

European starling

Habitat

farmlands, suburbs, cities and woods edges. Absent from marshes and forests



Sturnus vulgaris

European starlings are a non-native species that has become very common in Pennsylvania. Starlings evict native birds from nests and nest boxes by killing the eggs or chicks.



7.5 - 9 inches



strong fliers, up to 48 mph

Vocalizations

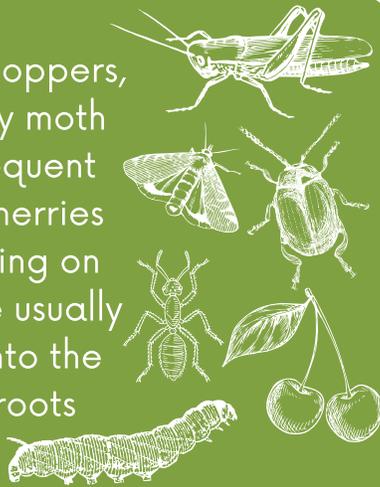


Starlings are great vocal mimics: individuals can learn the calls of up to 20 different species. Birds whose songs starlings often copy include the eastern wood-pewee, killdeer, meadowlarks, northern bobwhite, wood thrush, red-tailed hawk, American robin, northern flicker, and many others.



Diet

Starlings eat beetles, grasshoppers, ants, flies, caterpillars (gypsy moth and tent caterpillars are frequent prey), earthworms, grains, cherries and mulberries. When foraging on lawns in winter, starlings are usually gaping, probing their bills into the soil and prying apart grass roots to uncover beetle larvae.



American robin

Reproduction

Starlings begin defending nest cavities in late winter, emptying them before native cavity-nesters start claiming territories. Starlings nest in woodpecker holes, crevices in trees and buildings, and bird houses. In April, males perch outside the cavities; when they see other starlings, they sing and windmill their wings to attract a mate. The male's song includes shrill squeals, squawks and imitations of other birds' songs. The female fills the nest cavity with grasses, weed stems, twigs, old cloth and dry leaves, then lines a central cup with fine grasses and feathers. She lays four to six eggs, which are an unmarked pale bluish green. Both parents incubate the eggs, and they hatch after about 12 days. The nestlings are fed by both parents and leave the nest three weeks after hatching.



To be or not to be...?

All the European starlings in North America descended from 100 birds set loose in New York's Central Park in the early 1890s. The birds were intentionally released by a group who wanted America to have all the birds that Shakespeare ever mentioned. It took several tries, but eventually the population took off. Today, more than 200 million European starlings range from Alaska to Mexico, and many people consider them pests. Often, they drive native birds from their nests, including woodpeckers, nuthatches, great crested flycatchers, tree swallows, house wrens and bluebirds.



Visit www.pgc.pa.gov for more information on European starlings in Pennsylvania