



[www.loudounwildlife.org](http://www.loudounwildlife.org)

February 12, 2008

Mayor H. Ray Whitbey  
53 East Colonial Highway  
P.O. Box 130  
Hamilton, VA 20158  
[mayor@town.hamilton.va.us](mailto:mayor@town.hamilton.va.us)

Re: Town of Hamilton's Proposed Vulture Killing and Eradication

Dear Mayor Whitbey:

Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy recently became aware of the Town's intentions to kill one of the vultures roosting in Hamilton and hang its body from a tree in an attempt to drive the birds out of the area.

We are opposed to this action for the reasons provided below and request that you and the Town Council reconsider the need to take action against the birds.

- **From what we have heard from local citizens, the number of birds is not huge; the numbers are within normal ranges for our area and this time of year.** The report that we have from Hamilton residents last week is a sighting of 24 birds in one roost area and 17 in another. There was no noticeable excrement on the water tower or elsewhere. This raises questions for the need of any action to be taken on the part of the Town at all.
- **The number of vultures will drop naturally due to migration.** While we do have populations of Black and Turkey Vultures that reside in our area year-round, our winter populations swell simply because of the ebb and flow of natural migratory bird activities. The migration of non-resident vultures has already begun and over the next month, our local vulture populations will continue to decline naturally as more birds fly north to reach their summer habitats.

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- **Vultures play a valuable role as scavengers in our ecosystem.** Vultures play a significant public health role as they are “Nature’s cleaners,” removing from our landscape the road kill and other dead animals that otherwise would rot and spread disease as they decay. Recognizing that Loudoun has a healthy deer population, there are numerous dead deer that are either dumped or hit along the roads in the Hamilton area. The vultures are likely here because the food source is sufficient to carry them. We therefore need the vultures to clean up the roads.

We know of no cases of people contracting disease from vulture excrement but there are numerous examples of disease resulting from dead animals in streams and other places where vultures have not eaten the carcasses. In fact, a true public health concern would result from an absence of vultures as has occurred in other parts of the world.

- **Displacement of the birds from the current location could have greater negative effects on neighborhoods.** With continued clear cutting of trees and over development in our county, the vultures are losing their historic roosting places in the woods. They do habituate to human areas and often use structures such as water tanks, barns, cell towers and other man-made structures as replacements for trees. It is well documented though, that efforts to displace vultures from one location often results in their moving only short distances. The nearest next-best location could be roof tops and other areas that would result in greater human/wildlife conflicts. Leaving the birds to roost in the trees and other structures where they currently are is the best solution.
- **Vulture numbers across Loudoun are the lowest in 10 years.** Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy has led the Loudoun Christmas Bird Count (CBC) since 1997. Looking at our data from the past eleven years as compared to this past December, this year’s populations show the lowest number of Black and Turkey Vultures since 1998. The count circle that we have used consistently since 1997 includes Hamilton as one of the areas surveyed. This data has been reported to the National Audubon Society and is used to track nation-wide bird population data. In addition to the CBC data, reports from local bird experts convey that vulture roosts across the county are fewer and more scattered than in past years, further confirming a reduced population county-wide.
- **Vultures are not dangerous and their excrement does not pose a public health threat; they are of no risk to people or pets.** Their excrement contains uric acid which actually kills bacteria. With the number of vultures present in Hamilton and the natural shifting of their roost sites, there is no public health concern to children or adults from their excrement, as implied by the Leesburg Today article (2/1/08).
- **Impact on our children of killing and hanging a bird is significant.** Hanging a dead bird in public view to drive other birds away teaches that we do not value life or diversity. It teaches that if we are inconvenienced or don’t like how something looks that it’s okay to kill and it’s okay to drive away a species. It does not teach our children respect for others. It does not teach respect for our environment or the creatures with which we share this planet. We should be teaching acceptance, tolerance and understanding. We should be teaching our

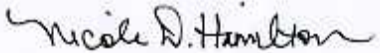
children about the lifecycles and importance of these birds, not reinforcing myths, promoting false information and reinforcing fear.

As Black and Turkey Vultures are federally protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, we would like a copy of the application that the Town submitted for the permit to kill vultures as well as a copy of the Migratory Bird Damage Project Report (WS Form 37). Under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Town must justify the need to kill either Black or Turkey Vultures. These materials can be faxed to my attention at 540-882-9638.

While the best solution is education about the birds and their lifecycles and tolerance for their presence, if the Town of Hamilton finds it necessary to try to deter the birds then we request that you apply non-lethal methods. Studies have shown that killing a bird and hanging it in view of others is not an effective long-term solution. This is especially the case during winter because vultures move from place to place due to migration and shifting weather patterns. An effigy would have to be maintained on an on-going basis to remain as a deterrent for ever-changing groups of vultures. If the effigy method is to be used, studies have shown that an artificial effigy can be as effective as an actual dead bird.

Looking forward, we welcome the opportunity to work with you and the Town Council on public outreach and education around the life cycles and behaviors of vultures to build awareness for these animals, avoid future human/wildlife conflicts and enable you to focus your limited resources on issues of higher priority and impact for the community.

Sincerely,



Nicole Hamilton  
President

CC:

- Hamilton Town Council
- Mark Rey, USDA, Natural Resources and Environment
- Dennis Rankin, USDA, Migratory Bird Treaty Act Enforcement
- Robert Blohm, Dept of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Div. of Migratory Bird Management
- JD Klopfer, Virginia Dept of Game and Inland Fisheries
- Loudoun County Board of Supervisors
- Thomas Koenig, Loudoun County Dept of Animal Care and Control

