

Egret Rookeries

When nesting birds become a problem



What is a rookery?

A rookery occurs when large numbers of egrets or herons nest together in a concentrated area (colonial-nesting). A rookery can consist of one species or several species. Several species are found in rookeries, but cattle egrets are typically the most abundant. Most rookeries go unnoticed, however, when these birds choose to nest in or near a residential neighborhood, the result can sometimes be problematic because of noise, smell, or damage caused by vegetation disturbance or excrement.

When is nesting season?

Some species, such as the yellow-crowned night heron, can arrive as early as February. Birds that arrive early in the season act as “scouts” and identify safe and suitable nesting locations. These birds are nervous and easier to scare off. Birds that arrive later, usually in March, look for locations chosen by others and are harder to deter. Most colonial-nesting waterbirds typically leave by mid-October.

What can be done?

Colonial-nesting waterbirds are protected by both federal and state laws (Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and Texas Parks and Wildlife Code Chapter 64, respectively). Harassment techniques can be used to encourage the adult birds to relocate before eggs are laid, provided that no birds are injured or killed. Once the first egg has been laid in any nest in the rookery, the law severely limits what can be done to deter the birds. Typical daily activities such as mowing, garbage collection, and pressure spraying sidewalks can continue as planned. However, any actions intended to disturb the birds or actions that would present a disturbance must stop. The most effective tool in rookery management is preventing the colony from becoming established.

Prevention

Trimming trees is the most effective way to prevent rookery establishment. Herons and egrets are attracted to areas with mature trees with dense canopy cover. Overlapping branches allow the birds to move easily through the trees. Trees should be trimmed outside of the breeding season so that there is less than 70% canopy cover. Reducing canopy cover greatly reduces the chances that birds will choose the area as a nesting site. This should be planned during winter months and finished prior to the arrival of birds.



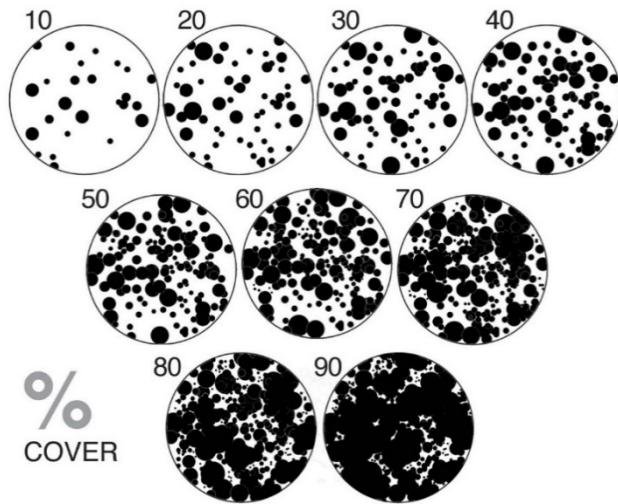
Cattle egret chick in a rookery. Cattle egrets are typically the last to arrive at rookeries.



A rookery established in a suburban neighborhood. The street and sidewalks are covered in bird droppings. Prevention of rookery establishment is the best approach.



The trees on the left side are untrimmed while the trees on the right have been trimmed to reduce canopy cover, which deters egrets from nesting.



To determine percent canopy cover, stand beneath the group of trees and look up. The area of sky blocked by leaves and branches represented by the black is the percent canopy cover. To deter egrets from nesting, less than 70% canopy is recommended.

Harassment Techniques

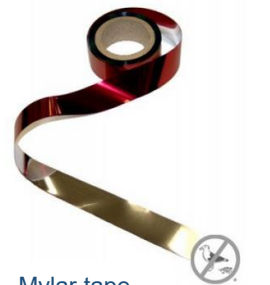
Harassment may begin as soon as birds first arrive, but before birds are nesting. If detected early, birds are nervous and easier to scare off. Below are some examples of harassment techniques that can be used:



Scare eye balloons



Noisemakers (air horns, pyrotechnics, etc)



Mylar tape

Other methods include water spray that does not injure birds and removing early nesting material from trees (do not remove nests with eggs).

Who to call:

For permits: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Migratory Birds Office at 505-248-7882 or USDA Wildlife Services at 866-487-3297.

For additional information: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Arlington Office 817-277-1100 or Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, DFW Urban Wildlife Office 972-293-3841.