

Guidelines For Using Effigies to Disperse Nuisance Vulture Roosts

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WHAT IS AN EFFIGY?

An effigy as defined in Webster's dictionary, is a "full or partial representation..." of a person or object. For dispersing a vulture roost, an effigy can be a fresh carcass, a taxidermic preparation, or an artificial likeness.

OVERVIEW

These guidelines were developed principally for wooded roosts, but the same principles apply for roosts in towers and other sites. Furthermore, these procedures might also be applicable to nuisance situations caused by daytime vulture activity. **Regardless of the situation or roost habitat, proper placement is the single most important aspect in successfully using an effigy to disperse vultures.**

Important factors to consider when deciding where to hang an effigy include:

- locations with the highest bird activity or use, often indicated by an accumulation of feces and feathers;
- visibility of the effigy to birds coming into the roost;
- prominent branches or support structures; and
- accessibility to the site.

THE EFFIGY

Once a bird has been acquired under a legal permit, it should be determined whether a long term or temporary placement is needed. If long term placement or multiple usage is required, it is advised that the bird be prepared by a taxidermist and then treated with a spray on preservative, such as Scotch Guard for leather. The posture of the prepared bird should resemble that of a dead bird hung by its feet with one or both wings hanging down in a outstretched manner. For short term placement (up to 3 months, depending on weather conditions) and if odor is not a concern, then an intact carcass can be used, under legal permit.

RECOMMENDED MATERIALS

The materials that are needed for hanging effigies in the roost can be found at most outdoor or general merchandise stores. The basic materials include:

- a bow and fishing arrow (fiberglass or other heavy arrow with line attachment point and field point);
- archery fishing set-up with rod, reel, and 20-40# line;
- spool of 1/8" - 1/4" effigy attachment line (nylon or other synthetic weather resistant);
- heavy duty fishing type snap swivels;
- a small smooth weight (e. g. sinker) or sand bag that can be used to adjust the line.

PLACING THE EFFIGY ATTACHMENT LINE

In wooded roosts, the attachment line can be readily placed using a compound bow fitted with a commercially available fishing set-up (such as Zebco 808 reel mounded on a small rod attached to the stabilizer hole and a fishing arrow). Alternatively, it is possible to use a standard fishing rod with fishing arrow (fiberglass field point arrow with a small hole near the nock for line attachment), however this requires a second person to hold the rod and ensure

that the line does not become tangled. It is recommended that 20-lb monofilament line be used due to its strength and flexibility.

Choose a branch or attachment point that is high and prominent. For best results, the effigy should be highly visible to vultures entering the roost. **The space directly below this point should be free of branches or other obstructions that could entangle the effigy during heavy winds.** For example, from an attachment point 5 feet out on a branch the effigy should hang down no more than 5 feet to prevent it becoming tangled in the trunk of the tree.

Shoot the arrow over the attachment branch. Attempt to limit the number of branches the line goes over by putting tension on the line after it passes over the attachment branch. Remove the arrow and secure the attachment line to the fishing line. Pull the effigy attachment line over the branch, remove the fishing line, and attach a heavy duty snap swivel to the effigy attachment line. If this line has gone over multiple branches, it may be necessary to pull back the line from all but the main attachment branch. This can be done by attaching a smooth-edged weight to the end of the line closest to the excess branches, pulling the weight over the branches until it reaches the effigy attachment branch, and then lowering the weight.

For lower attachment points, it may be possible to use a throwing bag slung over the branch or attachment point. For towers or other structures, a professional climber or other authorized maintenance person should install the effigy from a prominent point.

ATTACHING THE EFFIGY

To attach the effigy, take 2 - 3 feet of the same material as the attachment line, fold it in half and tie a small loop at the midpoint. This is the point at which the attachment line and snap swivel are connected. Next, tie the ends of the looped line to the legs of the effigy just above the feet, making sure to wrap the line twice around the leg before tying a secure knot. The knotted loop ensures that in the event one of the leg knots comes loose, the effigy will remain in place.

PUTTING THE EFFIGY TO WORK

Raising the effigy into place may require two people depending on the weight of the bird, the height of the attachment point, and the number of branches the line contacts. It often helps to get the effigy moving by having one person push up on it while a second person pulls on the other end of the line.

Raise the effigy as high as possible while evaluating the factors of visibility, entanglement, and accessibility to perching vultures. It is advisable to back away from the roost and look at it from different angles to determine if the height and prominence of the effigy is satisfactory. Finally, tie the trailing end of the attachment line to a secure location that minimizes potential interference by pedestrian, wildlife, or other traffic. Wrap and secure the excess line so that it will be available at a later time should the effigy need to be lowered for maintenance or replacement. Avoid tying to places (such as along a fence top, horizontal branch, or other movement corridor) where chewing damage by rodents is likely. The effigy should now be visible to incoming birds, hanging upside down with its wings outstretched, and ready to disperse the roost.

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(Mention of brand names does not constitute endorsement by the USDA. For technical questions regarding effigy use and installation please contact John S. Humphrey at the USDA National Wildlife Research Center's Florida Field Station - 352-375-2229; email: john.s.humphrey@aphis.usda.gov)