

Threats to Birds of Prey

Raptor mortality (death) is affected by a number of natural and human-caused factors. Natural factors include such things as accidents, weather, natural disasters (lightning, volcano), predators, parasites, disease, and old age. Human-caused factors often include increased population growth and industry, habitat destruction, environmental contamination, electrocution, shooting or pole trapping, and egg collection.



Photo by David R. Neilson

Human Behavior and the Environment

Humans are often unaware of the long-term consequences of air, water, and land pollution on both wildlife and themselves. Below are a few examples of ways human activities can harm raptors:

- **Birds and mammals become soaked in oil** - The oil reduces the insulating properties of bird feathers or mammal fur and they eventually die from hypothermia and starvation. Scavengers such as vultures, eagles, or hawks that eat the oil-soaked carcasses often die from petroleum ingestion (they eat it.)
- **Pesticides used to kill insects affect raptors** - Pesticide residues build up in raptors that feed on animals or insects that have ingested or been contaminated with pesticides. During stress or when food supplies are low, pesticides stored in the tissues are released into the bloodstream. When pesticide levels reach a lethal dosage in the organs or nervous system, the bird dies.
- **Waterfowl often eat spent lead pellets from shotguns or lead fishing weights** - Raptors then die from lead poisoning after eating the affected birds.
- **Non-target poisoning** also creates problems for unsuspecting birds of prey, particularly scavengers. Eagles or vultures occasionally eat a carcass baited with poison intended to kill coyotes or other predators.
- **Collisions** with high tension cables, towers, vehicles (especially in populated areas,) and large windows. Raptors are attracted to power poles and power lines because they provide high perches for hunting, roosting, and occasional nesting. Touching two conductors or a conductor and ground wire at the same time may electrocute raptors with large wingspans. Sadly, 70 to 90 percent of all raptor mortalities on power lines occur to young eagles. After studies of this problem, power companies have taken steps to prevent electrocutions by adding perches, modifying ground wires on problem poles, and designing safer poles.
- **Shooting** - Although shooting a raptor is illegal, it still occurs. Before laws were established to prohibit raptor shooting, many people would gather along migration routes for target practice. In August 2014, headlines were in newspapers as far as 200 miles away about a shooting of an osprey and a barred owl within 15 miles of the Town of Cable in Bayfield County.
- **Pole trapping** - Raptor species, which occasionally prey on domestic animals (e.g. chickens, pigeons, duck, quail, fish, and rarely sheep), are most vulnerable to shooting or pole trapping, because humans see these birds as competitors.

Adapted from the following Source:

http://idahoptv.org/sciencetrek/topics/birds_of_pre/facts5.cfm

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