

BUILD YOUR BIRD BUSINESS

*Whether you focus on subcontracting
or taking it in-house, experts agree:
Do your homework first*

By Heather Gooch | PMP Editor

W

alk before you run. Pest management professionals (PMPs) can build their entire business on this mantra, but it's especially pertinent for the bird control segment.

"You can lose your shirt quickly if you don't know what you're doing," points out Stuart Aust, founder and former owner of Bird Doctor, Paramus, N.J. But the

Pest Management Professional Editorial Advisory Board member, now president of mergers and acquisitions firm The Aust Group, notes success is possible if you start small and work your way up.

Mike Gerharstein and Jared Miller are wildlife supervisor and wildlife manager, respectively, for Columbus, Ohio-based Varment Guard, the wildlife arm of Plunkett's Pest Control. Both agree there is more opportunity than ever for PMPs to branch out into bird control.

Miller notes that whereas small commercial businesses used to be able to take care of nuisance bird problems themselves, gun control regulations are making that more difficult. Gerharstein says there are growing bird control opportunities in industrial facilities with third-party audits. Thanks to the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) of 2011, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and other food health inspectors are looking at bird feathers and droppings in pet food and livestock feed, for example.

"There's a lot of natural risk with contamination," Gerharstein adds. "We've had jobs where the USDA was threatening to shut industrial facilities down, and they cannot afford to stop production for very long."

Rolie Calzadilla, CPCO, CGC, CWCP, agrees. Terminix Commercial's bird and wildlife technical manager, based in Miami, Fla., points to the mass salmonella poisoning by the Peanut Corporation of America in 2008 as a prime example. With nine deaths and an estimated 714 people

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Blue Ridge Wildlife & Pest Management Technician Jason Davis installs Bird-Shock Flex-Track on the roof of the National Museum of African American History & Culture.

PHOTO: BLUE RIDGE WILDLIFE & PEST MANAGEMENT



PROTECTING OUR NATIONAL HERITAGE FROM PEST BIRDS

The National Museum of African American History & Culture is a Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. It was established in 2003, but the building itself didn't open until September 2016. And it is Roanoke, Va.-based Blue Ridge Wildlife & Pest Management's responsibility to ensure there are no pest birds like pigeons or starlings around to damage buildings or interfere with visitors.

Jason Reger, CWCP, who is president of Blue Ridge as well as a past president of the National Wildlife Control Operators Association (NWCOA), notes that it all started with a federal bid during the construction process back in 2015.

"I gave them an option for an electric track system, then they asked for a design," Reger recalls. "I hired a guy to create a CAD [computer-aided design] drawing of what I had in mind, and designed the system myself using 14 different systems."

Reger is no stranger to federal government contract bids. For example, he counts among his clients a Veterans Administration (VA) hospital where he created an integrated wildlife management program — ensuring pond weeds and the wildlife populations were at their cultural carrying capacities.

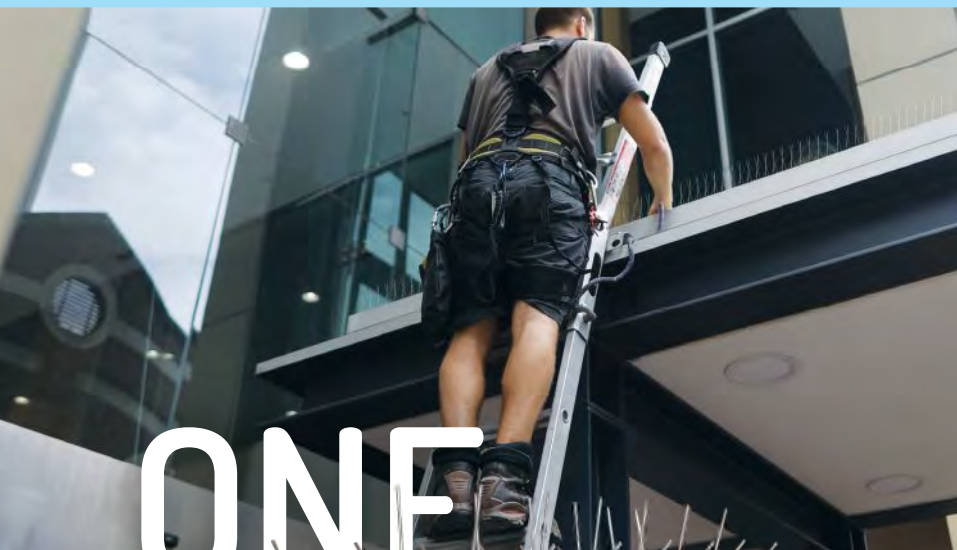
This Smithsonian project is notable for a few reasons, including:

