



Managing Vulture Damage

Vultures play an important role in our ecosystem, feeding mostly on carrion (flesh of dead animals). But as their populations have increased in size and range over the last 30 years, so have conflicts between vultures and people. If you're having problems with vultures, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Wildlife Services can provide information and advice or work onsite to help reduce damage and resolve conflicts.

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

Know Before You Act

Vultures are 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 specific local information, contact your State Wildlife Services office by calling 1-866-4USDA-WS (866-487-3297).

Types of Vultures

Black and turkey vultures are native to North America. They have bald heads, sharp beaks and nails, and highly acidic stomach liquids and urine. They often form large roosts and loafing areas, numbering from a few dozen to hundreds of birds. Vultures are adaptable and show complex behavior. These features make them excellent scavengers but can also cause damage to property and lead to conflicts with people in agricultural, suburban, and urban settings.



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

Damage Caused by Vultures

Property Damage. Large groups of vultures can roost or occupy woodlots near homes and be destructive. Black vultures often damage 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 and office buildings, communication towers, and electrical transmission structures. This can lead to arcing and power outages, at great expense to utility companies. It can also hamper maintenance activities around communications towers, impacting the longevity of these structures.

Agricultural Damage. Both turkey and black vultures normally feed on animal carcasses. Black vultures, however, may also attack and kill calves, lambs, piglets, adult animals during 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

ethanized 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.

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 and characteristic soaring behavior. This behavior increases their chances of being struck by low-flying aircraft.

How We Can Help

Vulture management is complicated and site-specific. 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 specific problems. For example, a vulture effigy, hung correctly, may scatter a roost. Sound- and light- devices (i.e., propane cannons or pyrotechnics and lasers) may also 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. We can help you identify and remove or



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

avoid potential attractants, such as open garbage, dead livestock, and outdoor feeding of domestic or wild animals. In some situations, selective, lethal removal of birds may be needed to resolve damage effectively.

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

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 go to www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife-damage.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

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.