

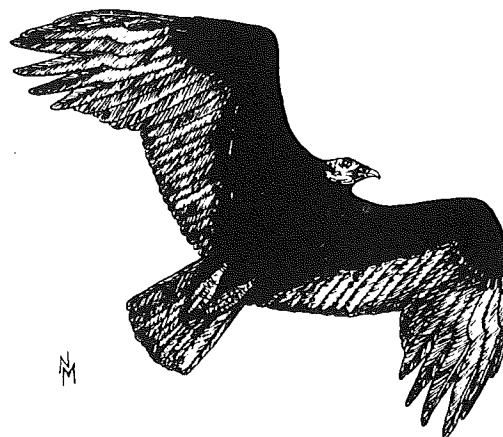
Turkey Vulture

Cathartes aura

Since the 1950s the Turkey Vulture has shown one of the most dramatic population increases of any of Vermont's birds. The state's first breeding record was obtained during the Atlas Project period. The northward spread of Turkey Vultures into New England is a recent development. Forbush (1927) considered them accidental in Vermont and occasional in the rest of New England. Sight records from Vermont began appearing sporadically in the *Bulletin of New England Bird Life* in 1938, but Turkey Vultures were not reported regularly in Vermont until about 1960. Spear (1976) considered them uncommon in southern Vermont and in the southern Champlain Valley. Bagg and Parker (1951) ascribed the Turkey Vulture's successful northward expansion partly to a more reliable food supply in the form of increased numbers of road-killed animals and increased mortality among New England's deer herd as a result of overpopulation—both of which benefit a carrion-eating species.

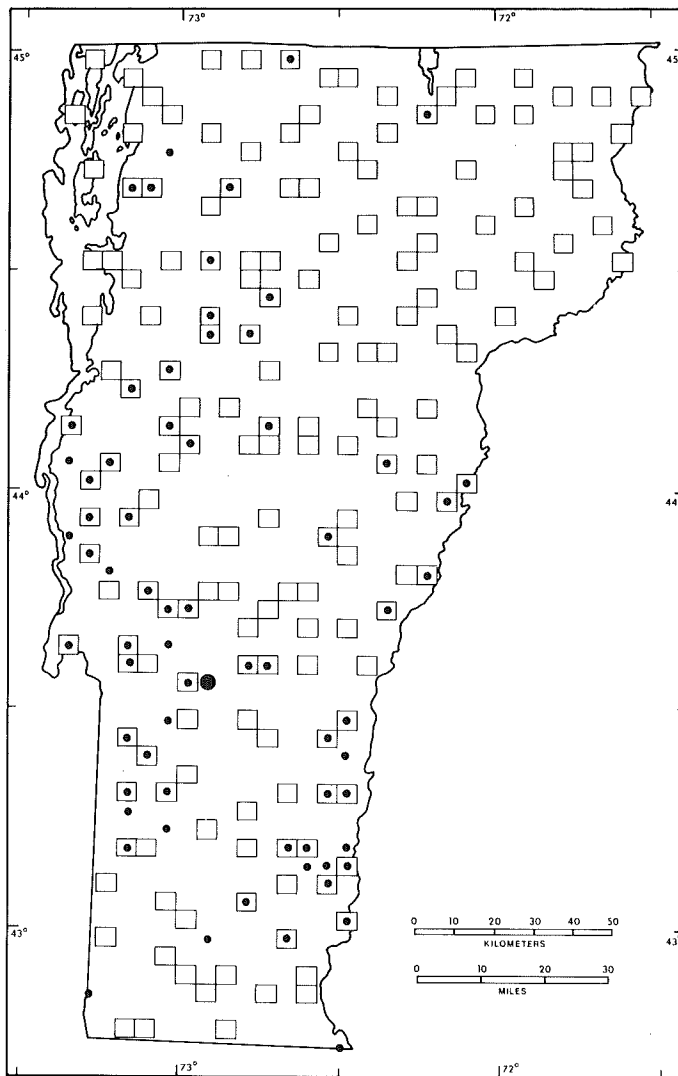
Turkey Vultures spend extended periods of the day aloft, traveling long distances in search of food, and were fairly easy to locate in Atlas Project blocks. They forage primarily over open areas, either wet or dry, although openings in wooded habitats created by roads, logging, and bodies of water are also suitable (DeGraaf et al. 1980). In the South, where Black Vultures and Turkey Vultures coexist, they apparently divide the scavenging niche. Turkey Vultures feed singly or in small groups on smaller carcasses than those favored by Black Vultures; they locate carrion by sight and smell (Stewart 1978).

Turkey Vultures return in late March and early April after spending the winter in the southeastern U.S. Confirmation of breeding is extremely difficult, and nests are most often located by accident. The only Atlas Project confirmation was of a pair observed mating (DD) on a ledge on Bald Mountain,



Mendon, on April 22, 1979 (ASR, N. L. Martin). A pair was present regularly at that location throughout the spring, but a search of accessible ledges did not locate a nest. Vermont's first recorded nest was located in June 1983 in a crevice in a cliff in northwestern Franklin County (RVB, Summer 1983).

Nest sites are varied: they include caves, ledges on cliffs, hollow logs or trees, dense shrubbery, abandoned hawk nests, and deserted farm buildings (Tyler 1937; Brown and Amadon 1968). Caves with two entrances were preferred nest sites in an Ohio study (Coles 1944). Females apparently choose the darkest part of the site in which to lay 2 dull white, brown-splotched eggs (Coles 1944; Brown and Amadon 1968). Both adults apparently incubate the eggs during the 38 to 41 days required for hatching (Coles 1944; Brown and Amadon 1968). Egg dates for New York State range from May 4 to June 20 (Bull 1974); Vermont's one nest on record contained 2 eggs in early June when it was discovered. The young are covered with white down upon hatching. They are fed by regurgitation. Turkey Vultures have a protracted nestling period of about 11 weeks, but during that time the young move about easily and may leave the cavity to sun, stretch, and preen (Brown and Amadon 1968). Nestling dates in New York are between June 15 and August 27 (Bull 1974), and are probably similar in Vermont. Young vultures can fly fairly well and



No. of priority blocks in which recorded
TOTAL 52 (29%)
 Possible breeding: 52 (100% of total)
 Probable breeding: 0 (0% of total)
 Confirmed breeding: 0 (0% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	13	42	25
Green Mountains	13	24	25
North Central	1	5	2
Northeast Highlands	0	0	0
East Central	3	16	6
Taconic Mountains	10	62	19
Eastern Foothills	12	50	23

may travel long distances soon after fledging. The presence of immature vultures at two hawk-watch locations in Vermont (Bald Mountain, Mendon, September 1978 and 1980; Deer Leap, Bristol, September 4, 1981) raises the intriguing possibility that they had been raised in those areas (N. L. Martin, pers. observ.; J. J. Allen, pers. comm.). Turkey Vultures do not depart from Vermont until early October; a few may linger into November or later.

During the Atlas Project, Turkey Vultures were seen most often in the southern two-thirds of the Connecticut River valley, in the Taconic Mountains, and in the Champlain

Valley north to Canada, with occasional sightings in other areas. Turkey Vultures in Vermont will probably continue to increase in numbers.

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