

## Common Raven (*Corvus corax*)

The raven is often referred to as the most intelligent and highly evolved bird. These birds can mimic the sounds of other birds as well as human language. The raven is crafty, resourceful and learns quickly. Ravens are also territorial and will threaten others by opening their bill. Ravens are known to break tortoise shells by dropping smaller tortoises onto rocks from above so they can eat the animal. Humans have inadvertently aided the raven populations by leaving pet food out for ravens to eat. Ravens usually mate for life and are often seen soaring or performing aerial acrobatics. Ravens often nest at the top of power poles or trees. They will also nest in ornamental trees such as elms and cottonwoods. The young can fly approximately 40 days after hatching. Young ravens work together to find and protect food. Single ravens find food sources and then lead others to the location where they feed as a group. Ravens can grow more than 24 inches in length. This all black bird has a powerful, slightly hooked beak and strong legs. Its 2-inch eggs are greenish marked with brown.



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## European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*)

The starling was introduced to the United States from Europe. The European starling competes with native birds, like the bluebird, who also nest in holes and crevices. Although these birds are wary of humans, they are bold and aggressive toward other birds. In fact, starlings have been known to physically evict native nesting birds from their nests. However, European starlings often nest close together. The nesting territory of a pair may extend no further than 10 to 20 inches around the entrance of the nesting cavity. Starlings can imitate calls of other birds, mock loud noises and have been known to bark like a dog or meow like a cat. In the spring, the beak changes from dark brown to yellow. Even though the starling is an



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introduced bird, it is helpful in consuming harmful insects and the seeds and fruit of non-native plants. These birds resemble blackbirds but have an iridescent coat with a long beak and short tail. They can grow up to 9 inches in length. The 1-inch eggs are pale bluish- or greenish-white marked with brown. Starling nests are often found in the attic vents of military family housing.

## House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*)

In the 1940's, house finches were caught in the western United States and sold to dealers in New York as "Hollywood finches." Finches stay close to water and drink frequently during the hot months. They do not migrate, but foraging flocks do move around in winter. Finch nests appear unclean because parents do not carry off the waste of the nestlings like other birds. House finches will nest almost anywhere, in the eaves and rafters of buildings, window louvers, attic vents, chimneys, or in trees. They will occupy nesting sites abandoned by other birds. The house finch grows 5 to 6 inches in length. Male finches have a bright red breast and forehead, females are striped with shades of brown. Its 1-inch egg is bluish-white, sparsely marked with brown or black. (Cover Photo)

## European House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)

This exotic species was introduced from Europe and first seen in California in the 1870's. Its introduction into North



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America occurred in 1851, when a group of a hundred birds was released in New York. Since this time, the European house sparrow and other introduced birds have been competing with native birds for food, water and nesting sites. Many introduced birds have

learned to nest earlier than natives thereby taking all the best nesting sites and materials. This leaves native birds with few nesting options. Introduced birds may eventually displace the natives. The aggressive European house sparrow is active throughout the year and can be seen harassing much larger birds. Occasionally, hawks and owls will hunt and feed on house sparrows. House sparrows are considered dependent on humans and are found mostly in manmade areas. They typically nest in yard shrubs

and housing vents. Male birds have white cheeks and a black throat. Females and young sparrows have a light brown breast and a dull eye stripe. House sparrows form monogamous pairs for each breeding season. Nests are made from dried vegetation, feathers, string, and paper. After the eggs are hatched, both males and females feed the young through regurgitation. These birds can grow to 6 inches in length. Their 1-inch eggs can be whitish-, greenish- or bluish-colored marked with gray or brown.

## Brewer's Blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*)

Blackbirds forage in large flocks, sometimes mixed with other species. Nesting often occurs in colonies of three to a hundred pairs. Individual nests and a small territory around the nest is defended. Blackbirds can become very protective of their young and may display "mobbing" behavior. Mobbing is the dive-bombing action exhibited by birds when they feel their young are in jeopardy. Blackbirds can also be seen probing the ground with their bills and turning over rocks looking for insect larvae and seeds. Young blackbirds are fed mostly spiders and



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insects and can fly 14 days after hatching. The blackbird can grow up to 9 inches in length. Males have whitish-yellow eyes while females are a brown-gray color with brown eyes. Their 1-inch eggs are gray with brown markings. Blackbirds can be seen nesting in various places including trees.

