

# Nighttime Bird Roosts

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Birds roosting in large numbers at nighttime can cause several problems. Airplanes are more likely to crash if they strike many birds at once. Large flocks of birds can also have a significant impact on grain fields, or crop fruits such as cherries and grapes. Bird droppings under a large roost site can be a considerable nuisance. Birds calling from their perches before sunrise are annoying to people sleeping nearby.

## WHY BIRDS ROOST

Communal roosting provides several advantages for birds. This phenomenon provides an opportunity for birds to find mates and to sharpen communication skills they use throughout the year. Some birds, because of their age or familiarity with the surrounding landscape, may be more efficient at finding food. Less experienced members of a roost can follow other birds to known feeding sites. Roosting flocks also provide a form of protection from predators. Birds occupying the center of the flock are less exposed to predators than those on the edges.

Several bird species roost in groups of hundreds or thousands. These roosting flocks may be composed of a single species or of several species. Birds that commonly roost in large numbers include starlings, house sparrows, crows, grackles, gulls, purple martins, red-winged blackbirds, pigeons, vultures and wading birds.

## TYPES OF ROOSTS

Birds roost in a variety of natural areas and man-made structures. Natural roosting sites can include trees in urban parks and residential areas, haystacks, ivy, hedgerows, and marshy areas. Man-made structures chosen for roosting often include barns, ledges, chimneys, attics, flat roofs, airport hangers and runways.

## LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

The legal status of each bird species may vary on federal, state and local levels. As non-native species, house sparrows and starlings are not protected by federal or state law. However, local ordinances may require permits for controlling these species. Migratory birds, such as gulls, are protected by federal and state law. **It is illegal to poison wildlife in Florida.** Regardless of their legal status, all birds must be treated as humanely as possible. Cruelty to animals is prohibited by Florida Statute 828.12.

## CONTROL METHODS

Each roost site is unique and may require individual attention by a professional to determine the appropriate control methods. Contact the State Director of Animal Damage Control, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, APHIS (Animal, Plant, Health, Inspection Services; 904/377-5666).

Control methods consist of 2 basic types: mechanical and chemical. Because each roost is unique, methods that work in one situation may not work in another. No single method has proven to be a cure-all for roosting problems. Using several methods together usually results in greater success. Refer to (Table 1) for control methods recommended for various roosting species.

## **Mechanical Control Methods**

### **Exclusion options**

1. Design new buildings or alter old ones to eliminate horizontal resting places, such as designing 45° angle ledges or constructing beams in barns for **catwalks** so cats can patrol bird roosts.
2. Apply **porcupine wire** (metal prongs) or sticky repellents (bird glue) on ledges or rafters. Covering the ledge with masking tape before applying the bird glue makes removal of the sticky substance easier.
3. Hang **heavy plastic (PVC) strips** in large door openings of warehouses. This method allows for human traffic while excluding birds.
4. Cover high value crops, such as fruit trees, with plastic **bird netting**.

### **Habitat Modification options**

**Prune small branches** so that trees become less suitable roosting sites for small birds.

### **Frightening device options**

1. Visual or auditory frightening devices include recorded bird distress calls or alarm calls, gas-operated exploders, battery-operated alarms, exploding shotgun shells (shell-crackers), firecrackers, lights, bright objects, eyespot balloons, scarecrows, and motorized hawks. Most birds adapt quickly so devices must be diversified and their locations shifted constantly.
2. Avitrol® is registered in several bait formations as a chemical frightening agent. Use is restricted to government agencies, pest control operators, and persons under their supervision. Birds that eat treated bait behave erratically and give warning cries that frighten other birds from the area. This chemical is lethal and cannot be used without a permit from the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission.

### **Trapping options**

As with all control methods, special care must be taken in trapping so that non-target birds are not affected, particularly migratory birds which are protected by federal and state laws. All non-target birds caught accidentally in traps must be released immediately.

