

Figure 1. Pigeon or rock dove.

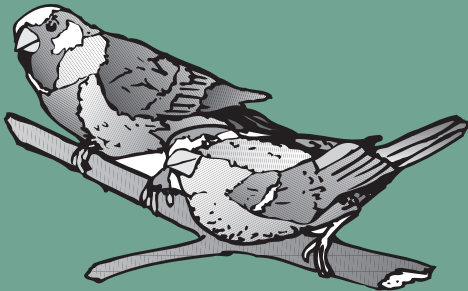


Figure 2. English sparrows.



Figure 3. European starling.

Images courtesy of the Department of Communications and Marketing, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech.

We all enjoy birds in our gardens. However, while many birds are adapted to living around humans, three invasive species frequently become pests: pigeons (rock doves), English or house sparrows, and European starlings. Pigeons and sparrows scavenge in parking lots, picnic areas, and parks, while starlings are more likely to be seen in lawns and mowed fields where they forage for seeds and insects.

PIGEONS. Pigeons collect in flocks on structures with ledges, outcroppings, or beams such as those found in covered play areas and entryways. Color varies, but most pigeons are gray with iridescent neck feathers, red legs, and a black band on their tail. Pigeons feed on grain, garbage, and everything in between. They exhibit extreme site loyalty, do not migrate, and have excellent homing instincts, making it difficult to manage pigeons by trapping and relocation. Scare tactics are not particularly effective for pigeons, as they quickly acclimate to owl or hawk figures, noises, and other threats.

ENGLISH SPARROWS. English sparrows are medium-sized songbirds. The male has a black bib and white cheeks, while the female is gray-brown all over. They feed on grains, seeds, fruit, and human food debris. They build messy nests in sheltered locations, including on light fixtures, signs, and building ledges. Sparrows do not migrate, so are seen year-round in most areas. They generally do not respond very well to scare tactics, but nest removal and bird-proofing strategies are effective.

EUROPEAN STARLINGS. Starlings have short tails and chunky bodies. Males are glossy black with speckled feathers, while females are dull brown. Both have bright yellow beaks in the spring. These aggressive, noisy pests crowd out native birds and devour grain, fruit, seeds, and insects in gardens and fields. Starlings build messy nests in cavities such as soffits, air vents and under loose-fitting roofing. In urban areas, starlings may be a problem when they flock together to migrate or overwinter, returning to favorite roosts year after year. They quickly acclimate to repeated scare tactics, so those tactics must be varied often for best results. Branch thinning and tree removal as well as exclusion maintenance can be helpful.

BIRD MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

English sparrow, pigeons, and European starlings are *not* protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, so you have more management options. Be sure to check with your state's Department of Fish and Wildlife for current restrictions. (Native sparrows, pigeons, and doves *are* protected.)

1. Remove water and food sources, such as bird baths, feeders, and trash. Make sure outdoor trash cans are lidded. Pick up trash and food debris daily in outdoor lunch/snack areas.
2. Remove shelter by thinning or removing trees and shrubs near buildings.
3. Nest removal or destruction will help discourage sparrows and pigeons. There may be public relations issues associated with nest removal.
4. Do not handle dead or injured birds, or bird droppings.
5. Screen vent openings and holes using ¼-inch rust-proof wire mesh.
6. Mount wood, metal, or Plexiglas on ledges at a 45° angle.
7. Mount signs flush to walls or block spaces behind them.
8. Screen exposed roof beams and rafters with netting.
9. Place spikes, porcupine wire, or coiled bird wire along ledges. This may not be as effective for smaller birds such as sparrows. Several straight wires or monofilament lines may also be used, provided the spacing between the wires is narrow enough to prevent landing.
10. Apply sticky repellents along beams and ledges. For porous surfaces such as masonry, mount a strip of tape on the surface and apply the repellent to the tape. Sticky repellents become less effective as they age and are less useful in dry, dusty environments. NOTE: Bird repellents (such as gels) are classified as pesticides, so you must follow all applicable laws including posting and notification requirements when using them.

BIRD-RELATED HEALTH CONCERNS

Messy nests, feather debris, slippery and unsightly droppings, corroded surfaces, and potential disease hazards are all problems created by birds when they decide to occupy human structures. Birds also carry parasites, bacteria, and viruses which can cause illnesses in humans and other animals. Some of the most significant risks are listed below.

1. Mites, lice, and fleas can bite humans when they leave their bird hosts.
2. Bird droppings may be contaminated with bacteria such as Salmonella, which can cause food-borne illness when ingested.
3. The droppings may also cause lung infections, such as Cryptococcosis and Histoplasmosis, if inhaled.
4. Birds carry pathogens—including West Nile Virus—which can be transmitted to humans by mosquitoes.

Always wear appropriate protective equipment such as gloves and respiratory protection when removing nests or cleaning up bird debris or feces. Do not inhale dust from nests or droppings, and wash contaminated clothing and skin thoroughly after contacting bird waste.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- *University of Nebraska-Lincoln (Urban Pest Birds)*. <http://elkhorn.unl.edu/epublic/live/g2024/build/g2024.pdf>
- *Internet Center for Wildlife Damage Mgt.* <http://icwdm.org/wildlife/birds.asp>
- *eXtension (Cooperative Extension Online)*. <http://www.extension.org/pages/8664/wildlife-damage-management:-birds>
- *Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife (Birds)*. <http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/birds.html>
- *Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (Birds of Oregon)* <http://www.dfw.state.or.us/species/birds/>
- *The National Pesticide Information Center (NPIC) provides objective, science-based information about pesticides and related topics to enable people to make informed decisions. To contact NPIC, call 1-800-858-7378 or visit <http://npic.orst.edu>.*

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