

## **INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY**

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Every so often I get questions about ways to discourage problem animals from around the home or farmstead. While there is not enough room in this column to cover this topic adequately, I am going to just touch on some key points and refer you to reference materials you can study to learn ways to discourage unwanted animals and ways to attract wanted ones. I will focus on birds in this column, but keep in mind there will be similarities with other unwanted critters. During our session on animal ecology during the master gardener class, we learned the animals we deal with today are those that are most adaptable to humans and the environment created when the prairie was turned into crop land.

The publication *Managing Iowa Wildlife: Problem Birds Around Homes and Farmsteads PM-1302d* discusses how people can attract birds to their backyards with plantings and feeders. However, these methods can also attract unwanted birds. Sometimes we must look around and see what else may attract birds. For instance, on a farmstead, birds may be attracted to feedlots and stored grain. It may be necessary to take steps to make these areas less attractive to birds. To effectively control unwanted birds, you need to understand what the bird's daily requirements are and then remove or exclude these requirements from the bird. Manipulation of a wild animal's environment for purposes of increasing or decreasing numbers is an important part of wildlife management.

To survive, all animals need habitat which is made up of four essential elements: space, food, shelter and water. It is also necessary to know characteristics of the animal you want to control. By manipulating these factors you can attract and maintain desirable animals and discourage problem ones. Let's start with space. Each bird species has a preference for different amounts of space. But altering space alone will not have much effect on control. You will need to pay attention to food, water and shelter as well, in order to more effectively control bird populations.

Common food sources for birds include seeds, fruits, berries and insects. To reduce the number of problem birds will require eliminating or controlling access to a food source. For instance, you can reduce the number of undesirable birds around homes by choosing plants that do not produce edible nuts, fruits and berries or by changing the type of food offered in bird feeders. Around the farmstead protect possible sources of food from the birds such as grain and livestock feed.

All birds need shelter for cover, roosting and nesting. The kind of shelter a bird will use varies with the season, the species of bird, and the reason the bird is looking for shelter. On farms, birds like to roost in places that provide them easy access to a source of food, such as livestock feed or grain storage. When birds nest in inappropriate places be persistent about removing their nests. A more long term solution is to either exclude the birds from the area or make it less comfortable for them. There are several methods that can be used to prevent birds from nesting or roosting on ledges and rafters or under eaves and other overhangs such as netting or sticky repellants.

A source of water is essential for birds year round and can attract problem birds to areas like feedlots and grain storage. In rural areas, drain unnecessary water from troughs, junk piles, ruts or low spots in the barnyard. Water level in water troughs should be low enough that the bird is unable to reach it while perched on the edge and deep enough so they cannot stand in it.

For more detailed information about controlling unwanted birds, read publication Pm 1302d on ISU's website: [www.extension.iastate.edu/](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/) or contact the Grundy office of ISU Extension at 319-824-6979.