

nature

Birds keep their 'personal space'

By Timothy Nowicki
special writer

Fall is the season when the behavior of birds changes from defending territories to gregariousness. Juveniles and adults form large flocks seen frequently around the metropolitan Detroit area.

Blackbirds, of 3-5 different species, constitute most of the conspicuous flocks seen at this time of year. Passing the intersection of I-94 and I-275 on the way home from work the other day, I noticed a large flock. They were feeding in the fields and marshes of the cloverleaf, putting on a layer of fat to sustain them on their migration south.

WHEN BIRDS finish feeding, they roost on the towers and cables that dissect the intersection.

Passing by, I noted that all the birds on the wires were evenly spaced from their neighbors. From a distance, they looked like inch marks on a ruler.

A few days later at work, I watched a starling land on a telephone wire among a group of neatly spaced birds. When he landed, birds on either side of him moved away to establish the same distance they had between neighbors before his arrival.

Birds next to the two that moved adjusted their spacing, and so it went on down the line. It reminded me of a game of dominoes.

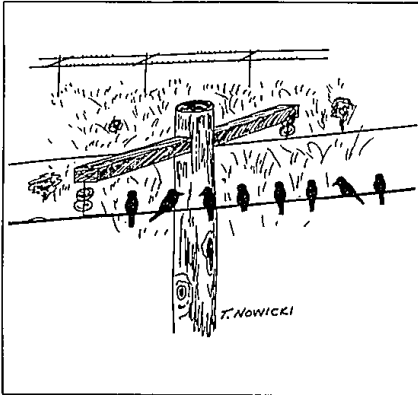
INDIVIDUAL spacing is readily observed in birds, but not restricted to them. Man too has a "personal

space" that he maintains when conditions allow it.

People standing in line adjust the distance between themselves and the people in front of them, particularly strangers, when room permits.

Under crowded conditions, this invisible "bubble" disintegrates, but man then institutes other behavioral actions to compensate for his loss of personal space.

Though each person has his own individual distance, take note of the spacing of people in line at the bank next time.



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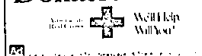
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