



Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

Description

Starlings are distinguishable from blackbirds by their shorter tails and triangular shape of wings in flight. Their chattering mimicking song often sounds like several birds and can imitate other species, or even car alarms. Adult males and females are about 21.5 cm long. The plumage is blackish with a green and purple iridescence, especially in summer. Pale spots seen in winter fade away by spring. Juveniles are dull brown in summer but moult in autumn to adult plumage.

Nationally, the numbers of starlings are in fact declining, although there is currently estimated to be a British breeding population of 8.5 million birds. 30% are found on farmland, whilst 57% are in urban and rural gardens



Nesting

Starlings build a substantial nest, mainly of grasses, in trees and buildings. They commonly nest within the roofs of buildings.

Usually 4 eggs are laid and incubated by the female for 12-13 days. While breeding, the parents roost in, or close to, their nest-site. Fledging takes place after 21-23 days. Soon after becoming independent of their parents, in May, first brood juveniles join communal roosts, leaving the parents to rear a second brood.

In the breeding season Starlings are mainly insectivorous, leather jackets forming a large part of their diet. Invertebrates continue to be eaten in summer but where soft fruits are available they become an important food source, especially for juveniles. In winter, Starlings are omnivorous, eating invertebrates, grain and stock feed and they also scavenge at refuse tips.

Flock Behaviour

Most Starlings roost communally from late summer until the following breeding season, forming conspicuous gatherings at dusk. During the winter the resident British population is augmented by large numbers of immigrants which return to the Continent the following spring to breed.

Damage

Damage results from both the Starlings' roosting and feeding habits, and consists mainly of noise, fouling and food removal. In rural roosts, which are usually in dense thickets, the combined action of large quantities of Starling guano and the weight of birds on branches can eventually kill the trees. In cities, droppings foul pavements, disfigure buildings and monuments and erode stonework

Control

Starlings are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Even if the birds are causing damage to property or other problems such as noise or odour they can not be killed. Failure to comply with the 1981 Act can result in a fine of £5,000, a custodial sentence of 6 months, or both.

An "individual" licence is granted by DEFRA to approved, named individuals, to tackle a specific problem, within a specific period of time, in an agreed manner. DEFRA assess applications on a case by case basis. **Without a licence it is illegal to kill starlings.**

Office Use Only: UNCLASSIFIED

These birds do not have the same pest status as rodents, and the Borough Council has no statutory duty to take action. Where another property, or landlord is involved the Borough Council can not compel them to take action if they choose not to.

What You Can Do

If you have birds which are actively building a nest, using the nest, have laid eggs, or are rearing young there is no action which you can legally take. You must wait until the nest is no-longer in use.

- Disused nests can be removed, but should be handled with care as they may contain insect pests such as bird mites which could accidentally be spread.
- Nest can be difficult to get to safely. Carefully plan how you will reach the nest, and how it can be removed in order to prevent injury or unnecessary damage.
- Before starting work ensure that you have correct protective clothing. A nuisance dust mask, or similar, should be used to minimise the amounts of dust from a nest which is inhaled during the removal process. Gloves are also recommended.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after handling nesting materials
- Removed nests can be burnt, or disposed of, suitably bagged, with your normal refuse collection. Burying / composting is not recommended as this may spread disease.
- Where access has been caused by a maintenance issue – missing tile, rotten fascias and soffits, these repairs should be tackled.

Birds can be prevented from entering or roosting on buildings by either installing netting over vulnerable areas or fixing wire, plastic or other purpose-designed devices to deter birds from landing on ledges, window sills or other structures. Guards can be fitted under the bottom row of tile above the gutter to prevent birds getting into soffits / lofts.

The fitting of proofing and deterrent measures can be complicated, and is usually carried out by experienced operators. Correctly installed, these measures can provide a long term solution to bird problems. If inappropriate techniques are used, they may fail to exclude or deter the birds. For example, most anti-roost devices do not work effectively against starlings, and the mesh size of netting must be suitable for the species involved.

Services from Us.

The Borough Councils Pest Control Service will NOT remove nests / block holes. The work required is better undertaken by a builder / roofer, who can also make the necessary repairs to prevent birds getting back into the building once nest are no longer in use. **We do not have a list of contractors, and can not recommend the services of any tradesman.** We can however assist with the treatment of **insect infestations**, associated with nest material, if required.

- To request our help please call 01782 742590 during office hours or see our website.
- Our current charges are detailed on our website at www.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk , or available by calling our Customer Services Team on 01782 742590
- Some landlords may pay this charge on your behalf if you live in rented accommodation.
- Our waiting times are typically 3-5 working days.

Rev July 2015

Office Use Only: UNCLASSIFIED

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
Civic Offices
Merrial Street
Newcastle
Staffs
ST5 2AG

Telephone 01782 742590
Email customerservices@newcastle-staffs.gov.uk