- Reger worked with Bird Barrier President Cameron Riddell to exactly color-match the Bird-Shock Flex-Track on the "Quaker Bronze" steel of the roof. "When we did our mockup, there's a balcony near the administration offices. When the administrators went out to look at the roof, they couldn't see the Shock Track at all," Reger said. "We needed that uniformity in color so that if no one is specifically looking out the window for it, they don't even realize it's there."
- Every wire was hidden, thanks to Reger's meticulous measuring of all the spacings needed. He went home and enlisted the help of his two kids — aged 9 and 6 at the time — and they created 2,400 custom jump wires in two weeks. They made a family project out of the task by sitting in the living room, cutting the wires, adding the attachments and doing the heat shrinks. "Most PMPs try to lay shock track as they go, but with a project like this, 75 percent of the work is preparation," he said. "Preparation is the name of the game."

The bid goes out every year, and at press time, Reger was working on the next bid to keep the business. The Smithsonian also asked him for a quote to provide maintenance on the bird control systems and the outdoor lights that his firm installed for the electrical contractor on-site during the construction phase of the project. Although Roanoke is about 3.5 hours away from Washington, D.C., the scope of the work and the reputation-building it creates makes traveling worth the cost, he said.

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 36

in 46 states sickened, the company was found to be negligent for a number of reasons — yet chief among them was letting its damaged roof allow rain into the production area. “Pigeons were nesting on the rooftop equipment, and their droppings washed down with the rainwater,” he explains.

TAKE IT SLOW

Back to that walk-before-you-run advice: R. Brett Madden, Esq., ACE, is president of Alliance Pest Services and Aviaway Bird

Control Services,

Tinton Falls, N.J.

Previously, he had built up No Fly Zone before selling the company several years ago. With this second incarnation of

his bird business, Madden notes he is becoming choosier about which accounts he takes on.

“Our previous company had grown to the point where we had to take on every single job to ‘feed the machine,’ to justify the costs of crews, trucks and tools,” he explains. “Today, I’m weighing the profitability of each potential new job with the level of work and aggravation it might bring. I think a lot of companies look at bird control and see high-dollar jobs. But a danger to that can be that you may end up making less on the high-dollar jobs than on the smaller, but secure jobs.”

One lesson particularly resonates with Madden: “We lost a significant amount of money on a large bird netting job because the client went bankrupt, and we were awarded pennies on the dollar.”

TOOLS AND TRAINING

Aust currently is mentoring 14 pest management companies, and part of that process is helping them discern whether bird control is the right fit.

“If it is, we have them start with the little jobs, like birds nesting on an air-conditioning unit:

You clean, sanitize and install spikes. Then they move on to birds on the downspouts, in the attic, and so on,” he offers as an example.

Aust points out that he started expanding his Bug Doctor business years ago simply by creating an

invoice stuffer saying “We now offer bird control services.”

“Start small, get familiar with how best to provide the service, and the bird control suppliers will find you,” he predicts. “Once they know you’re capable of bigger things, they can start sending you leads in your market, too.”

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BRETT MADDEN



STUART AUST

Learn the ins and outs of lift safety before taking on a big job like this, installing bird repellent dishes on the roof tiles of a pier structure.



PHOTO: BIRD BARRIER

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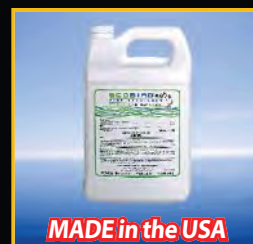
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Bird experts stress the importance of making sure you have a properly fitting harness, and check the lanyard every time. If the lanyard is ever used in a drop event, discard it and get a new one: It's a one-time use.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 40

Manufacturer and distributors are invaluable, Aust says, because they can help train your team on how to best use their bird control products, and also provide leave-behind literature for clients, displays for home and garden shows or an account presentation, help prepare big bids and even help troubleshoot on problem accounts.

"Many of them also offer certification, with a day-long or so program," Aust continues. "This can build pride among your techs: We framed their certificates and hung them prominently in the office, and we made copies to keep in their files. We also would include a copy in our bird control proposals to show we were on the level, as opposed to a company that doesn't have certified techs."

