of nontarget birds will be of concern. Proper placement, of course, reduces hazard. Reduced dosage may also be an option for lowering secondary hazard.

However, relative to raptors, we must be sure that the rodent population being preyed upon is also the one being controlled before countering the use of a rodenticide. Barn owls, for example, are not feeding on barn rats and mice. Typically they are preying on grassland vole populations at some distance from the nest or roost site. Furthermore, the loss of an individual raptor to secondary poisoning should not be confused with hazard to even a local population or species.

Changing Populations

It is pleasant to note that blackbird populations — and blackbird corn losses — are reduced, though we may admit to not understanding fully the reasons. Will this trend continue? Is the current PIK program likely to provide increased nesting sites and result in a trend reversal? What will be the impact of the increasing numbers of no-till fields?

The grackle, in contrast, is noted to be on the increase. Especially in the corn states, will we see a change in the bird damage patterns? Will a different strategy of bird repellency be required?

Ring-billed gulls may turn out to be the “Norway rats of the bird world.” These gulls have been increasing in numbers, feeding on the ever-expanding detritus of our urban societies. Not only are they major nuisances, but they constitute serious safety hazards at many of our Great Lakes and Atlantic coast airports. It appears that proper management of our garbage supply (disposal) will be critical in the management of this species.

Airports

The new jets are designed to maximize problems with birds. They are quieter, thus “creeping up” on runway bird flocks. The engines are low-slung, thus closer to birds rising from the runway. The engines are larger, providing more bird-engulfing surface. Because of the emphasis on lightness and energy conservation, engine parts are less durable and less able to withstand bird impact. In fact, the new DC-767 had a record number of bird strikes in its initial days of operation. Concern for airport bird problems is still a very “live” issue.

Disease

Birds as reservoirs of disease usually is one of the rationales we give for requiring bird control — especially in urban areas. Yet research on avian zoonoses has nearly ceased.

Lack of funding has closed the Public Health Service lab studying fungal infections (histoplasmosis), and relatively little monitoring of the encephalitides (especially St. Louis) is possible. Most has to be done by state agencies with very limited budgets. Fortunately for us, the summer has been dry, and mosquito populations have been held relatively low.

International

Clearly the awareness of pest birds and the need for management practices is growing around the world. Especially in developing countries, where depredations on an already limited food supply cause real concern, efforts are being made to adapt existing techniques to local conditions.

Quelea, the weaver-finch of Africa and the most numerous bird species in the world, continues to attract attention. Through the efforts of FAO and bilateral projects, management efforts have begun to shift from simply mass killings at roosts and nest sites to selective use of lethal tools against only depredating populations, manipulation of planting schedules, and use of repellent tools.

Even while attention has been focused on quelea, other weaver-finches, especially the golden sparrow, have increased in importance as pest species. In some parts of West and North Africa, they are pests of significance.

A Nairobi conference early in 1985, sponsored in part by FAO, will attempt to review accomplishments already made, project research needs, and recommend management priorities relative to quelea and associated species. This will be an international milestone for a major bird problem.

Summary

These are some of the diverse subject areas that will be dealt with at this conference. By your sharing and participation you will make the next several days worthwhile.

