

Turkey Vultures — Scavengers of the Sky



Turkey vultures fly with their wings held in a shallow V (top right). In Michigan, turkey vultures nest in hollow trees or hollow logs. The eggs and young (below) photographed in WRA are safe in their hollow log nests.

With their red, featherless heads turkey vultures resemble turkeys when at rest (top left). Turkey vultures lower their body temperatures at night and warm up by spreading their wings toward the sun the next morning.



Turkey Vulture Eggs



Week Old Nestlings

The turkey vulture is a large carrion feeding raptor with a six foot wingspan. It rarely kills its prey, but instead feeds on the remains of kills left by other animals and on the many animals killed by cars on area roads.

Unlike most birds, the turkey vulture has a keen sense of smell and is able to locate rotting carcasses by detecting the odors rising from them.

Its large wings allow it to soar effortlessly on thermal updrafts for hours in search of food.

Turkey vultures are migratory. They arrive in Michigan in late February and begin nesting soon thereafter.

Turkey vultures often roost in large community groups, breaking away to forage independently during the day.

The Turkey Vulture has few predators. Its primary form of defense is regurgitating semi-digested meat, a foul-smelling substance which deters most creatures intent on raiding a vulture nest.

With few predators and an abundance of road kill animals for food, the turkey vulture is doing well and is considered a species of least concern. It provides a useful service, disposing of dead animals that might transmit disease.

The turkey vulture is the most common vulture in the Americas. Its global population is estimated to be 4,500,000 individuals. Turkey vultures are commonly seen throughout the Waterloo Recreation Area.