# Living With Birds



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*The House Finch*

# At Edwards AFB

Environmental Management (661) 277-1401  
Corvias Community Office (661) 385-6060  
Environmental Public Affairs (661) 277-4127

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*Birds can make their nest in various places. This nest in the Edwards Base Housing Area is resting on an electrical conduit.*



**“No person shall at any time, by any means or in any manner, take, possess, transport, or export any migratory bird, or any part, nest, or egg of any such bird, in violation of any act of Congress or any regulation issued pursuant thereto” (Title 50 Code of Federal Regulations Section 20.71 of Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918)**

# Birds and Our Environment

## Housing Area Birds

The military family housing area offers the opportunity for hours of bird watching entertainment. Many of the birds in this area have a habit of making their nests on or near houses. Depending on your preference, this could be a pleasure or a nuisance. This brochure suggests ways for you and our local birds to share the environment and to make the most of this learning experience.

## Attracting Birds

Although many Edwards newcomers are accustomed to providing song birds with bird baths and feeders, Environmental Management discourages residents from providing wildlife with water and food. Bird baths and feeders attract not only birds, but other desert wildlife such as squirrels, coyotes and bobcats. Bird seed/feed is not recommended. However, Edwards is home to hummingbirds. An effective way to attract hummingbirds is to put out a nectar feeder protected

from cats and the desert wind. Hummingbirds will also seek out nectar from flowers, such as those on the desert willows found in many housing area yards.

When attracting birds, keep their safety in mind. Make sure your lawn chemicals are not harming the birds. Many herbicides, insecticides and fertilizers can kill and contaminate their food.

## Discouraging Birds

The easiest way to discourage birds from making your house their home is to identify the bird and what's attracting it. Your goal is to remove what the bird wants, or build a barrier between the bird and what it finds attractive



*A typical bird's nest on a louver in the base housing area.*

before it nests. Areas that commonly attract birds in housing at Edwards AFB are dense landscaping, attic vents, louvers, support beams and electrical conduits. These hot spots can be temporarily altered to deter nesting. Removing water and food sources will also help deter birds.

## The Law and Birds

Most birds and their nests are protected by the *Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918*. This act was put in place to stop people from collecting wild birds, feathers and nests. Historically, bird feathers and nests were collected for sale and use on hats and other artifacts to the extent that some bird populations were diminishing.

Birds normally nest during the spring. However, conditions in housing at Edwards allow some birds to nest into late summer. If you find a nest on or around your home, observe the activities of the birds, but avoid disturbing the birds and their nests. Any violation of the *Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918* should be reported to **Environmental Management at 277-1401**.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q. What can I do if a baby bird falls out of its nest?**

**A.** In most cases, it is best not to interfere. Often times when young birds are learning to fly they may appear helpless if seen on the ground. Usually, the parent birds are aware that their baby has fallen while learning to fly, and they will continue to feed it even if it's out of the nest. Observe the young bird from a distance to see if the parent birds are continuing to provide care. Make sure you are not scaring off the adult birds. If you must take action because of pets, return the bird carefully to the nest. If the nest cannot be located, try to put the young bird in a protected area where it can be seen by the parents. If you feel the bird needs medical attention, you may put it in a covered shoe box and contact the **Base Veterinarian at 277-2177**.



*Screening attic vents is a way to prevent nesting.*

**Q. How can I alter my house to deter birds from nesting?**

**A.** Nesting typically occurs during the spring months, but has been observed into late summer. Before nesting occurs, cover any potential nesting areas with rocks, boards or other material to remove any flat surface. Pruning vegetation to reduce hiding places and screening attic vents can also deter nesting. Call the **Corvias Community office at (661) 385-6060** before making any permanent alteration to your house or to learn what alterations are allowed.

**Q. What can I do if I find an injured or dead bird?**

**A.** First, make sure the bird is actually injured. Even sick or injured birds can recuperate quickly if left alone in a safe place such as a bush close to the ground in a yard without pets.

However, if the bird has obvious symptoms of a serious injury, such as a broken wing, take it to the base veterinarian. Place the bird in a covered box, and place the box in a warm, quiet place. Do not offer first aid, food, or water. If a dead bird is found in housing, the occupant may dispose of it. If it has a wing tag or leg band, call **Environmental Management at 277-1401**.

**Q. How can I obtain more information about the birds in my area?**

**A.** The internet, local bookstores and libraries have field guides and bird books that can help identify local birds and answer most biological questions. Direct questions regarding the biology of birds to **Environmental Management at 277-1401**.

**Q. Why are ravens protected if there are so many of them?**

**A.** The raven is one of many birds protected under the *Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918*. This act regulates the number of birds being killed each year by issuing federal permits, such as hunting permits or depredation permits. Birds do not have to be endangered to be protected. In fact, the raven population is growing each year in response to urbanization. Trash cans and landfills offer the ravens a food source while sprinklers offer a source of water. You can help control the raven population by not littering.