



Turkey Vulture

(*Cathartes aura*)

DID YOU KNOW:

The Turkey Vulture is closely related to the California Condor. These two birds, along with the Black Vulture, are grouped by scientists in the same classification as storks and

flamingos.

EATING HABITS:

The Turkey Vulture's scientific name means cleanser, which perfectly describes their role in nature. They eat carrion (animals that are already dead). Turkey Vultures clean up road kill, and other rotting carcasses, that contain diseases which could make humans or their pets sick.

THE YOUNG:

Turkey Vultures do not build nests. Instead a mated pair will lay their eggs on the ground, on a rock ledge, in a cave or in a hollow tree. The female lays two eggs, and both parents incubate them until they hatch in about a month. Three months after hatching, the young vultures are ready to fly. They may live more than 20 years.

HABITAT (HOME):

Turkey Vultures live in almost every habitat in North America. These birds live in large groups called roosts. The current generation and their future generations will use the same roost for many years. They live and work together. They even communicate with neighboring roosts when a large feast is located. Turkey Vultures are often seen soaring together as they search for food.



DEFENSIVE HABITS:

Turkey Vultures' strong, sharp beaks, which are used for tearing meat, make great weapons. Vultures have a unique way to protect themselves -- they vomit! Because of its strong stomach acids, a vulture's vomit smells horrible. The predator thinks that the vulture probably won't taste good if it smells so bad. Vomiting also makes them lighter so they can take off faster.

UNUSUAL FACTS:

- Turkey Vultures spend several hours preening themselves and will even bathe if water is available.
- Scientists believe Turkey Vultures may be as intelligent as domestic dogs.
- Turkey Vultures have been used to detect the location of natural gas leaks, because they will circle over the leak lured by the rotten-meat odor added to the gas.
- These birds use thermals to help them glide through the air. The hot air lifts the birds and then they can glide down and pick up another thermal.
- Turkey vultures love to sun themselves. This is called a horaltic pose. A vulture's body temperature drops overnight, and this pose will help the birds to warm up. This pose is also used after bathing to dry their feathers.
- Turkey vultures do not sing, cackle, scream, or call out in any way. This is because they do not have a voice box. With no voice box they are very limited, but they do grunt and hiss.