

## EXTENSION NOTES



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### Ways to Deter Black Vultures

In the past when most Kentuckians thought about vultures, the native turkey vulture (or buzzard) came to mind. They are carrion feeders and are often thought of as nature's decomposers. Although, not cute and cuddly creatures, they did not cause problems for farmers and are vital in the ecosystem to clean up dead carcasses. However, now when vultures are mentioned a negative reaction to black vultures may occur.

Black vultures are also 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 several 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.

It is not difficult to differentiate between the two species if you look closely. Adult turkey vultures have a bright red head with brownish-black feathers and the black vulture has a gray-black head with black feathers. In flight black vultures hold their wings in a more horizontal position and tend to flap more compared to turkey vultures that have more of a v-shaped profile and soar for longer durations without flapping. As they fly above, turkey vultures have a longer tail with two-toned feathers on the underside across their entire wingspan. Black vultures have a shorter tail and only the primary feathers at the tips of the wings are white on the underside.

While they are usually carrion feeders too, black vultures will also 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 habit 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 more information about black vultures, contact your Carter County Cooperative Extension Service. Educational programs of the Cooperative Extension Service serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expressions, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, or physical or mental disability.

#### **Upcoming Events:**

- **Little Sandy Beekeepers** - Tuesday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> @ 6:30 PM – Topic: Splitting Hives
- **Winter Door Swag Workshops** – December 12<sup>th</sup> & 16<sup>th</sup> @ Noon – Call 474-6686 to register.