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4-28-2016

To: Rains County Leader

From: Stephen Gowin
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For many of our livestock producers, now is the time for birthing season. During this time, animals are very vulnerable to predators. Of course the predator that we mostly fear and watch out for is the coyote. However, in recent weeks, I have received several phone calls about the Black Vulture, or what we call the Mexican Buzzard.

Two species of vultures live in the United States. Turkey vultures (*Cathartes aura*) are found almost nationwide. Black vultures (*Coragyps atratus*) are found primarily in Texas and the southeastern United States, although their range is expanding northward.

Turkey vultures are almost exclusively scavengers, relying upon their very sensitive sense of smell and good eyesight to locate food. They feed primarily on dead or decaying carcasses. Adult turkey vultures have blackish-brown feathers and red heads.

Black vultures, on the other hand, rely solely on visual cues to find food and also attack and kill live animals. Black vultures have black feathers and gray heads and have a distinctive white patch near the ends of their outstretched wings.

Black vultures attack livestock during the birthing process. They also attack newborn animals immediately after they are born. They attack around the eyes and other soft tissue of the animal. So we must keep a very watchful eye on our livestock during this time.

Black vultures will appear in groups of 2-3 on up to groups of a dozen. Therefore, they can cause significant damage in a matter of minutes.

The biggest problem that livestock producers face with these predators is the fact that they are protected by State and Federal Laws. This means you are not allowed to protect your livestock by killing these predators.

However, producers can apply for depredation permits through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services. Once you have obtained these permits, you can protect your livestock. But, you must have a permit in order to do so, or you are breaking federal laws. This can land you some very stiff penalties.

You can obtain these permits by contacting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage/. The turn around for getting your permits can take up to two months, so it is important that you apply as soon as possible if you are having problems. It is also important that you apply for the permits each year. Each permit has to be current in order to be in compliance.

I hope that this information helps and if you have any questions please give me a call.