

STARLINGS AT ESPERANCE



The attention of Honorary Wardens is drawn to the fact that, for the past two years Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*) have been observed in October near Esperance. In 1970 only one bird was seen and this was destroyed by the Agriculture Protection Board. The only previous positive identification was reported at Gingin in 1936. However, this year at Cordingup, east of Esperance, there are signs that starlings may be finding their way overland from South Australia and the eastern States where they are found in their millions.

At the time of writing fifteen starlings have been destroyed by the Agriculture Protection Board, and there are indications that the birds are now resident and breeding in Western Australia. Two nests have been found and two immature birds have been shot. The Agriculture Protection Board will pay a bounty of \$2 per bird for starlings, which is some indication how serious the recent invasion is considered to be.

Starlings are of European origin and were introduced into Australia in 1881. They are a self-reliant and gregarious bird, often found in large flocks. They present a problem to agriculture because, having wide tastes in food they frequently attack soft fruits and seedlings. Starlings also compete with native birds for food and usurp their nests. When they build their own nest it is an untidy assortment of straw and feathers placed in a hole in a tree, in a crevice in a building, or similar situation. Cases have been reported of nests being placed on the back of living sheep.

Starlings generally breed from September to January, hatching five to seven eggs which are pale blue, sometimes almost white. An adult bird is $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches long and is black with a green and purple sheen and profuse pale white or buff spotting all over.

Any destroyed starlings should be forwarded to the Agriculture Protection Board, Jarrah Road South Perth (Tel. 67 0111), whereon a \$2 bounty will be paid. Any sightings should also be notified immediately.