

WILDLIFE IN CONNECTICUT

INFORMATIONAL SERIES

No. 3

EUROPEAN STARLING

Sternus vulgaris

No Picture

Habitat: Cities, towns and agricultural areas.

Weight: Adult weight: 2.25 to 3.5 ounces.

Length: Adult size: 7.5 to 8.5 inches, with a wingspread of 15.5 inches.

Food: Starlings feed on a variety of insects and other invertebrates (approximately 50 percent of diet), seeds, fruits and cultivated grains.

Identification: In the spring, the adult starling's plumage is glossy black and the bill is yellow. In the fall and winter, the plumage is iridescent, speckled with white or light tan spots, and its bill is grayish. Juveniles are dull brown with a white throat. The starling's short tail and longer, slender bill distinguishes it from other blackbirds. In flight, it appears triangular in shape and flies swiftly and directly, not rising and falling like most other blackbirds.

Range: Starlings are native to Europe but were introduced to North America. They are now found from southeastern Alaska and southern Canada, throughout the United States, to southern Mexico. Most starlings will remain in the same general area throughout the year; however, some young birds will migrate up to several hundred miles in response to cold temperatures.

Reproduction: In Connecticut, starlings mate in late March to early April. The males initiate nest building and seek sites in a natural tree cavity, building crevice or

artificial nest box. Females will continue to construct the nest using grasses, straw, twigs and debris. Typically, four to six pale blue or greenish-white eggs are laid by the female and incubated for 11 to 13 days by both the female and the male. The young are altricial (helpless) when born and remain in the nest for 18 to 22 days. In Connecticut, there are usually two broods per year.

Interesting Facts: Common names include common starling and church-martin.

European starlings were introduced to the United States from Europe in 1890. They were released into New York City's Central Park by a man who wanted to introduce all the birds mentioned in Shakespeare's work. Since then, this highly adaptable bird has spread across the country, successfully outcompeting many native, cavity-nesting birds.

Starlings are most often recognized by their gregarious habits. When not nesting, starlings feed and roost in

large flocks. In the spring and fall, a loud chorus of chirps can be heard as groups gather in treetops; sometimes they will imitate the calls of other birds. They will also gather in large groups in marshes and orchards to feed, often accompanying blackbirds, cowbirds, grackles and robins. They may fly 30 or more miles a day from their roost sites to feed.

History in Connecticut: European starlings arrived in Connecticut after their introduction into New York City in the late 1800s. The first documented nest in Connecticut was in 1900 in the southwestern part of the state. Presently, they are commonly found in cities, suburbs, towns and agricultural areas and may be the most numerous bird in Connecticut.

Management of Nuisances: Starlings can be a nuisance due to their gregarious nature and habit of nesting in inappropriate places such as an attic or eave vent. Large concentrations of starlings can damage agricultural crops, consume large quantities of livestock feed and contaminate feed and water with their droppings. They have also been implicated in the spread of disease in livestock. Large flocks roosting on rural and urban buildings also are considered a nuisance. While

starlings may be beneficial in helping to control insect pest populations, they have outcompeted native species such as bluebirds, woodpeckers and purple martins by taking over nesting cavities.

To exclude starlings from buildings and grain storage facilities: 1) close doors and all other openings larger than one inch, 2) place boards or metal coverings at a 45-degree angle on ledges to eliminate perching areas, and 3) hang heavy strips of material in open doorways or at feed bunkers. In open farm buildings, eliminate roosting areas by covering the underside of rafters with netting. Netting is also useful for protecting fruit trees.

Reduce the availability of food and water by removing spilled grain and standing water. Bird-proof feeders and storage facilities.

European starlings are an introduced species and are not protected by federal or state law in Connecticut. The nest, eggs, adults and young may be legally removed or destroyed.

Food: Starlings feed on a variety of insects and other invertebrates (approximately 80 percent of diet), seeds, fruits and cultivated grains.

Habitat: Cities, towns and agricultural areas.

Weight: Adult weight: 2.25 to 3.2 ounces.

Length: Adult size: 7.5 to 8.5 inches, with a wingspread of 13.5 inches.

Identification: In the spring, the adult starling's plumage is glossy black and the bill is yellow. In the fall and winter, the plumage is iridescent, tinged with white or light tan spots, and the bill is grayish. Juveniles are dull brown with a white throat. The starling's short tail and longer, slender bill distinguishes it from other blackbirds. In flight, it appears triangular in shape and flies swiftly and directly, not waggling and falling like most other blackbirds.

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