Madden agrees, and adds it also is helpful to get to know architects and engineers to familiarize yourself with the ins and outs of building structures.

"We've done thousands of jobs, and no two are alike," Madden points out, adding that the more expertise you can accrue, the easier it is to spot accounts that aren't worth the trouble. "We also conduct a job safety analysis, where we come to the site and go over what hazards we'd be creating, what hazards the client is creating, and how to mitigate both."

Having a crew certified in repelling and rope safety helps, too, Madden says. "We just looked at a job where we were one of eight bidders. But we were the only ones who brought the safety equipment — harnesses, lanyards and so on — so that we could thoroughly look at the job from all angles. Everyone else had to look from the street."

Miller points out that the National Wildlife Control Operators

Association (NWCOA) is a great training and certification resource as well. He says NWCOA's course covers a lot of what PMPs who handle bird control need. Calzadilla takes it a step further: "I recommend anyone serious about getting into bird control look into the NWCOA class."

Depending on the client, sometimes you need extra training just to perform their bird control work, Gerharstein says. "For example, we have [a customer with] an ethanol plant where the crew must wear fire-retardant clothing," he says, noting that they also cannot use



JARED MILLER



MIKE GERHARSTEIN

EXPERT BIRD CONTROL ADVICE

► “Don’t be the low-price leader. Upsell value via risks like health, brand, property damage and slip-fall liability. Commercial clients won’t mind paying a little more for peace of mind. When bidding on government work, you usually are forced to be the ‘lowest responsive bidder.’ The operative word is *responsive*. Don’t necessarily be the lowest; be the lowest that answers all of the questions, dots all the I’s and crosses all the T’s.” — *Rolie Calzadilla*

► “Hire a consultant, and be prepared to deal with ups and downs. Have a plan for everything, and expect a learning curve. We operate under the ‘6 Ps’: Proper planning prevents piss-poor performance!” — *Brett Madden*

► “Consider the time of year. If your crews are slammed doing wildlife in May and June, and you get a bird control call in May, realize that for a lot of bigger jobs, the problem has been going on for years. See if you can wait until

October or November, when you have more manpower. We even offer better pricing if they can wait.” — *Jared Miller*

► “Understand that bird work is a different style of labor than a wildlife or pest control route — the key being *route* vs. *project*. For birds, you might have an 8- to 12-hour day, rinse and repeat, until it’s done. And a lot of facilities need you to come in during third shift. Depending on the size of the job, you have to be willing to travel and maybe stay in a hotel for a week or so. One we did for three months; it just depends on the size of job.” — *Mike Gerharstein*

► “One way for a PMP looking to get into bird control is to do some subcontracts where you can partner and watch and learn from the subcontractor doing the work. Just have that non-compete signed! But seriously, if I was ever to go back into pest control, I’d have a bird control company right away.” — *Stuart Aust*

pneumatic drills there because of the combustible dust hazard. “We had to be trained in their specific safety protocols, and we have certification just for their business.”

At the end of the day, Calzadilla says, it’s a matter of safety first. “Fall protection is a must when on a lift. Basic [personal protection equipment, or] PPE like a safety vest, gloves, hardhats, eye protection are needed for nearly every job.”

He also offers these tips:

- If you’re handling sheet metal or steel, wear gloves to protect your hands from cuts.
- If you’re using a hammer-drill and generating a lot of dust, wear a mask.
- If you’re using a powder-actuated gun to shoot into steel, wear hearing and eye protection.
- There’s a big difference between

a minor bird droppings cleanout and a major one. You might need a full-face respirator, a Tyvek “bunny suit,” heavy-duty chemical gloves and boots. Eyes and ears can be entry points for zoonotic disease.

“It’s a lot of training and a lot of PPE ready when needed,” Calzadilla warns.

