



**Animal and Plant Health
Inspection Service**

Wildlife Services

Factsheet

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Managing Vulture Damage



Wildlife Services, a program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), provides Federal leadership and expertise in managing conflicts between people and wildlife to help protect the Nation's agricultural and natural resources, property and infrastructure, and public health and safety.

If you are experiencing vulture damage, our biologists can help by providing information and advice or working onsite to reduce damage. We also conduct research to develop new methods for resolving these conflicts.

Vultures have an adaptable nature and show complex behavior. Combined with increasing populations, this leads to a wide range of conflicts.

Know Before You Act

Vultures are migratory birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, State laws, and regulations. They are managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (part of the U.S. Department of the Interior) and State wildlife agencies. The birds, their nests, and eggs cannot be killed or destroyed without a Migratory Bird Depredation Permit. Individual States and localities may have further restrictions on vulture management. For more specific local information, consult with Wildlife Services staff in your State by calling 1-866-4USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297).

Types of Vultures

Two different vulture species are native to North America: black vultures and turkey vultures. Both raptor species play an important role in the ecosystem, feeding mostly on carrion, or already-dead animals, though black vultures also exhibit predatory behavior toward wildlife and livestock. Physical features of the birds are useful in their role as scavengers: bald heads, sharp beaks, sharp nails, and highly acidic stomach liquids and urine. The latter contributes to damage issues; as a defense, the birds regurgitate a reeking and corrosive vomit. The uric acid kills bacteria on a bird's legs, but it can also be corrosive. Sharp nails and beaks are highly destructive to synthetic surfaces.

Populations of both species have increased in abundance and range in the past 30 years and may continue to do so into the future. Vultures often form large roosts and loafing areas, numbering from a few dozen to hundreds of individual birds.

Vultures have an adaptable nature and show complex behavior. Those traits, combined with their increasing populations and proximity to humans, contribute to a wide range of conflicts between vultures and people. These





The turkey vulture (left) is the larger of the two species, weighing about 4 pounds with a 6-foot wingspan. The adult's featherless, bright red head is distinctive, and the body feathers are mostly dark brown/black.

The black vulture (right) weighs less than 4 pounds with a wingspan of less than 5 feet. It is mostly black with a gray head.

can occur in agricultural settings, as well as suburban and urban areas. Wildlife Services works closely with farmers, homeowners, State and local governments, and industries to resolve such conflicts.

Conflicts With People

Property Damage. Large groups of vultures may roost or occupy woodlots near homes and can be destructive. Black vultures often damage homes and commercial buildings by tearing window caulking, roof shingles, vent seals, rubber roof liners, and pool covers. They can damage vehicles by scratching paint, removing rubber seals and wipers, and ripping vinyl seat covers from boats and tractors.

Both black and turkey vultures also affect the quality of life for area residents. The birds' feces and vomit can accumulate, especially on roofs of houses, office buildings, communication towers, and electrical transmission structures. When this happens on electrical transmission towers, arcing and power outages may occur, at great expense to utility companies. When this happens on communication towers often used as roosting sites by vultures, it hampers maintenance activities and impacts the longevity of the structure.

Agricultural Damage. Both turkey and black vultures normally feed on animal carcasses. Black vultures, however, can also attack and kill calves, lambs, piglets, adult livestock incapacitated while birthing, and other weak animals. This predatory behavior often results in serious injury or death to livestock, as vultures target the eyes and soft tissues. In most cases, affected animals must be euthanized because of their injuries. A 2017 USDA report on cattle and calf losses in the United States reported that vultures were responsible for 10 percent of all calves lost to predators. Before allowing cell towers on their lands, ranchers should be aware that vultures commonly roost on cell or satellite towers. Wildlife specialists can suggest methods to discourage tower use by the birds.

Health and Safety Concerns. Accumulations of feces, as well as vulture roosting and soaring behaviors, create health and safety concerns. Droppings near homes and drinking water sources may pose health concerns for individuals and municipalities. Many people find the white-wash stains of vulture droppings and their associated ammonia odors offensive. Additionally, concentrated vulture populations can be hazardous to aircraft, especially when close to airport flight paths, because of the birds' large size characteristic soaring behavior. This behavior increases their chances of being struck by low-flying aircraft.

Vulture management is complicated and site-specific, so consulting with a wildlife professional is vital to successfully resolving damage.

How We Can Help

Vulture management is complicated and site-specific, so consulting with a wildlife professional is vital to successfully resolving damage. Our Wildlife Services staff can help in many ways. This may include giving information on habitat management or strategies and tools for dispersing vultures from areas of conflict. Our biologists can document vulture damage and start the depredation permit application process when necessary. In some cases, we may enter into cooperative service agreements to resolve these conflicts.

We can also evaluate the damage situation and recommend possible techniques for resolving the specific problems. For example, a vulture effigy, hung correctly, will often scatter a roost. Sound- and light-devices (i.e., propane cannons or pyrotechnics and lasers) also may be used to disperse vultures, especially at roost locations at night or as birds return to settle for the night. Motion-activated sprinklers and inflatable air dancers may be useful for dispersing vultures from rooftops. Obvious attractants, such as open garbage, dead livestock and outdoor feeding of domestic or wild animals, can be removed or excluded, although the source of a site's attraction can be unclear. In some situations, selective, lethal removal of birds may be needed to resolve damage effectively.

Science-Based Solutions

Wildlife Services' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) conducts research on a wide variety of wildlife damage issues. Scientists at the NWRC's Florida field station carry out studies to better understand vulture populations and their ecology and behavior in order to develop strategies that help minimize property damage, protect agriculture, and relieve health and safety concerns caused by vultures.



Integrated techniques for resolving conflicts with vultures may include using real or constructed effigies/models.

Learn More

For more information about managing vulture damage, or other Wildlife Services operations, call your State office at 1-866-4USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297) or visit our Web site at www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife-damage.

Wildlife Services is not the only source of wildlife damage management services available to the public. Private-sector wildlife damage management providers may also be available. Wildlife Services does not endorse or recommend any specific private-sector provider or the use of any specific product over another.

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