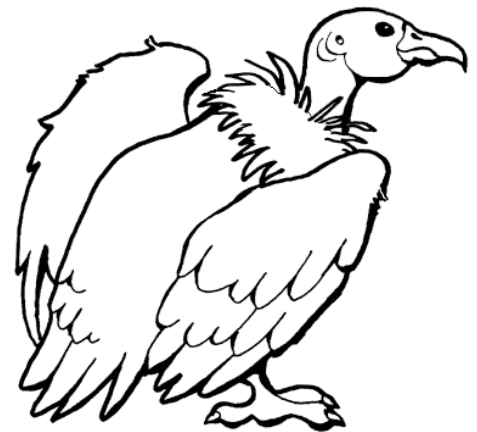


Turkey Vulture

Scientific Name: *Cathartes aura*

Did You Know?

- The turkey vulture is related to the stork, not to any birds of prey.
- The turkey vulture's scientific name Latin for "cleansing breeze."
- Like all other vultures, the turkey vulture has a bald head. This is so that bits of carrion (dead meat) do not adhere to the skin as they would to feathers.
- At close range the naked red heads of the adult turkey vultures resemble those of turkeys, hence the name.
- Turkey vultures are the only scavenger birds that can't kill their prey. A close inspection of their feet reminds one of a chicken instead of a hawk or an eagle. Their feet are useless for ripping into prey, but the vultures have powerful beaks that can tear through even the toughest cow hide. They feed by thrusting their heads into the body cavities of rotting animals.
- Turkey vultures have an extraordinary sense of smell. They have been known to be able to smell carrion from over a mile away, which is very unique in the bird world. The turkey vulture has the largest olfactory (smelling) system of all birds.
- Vultures prefer meat as fresh as possible and won't eat extremely rotted carcasses. They can smell carrion only 12-24 hours old.
- In the early morning hours you may see turkey vultures sunbathing in a tree with their wings spread out. This is done to increase their body temperature after the cool night.
- When you see turkey vultures swarming around in a cluster in the early morning hours of early spring or fall, they are preparing to continue on their migration. Vultures seen in the evening hours have probably arrived in the area that day and are preparing to roost for the night.
- Researchers have determined that turkey vultures can travel at up to 200 miles in a day.
- Turkey vultures average 2 1/2 feet tall with a 6 foot wingspan. In spite of their large size, they only weigh about 3 pounds.
- People will often mistakenly call turkey vultures, buzzards, which is the British name for certain hawks.
- Turkey vultures have been known to live up to 24 years. The average age is estimated to be around 20 years.
- Vultures help clean up the environment by eating the flesh off dead animals before it rots and causes disease.



Chattahoochee NATURE CENTER

Continued on back

General Information On Turkey Vultures

IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS:

Wingspan 6 feet; length, 27 inches. Brownish/black body, the featherless head is black in immature birds, red in adults. Wings are held in a V when soaring, unlike eagles which hold their wings straight out. Birds rock or appear unsteady in flight.

RANGE:

Southern Canada through South America. Migrates to the southern U.S. in the winter.

HABITAT:

Open country, roosts in large congregations in secluded woods.

NESTING:

Usually on the ground under cover, sometimes in caves. Lays 2 eggs.

FEEDING HABITS:

Turkey vultures feed on carrion, which they locate by smell or possibly vision. They are often seen feeding in groups on large items but will eat almost anything.

CONSERVATION STATUS:

Considered common in its range, this bird is afforded no special conservation status.