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# NATIONWIDE ESTIMATES OF BLACKBIRDS AND STARLINGS

Brooke Meanley

*USFWS, Denver Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, Maryland and Denver, Colorado*

Willis C. Royall Jr.

*USFWS, Denver Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, Maryland and Denver, Colorado*

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## NATIONWIDE ESTIMATES OF BLACKBIRDS AND STARLINGS

Brooke Meanley and Willis C. Royall, Jr.  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Denver Wildlife Research Center  
Laurel, Maryland and Denver, Colorado

An estimated 538 million blackbirds and Starlings are found in the United States, based on the national cooperative blackbird/Starling winter roost survey conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service during the 1974-75 winter period of December 20-February 15. Approximately 74% or 398 million of these blackbirds and Starlings occurred in the Eastern States, including the tier from Minnesota to Louisiana; 26% or 139 million birds were in the West.

The national roosting population in 1974-75 was composed of 11 species (Table 1) in the following approximate proportions: 38% Red-winged Blackbirds; 22% Common Grackles; 20% Starlings; 18% Brown-headed Cowbirds; 2% Brewer's Blackbirds; and less than 1% six species combined (Rusty Blackbirds, Boat-tailed Grackles, Great-tailed Grackles, Tri-colored Blackbirds, Yellow-headed Blackbirds, and Bronzed Cowbirds). (Some 2 million robins also were reported in the 1974-75 survey, though not solicited and therefore not tabulated, from 20 of the blackbird roosts in the Southeast.) The 1974-75 species proportions are similar to those found in the last nationwide winter survey (1969-70). In the 1963-64 national winter survey, Redwings made up 33% and Common Grackles 31% of the total population.

In all, 723 blackbird/Starling roosts were reported in the 1974-75 survey, of which 137 were major roosts of a million or more birds. These roosts were distributed among 20 states (16 in the East, 4 in the West) as follows: Louisiana--22; Arkansas--19; Mississippi--18; Tennessee--14; Texas--13; Kentucky--11; North Carolina--8; Alabama--7; California, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Maryland, New Mexico, and West Virginia--1 each.

We acknowledge the collaboration of personnel of Regional Offices of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the cooperation of State and county conservation and agricultural departments, the National Audubon Society, and individual ornithologists; without these contributions, the roost survey would not have been accomplished. A more detailed progress report listing locality, reporter and observation date, population size and species composition, and habitat and acreage for each of the 723 roosts is available from the authors.

### DISCUSSION

Smith: Now we are wrestling with whether we should continue with the survey every 5 years, as we have done in the past, or do it more often. Plans to date are to do it every 5 years for the whole country but for certain areas of the country, do it every year or every other year.

This is probably the best estimate available for the national population, and we know errors are present in the estimate. However, this is probably a minimum figure, for some areas of the country were not surveyed properly.

Another thing that should be mentioned is related to the many people who report these estimates. They include conservationists, members of the Audubon Society, bird lovers, etc.; and we have had indications that if their reports result in population reductional programs, sources of information may dry up. Apparently, many people do not want to report roosts and then have somebody go in and try to remove the birds.

TABLE 1. Proportions, by Species, of Totals Reported, 1974-75

SPECIES	EASTERN STATES populations (%)	WESTERN STATES populations (%)	U. S. A. populations (%)
Red-winged Blackbird	119,848,000 (29.7)	78,676,000 (61.4)	198,524,000 (37.8)
Common Grackle	107,177,000 (29.8)	2,299,000 (01.7)	109,466,000 (21.9)
Starling	87,193,000 (23.4)	11,350,000 (08.8)	98,543,000 (19.7)
Brown-headed Cowbird	66,800,000 (17.9)	23,894,000 (18.5)	90,694,000 (18.1)
Drewer's Blackbird	21,000 ( tr )	10,255,000 (07.9)	10,276,000 (02.0)
Trif-colored Blackbird	-----	1,076,000 (00.8)	1,076,000 (00.2)
Rusty Blackbird	713,000 (00.2)	329,000 (00.2)	1,033,000 (00.2)
Scot-tailed Grackle*	18,000 ( tr )	579,000 (00.4)	598,000 (00.1)
Yellow-headed Blackbird	-----	208,000 (00.2)	208,000 ( tr )
Bronzed Cowbird	-----	26,000 ( tr )	26,000 ( tr )
TOTALS			
(specified)	372,770,000 (100)	129,864,000 (100)	501,434,000 (100)
(unspecified)	25,660,000 -	10,728,000 -	36,388,000 -
GRAND TOTALS	398,430,000 ( 74 )	139,392,000 (26)	537,822,000 (100)

\*Includes Scot-tailed Grackle of the West, elevated to species rank in 1973.