



Wild Bird Control in the Poultry House

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Poultry houses of all kinds can be troubled with wild birds. Not only do the wild birds cause messes with their droppings and nests, but they can consume or contaminate large quantities of feed and be carriers of diseases and parasites. Another problem with birds is that they can damage the insulation in poultry houses resulting in the loss of the insulating qualities. The most common problem birds in poultry houses are sparrows and starlings.

If birds become a problem there are several approaches to finding a solution. The initial approach should be to eliminate birds outside the house. The first step is to avoid situations that encourage birds to congregate near the poultry house. One way is to avoid having trees, particularly those with dense foliage, or fruit trees near the houses. These types of trees encourage birds by providing cover and food. Another disadvantage to trees close to the poultry house is that they may block prevailing winds needed for natural ventilation. Vines growing on buildings will also provide cover for unwanted birds and should be eliminated.

Another factor to be avoided is excessive ground cover. The ground cover may provide seeds and insects, which will attract birds. Poor drainage, which could result in standing water, is another way that birds can be attracted. In addition, the ground cover or standing water may support the build-up of rodents, which can also create problems.

An important item that must be considered in bird control is the elimination of any openings or structural features on the outside of the house that may provide a nesting site. These design features are already determined for existing housing, but can be considered when planning new housing. Even for existing houses, some modification of the exteriors may be possible to eliminate nesting sites. Such design factors as space under corrugated metal roofing and space between roof and wall junctions may need modification to discourage nesting. Other sites are usually easy to locate.

Methods of solving the bird problem should also include eliminating any spilled feed on the outside of the house, so birds will not be encouraged to remain in the area. This may require clean-up around feed bins after they have been filled, and it may require repair and proper maintenance of auger tubes to prevent small amounts of feed from being wasted.

The next step in wild bird control is determining where the birds are entering the house and then, if possible, preventing those entries. Birds may gain entry at any time the doors to the house are left open. House clean-out may be a problem time. Since houses are not frequently cleaned, a good bird prevention program might include efforts to eliminate any birds that have gained entry during clean-out. As soon as the house

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is closed and being made ready for the next flock of chickens, special efforts should be made to get rid of any birds present. Scaring the birds toward an opening at one end of the house using several people and noisemakers might be effective. Catching remaining birds at night with a net could also help keep the problem under control. As a last resort, the use of an air rifle at night might be necessary in order to eliminate the most evasive intruders. At other times birds may enter through holes in sidewalls made by rodents or where utilities enter the house. Holes in wire netting may also allow entry by the unwanted visitors. Any time wild birds are seen inside the house, efforts should be made to identify and eliminate the entry points.

In situations where it is impossible or impractical to prevent birds from entering houses, it is important to create situations that discourage the birds from remaining inside the house. One important factor of this program is to regularly destroy the nests and eggs to prevent a population build-up. A systematic program of removing nests at least once each week should be followed. Not only do nests encourage increases in populations, but nesting materials are messy, and can create a fire hazard if the nests are constructed near electrical connections, or on equipment where the nest material could cause heat build-up or extra friction.

Other methods of discouraging birds in poultry houses include such things as flashing or rotating lights at entry points. At times when the doors to poultry houses need to be open, a strobe light or rotating beacon may keep birds from entering. Another suggestion is to place plastic or paper likenesses of raptors (hawks or owls) or mobiles (likenesses of hawks or owls, which swing in circles) within the house. Since the hawk and the owl are both natural predators of the unwanted visitors, the birds may leave the area. Plastic or artificial snakes attached to the rafters or other roosting areas may also discourage the birds from staying in poultry houses.

If bird proofing the house does not prove effective, it may be possible to trap the birds. Probably the most widely used traps for wild birds are the funnel traps. A general description of a funnel trap is a cone or half cone with the point or small end opening into a trap or cage. Birds can be encouraged to find a way into the trap through baits leading them into and through the cone. Once inside the cage or trap it is their instinct to try to exit around the sides. The opening into the trap must always be well into the center and away from the sides.

A trap design reported to be effective against sparrows and starlings was originally referred to as an Australian crow trap. The principle of the trap is to provide small openings in the upper portion of the trap at the bottom of a "V" shaped top (See Figure 1). Birds enter the trap to reach bait by dropping through the narrow openings and then tend to attempt to fly out at the sides or ends rather than exit the way they entered. Once birds are in the trap they serve as decoys for others and it may be desirable to leave a dozen or so birds in the trap for that purpose, or artificial decoys may be used. If birds are left in the trap, plenty of feed and water should be provided.

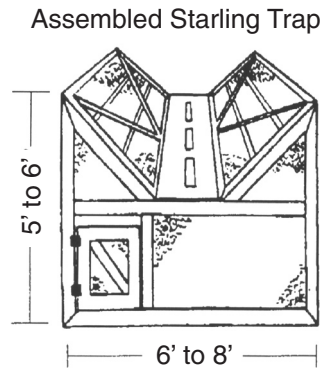


Figure 1. Assembled Starling Trap

Construction of the trap described above is not difficult. The sides can be covered with one-inch poultry netting. The wire should be on the outside of the frame on the sides and ends, but on the top it should be on the inside. This will provide exposed frames to serve as perches for the birds. If the trap is to be used for starlings and sparrows, the slits in the top panel should be one and three-fourths inches wide and no closer than nine inches to each end. When birds are to be removed from the trap, the decoys should be removed first, then the trap covered in plastic and some type of fumigant used. Extreme care should be used with the fumigant.

Other trap designs that use one-way doors or drop devices, triggered by the weight of the bird, can also be effective against certain species. None of these traps are 100 percent effective or escape proof, but they can be effective in reducing bird numbers.

Another method of control may be with poison grain; however, extreme care must be given to this program because of the danger to poultry in the house and to other animals in the area. There are also chemicals (Avitrol is an example) that can be placed on the roosting areas and are toxic to birds after contact. An additional advantage to the use of some of the contact materials is that they cause the affected birds to exhibit an erratic behavior that causes other birds to leave the area. Before these compounds are used inside the poultry house, they should be considered for use outside the building to prevent a build-up of a wild bird population. Perches with built-in wicks to provide contact with chemical agents can be installed outside the house near nesting areas. Birds usually perch before entering a hole where nests are located. Strategic placement of chemically treated perches may be very effective in reducing outside populations. There are restrictions on the use of all toxic materials, and they should always be used with care and with restrictions in mind. Any type of poison should only be used as a last resort, and only then by a person qualified to handle the compounds in question. Label directions should always be followed and extreme care used. These precautions are important for the safety of the personnel working in the area, other animals and birds in the area, and for poultry that are in the house or that may be in the house in the future.

Wild birds can result in costly damage to the poultry house or cause a disease in the flock. In summary, the steps in keeping bird problems to a minimum are first to discourage birds from staying around the poultry house; second, destroy nesting materials; and third, eliminate those that remain after other efforts have failed. Persistence may be the real key to wild bird control. If birds are a problem, a control program should be outlined and then rigidly followed to make it effective.

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