



Bird Control UPDATE

Strategies and tools for integrated bird management

Starling Wars – The Grower Strikes Back

STARLING STRATEGY

The common starling (or European starling, *Sturnus vulgaris*) needs insect protein, so it will fly over an insect-rich area such as water or a cow paddock, before sweeping into a crop. The flight path into the crop is therefore easily predicted, and helps determine placement of the radar detection units.

Where will starlings feed in the crop? They prefer more exposed areas where they can make a quick getaway. So newer plants, with less foliage, are a prime target for starlings and a logical location for a deterrent unit.

When the unit is triggered, the birds will attempt to find another feeding site; but further units strategically placed in the crop, prevent them from peacefully feeding and they soon leave the area.

STARLING IMAGE: BRIAN CHUDLEIGH/
NATURE FOCUS

STARLINGS are capable of inflicting considerable damage on ripening and ripe crops over a relatively short period of time. Their mobility often frustrates growers' attempts to shoot or chase them out of the crop.

Introducing Kopparossa Estate

For Gavin Hogg of Kopparossa Estate vineyard in Narracoorte, S.A., this was a familiar story — until last season. Kopparossa Estate has 100 acres cropping (planted 1996/97) with Shiraz, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. Their 1998/99 harvest report showed 5 acres out of the 20 acre Merlot crop were lost to starlings and crows.

With a significantly increased yield predicted for the 1999/2000 season, Gavin was concerned that similar bird damage levels would result in substantial losses.

Rather than 'wait and see', he decided to act before the birds had a chance to establish a feeding pattern in the vineyard.

Assessing the situation

We arrived at Kopparossa in November 1999 and met with Gavin and his vineyard manager, Robert Mason. We inspected the cropping area and discussed their experiences with birds in the prior season. This knowledge formed the basis of a control program that incorporated the latest in 'responsive' bird deterrent equipment along with a strategic action plan.

Tools plus strategy

Deterrent equipment was deployed in the vineyard in late January 2000 — well before any birds had begun to take an interest in the crop. The system included a radar detection unit, which senses bird presence, and three deterrent modules, to emit bird distress and alarm calls when triggered. Gavin and Rob were instructed on how to use the equipment and learnt the essentials of the tactical 'battle plan'.

And then came the birds ...

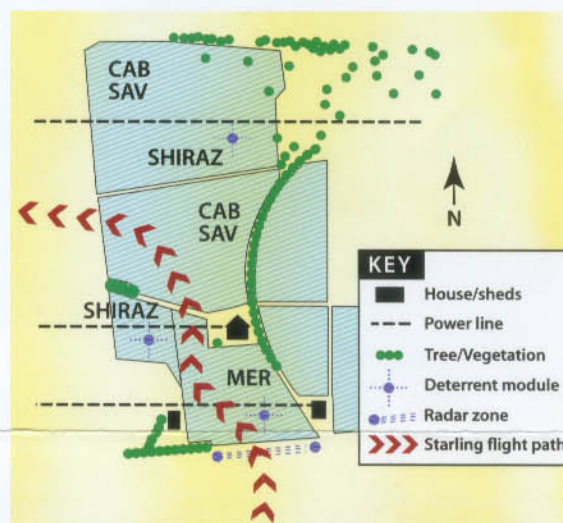
Robert reported that the first group of starlings that flew through the radar detection zone and encountered the strategically placed deterrent units, broke up into small groups and flew right through the vineyard without landing. He observed this flock try once more before departing the area.

Other small flocks made similar attempts over the season, but with the same result: they were unable to settle in for a feed, due to the vigilance of the radar system, and the continued effectiveness of the bird deterrent sounds.

Once a bird establishes a new flight path or feeding pattern it will stick to it, even if it means going further for a new food source. So, effectively, both species had been 'trained' to stay out of the vineyard.

Regaining control

Like Gavin Hogg, growers haven't previously had access to adequate tools or strategies to combat the birds — until now. As you can see, the new 'detect and deter' radar system is vital in helping growers overcome their pest bird problems.



Kopparossa site plan. Note the starling flight path through the crop, deflected at every turn by the deterrent modules.

At Kopparossa, the combination of an effective battle plan and the use of powerful radar deterrent technology, resulted in little to no crop being lost to the birds.

The results being achieved by growers such as Gavin Hogg at Kopparossa are not unique — our systems are capable of protecting any crop, in any situation, from any bird species.

If you would like to read about other growers who have succeeded against the birds, visit our website: www.birddeter.com.au.

BirdDeter

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