

Protecting Livestock from Predation—Coyotes and black vultures are significant predators of livestock in Virginia. According to the Cooperative Sheep Extension Specialist, the number one cause of sheep producers going out of business is coyote predation or the effect of coyote predation combined with low lamb prices. The number of sheep in Virginia has declined from 165,000 in 1990 to 59,000 in 2002.

WS provides technical information to livestock producers on fencing, husbandry, and guard dogs and removes offending coyotes to protect the \$328 million livestock industry in Virginia. In the last 3 years, WS has significantly reduced average predation losses from 17 sheep per farm to 2 sheep, 10 calves per farm to 2 calves, and 26 goats per farm to 7 goats.

Black vultures, one of two vulture species living in Virginia, are another threat to livestock. Black vultures are both predators and scavengers. Calves, cows, and sheep are vulnerable to black vulture predation. WS has assisted livestock producers by providing technical assistance. Between 1996 and 2001, WS helped 92 livestock producers get Federal permits to remove black vultures to protect their livestock.

Protecting Residential Property from Canada Geese—WS gets more requests to manage Canada geese problems than any other wildlife species. Twenty-six percent of all requests for assistance in Virginia involve Canada geese. Concerns include the accumulation of droppings on turf, feces-contaminated water, and aggressive geese that bite children and the elderly. The majority of geese live in urban and suburban areas benefitting from nutritious lawns, ample water, and few predators.

In addition to providing technical assistance and educational programs for the public, WS removes flocks of problem geese that cause property damage, harm water quality, and threaten public health in urban and suburban areas. WS removes about 2,100 resident Canada geese from airports, parks, businesses, retirement communities, medical centers, and residential areas each year. The captured geese are then donated to local food banks to feed people in need.

Protecting Residential Property from Vulture Roosts—Black vultures and turkey vultures congregate from fall through early spring in large roosts that often contain hundreds of birds. Vulture problems are the second most common wildlife complaint received by Virginia WS because their roosts are frequently located in residential areas. The accumulation of fecal droppings and vomit on

homes and vehicles causes property damage and is a health concern to residents. Black vultures can also cause property damage by removing shingles and window gaskets from homes and businesses. Virginia WS assists dozens of towns annually by dispersing roosts and helping local officials obtain Federal permits to remove some vultures in an effort to reinforce harassment programs. WS also provides bird scaring equipment and technical support.

Looking to the Future

Several wildlife damage issues are on the forefront in Virginia and need to be addressed. First, expanding deer, Canada goose, and other wildlife populations are creating an increased risk to aviation safety in Virginia. Regional and local airports have limited funding and often do not have the resources to address significant wildlife risks to aviation safety. The second challenge is finding a way to provide wildlife damage management services to low- and middle-income people. Wildlife damage management is complex, and can be expensive due to many State and Federal laws and regulations. The final issue involves protecting Virginia's rare natural resources. Limited State and Federal funding exists to protect threatened and endangered species from other predatory wildlife. The Nature Conservancy, a private organization, has provided most of the funding to protect Virginia's threatened piping plovers and Wilson's plovers from predation.

Virginia Wildlife Services Funding

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

