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This fall and winter, the walks around the Branch County Courthouse and Annex are covered with bird droppings. The mess is even splattered on building windows.

Vehicles in nearby parking lots became inadvertent targets.

Attempts to remove large flocks of what courthouse staff called crows met with only limited success. A couple of times, maintenance crews used a power washers to clean the walks and entrance only to have the waste droppings back the next day. Power washing was not a good idea in freezing cold temperatures which left the walks covered in ice.

The main roost was the Ginko tree on the south side of the main building. The birds also used other nearby trees. The swarms of the black birds flying in formation can be spotted around Coldwater before they settled down for the night.

County Building Manager Scott Walls installed a “back up beeper” from a vehicle on the roof near the tree. It was set to emit a beep every 20 minutes from 5-9 p.m. then again from 4-7 a.m. in an effort to drive the birds away.

That worked for a couple of weeks in January, then the birds became accustomed to the beep and returned.

When a dead bird was found nearby, someone decided to test the myth the birds would not roost in a tree with a dead bird hanging on it. The birds ignored it. A judge did not like the way it looked and had it removed.

While county staff insist these birds are crows, this flock is similar to one of blackbirds that plagued downtown Coldwater last year.

The super flocks remain in areas where there is less snow. Richard A. Dolbeer, of the USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services, said last year they stay in an area where there is abundant food, cleaning out harvested fields during the day.

A large flock also creates the conditions for "predator confusion." Each bird in a massive-size flock doesn't have to be quite as vigilant as it would be if it was flying solo.

By late March, the flocks will disperse to set up nests and begin breeding. Some are year-long residents, others migrate here from Canada and other northern latitudes. They stop where there is food.