

## **Bird Control on Dairies by Altering Habitat**

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While it may not be practical or even possible to control all birds on a dairy, it may be possible to reduce the numbers of some birds commonly found on dairies. The key to control is to know about the nesting, roosting and foraging habits of these birds. Each of the common dairy birds has a preferred nesting site on or near the dairy. They also have preferred roosting and foraging sites. By altering one or all of these preferential sites, it is possible to reduce the number of birds on a dairy.

As an example, consider a dairy I recently visited. This dry-lot, corral style dairy had shades across each corral. The crossbeams supporting the roof were pipe and the ends of the pipe had been left open. There were about 1536 pipe openings on the dairy that provide a nesting place for House Sparrows. Over the warm weather nesting period, House Sparrows can produce a new brood of sparrows in 6 weeks, however, most probably have only 2-4 broods per year. On average, a pair of House Sparrow has 4-5 eggs in each brood. To make the math easy, in 3 broods with 4 eggs each, a pair of House Sparrows could produce 12 new sparrows each year. If a pair of sparrows used each pipe opening on this dairy, they could potentially produce more than 18,000 new sparrows to live on the dairy.

So, consider how House Sparrows might be reduced on a dairy. House Sparrows prefer to live in cavities such as open pipes that might be used in construction of corral shades or other pole-type structures (Table 1). These sparrows also stay within a mile or so of where they were born. By closing up the open pipes, the number of nesting sites can be reduced resulting in fewer sparrows living on the dairy. This will work best if the dairy is somewhat isolated from other nesting places such as nearby large trees, abandon buildings or other dairies. Closing up spaces between eaves and supporting beams will also be helpful. Closing the pipe openings will also reduce the nesting locations for Starlings as well. However, Starlings are more prone to traveling long distances to feed or roost during the day on the dairies and less impact would be expected to less impact on their numbers. Other birds that only feed on the dairies would not be impacted by altering dairy nesting sites.

When Blackbirds are a pest problem, the point of interaction to consider would also be the nesting sites. Red-winged blackbirds prefer to nest in cattails around marshes or streams, so the focus should be the nesting sites located close to the dairy. Removal of these nesting sites could result in decreased numbers of these blackbirds during the breeding season and perhaps during the winter as well. Weed control around lagoons may also be beneficial. Roosting under buildings and shades maybe reduced by construction design that leaves no poles or beams for birds to sit upon. Changing construction design

will also be expected to impact the number of Pigeons and Starlings roosting during the day on the dairy.

Pigeon control is very difficult particularly for dairies that are close to cities as the birds tend to flock out to the dairies to forage in the early morning; roost on structures during the day; feed again in the mid-afternoon; and return to their city roosts by dark. Resident pigeons can be controlled by preventing nesting on ledges and platforms in buildings. Reducing ready access to large piles of grains or grain mixes outside of storage buildings will also discourage excessive numbers of pigeons from congregating on dairies.

House Finches tend to come to dairies from nearby orchards. They have a strong preference for bits of almonds they find in large pile of almond shells or hulls. Finches are usually found in small numbers thus not causing major problems. The finches as well as Cowbirds are difficult to control as they generally only come to the dairy to feed.

In summary, some reduction in the number of birds on dairies can be attained by decreasing the available nesting and roosting sites on the dairy (Table 2). The extent of reduction will depend on the location of the dairy to other dairies and cities as well as the types of bird coming to the dairy. For maximum control, a combined program of habitat modification, exclusion, frightening and repellents should be considered.

Table 1. Preferences for common birds found on dairies

<b>Bird</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Nesting</b>	<b>Roosting</b>	<b>Foraging and Feeding</b>
Redwing Blackbirds	Year-round residents when nesting area nearby; form large flocks in winter for short migrations	Marshes, cattails, ditches, hay fields, stream banks	Marsh grasses, cattails at night; corrals shades during hot days; form large groups in winter and roost in large trees	Grain, seeds, insects while breeding
Cowbirds	Similar to Blackbirds	Lay eggs in nests of other birds; wooded areas	Similar to Blackbirds and Starlings	Grain in manure in pens; follow cattle
Brewer's Blackbirds	Similar to Redwings	Trees, pastures	Similar to Blackbirds	Insects during breeding, also seeds, grain; common in parking lots eating insects off cars
House Finches	Stay within a few miles of where they were born; group up during non-breeding	Eaves and ledges of buildings	Trees, orchards nearby dairy	Grain, seeds, almond residues, fruits, berries
House Sparrows	Stay within a mile of where they were born	Cavities (holes), crevices in buildings, trees	Holes in dairy structures, open beams, trees	Grain, insects during breeding season
Starlings	Dairy residents; flock-up in winter; move to feed	Cavities (holes), crevices in building	Large tree groves at night; corral shades during hot weather	Insects, grain, fruit; in winter may travel from 15-30 miles from roost to feeding site
Pigeons	Stay near where they are born; fly out from city to dairies during the day	Platform nesters, ledges, beams	Beams and ledges under buildings and corral shades	Grains and seeds; feed alleys, stored feeds, spilled feeds; may feed up to 15 miles from roosting site

Table 2. Bird control strategies

<b>Bird</b>	<b>Control Strategy</b>
Redwing Blackbirds	Reduce nesting habitat such as cattails or tall grasses along marshes, ditches, stream or lagoons; reduce day-time roosting sites upon pipes or beams
Cowbirds	Non-specific; may be some beneficial results from foraging in manure
Brewer's Blackbirds	Reduce nesting habitat such as cattails or tall grasses along marshes, ditches, stream or lagoons; reduce day-time roosting sites upon pipes or beams
House Finches	Non-specific
House Sparrows	Reducing nesting and roosting sites in open pipes and building crevices
Starlings	Reducing nesting and roosting sites in open pipes and building crevices
Pigeons	Reduce nesting and roosting sites on ledges and platform; store all grains in barns to prevent easy access; avoid open grain piles