

THE TRASH BIRD

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GARBAGE! Junk! Trash! Three little words that do not necessarily conjure up visions of beauty. To most people garbage means work, a mess, a foul smell, and “I don’t care what you do with it. Just get it out of my sight.”

“Now, what,” you might ask, “is *Sturnus vulgaris*, and what has that got to do with garbage?” Well, *Sturnus vulgaris* is the scientific name of the European starling, and I think that the attitude most people have about the lowly starling is the same attitude that we have about garbage.

Ask practically anyone what their favorite bird is and I’d be willing to bet a sizable sum of money that it would be a long while before anyone said, “I like starlings.” In fact, it is doubtful you would discover many bird watchers visiting their local landfill to watch starlings. Likewise, you would be hard pressed to find anyone who spends time pleasantly dreaming about their garbage and all of the great times they spent creating it.

Starlings take a bad rap because they are cavity nesting birds that have competed successfully with other more “beautiful” cavity nesting birds. This makes lovers of bluebirds mad, for example. Although starlings consume vast quantities of harmful insects and the seeds and fruit of invasive plants, they are also messy, produce young in unbelievable numbers, and have spread like wildfire to all parts of North America. From a historic perspective, it’s interesting to note that starlings didn’t even get to the United States by themselves. That’s right! Someone from New York City in the mid-1880s decided that it would just be great if every bird that was ever mentioned in a Shakespearian play could be found in America. And the rest, they say, is history.

Just like the story of the starling, the garbage found packed up and sitting outside your door did not get there by itself, either. That’s right — you did it. I did it. We purchased all kinds of stuff and threw away most of it. We complain about it. We worry about so many landfills that, just like star-



lings, are found in every corner of North America. But we are the reason the garbage and the starlings are here.

The next time you see a flock of starlings, just stop a moment and think, “We brought those birds here, and now we are mad that they have done so well.” And, the next time

you get ready to purchase anything, think, “How much garbage am I going to create by buying this?” People say that hindsight is 20/20, and although the starlings are already here, remember that it’s not too late to change — you haven’t purchased tomorrow’s garbage yet!