

HUNTING, FISHING & OUTDOORS GUIDE

Spring Fever

MDC expert shares advice for dealing with black vultures

BY COLIN WILLARD
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VIENNA — Local farm families gathered at The Market in Vienna on April 3 for the 2023 Beef Meeting presented by the University of Missouri Extension. The evening included a roast beef meal and presentations by guest speakers, including Alan Leary, who oversees the Missouri Department of Conservation's (MDC) Wildlife Damage Management Program. The program helps landowners who have issues with wildlife interfering with their property.

Black vultures are the most numerous vultures in the Western Hemisphere. Leary compared their migration to that of armadillos. He said the black vultures' range has expanded over the last decade as they have continued to move further north because of warmer temperatures and food availability.

Black vultures are scavengers first, but they sometimes become predatory. When they become predatory, they usually target newborn livestock such as calves or lambs. They sometimes target adult cows if afterbirth covers them or they are weak from giving birth. Black vultures account for about 5.2 percent of nationwide cattle deaths caused by other wildlife. Leary said that number is "definitely higher" than Missouri's totals, but other states such as Texas increase the average because they have much larger black vulture populations.

Black vultures damage more than just livestock. They sometimes perch on vehicles. When they do, Leary said they may tear off wiper blades, rip out the rubber from around the windows or scratch the paint.

Leary shared a story that took place near Bagnell Dam, which forms the Lake of the Ozarks. During paddlefish season, fishers leave paddlefish guts around the

lake, and black vultures scavenge the fish remains. He said that he has seen a photo of about 25 black vultures perched on a truck and its trailer.

"It had suffered quite a bit of damage by the time he (the owner) came back from fishing," he said.

Black vultures also damage buildings by tearing off roof shingles, pulling off window caulking and ripping off chimney lining. Perching on houses can also lead to black vultures leaving behind odors and waste.

Although the black vultures cause destruction that can be troubling to humans, they serve a purpose in the ecosystem. The stomach skin of the black vultures breaks down diseases such as rabies and botulism. If a black vulture scavenges a rabies-infected carcass, rabies does not appear in the vulture's waste, which helps prevent the spread of disease.

Leary said that beginning in the 1990s, the vulture population in India increased by about 95 percent. The main cause of the decline was poisoning from an anti-inflammatory livestock drug. Declining vulture populations led to feral dogs becoming India's main scavengers, which increased the spread of rabies. The spread of rabies by feral dogs has made India the country with the highest rate of human rabies cases worldwide.

Black vultures have a disadvantage while scavenging when compared to turkey vultures, which have a much better sense of smell that allows them to more easily locate carcasses. Black vultures rely on their eyesight to watch turkey vultures locate food and follow the turkey vultures' lead. Sometimes the species share meals, and sometimes one group chases the other away from a carcass. They are also known to roost together.

Permits for removal only affect black vultures. Federal law still protects turkey vultures, and they never become predatory.

The easiest way to tell the difference between black vultures and turkey vultures is by looking at their heads. Black vultures have dark heads. Adult turkey vultures have red heads, but juvenile turkey vultures have dark heads.

Another way to tell the difference is by looking at their wings while they fly. Black vulture wings are only white on the ends. Leary said the pattern looks like a hand. Turkey vultures have white primary feathers. The birds also position their wings differently when they fly. Black vultures hold their wings flat, but turkey vultures raise their wings into a "V" shape.

"If you look out the window there, within the next five minutes you'd probably see a turkey vulture fly by, and it's going to look like they're in a 'V' shape," Leary said. "It's quite distinctively different."

Leary shared steps that those bothered by black vultures can take to reduce the problem.

"There's no silver bullet for this issue," Leary said. "You're going to have to implement a wildlife management program where you start doing several things all at the same time, and they work together to solve the problem. You're not going to be able to go and put a scarecrow out there and it's problem solved. It's not going to be that simple."

Options Leary listed included harassing the birds, changing farm operations and applying for federal permits that allow the permit holder to legally kill a limited number of black vultures.

One method that homeowners can use to deter black vultures from perching on a house is bird spikes. Another option is hanging fishing line about three inches above the railing where the birds perch because they will not perch on the fishing line.

