Ways to deter black vultures

Source: Matt Springer, assistant extension professor of wildlife management

Black vultures are native to Kentucky. As a result, they are present here year-round, but you may be seeing more of them now for a few reasons. Their overall populations have increased in the state in the past couple of years. They are also a migratory species with a recently expanded range that stretches from Canada to South America, so you will see a lot more birds in Kentucky during the fall and winter as the birds from the northern range migrate south.

While they are usually carrion feeders, black vultures will attack and kill small- to medium-sized animals, including young livestock like calves, piglets, goats and lambs. This is why they are a nemesis to many Kentucky farmers.

Not to mention, black vultures can roost with as many as 100 other vultures, which can make them seem particularly menacing. Their roosting can cause structural damage, because the birds have a bad habitat of picking at materials that have a rubbery texture. They have been known to damage pool covers, roof shingles, rubber roof liners, vent seals and window caulking.

Since black vultures are federally protected by the 1918 Migratory Bird Treaty Act, you cannot kill them or destroy their nests or eggs without a federal permit. Even if you do get a permit, these birds are extremely smart and very difficult to kill. However, it is legal to take steps to make the birds uncomfortable by making loud noises or spraying them with a garden hose.

It is also legal to use effigies to deter them from your property. Effigies are perhaps the easiest way to deter black vultures. When properly displayed, these depictions of dead vultures are extremely effective at getting these birds to move on their way. Effigies need to be hung high and upside down by their feet with their wings spread, so the vultures can see them from a distance.

Since many Kentucky livestock producers have animals that give birth during the fall and winter, putting the expectant mothers in one pasture and hanging an effigy in that area is very effective at keeping black vultures away from newborn livestock. For the most success, make sure the effigy can be seen from all angles and any location in a birthing pasture. You may need to hang more than one effigy to accomplish this.

Building your own effigy is easy and inexpensive, as you can reuse many items commonly found around your farm. Matt Springer and Jonathan Matthews from the University of Kentucky Department of Forestry and Natural Resources have developed a pattern and directions to make a black vulture effigy using a rubber stall mat that you can freely access and print online at <http://forestry.ca.uky.edu/files/forfs18-03.pdf>. The entire project costs less than $30 and takes about two hours to complete.

 For information about black vulture control, contact the (COUNTY NAME) office of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

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