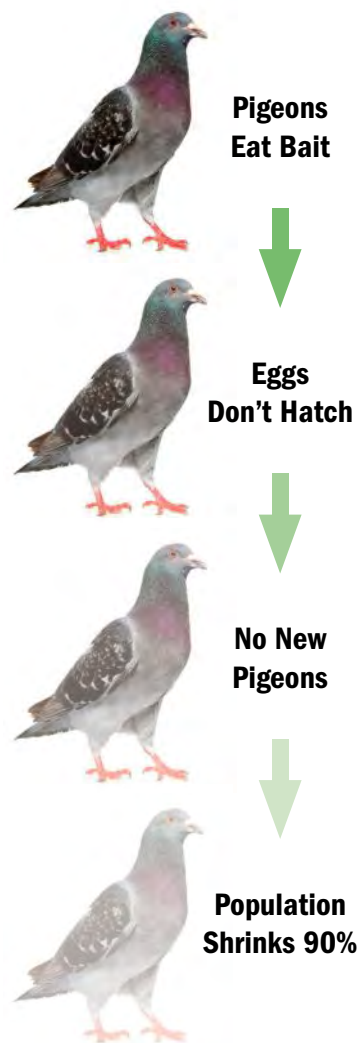
TREAT IT LIKE THE INVESTMENT IT IS

Bird control work is not something you can skip on when it comes to tools, materials and equipment, according to every PMP interviewed for this article.

“Buy the best tools available when you need them for a specific job,” advises Calzadilla. “That way, the job pays for the tools. Labor is the most expensive element of a large bird job, and wasting time with inferior tools is counter-productive.”

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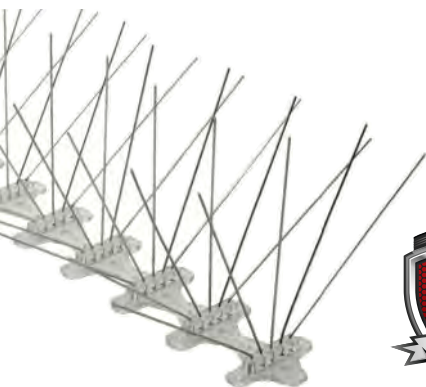
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Calzadilla also recommends renting the “exact lift needed for the job and charging it to the job. Using the wrong lift, or trying to save a couple hundred dollars on a lift rental

may cause extra labor hours.”

People are an investment, too, Madden points out. “Between the bad driver records, background checks,

personality tests — all those things — we’re lucky to find one good job candidate in 50,” he laments.

He notes that a good bird control tech — someone with construction knowledge, the ability to work as a team player and yet is a self-starter not



ROLIE CALZADILLA



Technicians from Blue Ridge Wildlife & Pest Management lay Bird-Shock electrical track along the National Museum of African American History & Culture in Washington, D.C.



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Blue Ridge Wildlife & Pest Management General Manager Cedric Short, left, lets a client see how StealthNet is attached.

afraid of heights or odd hours — is rarely the same as a good general pest control technician. But once you make the right hire, it can pay dividends in the quality of your work.

“When they’re the right fit, your crew can work like a well-oiled machine,” he says. PMP

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Bird solutions

Product manufacturers share what's new — and their five-year forecasts



AVITROL

Tasheena Dillingham

President and CEO

Over the past few years, our innovations have been geared specifically toward offering PMPs a line of full-service products and support tools. They include Avitrol Easy Blend (pictured), for bird baiting at sensitive sites; the Bird Control App, designed to help scope, bid and execute bird work; a full certification program; a complete proposal and bidding service; and several other solutions. Each of these tools was born out of a desire to truly bring value by helping teams sell and execute bird work, in a myriad of scenarios, at a high level.

Looking ahead, our development team is working on implementing artificial intelligence (AI) to correctly estimate the number of birds at a location, determine the type of bird, autogenerate the labor involved in the treatment, and auto-create quick estimates. The

net result will be a significant reduction in the amount of time it currently takes to scope and bid bird work across the country.

PREDICTIONS: What we consistently hear from PMPs is that one of their barriers to expansion in bird work is that the close rate on their bird bids are somewhere between 5 percent and 10 percent, whereas the close rate on general pest control is closer to 60 percent — and on bed bug

work in particular, it's 80 percent plus. But as teams work directly with manufacturer sales groups, their close rates grow to more than 60 percent on bird proposals.

Over the next five years, then, we expect to see growth in bird control as a percentage of a PMP's overall business, simply because the close rates will more closely resemble what they see across other pest verticals.



BIRD BARRIER AMERICA

Cameron Riddell

President

Bird Barrier's new training studio can deliver a rich experience to PMPs at remote locations on their computers, TVs or mobile devices. Nine remotely operated cameras focus on all aspects of the training, allowing for close-up action or tool usage and installation techniques. The director also incorporates photos and on-the-job videos in the presentation, so attendees feel like they are on an actual jobsite. The results are much more dynamic than a traditional PowerPoint webinar: Attendees stay engaged throughout the session because they can ask questions anytime they want.