If the black vultures roost somewhere around a house at night, lasers are an option to chase them away.



MISSOURI DEPARTMENT of Conservation Wildlife Damage Management expert Allan Leary was the guest speaker on April 3 for the 2023 Beef Meeting held at The Market in Vienna.

"You're going to have to do it more than once more than likely," Leary said. "If there's a reason they want to be up there, they're going to come back. You have to be persistent, and you have to go out five, six, 10, 15 nights and scare them off that roof. Eventually, they'll get tired of coming back."

Noise can also scare away

roosting black vultures. Someone trying to chase off birds could use a noisemaker such as a clapper or household objects such as two-by-fours.

As a quieter option, Leary recommended using effigies to repel black vultures. Although it's difficult to get a real dead vulture without a permit, a homemade ef-

figy could also be effective.

"They're pretty easy to make," Leary said. "You could get a bowling pin or something and put a black garbage bag on it and hang it upside down."

Another way to discourage black vultures from visiting an area

See **Vultures**, Page 13



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MDC reports young hunters took 2,550 turkeys over youth weekend

BY JOE JEREK
Mo. Dept. of Conservation

JEFFERSON CITY – Preliminary data from the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) shows that young turkey hunters in Missouri harvested 2,550 birds over the past youth weekend, April 1 and 2. Top harvest counties were Osage with 71 birds harvested, Miller with 65, and Texas with 64.

Young hunters checked 2,881 birds during the 2022 spring youth weekend.

“The cool, windy weather on

Saturday made for challenging turkey hunting conditions,” said MDC Turkey Biologist Nicholas Oakley. “Fortunately, hunters stuck with it and Sunday’s weather was more conducive to harvesting a turkey.”

Get more harvest information by county at extra.mdc.mo.gov/widgets/harvest_table/.

The regular spring turkey season runs April 17 through May 7. For more information on turkey hunting in Missouri, visit mdc.mo.gov/hunting-trapping/species/turkey.

ALEX WIEBERG (photo right), 11, from Meta, (5th Grade, Maries County) downed this turkey while hunting with his grandpa Bobby Wilson in western Maries County. He took the bird during the annual Youth Turkey Hunting Season. The turkey weighed 25.50 pounds. He is the son of Crystal and Tim Wieberg, Meta.

CAYSON FAULKNER (photo far right), 11, harvested his first turkey while hunting with grandpa Paul in Maries County. He took the bird during the annual Owensville Area Youth Turkey Hunt and sends thanks to Clay Chapman for scoring and cleaning the turkey.



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is to remove attractants such as dead trees or dead animals.

“As long as you have an attractant there for them, they’re going to come back,” Leary said. “That would be like someone coming and putting a nice warm pizza on my desk every day and expecting that I’m not going to eat it. They’re going to lose a lot of pizzas because I like pizza.”

Sometimes leaving a vehicle in an area that might attract black vultures is enough to deter them because they think humans are there. That method is not always guaranteed to work because the vultures sometimes learn that abandoned vehicles are empty.

If crows do not bother someone experiencing issues with black vultures, leaving out cracked corn to attract crows can cause vultures to avoid an area. Leary said the two types of birds do not get along.

Problems with black vultures could persist even after taking measures to discourage vultures away from an area. If vulture issues continue, there are other options.

The United States Department of Agriculture will have two wildlife services technicians assigned to help people around the state who experience issues with black vultures. They will assist with developing a wildlife management plan and making changes to a property to deter black vultures.

The Missouri Farm Bureau offers applications for permits that allow the use of lethal force to eliminate vultures. The permits only allow the holder to remove up to five black vultures.

“With that, you get the potential for five effigies,” Leary said. “You’re never going to get a permit for this to be an eradication program. This is a wildlife damage management program. It’s not a problem that we’re ever going to shoot our way out of.”

Leary said the intent of the program is

not prevention. Applicants are unlikely to receive permits until they have suffered a loss of cattle because of black vulture predation. Property owners also have the option to apply on their own for a federal permit through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Service. There is a \$100 application fee.

“They could give you a permit to shoot 1,000 of them, but as long as you don’t remove the attractant, you’re not going to win this,” Leary said. “I can promise you that. Shooting your way out of it is

not the solution.”

