

## Wildlife Services

Protecting People  
Protecting Agriculture  
Protecting Wildlife

State Report

FY 2015

# Virgin Islands



### Contact Information:

Ken Gruver, U.S. Virgin Islands  
Wildlife Services State Director  
School of Forestry and Wildlife  
602 Duncan Drive, Room 118  
Extension Hall  
Auburn University, AL 36849

Phone: (334) 844-5670  
FAX: (334) 844-5321  
Toll-Free Number: 1-866-4USDAWS  
(1-866-487-3297)  
Kenneth.S.Gruver@aphis.usda.gov  
www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife-damage

### USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in the Virgin Islands

Every day, the Wildlife Services (WS) program in the Virgin Islands helps citizens, organizations, industries, and Government agencies resolve conflicts with wildlife to protect agriculture, other property, and natural resources, and to safeguard human health and safety. WS' professional wildlife biologists and specialists implement effective, selective, and responsible strategies that value wildlife, the environment, and the resources being protected. WS manages wildlife damage according to its public trust stewardship responsibilities as a Federal natural resource management program. WS supports the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, based on the principle that wildlife resources are owned collectively and held in trust by Government for the benefit of present and future generations.

The U.S. Virgin Islands encompass a series of Caribbean islands including St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix, governed as a U.S. Territory. The Islands contain a mix of tropical habitats and associated wildlife species. Wildlife Services (WS) projects are managed out of the WS-Alabama office and include minimizing wildlife/aircraft conflicts at island airports and managing invasive species such as mongoose and black rats on National Park Service lands.

### Applying Science and Expertise to Help the Public

WS frequently provides information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this technical assistance can be provided in person, by telephone or through the mail or internet. During 2013, WS delivered technical advice and recommendations to more than 1.6 million people. In most cases, landowners and resource managers use technical information to implement habitat management and other methods to reduce damage on their properties.

WS also implements solutions on-site, through direct management assistance, when the wildlife-related problem is complex and cannot be safely or effectively resolved by others. WS' National Wildlife Research Center conducts scientific research and assessments to refine methods and develop new science-based solutions to wildlife challenges.

WS applies and recommends an integrated wildlife damage management approach that incorporates biological, economic, public, environmental, and other information into decision making. WS implements a wide range of damage management activities; the following highlight WS' role in protecting resources in the Virgin Islands.

**Protecting the Virgin Islands from Invasive Species** — Nonnative species that cause harm are collectively known as invasive species. Invasive species may prey upon, displace, or otherwise harm native species. Some also alter ecosystems, transport disease, interfere with crop production, or cause illnesses in animals and humans. Executive Order 13112 establishes Federal leadership responsibilities regarding invasive species: to prevent the introduction of invasive species and to provide for their eradication or control to minimize the economic, ecological, and human health impacts.

In addition to completing a non-native black rat control project on Buck Island National Monument with the U.S. Park Service, the WS-Virgin Islands biologists assist the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Virgin Islands Division of Fish and Wildlife with control of non-native rats, feral swine, feral cats, feral dogs, and mongoose populations. Invasive, or non-native, species are damaging native flora and fauna on many of the local islands. If left alone, invasive species populations damage rare and sensitive native vegetation and limit the reproduction of endangered sea turtles and migratory birds.

Before WS implemented wildlife damage management measures at Buck Island National Monument, rats were destroying eggs and eating the young turtle hatchlings as they emerged. Since WS completed its efforts, the island vegetation and native wildlife have begun to show signs of restoration. WS continues to monitor Buck Island to ensure that rats do not become reestablished. WS has worked on nine different islands to help remove predation threats from rats. This has also helped in the reintroduction of the critically endangered St. Croix ground lizard on Buck Island.

**Protecting Human Health and Safety at Airports** Globally, wildlife strikes with aircraft have killed more than 231 people and destroyed more than 220 aircraft since 1988. Wildlife strikes cause more than 590,000 hours of aircraft down time and cost the nation's civil aviation industry approximately \$937 million annually. American military aircraft sustain losses exceeding \$10 million annually. WS has assisted the Nation's airports for decades and collaborates closely with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Department of Defense, and other Government agencies. WS provided assistance to 839 airports in 2014, including advice, training, on-site evaluations and assessments of wildlife hazards, and direct operational



United States Department of Agriculture  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

management to reduce wildlife strikes.