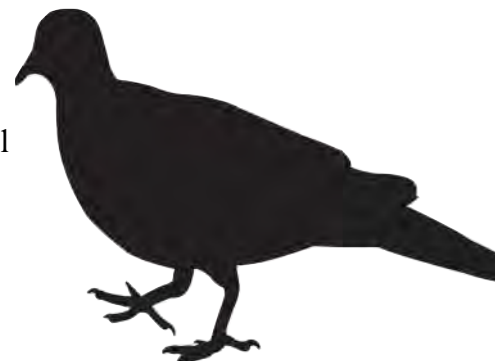
Our eTraining sessions are open to all parties, and private sessions are offered to a company's multiple locations — from one group to 50. All users need is a web connection. Training also can be broadcast live on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and LinkedIn. We suggest starting with "Introduction to Optical Gel," a video detailing our new bird control solution that is fast and easy to install and sell. Check it out online at [YouTube.com/watch?v=edwZLNRHMOU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edwZLNRHMOU).

PREDICTIONS: Many PMPs want to grow their bird control offering, but know they need training. With our remote training solution, they can train their team in one-hour segments and still get normal work done. We believe this trend will continue to grow in popularity.



Bird Barrier's Bobby June, left, sets up a shot in the studio with Cameron Riddell.

PHOTO: BIRD BARRIER AMERICA



We spoke with seven industry suppliers about their bird control products to assist pest management professionals (PMPs) on the job. Read on for their insights and announcements. We also want to know what bird management methods you're implementing, and what you hope to add in the near future. Drop us a line at pmpeditor@northcoastmedia.net.



BIRD-B-GONE

Bruce Donoho

Owner and CEO

We believe 2020 is going to be a big year for bird control. With the launch of our two new American-made

products — SpectrumV Holographic Bird Gel (pictured) and Avian Block — we're aiming to make bird control easier for PMPs, so they can grow their businesses.

SpectrumV Holographic Bird Gel is a high-impact, sensory bird deterrent that affects all bird species on three different levels: sight, smell and sense of touch. The installation of SpectrumV is about as easy as it gets, making it a perfect opportunity for PMPs to generate recurring revenue.

Avian Block passively distributes a proprietary blend of the proven bird deterrent methyl anthranilate (grape-seed extract). And again, we believe Avian Block's ease of use will help PMPs address historically hard-to-treat bird control issues like outdoor restaurants, trees, entryways and any other scenario where traditional structural bird control products like spikes, nets and electric track cannot be used.

We're also adding several new patents to Bird-B-Gone's portfolio this year, and have many more in the pipeline.

PREDICTIONS: Growing public awareness of pest bird activity and the risks they pose, coupled with the U.S. Food & Drug Administration's (FDA's) expanding enforcement of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), will continue to drive growth in the industry. This increasing demand will require PMPs to be equipped with the latest training and tools required to deliver the highest levels of service that today's consumers expect.



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Erick Wolf

CEO

Featuring the active ingredient nicarbazin at 0.5 percent, OvoControl P (EPA Reg. No. 80224-1) is birth control

for pigeons and other pest birds. The contraceptive product is fed to pigeons at a rate of 1 pound per 80 pigeons daily, preventing fertilization and hatching of eggs.

OvoControl P is ideally suited for large manufacturing facilities where exclusion simply is not an option. Target sites include power plants, oil refineries, prisons, campuses, mining sites and similar verticals.

A treated pigeon population will decline at a rate of about 50 percent annually through a natural process of attrition. With no new birds, the flock gradually, but predictably declines and comes to equilibrium at 5 percent to 10 percent of its starting point.

New Hampshire recently approved OvoControl P, becoming the 50th state in America to register the product as a general-use pesticide. A recently expanded label provides for additional target species, as well as the option to hand-feed the product without an automatic feeder.



PREDICTIONS: We believe the future of bird control for PMPs will continue to be driven by innovative and humane solutions. The growth of bird control will continue to outpace overall growth in the pest control industry.

Because of the exorbitant cost of development, actual pesticide registrations for avian species will be infrequent. Birds, especially migratory species, will continue to be a focus as disease carriers for livestock. Zoonotic disease and potential pandemics may increase in frequency. But each of these trends may represent additional opportunities for PMPs who have expertise in bird control.





