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## ORNITHOLOGY

# Air Force War on Birds

The Mach-2 Air Force has declared war on a 30-mile-an-hour flyer—and is pretty sure it can never win unconditional surrender.

The slow-moving enemy is the common starling, a pest to farmers and car owners as well as flying men.

In a display created for the current meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Air Force acknowledges that "bird/aircraft collisions are far more common than the public suspects or than pilots care to admit."

The menace grows as planes move faster and greater numbers are jet powered. One airline declares that every jet engine in its fleet has swallowed at least one bird. For the Air Force it is a \$10 million a year problem. Cost of damage to engines alone may total \$4 million to 5 million.

One of the worst offenders is the starling, an avian import that has spread in enormous numbers over the country since it was imported into New York in 1890 by a well-meaning soul who felt that Central Park should house all the birds mentioned by Shakespeare.

Research on the starling, where it lives, how it gets about, why it congregates in certain areas, and whether it might even be a good idea to change airport locations to avoid it, is under way under contract to the Air Force Office of Scientific Research. The work is being done by Dr. William J. Hamilton III, assistant professor of agricultural zoology at the University of California at Davis, and by his graduate students.

"It is very unlikely," the Air Force admits, "that any effort, no matter how concerted, can eliminate the starling altogether."

And if all this isn't bad enough, there are several other imported birds, whose populations, small at the moment, could "explode" almost overnight.

Three examples cited by Dr. Hamilton, now too few in numbers to do much harm, could launch such an explosion with disastrous results. They are the mynha bird, introduced into Vancouver Island in the 1920s; the three species of parrots now living wild within the city limits of Los Angeles, and the red-billed dioch, a finch that is a "terrible pest in Africa," yet is widely stocked in pet stores in the United States.



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