University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

USDA National Wildlife Research Center - Staff Publications | Wildlife Damage Management, Internet Center for

1-14-2010

Evaluation of Large, Mobile, Decoy Traps for Managing Blackbird Damage to Ripening Sunflower

George M. Linz
USDA/WS/NWRC

Anthony Slowik
USDA/WS/NWRC

H. Jeffrey Homan
USDA/WS/NWRC

Robert Byrd
USDA/WS

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/icwdm_usdanwrc

Part of the Environmental Sciences Commons

Linz, George M.; Slowik, Anthony; Homan, H. Jeffrey; and Byrd, Robert, "Evaluation of Large, Mobile, Decoy Traps for Managing Blackbird Damage to Ripening Sunflower" (2010). *USDA National Wildlife Research Center - Staff Publications.* Paper 942.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/icwdm_usdanwrc/942

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Wildlife Damage Management, Internet Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in USDA National Wildlife Research Center - Staff Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

National Sunflower Association Sunflower Research Forum,
January 13-14, 2010. Fargo, ND. NSA Website Online Forum
www.sunflowernsa.com/research/research-workshop/documents/
Linz_DecoyTraps_10.pdf

EVALUATION OF LARGE, MOBILE, DECOY TRAPS FOR MANAGING BLACKBIRD DAMAGE TO RIPENING SUNFLOWER

George M. Linz[1], Anthony A. Slowik[1], H. Jeffrey Homan[1], and Robert W. Byrd[2]
[1]USDA, Wildlife Services, National Wildlife Research Center, Bismarck, ND
[2]USDA, Wildlife Services, Portageville, MO

Introduction

An estimated 75 million blackbirds migrate through the sunflower growing regions of the Great Plains and can cause severe damage to ripening sunflower and corn. If bird damage can be reduced or kept at levels <10%, significant profits can be made. USDA Wildlife Services (WS) has developed some tools to help producers defend their fields against blackbird damage.

Eliminating problem roosts by applying glyphosate herbicide to dense stands of cattail in wetlands favored by blackbirds has been used successfully and has been a well received program. However, WS only has sufficient funds to treat <1% of the estimated 547,000 acres of cattails in North Dakota.

Lure crops have been used by some growers to reduce blackbird damage. Lure crops must be strategically placed so that they will intercept foraging blackbird flocks and thus reduce the amount of feeding in commercial sunflower fields.

Managing local populations with an avicide has proven difficult to use, because blackbirds prefer to eat ripening sunflower over taking avicide-treated grains placed on the ground.

The sunflower industry has requested that WS continue to develop methods for managing local populations of depredating blackbirds. One alternative might be to capture blackbirds in decoy traps. In this study, we evaluated large, mobile, decoy traps for capturing blackbirds that were doing or were about to do damage to a sunflower field near Wimbledon, North Dakota.

Methods

From late August to mid-October 2009, we maintained one trap (24'L x 8'W x 8'H) on the north side of the field near a small cattail wetland used as a day roost. A larger trap (36'L x 8'W x 8'H) was placed at the southern end of the field near a large wetland used as a night roost. The night roost held about 30,000 blackbirds. Each trap was outfitted with a standard drop entry for capturing. The traps were supplied with up to 25 decoy blackbirds to attract free-ranging birds to the trap. Food and water was supplied ad libitum to the decoys. Additionally, we placed feed on the tops of the traps to initiate activity and increase trap visitation

This article is a U.S. government work, and is not subject to copyright in the United States.

rates. We attended to the traps regularly to maintain the decoy birds and remove captured birds as warranted.

Results & Discussion

We estimated that at least 15,000 blackbirds were feeding in the nearby sunflower field. From 28 August and 5 October, we captured 154 red-winged blackbirds in the two decoy traps (Table 1). All the birds were captured in the last two weeks of the study, after the sunflower crop had reached physiological maturity. This may have occurred because the sunflower achenes had become slightly less palatable or harder to open.

Table 1. Number of red-winged blackbirds captured in decoy traps from 28 August - 5 October 2009.

Trap #	Date	Euthanized
3	9/23/2009	9
3	9/28/2009	16
3	9/30/2009	14
3	10/2/2009	60
2	10/5/2009	30
3	10/5/2009	25
Total		154

We concluded that large decoy traps were not cost-effective because of the labor and travel costs associated with maintaining decoy birds and the relatively few numbers of captured free-ranging blackbirds. Our results corroborated those obtained by researchers in Canada and suggest that decoy traps would not be an effective component of an integrated bird management plan to protect sunflower.