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Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*

The Turkey Vulture soaring effortlessly over the landscape is a common everyday sight throughout Florida, even in the Florida Keys, where, unlike the *Black Vulture*, it is a permanent year-round resident. It resides and breeds from British Columbia east to New York, Vermont, and New Hampshire, south to Cuba and Jamaica, and throughout Central and South America.

Habitat. Nesting habitat in Florida is chiefly dense stands of saw palmetto in or near open pine woods, fallen hollow logs, and, occasionally, caves, rock ledges, and abandoned buildings. No nest is constructed; the 1 to 3, most often 2, whitish eggs, often marked or stained with brown, are laid on the bare surface. Incubation takes approximately 38 to 41 days, and the young birds fledge at about 2 months of age (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Turkey Vultures feed on carrion found on highways, pastures, and at dumps. Occasionally, they will eat vinyl materials such as roofing covering, pipe insulation, and boat seat cushions, even though such materials contain no nutritional value. Apparently these materials emit an odor, which to the vultures, at least, is similar to that of rotting flesh.

Seasonal Occurrence. Eggs have been found from 13 February through 9 May for the Turkey Vulture. According to Stevenson and Anderson (1994), flocks of this vulture are frequently seen migrating southward from September through December, throughout most of Florida. Spring migrants have been noted March through May.

Status. A propensity to travel several miles from its nest site in search of food precluded the use of the "possible" breeding category for this species. As a result, its Atlas map, like that for the *Black Vulture*, is an under representation of the bird's true breeding range in Florida. Although the map does show breeding to occur throughout the state, the many gaps are chiefly a result of the difficulty in finding more tangible evidence for breeding than that provided simply by the disallowed criteria of seeing "a bird in suitable habitat during its breeding season." The large gap in the Everglades Agricultural area is probably real due to the lack of suitable nesting habitat in that intensively farmed region.

Herbert W. Kale II



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