

STARLING CONTROL

Starlings were introduced from Europe in the 1980's and are found throughout North America. They are a small, robin sized bird with a yellow bill, short tail, and dark body. They are cavity nesters that form large flocks at their feeding and roosting sites, especially in the winter. These flocks can number in the thousands. If you have never seen a starling, then you are one of the lucky few.

These birds fly from operation to operation and pose an obvious disease threat and a major biosecurity concern. E-coli, salmonella, and Cryptococcosis, are just a few diseases carried by starlings. In addition, and by far the biggest threat, is the potential for them to carry and/or transport the Avian Influenza virus. With the rash of out breaks of A.I. across the country, starlings pose a very real threat to spread the virus from operation to operation.

In addition, their droppings are corrosive and can cause property damage to anything it comes in contact with. Starlings eat about half their body weight in feed each day. With flock sizes numbering in the thousands, feed loss can be measured in tons, not pounds. The starlings will compete with the game birds for feed, which increases the stress on the game birds.

Starlings must be controlled and there are options available. One option is exclusion. Keep the birds out. This is easier to accomplish in a building, but almost impossible to accomplish in open flight pens. Frightening the birds is a good short term solution. The use of "bird bangers" or "propane cannons" will scare them away. However, they will get used to the noise and these scare techniques become less effective the more they get used.

The most effective way to control starlings is through population management. You could shoot the birds, but with large flock sizes, results will be limited. The birds can be trapped in a large "bird box" and then euthanized. Again, on large flocks, this technique is often ineffective. The aforementioned techniques are most effective on smaller flocks (less than 1000 birds). The best way to control larger flocks of starlings is through the use of toxicants.

There are several toxins that are lethal only to starlings. Avitrol, Starlacide Complete, and DRC 1339 are a few examples. These toxicants require a permit that must be issued by the state and must be applied by a licensed professional. The key to successful treatment is to get the starlings eating a pre-bait (a bait with no poison in it). Once the starlings start eating the pre bait, it can be switched out with the actual toxicant. Depending on the toxicant, it may take up to 2 days to work. A successful treatment could result in a flock reduction of 80%.

Starling control is critical aspect of a good biosecurity program. These birds can carry disease and transport the avian influenza virus. Not to mention property damage and loss of feed they bring with them. Don't underestimate these little birds. They could have a huge impact on your operation.

For more information on starling control, contact the US Fish and Wildlife Service at 866-487-3297.

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