Tourism is the U.S. Virgin Islands' largest industry, with most visitors arriving by air at the two major airports in St. Thomas and St. Croix. Both airports are located on the coast where birds are abundant. WS has cooperated with the FAA and the Virgin Islands Port Authority to conduct wildlife hazard evaluations. WS has also provided management plans and recommendations to successfully reduce the presence of wildlife at these facilities and better protect passengers and aircraft from the hazards associated with bird strikes.

**Protecting Threatened and Endangered Species and Other Natural Resources** — WS contributes to the conservation of species listed as threatened and endangered (T&E) through partnerships with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), State wildlife agencies, organizations, and landowners. During 2014, WS safeguarded populations of 162 T&E species nationwide by reducing the impacts of predation and competition from more abundant species, consulting with the FWS to ensure that WS programs do not jeopardize listed species, and developing and sharing information that contributed to conservation of listed species.

The Virgin Islands is home to the largest leatherback turtle nesting population in the United States at Sandy Point National Wildlife Refuge and to the critically endangered St. Croix ground lizard at several small islands surrounding St. Croix. WS helps to protect these two species as well as other sea turtles with population management of invasive species including feral cats and dogs.

**Monitoring and Controlling Wildlife Diseases** — WS works with Federal and State wildlife, health and agriculture agencies to monitor and conduct surveillance for diseases in wildlife that could impact agriculture or human health. The program's Wildlife Disease Biologists act as WS' first responders through the National Wildlife Disease Program's Surveillance and Emergency Response System (SERS). Information obtained through disease surveillance in wildlife populations enables agencies to better prepare for and respond to outbreaks and emergencies.

WS has a long history of responding to emergency requests for assistance from farmers, ranchers, and others. Increasingly, WS is asked to assist in responding to natural and manmade disasters such as hurricanes, floods, and oil spills. On emergency response teams, WS employees use their specialized skills to capture and safely handle almost any wildlife species found in the United States. WS expertise has been instrumental in recovering wild and domestic animals, hazing wildlife away from contaminated areas, and conducting wildlife disease surveillance and emergency control. WS' National Wildlife Disease Program biologists have extensive training in the Incident Command System, and can be mobilized quickly.

#### **Looking to the Future**

WS continues to provide the citizens of the Virgin Islands with safe, effective, and responsible management assistance for a variety of wildlife damage problems. The potential for human-wildlife conflicts likely will increase and WS' ability to respond will depend on the availability of personnel and resources, as well as legislative authorities to support these activities.

Public safety has become a growing concern for wildlife managers. This is particularly true at airports. Increased travel through the Virgin Islands airports, coupled with expanding bird numbers has created a greater need for airport managers to deal with threats posed by wildlife.

A second issue that faces the region is the impact of invasive species on native plants and animals. These problems are significant and growing rapidly. WS' partnerships with the National Park Service and Virgin Islands Fish and Wildlife Service have enhanced our ability to provide assistance with these problems. A

greater need remains, however, if WS is to adequately protect native species.

WS strives to meet the demands for assistance within the constraints of its existing resources and capabilities so that all citizens have access to program services. Collaborative, partner-based approaches will be increasingly important among natural resource, agriculture, and health agencies to meet public needs.

#### **Wildlife Services Funding in the Virgin Islands**

In addition to receiving Federally allocated funds, WS also receives funding from program beneficiaries such as agricultural producers, airports, individual citizens, businesses, organizations, and other Federal, State, and local Government agencies. See charts for sources of funding and resources protected.

#### **Top 5 Major WS Assistance Activities in the Virgin Islands**

- Protecting passengers and aircraft from collisions with wildlife
- Protecting threatened and endangered species
- Reducing impacts of invasive species
- Protecting livestock through cooperative efforts to monitor for cattle bont tick
- Protecting human health and safety from roosting birds

#### **Top 4 WS Research Projects of Interest to the Virgin Islands**

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Assessing and developing methods to control rodents and invasive species
- Developing chemistry-based tools for wildlife damage management
- Improving assessment, sampling, and economic methods for wildlife damage management

#### **Major Cooperators:**

- National Park Service
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Virgin Islands Port Authority
- U.S. Public Health Service, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Virgin Islands Fish and Wildlife Service
- Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture