

BIRD ELECTROCUTIONS:

Has your power flickered or gone out recently? Check below your power poles (particularly under transformer poles on rural properties) and look for evidence of birds. This could be anything from a dead or dying bird under or near the pole (or in fact still on the pole!) to just a pile of feathers. Raptors are particularly susceptible to electrocution because of their tendency to use power poles for hunting. Their large body size, combined with inadequate spacing of electrical equipment on power poles, make for a deadly combination. The good news is, some utilities are now incorporating bird safety into their new power poles designs; the bad news is, thousands of hazardous poles that were built long before bird safety was considered still remain, and pose a real risk to these birds. Each year hundreds, and possibly thousands, of raptors are electrocuted on power lines in Alberta (Platt 2005).

Currently, the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) does not regulate whether or not power lines are built to “bird safe” or “raptor friendly” standards. There should be a minimum of 60” horizontal clearance and 40” of vertical clearance among energized components AND between energized and grounded components on a power pole to deem it safe for birds (APLIC 2006).

Bird deaths on power lines is largely preventable. If you are concerned about birds getting electrocuted on power lines, there are a number of actions, you, as a citizen of Alberta can take:

1. Call your power company and insist they address the problem pole by making it raptor-safe. Solutions exist for most types of poles. Tell them you are concerned about the number of birds that get electrocuted on power poles.
2. Call the AUC Utilities’ Complaints Group @ 1-780-427-4903 or email them at utilitiesconcerns@auc.ab.ca Tell them what happened and request that all new power poles be built to raptor-safe standards (the 60”/40” standard).
3. Spread the word. Public awareness is a key component in affecting change at a higher level!

References:

Platt, C. 2005a. Patterns of raptor electrocution mortality on distribution power lines in southeast Alberta. M.Sc. Thesis, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB. 140pp.

APLIC. 2006. Suggested Practices for Avian Protection on Power Lines: the State of the Art in 2006. Edison Electric Institute, APLIC, and the California Energy Commission. Washington, D.C. and Sacramento, CA.