Abstract

Measuring livestock producer tolerance of black vultures in the Midwest

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Black vultures are both scavengers and opportunistic hunters, resulting in their common presence alongside livestock carcasses. Increased black vulture populations in the Midwest, USA (including in Indiana and Kentucky) have led to increased concerns among livestock producers on the risk black vultures pose to their livestock and livelihoods. As such, some news media have called black vultures “aggressive”, “nasty”, and “sky wolves,” which has led to increased calls for more lethal control measures. However, there have been few studies exploring the extent to which livestock producers perceive black vultures as a problem or the factors that influence these perceptions. Utilizing a survey of livestock producers of cattle, lambs, and goats, we explored the factors influencing tolerance of black vultures. We asked questions about perceived tangible and intangible costs and benefits, interpersonal trust, values, experiences, and attitudes towards wildlife in general and black vulture in particular. Our results show perceived ecological benefits and mutualistic wildlife value orientations (WVO) are significantly associated with increasing black vulture tolerance while intangible costs, lethal habits and utilitarian WVO were significant associated with decreasing tolerance. Lastly, tangible costs measured as attributed economic loss to black vultures was not significant in influencing tolerance. These results demonstrate the importance of incorporating non-economic social factors into human wildlife conflict studies alongside traditional economic considerations.