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Controlling Vertebrate Damage: House Sparrow
Michigan State University
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CONTROLLING VERTEBRATE DAMAGE

Extension Bulletin E-875

April 1977

house sparrow

(*Passer domesticus*)

See also the first in this series: Extension Bulletin E-860 on "General Considerations."

By GLENN DUDDERAR, Extension Wildlife Specialist

THE ENGLISH SPARROW, introduced from Europe by the Colonists, is a common resident throughout most of Michigan. It often creates unsightly and unhealthy situations when it roosts or nests in large numbers in ornamental ivy, decorative wood, metal or masonry on buildings, or in barns and sheds. Sparrows occasionally become so numerous as to consume or contaminate enough feed to create an economic loss. In this situation control is often desired.

REPULSION

Sticky repellents are glue-like substances which include polyethylene, resins, castor oil and others. When applied to surfaces where birds normally perch, sticky repellents will drive the birds away. All available roosting surfaces must be treated.

A list of sticky repellents is included in "Sources of Supply." Sticky repellents are available in aerosol, tube or spray form. The most appropriate form depends on the situation. For example, the spray form is best applied to roosts in ivy or trees; the tube form would be better on rafters in a shed. When applying a sticky repellent to a porous material, first apply silicone or strips of tape to prevent absorption. In dusty areas, application may be necessary every 6 months.

Other auditory and visual repellents are usually not effective on sparrows.

EXCLUSION

All too often construction creates the ideal situation for sparrows. Avoid any ornamental masonry, wood or metal work with small openings and cavities where sparrows can nest. If ornamental work is desirable or necessary, openings should be large and airy so as not to serve as suitable nesting places. Corrugated aluminum and steel, when applied to flat wood or steel beams, creates excellent nesting places and should not be used where there is an abundant food

supply that will permit large sparrow populations to develop.

When such situations occur, the only practical long-term solution is to plug openings with appropriate material such as wood, hardware cloth, screening or metal. Plugging holes with insulation will not work because the birds can pull the insulation out and use it as nesting material.

POPULATION REDUCTION

These techniques, except shooting, require a permit from the Law Enforcement Division, Michigan DNR.

Trapping

Sparrows are difficult to trap, and success with commercial traps requires great skill, patience and timing. A list of manufacturers is included in "Sources of Supply."

Traps are more successful in the winter when food is scarce. In addition to the many commercially available traps, traps can be easily and inexpensively constructed at home. Again—a great deal of patience and experience is necessary to use these traps effectively.

Drop Trap—Construct a frame 4 ft. square and 6 in. deep. Cover one side with $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. mesh wire or poultry netting. Make a small opening with a swinging door in the wire to allow the removal of trapped or protected birds. To operate the trap, select a spot where the birds are most likely to feed, and bait it well with cracked corn.

Once the sparrows begin to feed heavily, place the trap over the bait, raise one end and place an 18 in. stick with cord attached under one edge of the trap. Place two stakes at the lower edge of the trap to keep it in place. Adjust the supporting stick so that a gentle pull on the cord will move the stick and permit the trap to drop over the birds. String the cord to a blind, through a door, window or any place where you

can conveniently observe the birds, but the birds cannot see you. Keep enough tension on the cord so that the slightest pull will drop the trap without visibly moving the cord. The trap need not be watched constantly, but only checked intermittently and tripped whenever birds are beneath it.

Confusion Entrance Trap—Cut four 10-in. square pieces from each corner of a 3-ft. square piece of $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. or $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. mesh wire. The remaining large piece of wire has 4 flaps that can be folded down to create a 16- × 16- × 10-in. box with an open bottom. Fasten adjoining edges together. On 2 sides of this box, cut 2 semi-ovals, 4 in. wide and 4 in. high, so that the flat edges of the semi-ovals follow the bottom of the sides. Cut two of the 10-in. squares into two 4- by 10-in. strips and fasten these strips onto the inside of the semi-ovals to create tunnels into the wire box.

Make several 1-in. cuts into the inside edge of the tunnel and fold slightly inward to make a funnel. To create a door in the top of the box, cut a 6-in. square piece of wire from the center of the top, and then refasten one edge of this square to one edge of the opening from which it was removed. Use a small length of wire to make a latch on the opposite edge.

To operate the trap, select a place where the sparrows are most likely to feed, and bait it with fine-cracked corn. Continue the baiting for several days or until the sparrows feed **regularly** and **heavily** on the bait. Then place the trap over the bait. Check the trap at least twice a day and especially at sunset. Release all protected birds immediately. Destroy sparrows by wringing their necks, asphyxiation or drowning.

