



USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services  
2820 East University Avenue  
Gainesville, FL 32641  
Tel: (352) 377-5556; 375-2229

## **VULTURE DAMAGE**

Vulture damage may include killing or injuring livestock, damaging property and equipment, endangering the health and safety of humans, or general nuisance.

### **Livestock Damage**

Both turkey and black vultures normally eat carrion. However, black vultures are aggressive, and reportedly attack and kill newly-born calves, lambs, and piglets and other sick or helpless animals. Newborn stocks are especially vulnerable for the first few hours or days following birth. Vultures have also been reported to attack and kill downed or sick livestock, cows giving birth and occasionally young birds (i.e. wading birds and chicks of other larger birds) in the absence of the parents. Vultures may additionally cause flesh wounds by biting young or slow moving animals.

### **Property Damage**

For unknown reasons, vultures have an attraction to materials made of vinyl, plastic, latex, or other soft materials. Property damage includes tearing window caulking, roof shingles, vinyl seat covers of boats, tractors, and cars, swimming pool covers and enclosures, and boat canopies. Vultures' droppings or feces can deface and damage roofs of houses, office buildings, and electrical transmission towers. The accumulation of feces on electrical transmission towers has caused power outages.

### **Health and Safety Threats**

On occasion, vultures represent health and safety threats to people by contaminating water sources with their feces. This contamination occurs when coliform bacteria in the feces enters cisterns, water towers or springs from which residents draw water.

Concentrations of vultures can also be hazardous to flying aircraft. This is exacerbated when vultures are attracted to sanitary landfills or wooded roosts that are situated in close proximity to airports.

## **Nuisance**

Vultures often create a nuisance due to the white-wash effect (feces and pellets) and odor their feces leave at roost sites. Harassment of pets has been reported. Some people/cultures experience a general feeling of doom or discomfort when they see vultures hang around the homes.

## **DAMAGE PREVENTION AND CONTROL METHODS**

### **Exclusion**

Exclusion is a method used to prevent the birds from entering a location or prevent them from perching on structures whereby they can cause damage. Exclusion can be accomplished by:

- 1) Attaching a taut wire about eight inches high across a peak of a roof or other perching structure;
- 2) Use an anti-perch electrical track [sold by bird control companies];
- 3) Use anti-perch spikes, [also sold by bird control companies].

A wire grid system erected over a small open farrowing, calving or lambing pen may discourage vultures from entering the pen during the critical first few days while the young livestock are most vulnerable.

### **Repellents**

Visual: The presence of dead vultures in the roosts or other affected areas seems to act as a repellent to other vultures. Suspending a vulture carcass or vulture likeness (effigy) in a prominent, highly visible location has proven to be effective in a variety of situations. (See legal aspects).

Vultures can be moved from a roost with a low-powered hand held laser (Avian Dissuader™). The laser is more effective in low light conditions. The red light of the laser scares the birds without harming them. Even though vultures leave the site, they will likely return on subsequent days, so additional harassment will be needed.

Acoustic: Pyrotechnics (fireworks made for bird control) can be effectively used to move vultures from an area. These devices make noises up in the air, near the birds. There are several types of exploding and whistling devices. The “shell cracker” is a 12-gauge shotgun shell containing a fire cracker projectile that explodes after traveling up to 150 yards. They are fired from a single-barrel, open-bore shot gun. These exploding shells are extremely useful because of their range and loud noise.

Two products which are fired from a 15mm launcher (starter pistol) will effectively move vultures with persistent use. These products are known by several names: Whistlers, whistle bombs, bird

bombs, or bird whistlers. Whistlers travel 75 to 125 yards making a loud whistling noise and leaving a trail of smoke when they are fired from the launcher. Bird bombs travel 35 to 45 yards and explode making a loud “bang”. Bird bombs are especially effective if the birds are in trees or attempting to land on trees. Noises up in the air near the birds are much more effective than those at ground level.

Automatic LP gas exploders (propane cannons) and amplified electronic noises can be used to enhance the effectiveness of pyrotechnics.

Consult state, county and local laws or ordinances regarding noise and the possession and use of firearms and pyrotechnics prior to initiating a harassment program in urban areas.

To be effective, harassment with lasers or acoustic devices must be diligent and constant, and initiated as soon as the problem is recognized. The use of various harassment tools simultaneously increases the likelihood of dispersing the vultures. To disperse a roost, begin harassment at dusk as the vultures come to roost and continue until dark. One to two weeks may be required to relocate a roost. Efforts should be continued as needed to prevent the birds from reentering the roost.

*Cultural:* Removing food sources or attractants, such as dead livestock and road killed animals, lessens the likelihood of vultures being attracted to an area. Livestock producers that incinerate or bury dead animals may still suffer black vulture predation as the killing behavior appears to be learned. Vulture predation can be disrupted by lambing, farrowing, or calving in or near barns or other buildings. Modification of the roost (i.e., removing roosting trees) may enhance roost dispersal efforts.

*Shooting:* Shooting is an alternative method which may provide limited short-term results, and it is best used as part of a multi-faceted harassment program. (See Legal Aspects)

*Harassment additives/enhancements:* Water guns/hoses, and paintball.

### **LEGAL ASPECTS**

Vultures are protected by Federal Law and cannot be killed or injured without proper permits from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. If you need assistance with vulture problems you may contact us at:

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*Permit applications can be obtained through our office.*