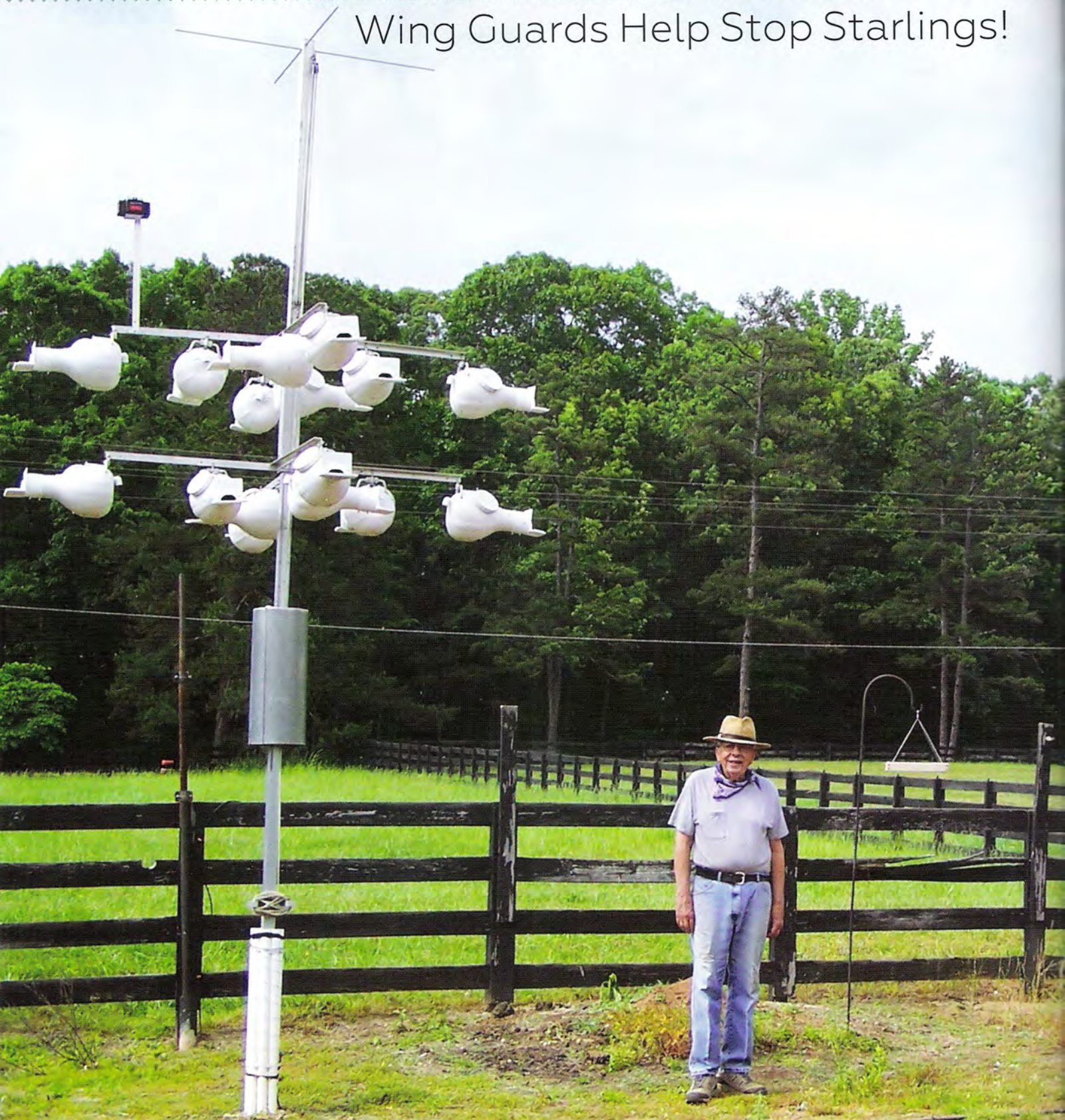


The Lewis Modification -

Wing Guards Help Stop Starlings!



Lewis Scott, Newnan, GA

My martin site consists of a gourd rack with 16 Troyer Horizontal Gourds and a multi-purpose pole holding two Safe Haven houses, and four more gourds. Currently 30 pairs are nesting. There are several SY (subadult) birds so I should reach full (32) capacity. I started with a Trio Grandpa over 10 years ago, then joined the PMCA in 2009, and my colony has grown as a result.

