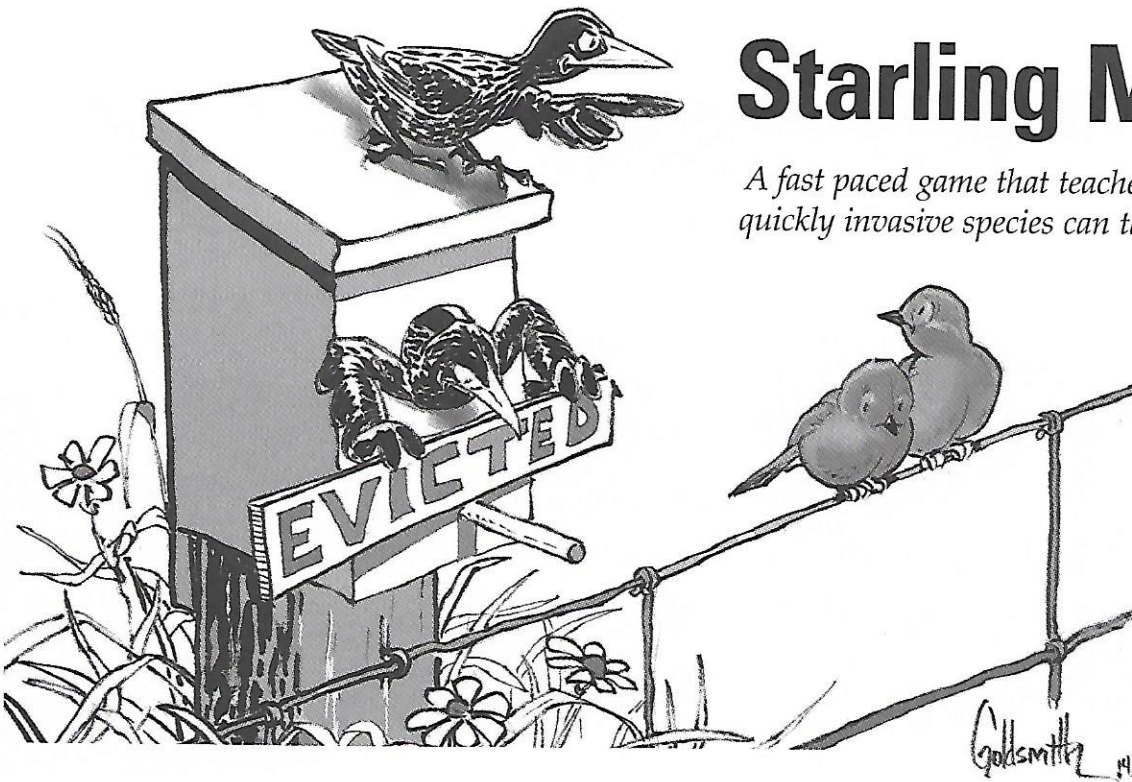


Starling Mania

A fast paced game that teaches students how quickly invasive species can take over an area



By Nicole Stewart

THE OVERALL INTENT of this game is to get across the point that once an invasive species takes hold in an area, there is often no room left for the natural species that inhabit that area. There are 'invasions' occurring all around us, so this game really hits home. Visual and physical aids help make connections that children never forget.

Discuss the following environmental concerns: Starlings are pushing out native bluebirds by taking their nesting places. As a result, bluebirds are now on the threatened species list. Local raptors eat starlings, but they can't reproduce as fast, so the population of starlings continues to grow. When they nest, their offspring return to the same place every year, so the flock gets bigger and bigger.

Grade Levels: 3-9

Subject areas: Science, Phys-Ed, and Math

Time: explanation: 10 minutes; running time: 20-plus minutes

Location: Gym or Field on play ground

Procedure

1. Have all children line up on one end of a rectangular field. They represent song birds, such as bluebirds.
2. Choose one child to be 'the starling' and have them stand in the centre of the field.
3. Upon your whistle the children will run from end A to end B.
4. The child-starling in the centre must try to catch as many people as possible by touch. Once a child is tagged they too become starlings and try to tag people immediately.
(Caution and care must be taken to avoid collisions and

carelessness especially on the first two runs.)

5. Upon your mark, children run back and forth while the starlings increase in number until there are only 2-5 songbirds left, these become the new batch of starter starlings for round two.
6. Round two is a repeat of the above, and an option that most groups like to pursue, given how enthusiastic most students become when doing the activity.

This is a high energy game. Every run equals one breeding season. In order to keep students brains moving, point things out after every end to end run. Bring to their attention the rapid growth of this species. Mention the effects on the natural species this number of starlings would have etc. This will give the end result that you are looking for in an educational game.

Follow-Up Discussion

Have the children research the affects starlings have had in other places. Research other local 'invasions' by both plants and animals. Identify the starlings and compare them to Canadian birds. How do they differ and why are the starlings doing so well?

Adaptations/Variations

Have the children choose which Canadian species they would like to represent in the game (both song and raptor). Add 2-4 Raptors to the game (they don't breed quickly): have them come in from the sides while the song birds run from 'A' to 'B'. The game will be much quicker so when a song bird is taken by a Raptor they must sit out for one run then become song birds again. Have the children graph the changes in species on a chart, noting the years and population sizes.

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