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European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

The European Starling is native to Europe and Asia, but was introduced into New York City in 1890 and 1891 (Ehrlich et al. 1988). From there it spread throughout the lower 48 states, north through Canada to southern Alaska, and south to northern Mexico.

Starlings winter over much of their breeding range, extending south into Mexico, the Bahama Islands, and Cuba.

Habitat. European Starlings are found almost anywhere with suitable nesting sites, although they tend to avoid densely forested areas. They nest in tree cavities, bird boxes, and buildings. Starlings compete with native cavity nesters such as Eastern Bluebirds, Great Crested Flycatchers, and woodpeckers (Ehrlich et al. 1988). They have been observed ejecting woodpeckers from their nests and usurping the cavity for their own use (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

Starlings choose nest sites up to 20 m (60 ft) above the ground, but 1 cavity in Pasco County in 1966 was only 0.5 m (18 in) above the ground (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). Starlings forage mostly on the ground, feeding on a variety of foods, including berries, seeds, insects, and other small invertebrates (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

The nest is built of twigs, sticks, paper, plastic, or other materials. Most Florida nests contain 4 or 5 eggs (Stevenson and Anderson 1994) that are pale blue. The eggs hatch in 12 to 14 days, and the young fledge at 1 to 21 days of age (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Seasonal Occurrence. During winter, when birds that breed farther north migrate to Florida, flocks of many thousands of European Starlings frequently are observed.

Two, sometimes 3, broods are raised per year, from March through July (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

Status. In 1890 and 1891 100 European Starlings were released in New York City (Terres 1980). The current North American population is estimated at 200 million (Ehrlich et al. 1988)! The first European Starling record in the state occurred on 24 January 1918 in Nassau County (Howell 1932), and breeding was first observed at Pensacola in 1931 (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). European Starlings now occupy most of Florida; they are absent only from large, undeveloped areas of the state such as the Everglades, Big Cypress Swamp, isolated Keys, the Big Bend area, and the Apalachicola, Osceola, and Ocala national forests. Even these areas may be invaded in the future, as has occurred recently in Blackwater River State Forest and Eglin Air Force Base (R. West, in litt.).

Bill Pranty

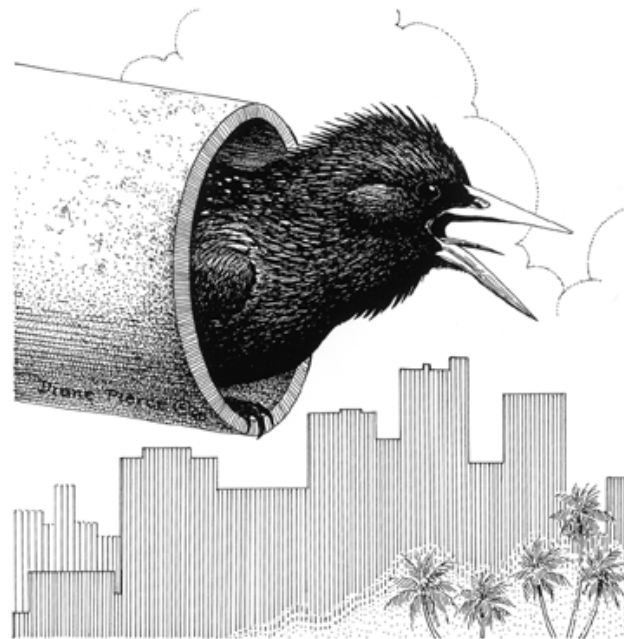


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