

# Wildlife Services

Protecting People  
Protecting Agriculture  
Protecting Wildlife

## Factsheet

October 2010

# Vulture Damage Management



Wildlife Services (WS), a program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), provides Federal leadership and expertise to resolve wildlife conflicts that threaten the Nation's agricultural and natural resources, human health and safety, and property.

The program's biologists provide direct management assistance and information to reduce vulture damage. They also conduct research to develop new methods for resolving these conflicts.

Vultures have an adaptable nature and exhibit complex behavior. These characteristics—combined with increasing vulture populations—are resulting in a wide range of conflicts between vultures and people. Conflicts occur in agricultural as well as in suburban and urban settings. WS works closely with farmers, homeowners, State and local governments, and industries to resolve conflicts with vultures.

Two different vulture species are native to North America: black vultures and turkey vultures. These scavengers play an important role in the ecosystem, feeding mostly on carrion, or already dead animals. Extremely adaptable, vultures thrive in close proximity to people.

Vultures have bald heads, sharp beaks, and highly acidic stomach liquids and urine. These physical characteristics help them in their role as scavengers, but contribute to the damage that the birds cause. The birds regurgitate a reeking and corrosive vomit as a natural defense. Their uric acid kills bacteria on their legs, but it is also corrosive. Additionally, the vulture's sharp nails and beaks are highly destructive to manmade surfaces.

Populations of both species have increased in abundance and range in the past 30 years. These increases may continue into the future. Vultures often form large roosts and loafing areas, numbering from a few dozen to hundreds of individual birds. Conflicts arise when these congregations form near people.

## Conflicts with People

**Property Damage**—Large groups of vultures may roost or occupy woodlots near people's homes. Their behavior 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. Damage to nearby vehicles includes scratched paint,

*The turkey vulture is the larger, weighing about 4 pounds with a 6-foot wingspan. Mostly dark brown-black, the adult's featherless, bright red head is distinctive. The black vulture weighs less than 4 pounds with a wingspan of less than 5 feet.*



removal of rubber seals and wipers, and the ripping of vinyl seat covers from boats and tractors.

Black and turkey vultures can affect people's quality of life due to accumulations of feces and regurgitations, especially on roofs of houses, office buildings, communication towers, and electrical transmission structures. Where these accumulations occur on electrical transmission towers, arcing and power outages may occur, at great expense to utility companies.

**Agricultural Damage**—Both turkey and black vultures normally eat carrion. Black vultures, however, also may attack and kill calves, lambs, piglets, and other weak animals. This predatory behavior often results in serious injury to livestock, as vultures target the eyes and soft membranous tissues. These domestic animals often must be euthanized due to the extent of their injuries.

**Health and Safety Concerns**—Health and safety concerns relate to the accumulations of guano (manure) and their roosting and soaring behaviors. Droppings near homes and drinking water sources may pose health concerns for individuals and municipalities. Many people view the white-wash effect of their droppings and associated ammonia odors as offensive.

Concentrations of vultures can also be hazardous to aircraft, especially when close to airport flight paths. Vultures are particularly prone to strikes because their soaring behavior increases the chances of being struck by low-flying aircraft.

### Management Assistance

Vultures are migratory birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, State laws, and regulations. They are managed by the U.S. Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service and by 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 impose further restrictions on vulture management. WS State offices may be consulted for more specific local information.

WS provides advice and direct management to help people resolve vulture conflicts. Vulture management is complicated and site-specific, so consultation with wildlife professionals is vital to successfully resolving damage situations.

Technical assistance may include information about habitat management or strategies and tools for dispersing vultures from areas where conflicts occur. WS biologists also assist by documenting vulture damage and starting the depredation permit application process. In some cases, WS may enter into cooperative service agreements to resolve these conflicts in the field.



*Integrated techniques for resolving conflicts with vultures may include use of real or constructed effigies.*

**Vulture management is complicated and site-specific, so consultation with wildlife professionals is vital to successfully resolving damage situations.**

WS biologists can assist in evaluating damage situations and identifying possible resolution techniques. Sound- and light-devices may be used to disperse the vultures, especially at the roost location as birds return to settle for the night. A vulture effigy hung correctly may scatter a roost in many instances. Obvious attractants, such as open garbage, can be removed or enclosed. In some situations, lethal removal of birds may be required to resolve damage effectively.

### Science-Based Solutions

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

### Additional Information

For more information about managing vulture damage, or other WS operations, contact the local office at 1-866-4USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297) or visit the Website [www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife\\_damage/](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage/).



Protecting People | Protecting Agriculture | Protecting Wildlife



**United States Department of Agriculture**

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is an equal opportunity provider and employer.