

The same has happened in downtown Hanford, since falconers with Portland-based Integrated Avian Solutions began flying hawks there on Oct. 1, 2018.

"We had immediate results," said Michelle Brown, executive director of Main Street Hanford, a nonprofit promoting downtown businesses.

She described years of problems from crows in the thousands roosting downtown.

"You would not believe the mess they would leave on downtown sidewalks."

Past methods to drive the crows away didn't work. That included installing speakers on buildings to generate predator sounds and, years ago, actually shooting some of the birds, Brown said.

But last year, the downtown Hanford group started researching the problem and found out Portland had success alleviating its crow problem by hiring Integrated Avian Solutions, and Brown said her group partnered with the city to hire the falconry business.

And after word got out about the falconers' success in Hanford, Madera officials contracted with the same business.

Officials in both cities are quick to note that the falcons aren't sent out to kill the crows.

Though Mars, the hawk, probably is a bit smaller than some of the crows, he's a predator, and the crows recognize that and don't want to be near him, said Baz, who lives in both Woodlake and Los Angeles.

Falconry, which can include working with hawks and eagles, has been around for centuries as a method of using the trained birds to hunt. But over about the past decade the use of raptor birds to control nuisance bird populations has grown dramatically, Baz said.

"Crows are smart," which is why piping the sound of predators from buildings doesn't work for long, as the birds don't actually see a predator and ignore the noise, he said.

In fact, that intelligence is why they like to roost in groups during fall and winter in Valley downtown areas, as they tend to be well lit – allowing them to see actual predators – and cities tend to be warmer at night than rural areas, Baz said.

"Plus, downtown environments tend to be predator-free environments," he said, adding that in Hanford and Madera, To combat the crow problems, "We basically use highly specialized and trained hawks to haze and harass roosting crow and compel them to leave," Baz explained.

By coming back with the hawks periodically, crows recognize the downtown area as the hawks' territory and stay away.

At least that's what's happening so far.

"It's not that they're pests, but they sit on all these telephone lines and poop on everything – all over our parking lot. If you have a black BMW, you're not happy," said Danny Brewer, general manager of

the La Quinta Inn in downtown Madera, which opened in November under the new name after undergoing a top-to-bottom renovation.

"I woke up the other morning here, and there had to be a thousand crows all around my property," before the hawks were put on the job, he said.

Since then, the difference has been tremendous, Brewer said. "I don't think I've seen much [crows] in the last couple of weeks."

But success at hazing crows has come at a price.

In Hanford, the city and Main Street Hanford have ponied up \$44,500 for falconry services from October to April, as crows migrate away to more remote areas in the other months to breed and give birth.

In Madera, the city, Madera County – which has buildings in the downtown area – the Madera Downtown Association and the city's parking district have paid \$8,500 so far for falconry services and still need \$21,500 to pay for the service to continue through April.

But after April, the hawks will be needed again, starting about October, to keep the crows from inundating downtown again.

For her part, Brown already is working on that, having begun discussions with Hanford officials to possibly double the budget to see if the hawks could be flown in a wider area so that the crows, that have been roosting just outside the downtown area since the falconers arrived, could be herded away from all the city's business districts.

"I think our goal is to fine tune it for the entire community and not just downtown Hanford. Of course that takes money."

In Madera, the county supervisors said that besides considering whether to fund crow hazing, they will consider whether to expand the program to include pigeons, also a nuisance, though not as big a one as the crows had been.

Baz said his company can haze pigeons to drive them from downtown, but the hawks would have to go out during daylight hours.

Copland said he's having thoughts similar to Brown's, as the crows driven out of downtown Madera are roosting in other areas outside the district, including a grocery store parking lot.

He said he would like to haze the birds out of all of Madera's retail and residential areas and drive them to roost in the eucalyptus trees along Highway 99 or in orchards outside the urban areas.

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