J.T. EATON

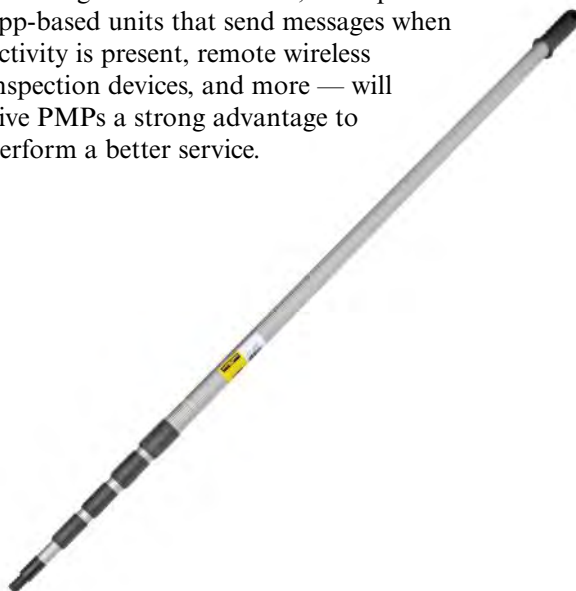
Craig Martelle

Northeast Sales Manager

J.T. Eaton's 20-Foot Pro Line Extension Pole (Item 1720AL5) has many uses in the bird management arena. This tool is easy to transport: It is just 62 inches in length, but extends to 20 feet. This can help keep the technician off a ladder, for safety. It may be used to remove bird droppings, birds' nests and even dead birds from ledges. The screw top is a standard size, allowing for any special tools needed to install other bird deterrent products.

PREDICTIONS: As with pest management overall, the guidelines for bird management continue to evolve and change. With continued training, we can help deliver better services with quality tools. Homeowners, food manufacturing and even agricultural areas are seeing more bird activity from many different species of birds. As a result, they want to decrease these issues on their property.

As a manufacturer, we are constantly looking at different tools to assist in the bird management field. We foresee the use of various new technologies — including mounted cameras, smartphone app-based units that send messages when activity is present, remote wireless inspection devices, and more — will give PMPs a strong advantage to perform a better service.



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NIXALITE OF AMERICA

Cory Gellerstedt

Co-President

2020 marks Nixalite of America's 70th year in business. Our focus always has been on producing and supplying bird control products made from quality materials. In recent years, we've expanded our line of bird exclusion products, including the SolaTrim bird and pest barrier for the protection of solar panel systems (pictured).

The SolaTrim Bird & Pest Barrier is an all-weather, long-lasting bird and pest abatement system designed to exclude birds and pests from residential solar system arrays. SolaTrim specifically blocks birds, squirrels and rodents from getting under rooftop solar systems, while allowing for air to circulate underneath the solar panels, maintaining a protected area between the roof surface and the bottom of the solar panels. SolaTrim is aesthetically pleasing and easy to install, thanks to its patented "peel-and-stick" installation process.

PREDICTIONS: With 5G technology becoming available,

we think there are going to be some big changes in the way PMPs perform their jobs and use bird management solutions in the next few years. Even now, PMPs want effective bird management solutions that are relatively easy to quote and install. At Nixalite, we have developed our online automated estimate worksheets to help PMPs quickly estimate product quantities and provide instant installation diagrams. Simply enter the dimensions of the areas that you need to protect from birds, and our automated system will calculate the exact amount of Nixalite spikes needed for the job and produce a custom installation diagram in PDF format for you to download or print.

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VIKING PRODUCT SUPPLY

Jacob Barnes

Sales Manager

Our Bird Banisher visual avian deterrent has gone through several component performance upgrades, especially for woodpecker control. These improvements include powdercoating the support rods; inserting swivel grommets to extend the service life in areas with strong winds; and implementing a new, pre-lubricated swivel design that spins in even lower wind conditions than before. For best results on woodpeckers, place Bird Banisher in areas near the damage, and use several devices per area.

We've been working on several new products for the bird control industry, particularly in the realm of incorporating ultraviolet (UV) light as a scare tactic away from buildings and structures. Completion of a two-year field study is anticipated to conclude this fall.

PREDICTIONS: We have seen steady increases in pest bird complaints in the past several years, and we fully

expect that to continue. Controlling pest birds is a very difficult problem for PMPs, as every species of bird typically requires a different approach and set of tools to win the battle. Pest and wildlife control companies that are looking to get into bird control will find no shortage of work, but the work can be challenging. We foresee an increase in training opportunities and social media discussions to aid operators who fight the battle against birds.





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