

# Starling

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**Starlings** are small to medium-sized passerine birds in the family **Sturnidae**. The name "Sturnidae" comes from the Latin word for Starling, *sturnus*. Starlings occur naturally in the Old World, from Europe, Asia and Africa, to northern Australia and the islands of the tropical Pacific. Several European and Asian species have been introduced to these areas as well as North America, Hawaii and New Zealand, where they generally compete for habitat with native birds and are considered to be invasive species.

Starlings have strong feet, their flight is strong and direct, and they are very gregarious. Their preferred habitat is fairly open country, and they eat insects and fruit. Several species live around human habitation, and are effectively omnivores. Many species search for food by opening the bill after probing it into dense vegetation; this behavior is called "open-bill probing" or is referred to by the German word "zirkeln". Plumage is typically dark with a metallic sheen. Most species nest in holes, laying blue or white eggs.

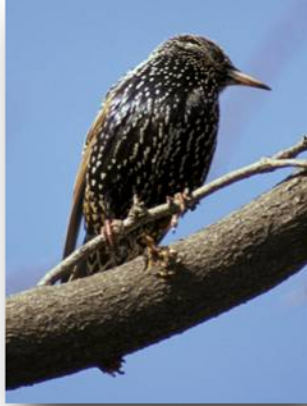
Many Asian species, particularly the larger ones, are called mynas, and many African species are known as **glossy starlings** because of their iridescent plumage. The shortest-bodied species is Kenrick's Starling, at 15 centimetres (6 in), but the lightest-weight species is Abbott's Starling, at 34 grams (1.2 oz). The largest starlings are the mynas of the genus *Mino*, especially the Yellow-faced and Long-tailed Mynas. These mynas can exceed 30 centimetres (1 ft) and weigh over 225 grams (8 oz). Starlings have diverse and complex vocalizations, and have been known to imbed sounds from their surroundings into their own calls, including car alarms, and human speech patterns. The birds can recognize particular individuals by their calls, and are currently the subject of research into the evolution of human language.



Like the house sparrow, the starling was introduced from Europe in the 19th century. It did not spread as fast and only reached the western coast within the last few decades. Starlings are well adapted to urban lives which offer it an abundance of food and nesting sites. It is a muscular bird about eight inches long with long wings and a short squared tail. Starlings are very aggressive and will drive native birds out of their territory, much to the dismay of local bird watchers. Starlings are well noted for their flocking habits. They often gather in the tens of thousands, creating a nuisance when roosting in populated areas.

## Damage

Starlings rank just behind pigeons and sparrows as an urban bird pest. Starlings can be a nuisance in both urban and rural areas due to their nesting, eating and living habits. When the bird is in its flocking phase, thousands of starlings often overwhelm buildings and trees. Large



scale buildup of feces from these flocks can lead to structural damage. The uric acid in the feces can corrode stone, metal and masonry. Gutters and drainage pipes clogged with starling nests often backup, causing extensive water damage. The bacteria, fungal agents and parasites in the feces also pose a health risk.

### **Control**

Starlings roosting habits can be modified permanently using 1-1/8" mesh Stealth Net and/or electrical systems like Bird-Shock. For large flocks or agricultural applications, these birds can be moved with a well-timed, organized scare campaign using strategically placed sophisticated audio systems like the Bird Wailer, Squawker, or the Bird-Guard units depending on the size of the area. These products combine natural and electronic sounds like species specific distress calls, predator hunting/attack sequences and canon or shotgun sounds. Other noisemakers such as Zone Guns and Bird Bombs & Screamers often have success in relocating these bird when combined with lights and visual frightening devices that flash such as Flash Tape, Scare Eye Balloons or Octopus. A new technique that has found some success for moving populations from trees is to fog problem areas with ReJeX-iT.

### **Nesting**

The Starling is a nesting bird. Their nests are in enclosed areas with at least a 1-1/2 inch opening. Look for their nests in old trees, church steeples and other holes and crevices. Due to their bullying nature they will take any suitable site, evicting any previous owner. They sometimes watch other birds build a complete nest before forcing them to leave.

### **Breeding**

Starlings have two broods a year with four to five eggs a brood. They average eight offspring a year. The eggs are white, pale blue or green-white. Incubation of the eggs takes twelve days. The fledglings leave the nest after 25 days. The young leave to join other juveniles and form huge flocks that move on to other territories.

### **Cycles**

Not a true migrating bird, starlings may move from rural trees to warm city buildings in winter. The daily cycle is one of leaving the nest at sunrise to travel up to sixty miles to feeding areas before returning for the evening. They disperse to mate in the spring. After mating season, they will often coalesce into huge flocks with defined feeding and roosting areas.