

European Starlings – A Fact Sheet on Nesting Habits



Physical description

- Stocky, black bird.
 - Long pointed bill – yellow in breeding season; brown by fall and remains brown over winter.
 - Pale legs.
 - Shimmering green & purple feathers in the spring.
 - Males and females are similar with very subtle differences.
 - Juveniles are drab gray-brown all over.
- Starlings molt their feathers in the fall. The new feather tips are whitish giving the bird a speckled appearance that gradually dulls over winter.

Similar species

- Blackbirds – have slimmer bodies, longer tails and shorter, thicker bills than starlings. No blackbirds have a yellow bill or pale legs.
- Juvenile & female Brown Headed Cowbirds are coloured very similar to a juvenile starling. The Cowbird has a longer tail, a slimmer body and a much stouter and shorter bill.

Nesting behaviour

- Starlings prefer to be around human activity – you won't see them when out in the forest camping – you will see them nesting in tree cavities and in/on building structures in urban and rural settings.
- Starlings reuse nest sites within the same season and will return to their nesting sites in subsequent seasons.
- Favourite sites include dryer & bathroom vents on houses, birdhouses, on building ledges, inside warehouses, in the rafters of barns, in crevices on hotels, office and government buildings.
- The average height of a preferred site is 10-25 feet from the ground.
- Males choose a nesting site and begin building the nest before they have a mate; the females choose their mate and then finish building the nest.
- Very aggressive at claiming nesting sites often displacing native cavity nesters and will destroy eggs and kill nestlings of other nesting species such as woodpeckers, chickadees, bluebirds and nuthatches.
- Both parents help build the nest, incubate the eggs and feed the young.
- Can nest up to 3 times per year.

Eggs

- Bluish or greenish white
- Incubation – 12 – 15 days
- One egg per day is laid and the average clutch is 3 – 7 eggs
- Chicks fledge in 21 – 23 days

Blocking nesting sites

Once the identity of the nesting bird(s) has been confirmed:

- Seal off nesting sites wherever possible – use netting or screen to block crevices, cracks & corners on buildings where starlings nest year after year.
- Place wooden, metal or plexiglass strips at 45 degree angles on building ledges to prevent their use.
- Check the birdhouses in your yard and reduce the holes to less than 1 ½ inches in diameter; remove all perches and ensure that there is at least 7 inches from the entrance hole to the bottom of the bird house to protect the young of other species who are nesting in the house.

For further information on the Starling Control Program contact:

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