Leary ended his presentation by reminding the attendees that though black vultures are troublesome to some farmers, they are not guaranteed nuisances.

“They won’t impact everyone,” he said.

“If they do impact you, hopefully, if you can implement some of these things that we’ve just talked about, it’ll be a short-term thing, and you can get them to move on and go somewhere else rather than be a perennial issue for you.”

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MDC reports 117 new cases of CWD for 2022 surveillance year

Deer harvested in Gasconade County tests positive for CWD, Maries, Osage clear

BY JILL PRITCHARD
Mo. Dept. of Conservation

JEFFERSON CITY – The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) reports that it sampled and tested more than 33,000 deer for chronic wasting disease (CWD) during the 2022 CWD surveillance year between July 2022 and April 2023. Of the more than 33,000 deer sampled, 117 tested positive for CWD.

CWD is a 100% fatal disease in white-tailed deer and other members of the deer family. The disease has been attributed to significant deer population declines in other states. Learn more at mdc.mo.gov/cwd.

Those 117 deer bring the total number of CWD cases found in the state to 409 since the first case in wild deer was confirmed by MDC in early 2012. Including recent sampling efforts, more than 243,000 tissue samples from wild deer have been collected for CWD testing in Missouri since MDC began CWD surveillance in 2002.

Nearly 19,400 of the 33,000-plus deer tested this past CWD surveillance year were sampled as part of MDC mandatory CWD sampling efforts in select counties during the opening weekend of the November portion of firearms deer season, Nov. 12 and 13. Most of the remaining samples resulted from MDC's voluntary sampling efforts conducted throughout the deer

season in partnership with taxidermists and meat processors throughout the state.

Of the more than 33,000 samples, about 3,500 were collected during MDC's targeted culling efforts conducted in cooperation with landowners on a voluntary basis after the close of regular deer season in localized areas near where CWD has been found. Through targeted culling, 41 CWD-positive deer were removed to help slow the spread of CWD.

"The goal of targeted culling is to remove CWD-positive deer from the landscape and reduce deer density in these localized areas to slow the spread of the disease and protect Missouri's deer herd," explained MDC Wildlife Health Program Supervisor Deb Hudman. "Targeted culling is a proven method to slow the spread of CWD and Missouri is one of several states that uses it to manage the disease."

Of the deer tested, MDC found CWD-positive deer in 23 counties: Adair (3), Barry (1), Barton (9), Carroll (1), Cedar (1), Crawford (2), Dallas (1), Franklin (22), Gasconade (1), Hickory (1), Jefferson (7), Linn (15), Livingston (1), Macon (13), Perry (4), Putnam (3), Ray (1), St. Clair (1), St. Francois (1), Ste. Genevieve (20), Stone (4), Sullivan (3), and Taney (2).

"During this past year, we found CWD in a number of new counties," Hudman said. "Cases were detected for the first time in Barton, Carroll, Dallas, Gasconade,

Hickory, Livingston, Ray, St. Francois, and Sullivan counties."

She added that MDC expects CWD to spread but the goal is to slow the spread while researchers work to develop a cure and additional management tools, and to keep the percentage of infected deer low.

In Missouri this past year, less than one percent of tissue samples from hunter-harvested deer tested positive for CWD.

"That is good news," she said. "It is a testament to our ability to find the disease early in new areas and apply management actions to slow its spread."

She added that if MDC does not continue to act aggressively to slow the spread of the disease, CWD could have significant effects on the deer population, hunting culture, and economy.

"There are areas of the country where over half of hunter-harvested adult bucks test positive for CWD," Hudman explained. "We must do everything we can to not let this happen in Missouri and we need the help of hunters and landowners in this fight."

Hunters and landowners are critical partners in the fight against CWD and can assist MDC by continuing to deer hunt, by participating in CWD sampling, by following regulations designed to slow CWD spread, and by cooperating with targeted culling efforts. Learn more at mdc.mo.gov/cwd.



MDC STAFF collect tissue samples from the neck of a hunter-harvested deer to have them tested for chronic wasting disease (CWD).

