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THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

February 9, 1976

ADMINISTRATIVELY CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM FOR: JIM CANNON  
FROM: JIM CONNOR  
SUBJECT: "Blackbirds"

The attached newspaper clipping was returned in the President's outbox with the following notation:

"Any better news on our Blackbirds?"

Please follow-up with appropriate action.



cc: Dick Cheney

Attachment:

Article entitled "Blackbirds Flout Law,  
Cheat Chemical Spray" from WASHINGTON STAR  
Sunday, February 8, 1976

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

Jim Cannon

Any better news  
on our Blackbirds.



FOR THE RECORD

New Federal Approval



# Blackbirds Flout Law, Cheat Chemical Spray

By John Sherwood  
Washington Star Staff Writer

RUSSELLVILLE, Ky.—The Congress of the United States acted with unaccustomed speed, and last week President Ford signed the bird-control blitz legislation into law. The pesky blackbirds of Highland Lick Road, however, are not "paying them any mind," as they say down here in the hollows.

Logan county, in the Bible and Bourbon Belt of southwestern Kentucky, has especially had it with the

blackbird "menace" that has been plaguing other parts of the nation as well. Only here, some 150 people have come down with a lung ailment that local health officials say is caused by diseased and disease-carrying birds.

The first of a two-state (Kentucky and Tennessee) 1976 mass-kill offensive against tens of millions of assorted, roosting blackbirds and starlings was launched here in deadly earnest the other evening. The whole town was geared for the protective-reac-

See BIRDS, A-5

# BIRDS

Continued From A-1  
tion kill. Everyone was talking about "those damn birds."

The offending area that is literally alive with roosting blackbirds was quarantined and sealed off. Roadblocks were set up. Police dome lights were flashing. Families were evacuated.

AND THEN, in the early evening dusk, a commercial helicopter roared in to deliver a killing chemical spray that was to freeze the birds to death if the attack was followed by predicted rainfall.

It rained heavily everywhere in the area, of course, except on the enemy. The sitting birds took the death strike like a spring drizzle, winning the first round. They continued to sit, instead of fall. And the next day, at dawn, they swarmed with a new vigor. Alfred Hitchcock would have been proud.

The troublesome birds in this particular 29-acre roost just outside of town are estimated to number upwards of 7 million. There are more than 75 million elsewhere in the surrounding migratory blackbird hotbeds in western Kentucky and Tennessee.

Tom Harris, Kentucky's commissioner of agriculture, was the field commander in charge of the spraying of an "avian stressing agent" called "PA-14," a chemical whose principal ingredient is "Tergitol."

He was flabbergasted when the rainfall stopped with the spraying. He wanted some kind of body count. A controversial Tergitol

dose last February in nearby Ft. Campbell killed an estimated 500,000 birds — hardly enough, however, to make a dent in the roost there. Pictures of the birds dying produced a great environmental uproar that put a stop to the exterminations.

HARRIS — a big and gruff, deep-voiced country boy — was most unhappy with this first winter offensive. Oh, a few of the birds keeled over, but Operation Wipeout was clearly another victory for the swift and feathered other side. But Harris plans to strike again, and soon.

"You have to have the right weather conditions to make it work," he said sadly, lugging back the Blossom Shop's "Bye Bye Blackbird" wreath of plastic flowers. The chemical, he explained, washes off the birds' protective oils when combined with rain and freezing temperatures, causing death from exposure.

Last Friday evening Harris watched helplessly as the birds came swarming in at dusk like endless, insane formations of attacking buzz bombs. They dotted the sky like pepper with their blackness; swooping lower and lower until they reached "home" — a devastated grove of dying cedar trees in the backyard of a 73-year-old "widow lady" named Goldie Lee Gunn Morris.

The birds first visited Goldie's place in large numbers in 1970, she says, and then skipped a year. But they returned in 1974, and their numbers soared almost beyond estimation last year and this year. Mrs. Morris has owned the grove

for all of the 52 years she has lived here.

At first she chased them with a broom, then banged pots and pans. She even took up shooting at them, along with other neighbors and a Baptist minister who lives across the street. But nothing worked. "Some times they bounce off the windows and walls," she says. "It's as if they want to get inside, you know, like that movie ('The Birds'). I got used to it, I reckon."

GOLDIE MORRIS can even manage to laugh about it, along with her neighbors who have an extremely easy-going, tolerant way of dealing with such an enormous problem. Is it their nature, however, to take things easy. The world moves slower here.

For George and Beverly Whitson, who live near Mrs. Morris, the situation is approaching the danger point. Their two daughters, Julie, 4, and Ginger, 3, are among the 150 Logan county residents living near the roost who have the respiratory ailment called "Histoplasmosis." It is caused, say local health officials, by the dried-up spores of the bird droppings. Some of the piles behind their house are a foot deep.

Glenn Little, a neighbor of the Whitsons, says his son, Lanny, 21, and his wife, Darlene, and their son, Christopher Ray, 3, all have the sickness which can cause blindness and is picked up merely by inhaling the airborne spores.

"THESE BIRD lovers, we never see them down here," says Little. "They're up in New York, aren't they? They should take some time out and come down to look at some of our

## GRACEHAM BIRDS GET REPRIEVE

GRACEHAM, Md. (AP)— The more than a million blackbirds roosting in a 60-acre pine grove near here may not be killed, state officials have ruled.

In a letter to the Frederick County commissioner, Ralph Bitely, state wildlife administrator, said an extermination effort wouldn't work at this time.

The commissioners had voted recently to seek state approval to exterminate the birds who have been plaguing the town every winter for two years.

"We can understand now how you feel about the birds," Bitely said, but he added that it would be useless to kill them now unless the extermination was coordinated with blackbird kills in several other states.

sick children. I like birds as much as the next guy, but the human environment has to be protected, too. I wonder how they would like this kind of roost in their back yards?"

The birds arrive in early October and migrate north in early April, but during their six-month stay they create havoc among farmers by eating the food put out for livestock. They also strip the early corn and wheat and soy bean fields. The sound and sight of them soaring off at sunrise to forage within a 50-mile radius is awesome and terrifying.

The patient people of western Kentucky and Tennessee have been putting up with it for years. "But we don't want to put up with it no more," says Little.