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## floral lakes

# Vultures Still Terrorizing Bartow Neighborhood

By SARAH STEGALL

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BARTOW | Much to their dismay, residents in the Floral Lakes retirement community fear southwest Bartow's pesky neighbors, hungry vultures, are here to stay.

Although the vultures have been around for years, roosting in trees near Clower Street and McAdoo Avenue, it's only been in the last couple of years that the birds have started destroying property.

"They're very destructive, very nasty, and very plentiful," said John Spigner, who lives in Floral Lakes.

The home Spigner and his wife, Judy, bought 3 1/2 years ago is next to Little Floral Lake, which is directly across from where the vultures roost.

"Sometimes, the whole bank looks black with them," Judy Spigner said.

Two years ago, the vultures attacked their home, damaging their roof.

It wasn't until they installed a motion-activated sprinkler system on the roof that the vultures stopped.

Although their home is safe, the system did little to scare the vultures away for good.

Because vultures vomit everything they consume, the smell can also be



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BLACK VULTURES gather along the shore of Little Floral Lake in the Floral Lakes retirement community in Bartow recently. Community residents say the birds are a nuisance.

unbearable.

"I don't see any solution until they find a new place," John Spigner said.

Bob Pittenger, who also lives in Floral Lakes, replaced his roof more than once before finally buying a sprinkler system.

He would like to see the vultures gone, but isn't hopeful.

"As long as they have a place, they'll be here," he said.

In the past, attempting to remove the vultures has proved problematic.

Because Bartow is a designated bird sanctuary, the vultures could not be bothered.

In April 2008, city commissioners approved an ordinance removing vultures from protection under the city's provisions as a bird sanctuary.

However, vultures are still federally protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said Breanne Strepina, a biologist with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

"Migratory birds are vulnerable to habitation loss," Strepina said.

That's why vultures are protected.

City Manager George Long said the issue is a private matter and that it's not the city's responsibility to intervene, but the city has tried to help residents.

Last year, the city bought four motion-activated sprinklers that residents can check out for free. The sprinklers are supposed to scare the vultures away.

"We've had several people use them," said Susan Burtz, Bartow's code enforcement coordinator.

Methyl anthranilate, an organic chemical with a fruity grape smell, can also be used.

The chemical is an irritant to the birds' respiratory and digestive systems, said Tim Keele, owner of Critter Control of Orlando, which uses the product.

Like pepper spray for humans, the chemical can also irritate the birds' eyes.

The downfall is that other birds could be affected.

And it isn't cheap, though it's not as expensive as it used to be, he said.

"It's feasible when you compare it to the damage they (vultures) will do," Keele said.

Another option is applying and paying for a permit, through the United States Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services, to kill one vulture, Strepina said, but it's not easy to obtain.

Instead, residents could buy a fake vulture.

It is suggested to hang the fake or dead vulture near the other birds.

This "seems to repel other vultures," she said.

James Bruce, who lives on the corner of McAdoo Avenue and Clower Street, just wants the vultures to stop destroying his property.

Vultures have picked the rubber casing around his car windows and shingles off his roof.

Because of all the rain, he's had to deal with many leaks.

"They seem like they're getting more and more aggressive," Bruce said.

Although the behavior of vultures really isn't understood, Strepina said the picking at rubber on cars and shingles on roofs is probably gratifying behavior.

"They like to pull off the rubber just like they pull off skin," she said.

[ Sarah Stegall can be reached at [sarah.stegall@yahoo.com](mailto:sarah.stegall@yahoo.com) or 863-802-7547. ]

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