PHOTO COURTESY OF MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

OUTDOORS IN THE OZARKS

I seen a few turkeys... once

I hunted wild gobblers for 50 years... but no more. The first hunt I went on was in the Ouachita Mountains in 1970 at a place called Muddy Creek WMA with an Arkansas Fish and Game biologist by the name of Gene Rush. Heckuva turkey hunter and a great guy.

Hunting in four states since then I have killed a lot of turkeys, many times six or seven per year, and guiding other hunters for many years, the 70s, 80s and 90s, I made a lot of money out of wild turkeys by doing that. But brother, there were a lot of turkeys back then.

I quit guiding hunters about twenty years ago, and I quit hunting three years ago when I began to see the numbers of wild gobblers take a nosedive. I will hunt them

"no more forever" as the old Indian Chief said. But I have to admit I called up and shot two just a few days ago; shot them with my camera... which I enjoy just as much as I ever did, shooting at them with my old twelve-gauge. You other hunters would too. No lugging them back, no gutting and skinning, no giving money to a corrupt state agency in buying tags. And turkeys from the grocery store are cheap if you gotta eat one. I like baloney about as well. You can see several of my gobbler photos at www.larrydablemontoutdoors.blogspot.com.

I wrote one book about turkey hunting 20 years ago. If you haven't read it, contact me and I will inscribe one to you. I am going to write another in a year or so; with some of the darndest photos you have ever seen. And experiences. I have seen some of the most unbelievable things happen in the spring woods you can imagine.

I got one of them occurrences on a movie camera about 1993, I think. I was on a hillside in southern Missouri listening to three or four gobblers on the roost across a small creek bottom. They flew down, but while gobbling a lot, they didn't come to my call. But 20 minutes later a non-gobbling tom came strutting up to me. He had a nice beard, but half of his tail was missing. He was a half-tailed gobbler. I was just calling with my mouth, imitating a hen without any call, something I learned to do many years before. I began filming him when he was about 20 feet away, stomping and strutting and drumming, but never gobbling. Calling softly and quietly I got him all shook up and he decided there was an invisible hen before him. And then he began to mate with that hen he was sure was there!! He really did, and completed the task. I have it all on film. 81 killed a monstrous 21-pound gobbler once with seven beards totaling 49 inches with one-inch spurs, and have photos to show it. In fact there is a picture of him in that book of mine. I was laid out in the leaves, calling in ticks, about noon,

with the warm sun shining down, when he awakened me. There were two of them. I like to think his partner had eight beards!

But here is something I have never written about. You might figure out why. You ain't gonna believe this! One morning about ten o'clock I heard a lot of gobbling about a mile away so I walked about half-way and called and the hillside rattled with their answering gobbles. I moved closer and found the most accommodating brushpile there ever was, about 150 yards from them. I got hid really well behind a clump of multiflora rose with some saplings in it. Was I ever hid... though one foot stuck out in front a couple of feet.

I called and three gobblers came easing up to see where the hen was, strutting and blowing and magnificent. In no time they were before me, and, to use an expression my old mentor Clyde Trout often used, "I uncapped his head."

The other two just instantly jumped on that thrashing tom beside them and gave him what-for for a good three minutes. When he lay still, they just stood there like they didn't know what to do. So I called and here they came, up to about 10 feet away, where they

seemed to be seeing who could gobble the best. Now I know that many times readers have thought I was a doggone liar, but this is the truth and I will swear to it in court!! Those two gobblers walked up to me and gobbled right in my face, again and again and again. I was frozen, looking right down their throats; and one actually stepped on my boot. I can say this... gobblers have a rather unsmell-good breath, and a gobble at that closeness is really different; a rattling, loud variant of what you hear that sounds entirely different when it is 100 yards away.

I guess while they were searching for that hen in the brushpile, they each gobbled six or eight times. In about five minutes that morning they gave up and wandered away, wondering. I was a little relieved. Two 20 pound tom turkeys appeared to be capable of flogging and spurring me good should revenge be on their mind.

Well, come next Sunday at our fish fry at the Brown Hill Church out east of Houston, Mo. I will tell some more stories about turkey hunting, and give away some of my homemade turkey calls and show folks how to make and use them. Church service is at 11 a.m. and the dinner starts at noon. If it rains, then we will postpone it one week.

Just let me know if you are coming. I need to know how many fish to bring, and how many turkey calls.

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