1. **Funnel traps** are the most commonly used for house sparrows. Funnel traps should be checked frequently.
2. **Automatic traps** are counterbalanced multicatch traps. House sparrows enter a compartment then are dropped into a lower compartment from which there is no escape. Enticing birds into the trap may be more difficult than the funnel trap, but overall catch is usually greater.
3. **Trigger traps** are limited in the number of birds they can catch at one time. Some are not automatic and require a person to spring the trap at the proper moment.
4. **Decoy traps** are used to catch starlings where they congregate. Place 10 to 20 well fed and watered starlings in the cage as decoys. The feeding and calling of decoy starlings will draw others to the cage.

### **Shooting options**

Shooting is often ineffective because of the small number of birds killed relative to the numbers usually involved in problem roost situations. The sound of shooting is more effective for dispersing birds from an undesirable roosting location. It can be a helpful technique when employed to supplement or reinforce other methods used in a dispersal program. This is not an option for migratory bird problems (see "Legal Considerations"). Local ordinances also may prohibit this option.

### **Chemical Control Methods**

#### **Repellent options**

1. Some chemicals such as Mesurol® can be used as a **taste aversion** method against birds. This material can be applied on fruit crops, such as cherries and grapes, and may repel birds by making them sick.
2. No effective repelling odors have been developed.

#### **Toxicant options**

It is illegal to poison wildlife in Florida.

#### **Fumigant options**

No fumigants are registered for control of birds.

### **Pesticide Information Numbers**

Contact the following for information on pesticide (chemical) use for bird control in Florida:

- IFAS Pesticide Information 904/392-4721
- Florida Department of Agricultural and Consumer Services, Pesticide Information 904/487-2130

## **Suppliers**

When the appropriate methods have been determined for a problem roost, supplies can be obtained from the following sources.

### **Porcupine Wire**

- Nixalite of America
- 1025 - 16th Avenue
- Box 727
- East Moline, IL 61244
- (309) 755-8771
- 
- Shaw Steeple Jacks Inc.
- 2710 Bedford Street
- Johnstown, PA 15904
- (814) 266-8008

### **Sticky Substances**

- Bird Control Internat. Corp.
- P.O. Box 12
- Macedonia, OH 44056
- (216) 425-2377

### **Netting**

- Almac Plastics Company
- 6311 Erdman Ave.
- Baltimore, MD 21205
- (301) 485-9100
- 
- Animal Repellents, Inc.
- P.O. Box 999
- Griffin, GA 30224
- (404) 227-8222

### **Chemical Frightening**

- Avitrol® Corp.
- 320 S. Boston Ave., Suite 514
- Tulsa, OK 74103

- (918) 582-3359

### **Kites, Balloons, and Other Frightening Devices**

- Local sources - lawn & garden, hardware, and feed stores.
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- Wildlife Control Technology
- 6408 S. Fig Street
- Fresno, CA 93706
- (209) 268-1200
- 
- Bird-X
- 325 W. Huron Street
- Chicago, IL 60610
- (312) 648-2191

### **Traps**

- Tomahawk Live Trap Co.
- P.O. Box 323
- Tomahawk, WI 54487
- (715) 453-3550

## **REFERENCES**

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## **Tables**

Table 1.

<b>Table 1. Control Methods of Birds by Species</b>									
	Species								
Control Method	Starlings	House Sparrows	Crows	Grackles	Gulls	Purple Martins	Black-birds	Wading birds	Vultures
Catwalks	X	X							
Porcupine wire	X	X	X		X				X
Plastic door strips	X	X							
Netting				X		X	X		
Prune branches	X			X		X	X		
Frightening devices	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Funnel traps		X							
Automatic traps		X							
Trigger traps	X	X							
Decoy traps	X	X	X				X		
Shooting	X	X							
Taste aversions	X			X			X		

### Footnotes

1. This document is SS-WIS-53, part of a series published by the Cooperative Urban Wildlife Program, a cooperative effort between the Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida and the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission's Nongame Wildlife Program.

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