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European Starlings



*On the
Watch*

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It's a very interesting time of year to look at Starlings. You might have to get out your binoculars to see the details. During the late Spring and Summer, Starlings are iridescent black - males with bright yellow bills - females not as deeply yellow. They are the only Canadian Blackbird with a yellow bill. In the Fall, that long, sharp, yellow bill, built so wonderfully to find tons of insects to eat, darkens considerably.

Starlings molt their feathers only once per year - in the Fall. The new feathers come in black with white tips. As the winter rolls on, those white tips wear off, until by Spring, the iridescent of their breeding season is back. They have no reasons to molt then - they can save that energy for their up-coming breeding season.

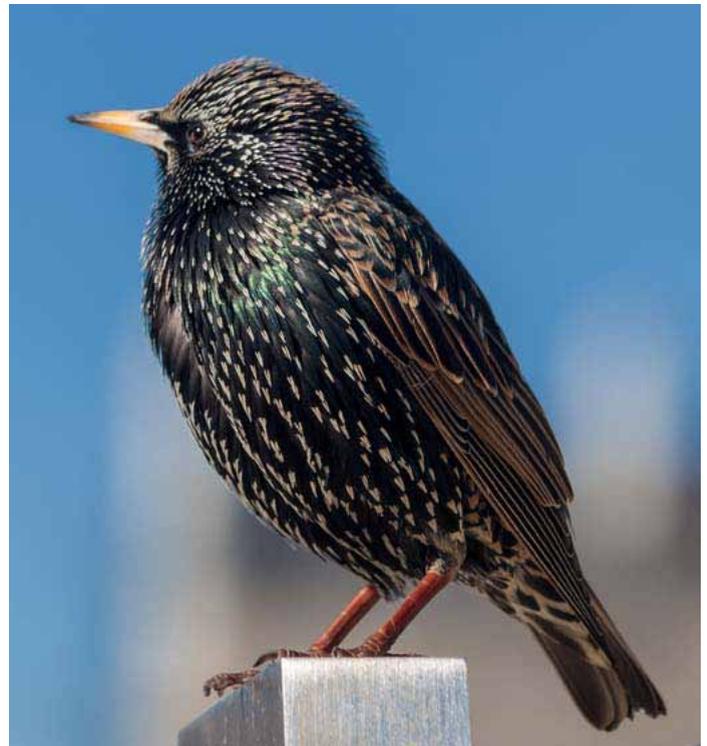
Starlings are slightly smaller than a Robin with short, square tails. Their short, pointed wings are used in a series of rapid flaps, then a short glide, swift and direct to where they wish to go, not rising or falling, seeming to have a built-in compass. In 1890-91, 100 Starlings from Europe were introduced in New York City in an attempt to bring birds of Shakespear to the New World. They have since settled from coast to coast and as far north as James Bay.

Starlings are applauded for the tons of harmful insects that they eat in warm weather, their long, sharp bills being wonderful for this. They make their nests in cavities- bird houses included. There are solutions to their aggressive behaviour at bird feeders and also taking over bird houses. Starlings love

to eat dried, stale bread, broken up and tossed on the ground a good distance from the feeders. Also, they cannot fit into bird house holes less than one and one eighth to half inches wide.

1951 saw the beginning decline in their numbers 54% from 1967 to 1983. Their population is stabilizing as most new species usually do. In winter, they choose a common place to roost together. Look for them, thousands of them, circling then diving into the roost to spend the night then in the morning dispersing in all directions to seek food. Starlings - an intriguing species to watch and learn.

Photo Below: The European Starling with the distinctive yellow bill and white-tipped feathers.



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