The idea of modifying the Conley II entrance came in 2010 as a follow-up to a problem I had with starlings breaching the crescent starling-resistant entrances (SREHs) on my Safe Haven martin house. I originally got the PMCA Wing Entrapment Protectors (WEP) with the intention of placing them on the inside of the entrances, to help prevent wing entrapment. But I could not see how to do this, because they would block the door from sliding open and closed.

So I put up my first Safe Haven without PMCA wing guards, along with my Trio house, which had wing guards installed on the inside. The starlings went for the Safe Haven and were able to breach the crescent SREHs. I noticed the door bending when one of them was having a hard time coming back out. I raised the porch and put PMCA wing guards on the outside of all of the entrances on the Safe Haven and it stopped the starlings from getting in—even one starling nest that had eggs at the time. It was obvious to me that the wing guard, along with the raised porch, played a role in keeping the starlings out. That was my original use of wing guards to help stop starlings—they were used on the outside to reinforce the thin, flexible doors on the Safe Haven. I think that because the starling has to lean down and poke its head in the hole, it is left off balance and unable to use its feet to push or side step its way inside. “

I had 20 Troyer Horizontal Gourds with Conley II entrances and starlings were getting into these gourds. I was able to control them by trapping and shooting. I decided to try the wing guards and raised porches on the four THGs below the Safe Haven, and made the modification during the off-season. The results? Next season, NO starlings! The following year I modified all of my Troyer Horizontal Gourds with Conley II entrances with the “Lewis SREH Mod.” When the martins returned they had no problem with the modified entrances. I think it’s been over three years now with no starlings in the houses and gourds that I modified with the wing protectors and raised porches.

James Rieman's martin colony in Houston, TX, is starling-free after he modified his T14 house by adding wing guards and raising porches.



"Starlings were huge problems for me in previous years, now I don't even think about them."

James Rieman Houston, TX



A closer view of James Rieman's T14 shows the plastic signboard material used to raise the porch floor up flush with the Conley II entrances.

Since Lewis Scott added PMCA wing guards (Wing Entrapment Protectors/WEP) and raised porches to his Troyer Horizontal gourds, no starlings have been able to enter.

I used pop rivets to attach the PMCA wing guards to the metal house doors. I use screws and a countersink drill to attach the wing guards to the Troyer gourds. Caulk and a C-clamp will work, too. It is not necessary to remove wing guards except to use the trap on Troyer gourds. If House Sparrows or very small starlings become an issue, it's easy to remove the screws, remove the wing guard, and use the Troyer tunnel trap that is made for this gourd.

I used 1/8" thick UV-treated PolyMax (high density polyethylene (HDPE) boards to raise the porches. I think PVC trim board would also work. I used a Dremel tool to make a groove (about 1" wide by 2" long) in the PolyMax—it's a little wider than the dip in the Conley II but the same depth. I don't think it needs to be exact but the martins need a little space to line up and go in. I watched them enter the Conley II entrance before I made the modification—they line up with the dip and go straight in. They have no trouble with my modification. The starlings I have seen enter a Conley II go in sideways

and they cannot do this with the wing guard. The measurement from the dip to the top edge of Conley II is 1-3/16 inches.

I hope more people will try this modification on their houses and gourds with Conley II entrances. The PMCA wing guards are inexpensive and come with stainless steel screws. If you try the fix and don't like it, you can easily remove it.

I think this modification will work to increase the effectiveness of most SREH entrances. All I can say is that it has worked for others as well as for me. I think the PMCA wing guard on the outside gives added protection. Two important points that should be made about this modification are the advantages it has over changing to a more restrictive SREH like the Excluder II. One, if you are starting a new colony, the Conley II is the least restrictive SREH. Martins will enter it as easily as a round entrance. Two, after you get martins, you can make this modification if you have a starling breach, instead of going through the work of changing to a more restrictive entrance by adding entrance plates.



A slight groove was filed in the raised porch, matching the bottom center dip of the Conley II entrance. If the raised porch does not come up enough to block the bottom of the Conley II, no groove will be needed.

