

Tamworth versus Starlings and Mynas

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Tamworth, as many people know, has been plagued over recent years by pest birds, particularly starlings. Indian Mynas, initially low in numbers, are now more commonly seen.

The CBD beautification program in 1998 resulted in an aesthetically pleasing area, but unfortunately, the Plane trees and Canary Island Date Palms provided a perfect roosting spot.

Council tried a lot of things over the years to rid the main street of starlings. Deterrents ranged from commercially available products to devices suggested by the public based on anecdotal evidence. Plastic snakes in trees, cotton webbing in trees, high intensity lights, strobe lights, light crystals, acoustic devices, water cannons and commercially available caricatures were all tried, but with little lasting success, despite some initial positive results: the birds quickly adapted.

In June 2007, Council embarked upon a massive assault on the birds in the main street. The plan was to herd the then roosting birds with fire hoses down the street into 2 sets of large nets which had been suspended on guide ropes, supported by 4 large cranes. The public and media turned out in big numbers to observe the event. The plan was going well until the birds, in their thousands, split up, scared by the glare of media cameras and camera flashes. Many birds hit the nets, but there was a “technical malfunction” — the nets were strung too tight and the majority of birds “trampolined” off. A second go that night, after adjustments, resulted in more birds being caught, but most were too wary.



The CBD offensive

A low profile exercise on the next night using the same plan saw many more starlings caught. The combined exercise of the 2 nights did achieve the desired result — the starlings moved out of the CBD for the next 12 months or so.

Even so, starlings and mynas were still around: most notably at the landfill site where there are easy pickings. Council undertook targeted trapping with a scaled-up PeeGee myna trap, with good success. The trap, some 5 metres long, 3 metres wide and 2.5 metres high has 10 small “feeder compartments” around the outside to lure the birds into the trap. The trap has worked very well and has caught many 100s of Starlings and Indian Mynas: eg, in one month it captured over 180 Starlings and 280 mynas. The trap is currently decommissioned awaiting changes to make disposal of trapped birds a little easier.



Trap at Forest Road Landfill

The local bird watchers group have also been active with their backyard traps and they have humanely despatched many starlings and mynas.

The war continues. Tamworth still has its beautiful main street with wonderful trees. With continued vigilance and deterrent actions, the marauding starlings and mynas have been kept to minimal numbers in the main CBD since the campaign of 2007. Early intervention has proved to be the key to the recent successes. Nightly actions using high pressure hoses for about a week at a time are keeping the masses from reinvading the area. It is critical to attack the birds when they first appear in small numbers, hence deterring them from inviting their relatives into the locality.

The future holds even more challenges to manage pest birds. Indian Mynas were virtually unknown when the CBD enhancement began in 1998. Now they are everywhere, and expected to become as big a problem as the Starlings unless dealt with now. Their increasing prevalence may warrant a change in tactics to deter them from inhabiting high value public places.

Government could take a more pro-active approach rather than watch the demise of many of our native species. Simply declaring both Starlings and Indian Mynas vermin and providing seed funding for control measures would assist greatly in the war against these pests.