

Turkey Vulture

Urubu à tête rouge
Cathartes aura

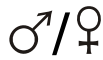
Migratory Species

Wingspan: 172 cm to 183 cm



The Turkey Vulture does not have any feathers on its head and the top part of its neck. The naked skin of the adult bird is red. A black duvet resembling fur covers the head of young Turkey Vultures. Large nostrils are obvious to the observer at the base of the white beak.

Unlike with other birds of prey, this species has a well-developed sense of smell which it uses to locate food. It will glide very high in the sky in a circular pattern while searching for carrion.



The male and female are similar.



The Turkey Vulture can be found in just about any habitat except for dense forest. It spends much of its time in flight, sometimes at very high altitudes. We often spot the bird in wide open spaces, such as agricultural areas.



The Turkey Vulture is a scavenger, meaning that it feeds on dead animal carcasses (carrion). It prefers fresh small carrion but it will sometimes feast upon meat at a more advanced stage of decomposition. It will not reject dead animals dumped by farmers such as calves, cows or pigs.



The Turkey Vulture record for longevity in the wild is 16 years 10 months. The bird can live up to 20 years in captivity.



The bird nests on rocky escarpments, inside a crack or cavern, or even in the trunk of a tree. The bird does not, however, build a nest. The female simply lays 1 to 3 eggs right on the ground.



The young stay in the nest for the first 50 days or so. Their first flight is taken gradually around 9 weeks of age. They remain dependant upon their parents several months after leaving the nest.



The Turkey Vulture was first sighted in Quebec in the 1970s. The first nest was observed and reported in Quebec in 1986. Since then, the species has become more and more common in southern Quebec and is frequently observed to the North. The increased frequency of sightings has been attributed to continuing highway development in Quebec. The carrion found roadside on these highways provide an abundant and continuously renewed source of food for this scavenger species.



Unlike other birds of prey, the Turkey Vulture hangs out in groups of 2 to 3 individuals, sometimes more. It is possible to see tens of vultures perched together in a tree early in the morning or at the end of the afternoon.