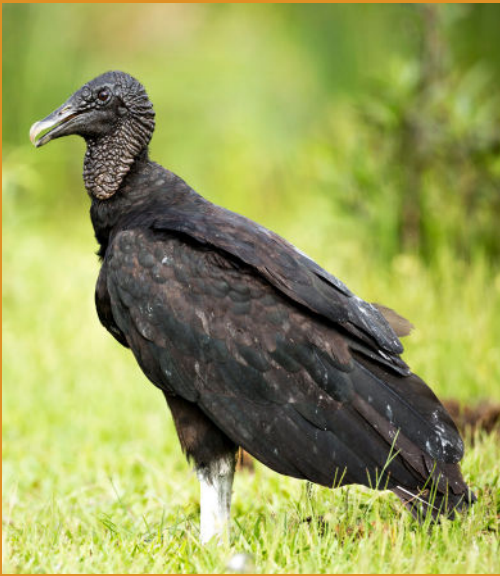




# Managing Black Vulture Predation

## Non-lethal Methods

Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry  
Oklahoma USDA Wildlife Services



## ABOUT VULTURES

There are two different North America vulture species: **black vultures and turkey vultures**. Both species play an important role in the ecosystem by feeding on carrion, or deceased animals. Black vultures also exhibit predatory behavior toward wildlife and livestock.

The vultures' **physical features** are useful in their role as scavengers: bald heads, sharp beaks, sharp nails, and highly acidic stomach liquids and urine. The latter contributes to damage issues; as a defense, the birds regurgitate a reeking and corrosive vomit. The uric acid kills bacteria on a bird's legs, but it can also be corrosive.

Vultures often form large roosts and loafing areas, numbering from a few dozen to hundreds of individual birds. Vultures have an adaptable nature and show complex behavior. Those traits, combined with their increasing population and proximity to humans, contribute to a wide range of conflicts between vultures and people.

## KNOW BEFORE YOU ACT

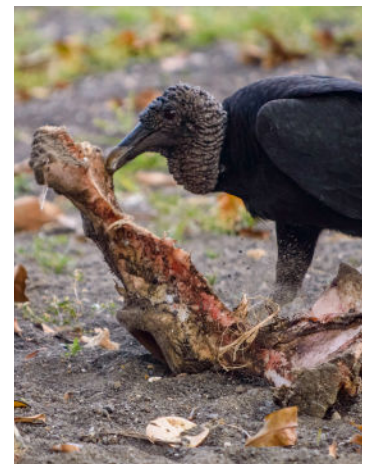
Black vultures are migratory birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, State laws, and regulations. They are managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and State wildlife agencies. The birds, their nests, and eggs cannot be killed or destroyed without a Migratory Bird Depredation Permit.

In Oklahoma, livestock producers may apply for and obtain a depredation permit administered through the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture Food and Forestry (ODAFF). Lethal control of black vultures is only allowed to reinforce non-lethal methods. Therefore, it is important to know, understand and implement non-lethal methods to protect your livestock.

## LIVESTOCK PREDATION

Both turkey and black vultures feed on animal carcasses. Black vultures, however, may also attack and kill calves, lambs, piglets, adult livestock incapacitated while birthing, and other weak animals. Black vultures target the eyes and soft tissues, often resulting in serious injury or death to livestock. In most cases, affected animals must be euthanized because of their injuries.

A 2017 USDA report on cattle and calf losses in the United States reported that vultures were responsible for 10% of all calves lost to predators.



## NON-LETHAL METHODS

Livestock husbandry methods to prevent vulture depredations are the best method of protecting livestock.

For small operations, confined birth areas (corrals or small, supervised lots) may be the most economical prevention method. Synchronized breeding, which concentrates birth into a short period of time, makes it easier and less expensive to confine animals for birth. Confinement increases labor and feed expenses,

## NON-LETHAL METHODS (CONT'D)

Similarly, guard animals may assist in protecting but may be economical for operators experiencing large losses. The removal of dead trees will also aid in deterring birds from congregating over livestock.

livestock from vulture depredations. Guard dogs, llamas or donkeys which are bonded to sheep or goats may physically intimidate vultures and prevent some losses. Guard dogs also consume after-birth, reducing vulture attraction. No research has been done on the effect of guard animals on vulture damage to livestock.



Black vulture roosts should be discouraged in pastures where livestock are giving birth. Cutting down roost trees may be warranted if vultures begin to concentrate in pastures.

Black vultures will also be attracted to a roost site due to an abundance of a stable food supplies. The proper disposal of dead livestock and removal of other human-made foods may reduce the attractiveness of possible roost sites in pastures. If vultures are using communication towers or electrical transmission lines for roosting within pastures, you can harass them with pyrotechnics from sunset to dusk and use lasers after dark to move the birds away. Pyrotechnics, launchers, shell crackers, propane cannons, and other tools can be purchased readily from a variety of commercial sources. Check local noise ordinances prior to utilizing these devices.

### **Management of vultures is most effective when a variety of control methods is used.**

Livestock producers may implement non-injurious harassment of black vultures without a permit. Harassment methods include chasing birds on foot or with vehicles, using agricultural pyrotechnics to make noise to frighten the birds and the use of effigies to scare birds from the roost.

