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Those Pesky Starlings

Starlings are finding their way into our homes via our louvered bathroom exhaust fan outlets. The starlings like to go in several feet and build a nest back in the duct.



The Pest

Vents? What vents?

Many homes built here have either exhaust louver doors or dampers installed at their bathroom fan outlets. Many already have the "bird guards" or "cages" installed. Perhaps one builder installed them and the other did not.

Regardless, unprotected louver doors are like conducting an Open House for the starlings.

The good news for us is that most all models have the louver doors at levels that can be easily reached using a 16 foot extension ladder.

However, the Westmont models have at least one extremely high exhaust serving the second level bathroom and requires a much taller ladder to service.

What about the low vents?

Typically, there may be 2 kinds of "just-above-ground-level" louvers. One is the louver door type being discussed, usually from the vent fan in a lower level bathroom, or a damper style dryer vent. The other is a "fixed" vent - louvers DO NOT MOVE. It is fixed (by code) to provide proper air to the burner of your furnace. These don't seem to appeal to the animals.

OK, So What?

The Starlings build nests, hatch their eggs (6 or more at a time), and in at least one case, broke through the wire reinforced plastic ducting of the chosen vent. The stench can be horrible, especially in the heat of summer. Replacing the ductwork can be difficult, given the limited amount of space where they are and the attic heat build-up. If the particular duct is the upstairs duct in the very shallow attics of the Westmont models, it could be even more challenging to replace the duct.

Stealthy Beginners

The bird will choose a duct and peck at one of the louver doors. When one of the doors opens, the bird can work it's way between the louver doors to obtain access. If it is the vent of a lesser used bathroom, you may not even know it's there - **YET**.

Then Things Get Nasty

It can build its nest, lay and hatch its eggs. Then, the feeding, nest clean-out activity and maybe more noise (peeping) starts. That's when you may notice the dirt and mess on the siding below that louver. By then, the obvious is "DUH" too late.

"Ounce of Prevention"

You may wish to invest in the cages which can keep the critters out of the louvers. One example brand would be the **deflect-o Universal Bird Guard**. It is an inexpensive, fairly easy to install "cage" device. **It just takes someone who can be up a tall ladder AND use both hands freely.**



Bird guard

The Bird Guards may be found at Home Depot for about \$5.00 each. They are white, designed to fit over most any bathroom exhaust vent of 3 to 4 inches, and can be painted.

The problem is getting them installed - - especially on the "high vents" of the Westmont model homes. If anyone finds a general "handyperson" who will do this for a reasonable fee - please let us know, and we can place them in the Dominion Club Vendor Services Directory.

Installation Decisions

If you decide to install bird guards, one of three situations will confront you. (2 more if you have a Westmont and are trying to find someone to install the guards.)

Situation #1. The duct is clear. Yea! Get the cover on while you can.

Situation #2. There is a nest and eggs. How you handle it is your call.

Situation #3. You're too late. there is a mess, a nest with hatched starlings, and the birds may or may not have broken through the plastic duct in your house. At this point, the remedy decision and it's impact on the starlings is your call too.

Cautions and Recommendations

Whether you do the work yourself, or find an installer, be careful when cleaning the duct of any debris.

1. Use a shop vac with a very narrow attachment to get between the louver doors without breaking them. Very carefully vacuum several feet back in the duct, trying not to break the plastic ducting.

Or **VERY CAREFULLY** use a long, homemade implement to reach in and pull the nesting material and/or eggs out of the duct. While removing the debris, remember the duct is just soft plastic, and it can be easily punctured.

2. Use of any screws to secure the bird guard that are longer than 1 to 1 1/2 inches could penetrate the vinyl siding more than you would desire.

3. Be sure to pad the ladder top as it leans against the vinyl siding.

4. After installing the bird guards, put a bead of clear silicone caulk across the top and halfway down both sides, between the new cage and the siding. This will help the installation better shed water during storms.

Additional Benefits

Cold windy winter weather, normally causes the louvers to flap in the wind, and/or the rain-changing-to-snow drips down the louvers and freezes them shut. The properly installed bird guard will cut down on wind affects, and the freezing rain/snow will not be able to freeze your louvers closed.