

## **Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*)**

### **Field Marks:**

- Large dark birds
- Long fingers at their wingtips
- Tails that extend past their toe tips in flight
- Dark brown body with a bald, red head and pale beak

### **Breeding Range:**

Turkey Vultures breed in the Northern United States with populations living year round in the Southern United States, Central America, and South America.

### **Habitat Preferences:**

Turkey Vultures are particularly abundant in open areas including farmland, desert, foothills, but can be spotted in a wide variety of other habitats. Densely forested areas tend to be less popular among Turkey Vultures.

### **Nesting:**

Turkey Vultures nest in more mountainous regions with caves, ledges, and cliffs marking the best nest sites. These birds tend to utilize nests repeatedly over time, but do not build full nests, instead they opt to arrange vegetation, obstacles, and soil to their preference in isolation. Turkey Vultures tend to have clutch sizes averaging 1-3 eggs that incubate for 28-40 with a longer nestling period of 60-84 days.

### **Feeding:**

Turkey Vultures find their food with a keen sense of smell that can detect carrion from over a mile away. Unfortunately, their talons are not typically sharp enough to pierce the skin of most mammals so they have to wait until their meal softens and other predators have already opened the animal for them. Turkey Vultures are often praised for their service in preventing the spread of diseases as their immune systems prevent them from contracting those disease (e.g. botulism, anthrax, salmonella).

### **Conservation Status:**

At this point in time, Turkey Vultures are not a conservation concern as they have seen population increases throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century with a stable population currently. The species was negatively affected by the use of DDT, but have since recovered. The major threat to Turkey Vultures currently include lead poisoning from animals that were shot and not retrieved by hunters.