Effigies, whether taxidermy mounts of a dead vulture, an artificial replica or one of the birds removed under depredation permit, can be hung in an up-side-down position where vultures can see it. Artificial effigies do not require a permit. Effigies should be placed in an area where vultures are roosting. This method is known to effectively disperse roosting behavior within 5-7 days of effigy placement. It is not recommended to place effigies in areas where they are found concentrating around livestock, as this will not be as effective.

## ODAFF WILDLIFE SERVICES BLACK VULTURE LIVESTOCK PROTECTION PILOT PROGRAM

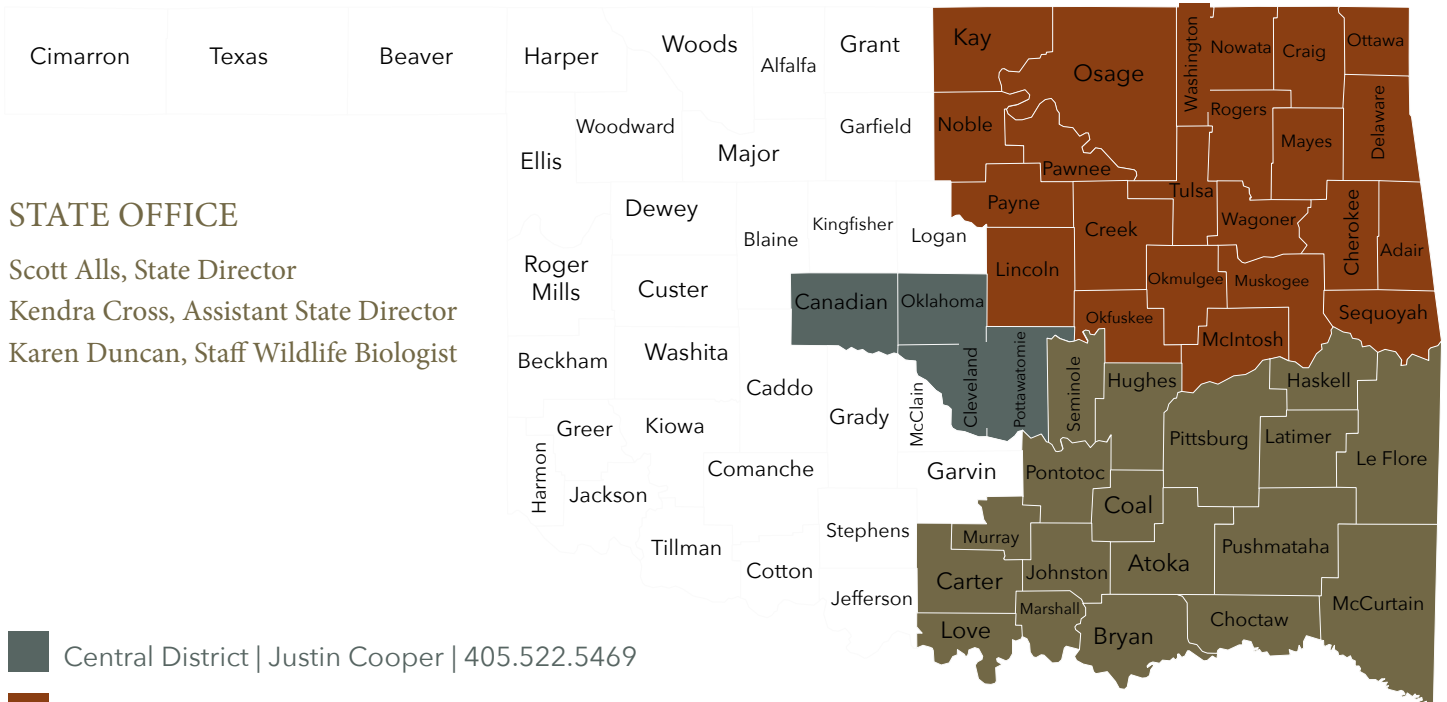
Producers participating in the ODAFF Wildlife Services (WS) Black Vulture Livestock Protection Pilot Program as sub-permittees, should be familiar with the standard conditions listed on the depredation permit provided with their authorization letter.

One of the important conditions of the permit is condition B. Sub-permittees must use non-lethal methods to support any lethal take. Black vultures taken with the sub-permit should be used as effigies to reinforce any lethal take. It is also the sub-permittees responsibility to haze black vultures with light, sound, or any devices to disperse vultures prior to the use of lethal control. The combination of these techniques will extend the effectiveness of non-lethal efforts and prevent the black vultures from becoming habituated to any one of the techniques.

Sub-permittees must also report the black vultures taken to the ODAFF WS as birds are taken. ODAFF WS is required report all take under this permit to the USFWS on a monthly basis. The information required includes the county where vultures were killed, date taken, and the number of birds killed with the final disposition (effigies, buried, etc.). Sub-permittees are not allowed to kill any black vultures in excess of the number approved in the sub-permit, or any other migratory bird species. Landowners experiencing livestock loss after reaching their sub-permittee limit may apply for a depredation permit through USFWS.



# Oklahoma Agriculture, Food and Forestry USDA APHIS Wildlife Services Map



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For more suggestions on non-lethal ways to protect livestock, contact your Oklahoma Wildlife Services District Office or the State Office at 405-521-4039.



**OKLAHOMA**  
 Dept. of Agriculture,  
 Food and Forestry