Shooting

Shooting quickly and intensely by several shooters armed with air or pellet guns, light gauge shotguns or .22 caliber rifles loaded with cartridges containing rat shot will reduce a sparrow population. Casual shooting will only make

sparrows wary and unapproachable. The .22 caliber rat shot is effective only at close range and will not significantly damage sturdy building material, such as barns or metal sheds.

Nest Destruction

Persistent destruction of sparrow nests will, in time, greatly reduce sparrow populations. A long pole with a metal hook is most useful. Persons applying this type of control measure often become discouraged because the sparrows begin to rebuild as quickly as the old nests are destroyed. However, a thorough job of nest destruction once every two weeks through the spring and summer will greatly reduce the population of sparrows the next spring and summer.

A Combination Method

Several of the above methods can be combined in one operation to make the control program more efficient. For ex-

ample, combining nest destruction with shooting and trapping will greatly reduce the amount of nest destruction needed, and the population will decline during the control program. Subsequent populations will be very small or perhaps none at all. Other combinations may also be appropriate, depending upon the damage.

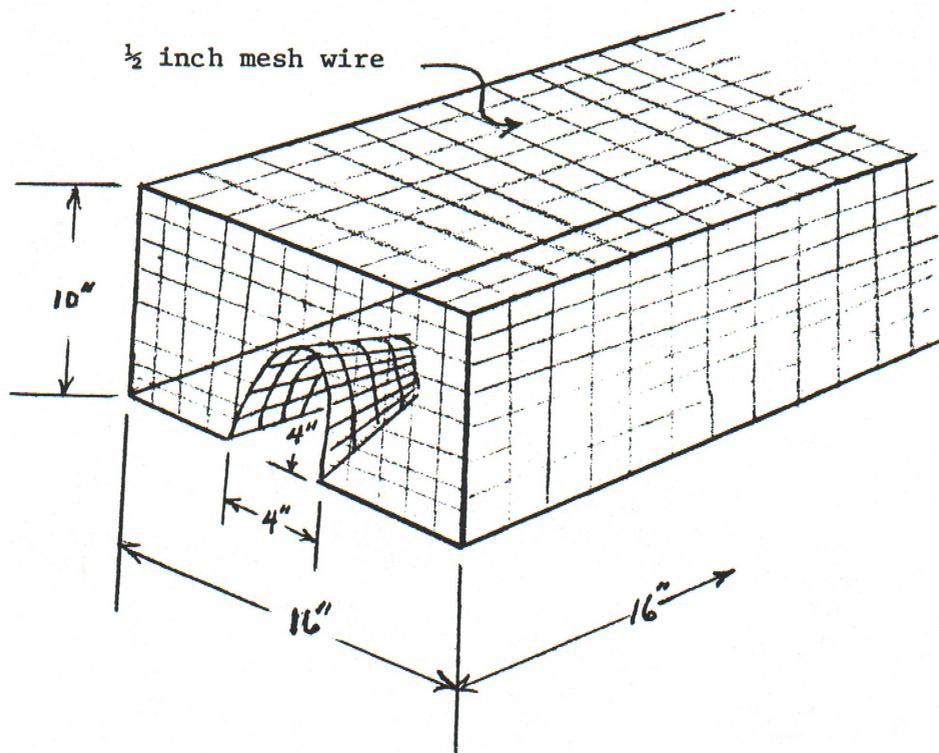
Poisoning

Commercial pest control operators are licensed and usually willing to conduct poisoning operations. If this approach is not feasible, you may purchase poison baits for sparrows from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (see "Sources of Supply").

The two poison baits, 0.6% strychnine-treated cracked corn and Avitrol-treated cracked corn, may be used under special permit and government supervision. Poisoning should not be conducted if it poses a hazard to people, pets, livestock or wildlife.

If poisoning is possible and desired, select bait sites where sparrows are most likely to feed but where the poison bait can be exposed safely. Such sites include shallow wooden troughs on the tops of rafters, small unused spaces between farm buildings, flat ledges and window sills, wagon beds, etc.

Sites must be prebaited with untreated cracked corn each day until the sparrows feed **regularly** and **heavily**. Prebaiting usually takes *at least* 2 weeks. During this time, observe the sites regularly to make sure no protected species are consuming the prebait. If this occurs, do not poison at the site. Once the bait site is deemed safe and the sparrows eat all the prebait, poison bait can be exposed. Place poison bait out early in the morning before the sparrows feed and clean it up before sunset. Dispose of all dead sparrows because they are hazardous to animals which may eat them. Retreatment must be preceded by another pre-baiting period.



Confusion Entrance Trap
for Sparrows