**European Starling**

European Starlings were intentionally introduced into the United States in the 1890s. Eugene Schieffelin, a big fan of Shakespeare, who wanted to see all of the birds mentioned by Shakespeare in North America, released the first birds in Central Park, New York. From the 100 starlings that were brought from Europe to New York, 32 birds survived. These original introductions met with great reproductive success, and there are now about 200 million starlings in the United States. They are found all across the country, but are especially common where humans have changed the habitat.

European Starlings have glossy black feathers that have distinctive white dots at some times of year. Young birds are brownish in color. They are omnivores, and eat a variety of foods including insects, worms, seeds, and fruit. Starlings are noisy birds that have gift for mimicry (as one learns from Shakespeare), and they can be easily tamed as pets.

Starlings nest in tree cavities, bird houses, and other buildings They compete for nesting sites with many native bird species including woodpeckers and bluebirds. At Arroyo Hondo Preserve, numerous sycamore tree cavities are occupied by starling nests, and these are very active and noisy places in spring.

Starlings are often seen in very large flocks that are known as *murmurations*. Such huge flocks have caused at least one airline crash as well as other problems for planes. Starlings have been blamed for crop damage, and may possibly be able to spread diseases.

Much more interesting information about starlings is to be found in the literature, and so, if you have some free time, you may want to do further research on these fascinating introduced birds.

**Interesting Note:** Eugene Schieffelin, who also imported the House Sparrow to the U.S., was a member of the *American Acclimatization Society*, a New York City group founded with the purpose of importing European plants and animals to the United States.

A bird sitting on a branch

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