



STARLING CONTROL PROGRAM

2008 – A YEAR IN REVIEW

2008 has been an exciting year for the Starling Control Program, its management committee and those working within the program. The research component has added a new dimension that is of real interest to those providing funding as well as those involved with the various aspects of the program. The Starling Control Program continues to be followed and well received by various levels of government, agriculture and the public.

The committee members continue to rely on the expertise and professionalism of the trappers, many of whom have been working for the program since it began. This year has focused on expanding the trapping program throughout the Okanagan-Similkameen and aggressively searching for new locations. With this in mind, more trapping kits were constructed and additional trappers were enlisted. Trappers continue to find their greatest success at feedlots and other cattle operations and at landfill sites.

During the early years of the program trapping was concentrated in the Cawston/Keremeos area and populations there were reduced substantially. Over the past two years those numbers have remained low and flocks have not re-established. In 2008 the area continued to be monitored and trapping resulted in birds being captured, but certainly not at levels seen in those earlier years. In 2003 10,360 birds were captured in the Cawston/Keremeos area. In 2008 overall populations there continued to be low and the ongoing trapping to keep it in that position netted 3,660 birds.

The Oliver area continued to be a steady source of birds over this past 12 months with one trapper manning a number of traps and ending the year with a total of 11,760 birds.

The Penticton Landfill proved to be a good location during the winter with over 2,700 birds trapped at that site in 2 months. The flocks tend to move off when the nesting season arrives and aren't apt to return to that spot in large numbers until winter. New locations were sought throughout the South Okanagan and some were tested with very limited success.



M-trap, baited and ready to go

Marshall's Feedlot in Kelowna was once again a hot spot for the program even though trapping did not get underway at that site until early September. A combination of M-traps and a drop trap were used with more than 21, 470 birds reported by the trappers to the end the year.

The North Okanagan was identified as a region needing more effort however the program got off to a late start. The traditional sites at Coldstream Ranch and the Vernon Regional Landfill continued as the primary locations. Later in the season another three sites were added in the Armstrong/Silver Creek area and others in the Enderby area were identified as potential sites. The total birds captured in the North Okanagan in 2008 was just over 2,100.

Starling Control Program				
Bird Counts 2003 – 2008				
	Okanagan Similkameen	Central Okanagan	North Okanagan	Totals
2003	15,369	-	-	15,369
2004	26,197	7,359	8,878	42,434
2005	22,249	17,686	7,431	47,366
2006	25,206	14,247	1,915	41,368
2007	22,622	10,591	1,510	34,723
2008	18,129	21,471	2,129	41,729
Totals	129,772	71,354	21,863	222,989

The significant increase in funding as a result of the support from the three Okanagan-Similkameen Regional Districts along with the on-going support of the Agriculture Environment Partnership Initiative and the various agricultural commodity groups has meant that a better inventory of traps and supplies could be provided for the trappers and, as well, that more time could be allocated to trapping. That coupled with the research requirements, has resulted in a more closely controlled and disciplined trapping program.

Another benefit from the additional funding is that administration and program management has been greatly enhanced and that has been of tremendous value for the growth of the project.

The following contributed financially &/ or in-kind towards the success of the 2008 program:

Regional District North Okanagan
 Regional District Central Okanagan
 Regional District Okanagan Similkameen
 Agriculture Environment Partnership Initiative
 Okanagan Tree Fruit Cooperative
 BC Fruit Growers' Association
 Okanagan Kootenay Cherry Growers' Association
 BC Grapegrowers' Association
 Thompson Rivers' University
 Landowners and their staff who provide trap locations,
 access to those sites & other services
 Members of the BC Milk Producers' Association
 Members of the BC Cattle Feeders' Association

Starling Control Program			
Budget vs. Actual January 1, 2008 - December 31, 2008 & Proposed Budget 2009			
	2008 Budget	2008 Actual	2009 Budget
Revenue:			
Program Revenue:			
Three Okanagan-Similkameen Regional Districts	\$ 75,000	\$ 69,712	\$ 75,000
Agriculture Environment Partnership Initiative	\$ 25,000	\$ 15,500	\$ 20,000
Various Commodity Organizations	\$ 34,000	\$ 28,500	\$ 27,000
Miscellaneous	\$ -	\$ 1,065	\$ 2,000
Research Revenue:			
NSERC Industrial Graduate Fellowship	\$ 15,000	\$ -	\$ 15,000
NRC IRAP	\$ 5,000	\$ -	\$ 5,000
Agriculture Environment Partnership Initiative	\$ 7,500	\$ -	\$ 7,500
BC Wine Grape Council	\$ 5,000	\$ -	\$ 5,000
Total Projected Revenues	\$ 166,500	\$ 114,777	\$ 156,500
Expenses:			
Trapping Costs			
Team of Trappers - trapping hours, mileage, sundry	\$ 90,000	\$ 54,904	\$ 97,000
Supplies	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,030	\$ 3,000
New traps construction	\$ 10,000	\$ 16,103	\$ 2,000
Data Collection	\$ 8,000	\$ -	\$ -
Administration, Office overhead, sundry	\$ 12,000	\$ 10,530	\$ 12,500
Research			
Graduate student (MSc) Fellowship, Fieldwork, Lab work	\$ 36,000	\$ -	\$ 36,000
Independent survey of starling numbers	\$ 5,500	\$ -	\$ 4,000
Preliminary work with Dr. Dickinson & associates	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 2,000
Total Projected Expenses	\$ 166,500	\$ 86,567	\$ 156,500
Income over expenses	\$ -	\$ 28,210	\$ -

Research Program

Doctors Tom Dickinson and Nancy Flood, a husband and wife team who teach and conduct research at Thompson Rivers University, are heading a research study to determine the population structure of European Starlings in southern British Columbia.

Dr. Dickinson began by collecting and analyzing data from annual Breeding Bird Surveys conducted through various means -- an example being the Okanagan Christmas Bird Count. He also met with the program's trappers and used their knowledge and the observations they have collected from their trapping results since the program began in 2003. In May, 2008 Dr. Dickinson & Dr. Flood put forward recommendations for a two-year research program that will fill the information gap and therefore help to evaluate the effectiveness of the trapping program. These recommendations were accepted and work began. **In summary:**

1. Standardize the Collection of Trapping data – Doctors Dickinson and Flood explained that if precise records are kept for the exact locations where trapping occurs and the exact numbers of hours that traps are functionally open, trapping data can be used to develop an index of population size.

The trappers met with Dr. Dickinson in early July to implement changes to the daily record keeping on the trapping results so that the information is of greater value to the overall program.

2. Determine the Origins of Starlings in the Okanagan/Similkameen – Observations from the initial data collected suggest that while the breeding population may be declining, the winter population continues to increase, likely due to migration from other geographic areas. The new research will use 'signatures' of stable isotopes to map out geographic origins of birds in the problem areas of the province. Recent advances at the University of Saskatchewan have been applied to problems such as the migration routes taken by songbirds, whales, and Monarch butterflies.

Feathers from captured European Starlings record the chemistry of the area where the bird hatched and are used in the stable isotope analyses. By knowing the isotopic signature of local sub-populations and getting reference points from other regions within BC and surrounding geographic locations, a library of signatures should be possible. Young of the year Starlings captured in the destination region can then be matched to the source population from which it came.

Trappers are now collecting samples that will become part of that signature base.

3. Develop an independent survey of starling numbers – Using already established protocols for counting birds, the plan is to enlist members of local naturalist clubs to help estimate the number of starlings in a region. The results of those surveys could then be compared to the trapping numbers to determine whether trapping and/or nest control efforts are changing the size of the breeding population on a local, sub-regional, or regional scale.

4. Graduate Student Fellowship – Dr. Dickinson is currently searching for a graduate student to work with him on the program starting in the 2009/10 academic year.

2009

With the wrap up of 2008, the program's management committee is now planning for 2009. The program will continue to work on the weak areas; striving for ways to improve the results of particular initiatives and in those regions that are lagging. At the same time improvements in other areas will be undertaken and new ideas investigated to push the program forward to higher levels.

Efforts will still focus on trapping, encompassing new sites and contracting and training trappers to ensure adequate coverage within each region. The research program, under Drs. Dickinson and Flood will be supported in order for them to achieve the best possible results in the work they have undertaken.



A drop trap at Marshall's Feedlot in Kelowna

For further information regarding the Starling Control Program

Please contact:

British Columbia Grapegrowers' Association

Attention: Connie Bielert

451 Atwood Road ♦ Grand Forks, BC ♦ V0H 1H9

Telephone Toll Free 877 762 4652 ♦ Fax 250 442 4076

www.grapegrowers.bc.ca