

New Computer Model Leads to Increased Numbers in FY 2008 Operational Reports

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has posted several reports about the operational activities of its wildlife services (WS) program during fiscal year (FY) 2008 to WS' Web page. Last year, WS universally adopted a new estimating tool for work with starlings and blackbirds in order to provide the most accurate and complete information to the public and other agencies.

Researchers at APHIS' National Wildlife Research Center developed and tested the new computer estimation method over a period of several years. The model was designed to more accurately calculate birds removed at dairies, feedlots and staging areas with DRC-1339, an avicide registered with the Environmental Protection Agency for use on starlings and blackbirds. Previously, WS reported only the number of bird carcasses actually observed following a treatment. The new model takes into account several factors, including the amount of bait applied and consumed, as well as the weather, to estimate the total number of birds taken.

As a result of the new computer modeling method and invasive species management, WS reported a 106 percent increase in the number of lethally removed animals, from 2.4 million in FY 2007 to 4.9 million in FY 2008. WS worked at the request of state or local entities seeking damage assistance. The computer model should allow WS to better document its efforts and the impact on target species.

"WS carefully assesses the biological and ecological impacts of our actions and consult with federal and state agencies to be confident that any lethal removal will not have a long-term negative impact on native species and the environment," said WS' acting deputy administrator, Martin Mendoza. "No one likes to kill wildlife, but when it is needed WS seeks the most humane and selective method."

Three invasive bird species, including European starlings, sparrows and pigeons, along with the blackbird group, accounted for more than 90 percent of all animals removed by WS in FY 2008. Blackbirds include red-winged blackbirds, three types of grackles, brown-headed cowbirds, crows and magpies. In removing these birds, WS protected several threatened species, air travel at airports, animal health and food production.

WS provides federal leadership and expertise to resolve wildlife conflicts in order to create a balance that allows humans and wildlife to coexist peacefully. For more information on WS or for copies of these operational reports, please visit the APHIS Web site at www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage.

Note to Stakeholders: Stakeholder announcements and other APHIS information are available on the Internet. Go to the APHIS home page at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov> and click on the "Newsroom" button. For additional information on this topic, contact Carol Bannerman at (301) 734-6464 or e-mail: carol.a.bannerman@aphis.usda.gov.

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