

# Blackbird damage severe on state field crops

LANCASTER — At least half of all Pennsylvania farmers experience some type of damage from birds. Blackbirds alone are responsible for an estimated \$12,500,000 loss annually in the Commonwealth. The situation was reported recently by wildlife

management scientists at Penn State. Damage to ripening grain is the most common loss to birds, they said, following by loss to fruit crops and feed supplies. And there is considerable contamination to feedlots from droppings.

R.D. Mitchell and J.L. George reported their findings from a survey of 4000 farmers in the Commonwealth. Mitchell is research assistant while George is professor of wildlife management at Penn State.

The blackbird species

causing the problems in Pennsylvania are the common grackle, the starling, the red-winged blackbird, and the brown-headed cowbird. Mitchell and George describe their research in the upcoming Summer issue of "Science in Agriculture," the magazine of the Agricultural Experiment Station at Penn State.

Field corn losses averaged \$468 per farm annually in the study. Yearly damage to grapes averaged over \$1000 per vineyard. And losses from birds in animal feedlots averaged from \$300 to over \$1000 annually, depending on the type of feedlot.

Problems with blackbirds are both urban and rural, George pointed out. Such birds roost in urban areas and create a nuisance by the noise as well as droppings that accumulate on homes, cars, and ground under roosts. There is also a possible hazard to human health if the droppings accumulate over time.

Such invasions of urban

settings occur twice a year, first in the Spring when blackbirds migrate north to their breeding grounds and again in the Summer after the breeding season.

The most widespread types of damage to farm crops occur in late Summer and early Fall when blackbird roosts of 10,000 to 100,000 birds are scattered all over the state. The birds leave their roosts during the day and go to fields of ripening grain to feed.

Field corn in the milk-dough stage is the crop most frequently damaged. The species largely responsible for this is the red-winged blackbird.

Control of corn damage involves the use of exploders or a chemical frightening agent, known as Avitrol. Both methods can be effective when used properly. Avitrol poisons the birds which emit distress calls that frighten away other birds. The damage occurs during a very short period, probably less than one week.

But there are problems

here also. The main objection to exploders is their annoyance to people living in the vicinity of protected fields. Moreover, exploders should be moved occasionally so the birds don't become too accustomed to the loud sounds.

The main problem with Avitrol is the high cost of application, since it must be applied by airplane. Other grain crops damaged by birds in Summer and early Fall are oats, wheat, and sweet corn.

Cherries are the most frequently damaged fruit crop with reported losses averaging \$487 per orchard annually. Control of bird

damage in cherry orchards, the Penn Staters suggest, can be achieved by using exploders, protective netting, or chemical repellents.

The most commonly used control method used by cherry growers is the chemical repellent Mesurol. This is sprayed on ripening cherries and causes a bird to "choke" when trying to eat a treated cherry. A study carried out a year ago indicated a grower can save \$250 an acre by using Mesurol.

The Penn State project was financed partially from far funds administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.

## Maryland declared pullorum-typhoid clean

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — Maryland, a prominent poultry-producing state, has qualified for advanced status under the National Poultry Improvement Plan, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Certain poultry producing surveillance regulations must be enforced by a state to qualify for the U.S. Pullorum-Typhoid Clean State classification. Commercial chicken and turkey breeding flocks must be free of Salmonella pullorum and Salmonella gallinarum—the organisms that cause pullorum and fowl typhoid—

for 12 months prior to qualification.

The NPIP was founded in 1935 to improve poultry, poultry products and hatcheries through better breeding practices and the control of certain egg-transmitted and hatchery-disseminated diseases. The plan in Maryland is directed by George Stein Jr.

Raymond D. Schar, senior coordinator for the NPIP program of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, said that certificates designating this status were presented last Thursday at the Parole Plaza Conference Center, Annapolis, Md.

The certificates were presented to Maryland Secretary of Agriculture, Wayne A. Cawley, Jr., and also to a representative of the Maryland poultry industry. R.P. Jones, assistant to the deputy administrator, Veterinary Sciences, APHIS, made the presentation on behalf of USDA.

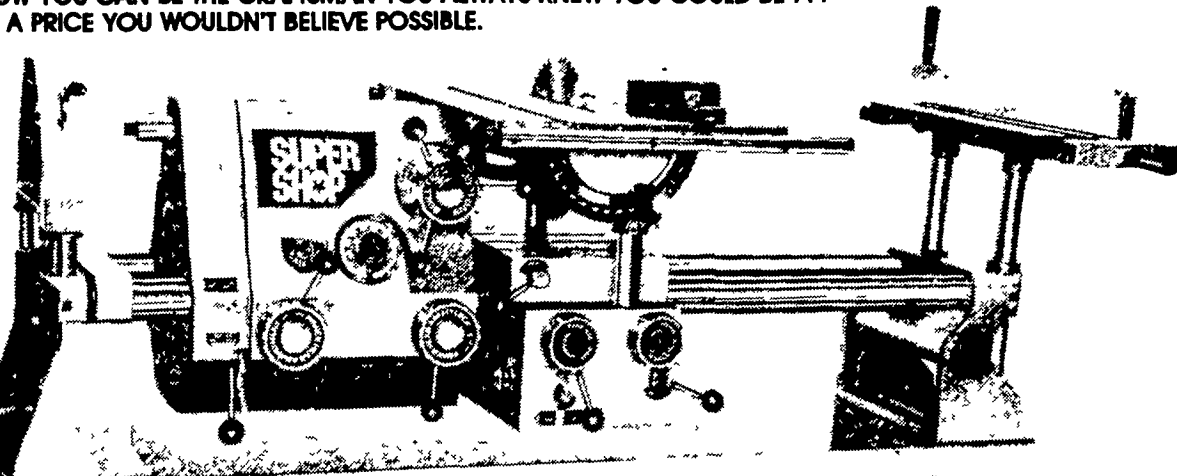
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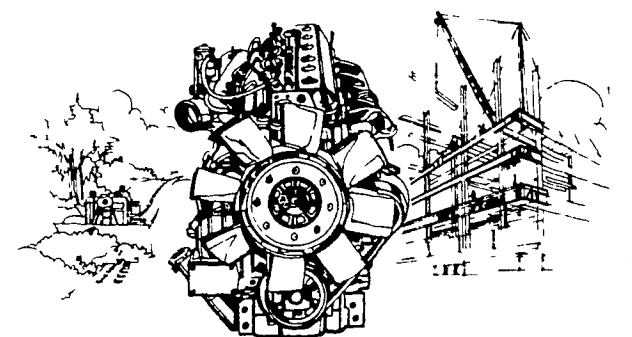
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