

Using Effigies to Disperse Nuisance Vulture Roosts

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What is an effigy?

An effigy is a “full or partial representation...” of a person or object. An effective vulture effigy for dispersing vultures at roost sites can be a fresh vulture carcass, a taxidermic preparation, or an artificial likeness.

WS specialists installing a vulture effigy made from natural and synthetic materials. *Photo by USDA WS*

Overview

The following guidelines were developed primarily for effigy use at vulture roosts in wooded or forested habitats, but the same principles apply for roosts located on towers and at other sites, or for nuisance vulture situations caused by daytime vulture activity. **Regardless of the situation or roost habitat, proper effigy placement is crucial to the tool’s success.**

When deciding where to hang an effigy:

- Identify locations with the highest bird activity or use, often indicated by an accumulation of feces and feathers;
- Place the effigy where it will be visible to birds coming into the roost;
- Hang it from a prominent branch or support structure; and
- Make it inaccessible to perching vultures to prevent the birds from damaging it.

Vulture Carcass Effigies

Effigies are often created from vulture carcasses but can also be made from a combination of natural and synthetic materials. Once a vulture has been acquired under a legal take permit, determine whether a long term or temporary effigy is needed. If the effigy will be used for a relatively long period of time (e.g., # of days/months) or at multiple sites, the bird should be prepared by a taxidermist and treated with a spray preservative, such as Scotchgard™ Leather and Suede. Position the prepared bird so it resembles a dead bird hung by its feet with one or both wings hanging down in an outstretched manner. If the effigy will be used temporarily (e.g., up to 3 months, depending on weather conditions) and if odor is not a concern, use an intact carcass.



Proper positioning of vulture carcass with outstretched wing. *Photo by USDA WS*

Recommended Materials

The following method and materials are best used for hanging effigies at vulture roost sites and can be found at most outdoor or general merchandise stores. Other methods such as using a fishing rod and weight, or an arborist throw bag can be used depending on the height and complexity of the desired placement of the effigy, however this is our method of choice due to greater accuracy and efficiency in placing the line.

- a bow and fishing arrow (fiberglass or other heavy arrow with line attachment point and field point);
- archery fishing set-up with rod, reel, and 20-40# line;
- spool of 1/8" - 1/4" effigy attachment line (nylon or other synthetic weather resistant line);
- heavy duty fishing type snap swivels;
- a small, smooth weight (e.g. sinker) or sandbag that can be used to adjust the line.



Example bow, archery fishing set-up and fishing arrow. Photo by USDA WS

Placing the Effigy Attachment Line

In wooded roosts, the attachment line can be placed using a compound bow fitted with a commercially available fishing set-up (such as Zebco 808 reel mounded on a small rod attached to the stabilizer hole and a fishing arrow). Alternatively, it is possible to use a standard fishing rod with a fishing arrow (fiberglass field point arrow with a small hole near the nock for line attachment), however this requires a second person to hold the rod and ensure that the line does not become tangled. Twenty-pound monofilament line or braided line is recommended because of its strength and flexibility.

Choose a branch or attachment point that is high and prominent. For best results, the effigy should be highly visible to vultures entering the roost. **The space directly below the attachment point should be free of branches or other obstructions that could entangle the effigy during heavy winds.** For example, from an attachment point 5 feet out on a branch the effigy should hang down no more than 5 feet to prevent it becoming tangled in the trunk of the tree.

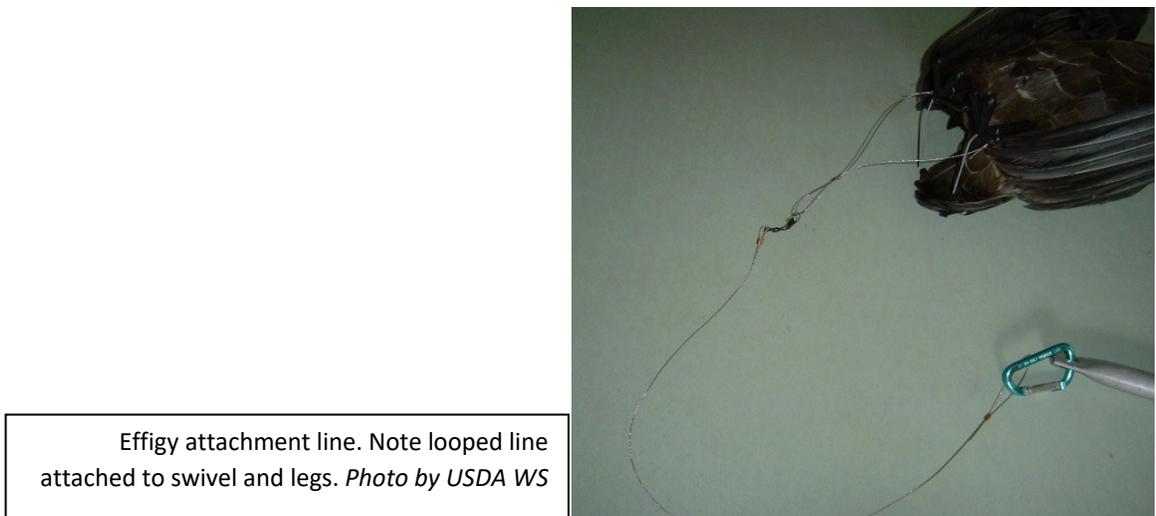
Shoot the arrow over the attachment branch. Attempt to limit the number of branches the line goes over by putting tension on the line after it passes over the attachment branch. Remove the arrow and secure the attachment line to the fishing line. Pull the effigy attachment line back over the branch, remove the fishing line, and attach a heavy-duty snap swivel to the effigy attachment line. If the line has gone over multiple branches, it may be necessary to pull it back from all but the main attachment branch. This can be done by attaching a smooth-edged weight to the end of the line

closest to the excess branches, pulling the weight over the branches until it reaches the effigy attachment branch, and then lowering the weight.

For lower attachment points, it may be possible to use a using an arborist throw sack slung over the branch or attachment point. For towers or other structures, a professional climber or other authorized maintenance person should install the effigy from a prominent point.

Attaching the Effigy

To attach the effigy, take 2 to 3 feet of the same material as the attachment line, fold it in half and tie a small loop at the midpoint. This is the point at which the attachment line and snap swivel are connected. Next, tie the ends of the looped line to the legs of the effigy just above the feet, making sure to wrap the line twice around the leg before tying a secure knot. The knotted loop ensures that in the event one of the leg knots comes loose, the effigy will remain in place.



Putting the Effigy to Work

Raising the effigy into place may require two people depending on the weight of the bird, the height of the attachment point, and the number of branches the line contacts. It often helps to get the effigy moving by having one person push up on it while a second person pulls on the other end of the line.

Raise the effigy as high as possible while evaluating its visibility, whether it can become entangled, and whether it may be accessible to perching vultures. Stand back from the roost and look at the effigy from different angles to determine if its height and prominence is satisfactory. Finally, tie the trailing end of the attachment line to a secure location that minimizes potential interference by pedestrian, wildlife, or other traffic. Wrap and secure the excess line for later use should the effigy need to be lowered for maintenance or replacement. Avoid tying the line to places (such as along a fence top, horizontal branch, or other movement corridor) where chewing damage by rodents is likely. The effigy should be visible to incoming birds, hanging upside down with its wings outstretched, and ready to disperse the roost.

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(Mention of brand names does not constitute endorsement by the USDA. For technical questions regarding effigy use and installation, please contact John S. Humphrey at the USDA National Wildlife Research Center's Florida Field Station - 352-375-2229; email: john.s.humphrey@usda.gov).