

This Is For The (Black) Birds...

It's like a scene from an Alfred Hitchcock movie as tens of thousands of blackbirds lift off from a sunflower field. The destructive little varmints are wreaking havoc in this field as they lift in a cloud, circle and then come down in a different part of the field to do more damage.

The recent wet weather has prevented the sunflowers from being harvested although the crop is ripe and ready to come in. Every day out there with the birds feeding on the plants amounts to hundreds of dollars lost in the harvest and eventual sale of the flower seeds.

Once the birds pick a field to attack, their presence can be devastating. The birds land on the flower head and peck out a few seeds. What they take in their initial feeding doesn't amount to that much.

But the removal of only a few seeds takes away the support structure for the rest of the seeds in the head. Now any disturbance can trigger a dropping of the seeds to the ground. It could be a rain. It could be a moderate to high wind. Or it might be the birds themselves as they land, fly away and then land again.

The disturbances cause the sunflower head to drop seeds to the ground. The blackbirds are too lazy to go down on the ground to feed and simply move to another head to land on. Multiply the attack by a few thousand blackbirds, spread out over a few days and the birds can cut the anticipated yield in half or even more.

Harvest is about the only sure method to control the blackbird invasions. Nearly everything else has been tried. There are propane cannons available that fire every few minutes or so with a loud "bang". That causes the birds to lift off but seldom chases them away. They circle for a few laps and then land on the flowers and start all over again.

Some farmers have hired kids and furnished them with a shotgun and a case of shells. That can be effective, at least for a little while. But the birds soon catch on to both the cannon and the armed kid and they simply move to a different part of the field.

At one time there was a poisoned bait seed that could be put out at strategic points around the field. In

most cases it did not kill the birds but made them violently ill and the squawking from the affected bird kept the rest of the flock away, at least for a little while.

Everything tried is more or less a stop gap measure with very limited success achieved with any of the control measures.

Birds are one of the two reasons that very few sunflowers are grown around here anymore. The other drawback is disease that seems to remain in the soil for years after the last sunflowers were grown on a patch of ground.

Sunflowers were the darling crop of the 1970s. The entire valley would turn a beautiful yellow when thousands of acres came into bloom at just about the same time each August. There are two kinds of sunflowers grown, confection grade that could be processed and sold for those that like to spit seeds.

The other sunflower variety has a much darker seed that contains oil. Cooking oil or saffron could be squeezed out of the seeds. The oil seeds were and still are a major component of winter bird seed that is sold for feeders.

The beauty of sunflowers was that they

could be seeded late and harvested early. They were a great crop with extreme drought resistance.

In the early years of sunflower production, a ton of seeds to the acre was not unheard of. Over the long haul the average price for a pound of sunflowers was about a dime a pound. That could vary somewhat but 10c a pound was about average. Combine that with a ton of yield and farmers were generating \$200 per acre with a relatively easy to grow crop. Not bad money back in the '70s.

Then came the diseases and the birds. The birds had always been around but with so many acres to choose from, they did not do a lot of damage on any one farm. But the disease in the plants was devastating. Yields dropped by half in just a few years.

Now any sunflowers being grown are likely already under contract. They will be delivered to a designated elevator at a guaranteed contract price, sometimes as much as 20 cents per pound. Back in the 1970s, every elevator in the area took the flower seeds. Now only a few designated elevators accept the seeds.



With a roar of wings and a lot of loud chirping, a flock of several thousand blackbirds darken the sky as they lift out of a sunflower field. Once the birds take possession of the field about all that can be done to protect the crop is to combine it and get it into storage. That remedy has not been practical with the recent rains.

Lady Tigers Team Up To Block Out Cancer

By: Emily Christ

Every year the Rothsay Volleyball Team hosts a cancer night. This year, it was on Tuesday, October 9, against the Parkers Prairie Panthers.

The stands on Tuesday night were full of pink pride on both sides. Every year the volleyball team sets out to raise money in October to take part of cancer month. This year the recipient of all the money that was raised was Heather Nelson.

Heather has breast cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy and radiation. Heather is pictured to the right with her family and below with the Lady Tigers Volleyball Team.

Both teams raised money for the cause through pink t-shirt sales. The Tigers also able to raise money by selling 50/50 raffle tickets and gathering donations throughout the night from both the Rothsay volleyball fans and the Parkers Prairie fans.

In between sets two and three, the volleyball team honored Heather and her husband Chad with a check that totaled over \$1,200. Joe Tillman was the winner for the 50/50 raffle, but instead gave the money to Heather.

Senior volleyball player, Cora Honer said, "Cancer night is always a very emotional night because we often honor someone from our community that is effected by cancer."

The volleyball team was gratefully for everyone that helped to raise so much money for Heather and her family.

