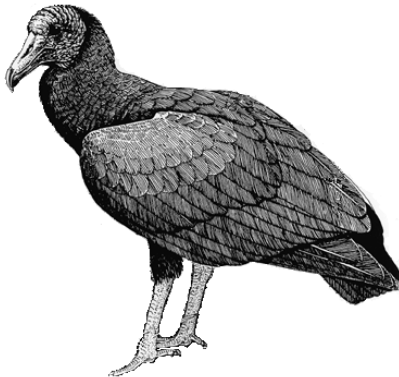


# Black Vulture

Scientific Name: *Coragyps atratus*



## Did You Know?

- Like all other vultures, the black vulture has a bald head. This is so that bits of carrion (dead meat) do not adhere to the skin as they would to feathers.
- Black vultures are good at finding "thermals" which they use in soaring to high elevations. They are more visual hunters than the turkey vulture and often watch the latter from above while it hunts by scent. Once food (carrion) is located, the black vulture, being more aggressive, often drives away the turkey vulture from its newly found meal.
- Vultures prefer meat as fresh as possible and won't eat extremely rotted carcasses. They can smell carrion only 12-24 hours old.
- The black vulture has rather weak feet with blunt talons. The beak is long and hooked, an adaptation for tearing flesh.
- Often confused in flight with the Turkey Vulture. Differences for the black vulture include: a long neck, a squared tail, non-dihedral (V-shaped) angle of wings while gliding, quick and laborious wing beats alternating with short glides, and does not "teeter" while gliding.
- The black vulture is a large black bird with a wingspan of 4 1/2 to 5 feet.
- The black vulture is long-lived, usually about 25.5 years, and without natural enemies as adults. Its lifestyle (carrion feeder) enables it to adapt well to human interactions and habitations.
- Vultures help clean up the environment by eating dead animals before they rot and cause disease. Vultures have long been perceived as loathsome creatures because of their repulsive feeding habits. We now know, however, the important role these scavenging birds fulfill by "cleaning up" dead animals from our forests and fields.
- In 1994, due to DNA analysis and other studies on anatomy, physiology, behavior, and cellular biology, the vulture was reclassified and placed in the stork family. In August 2007, this was revisited and they were removed from the Stork family.
- Vulture fecal matter is free of bacteria, viruses, and fungi due to the strong stomach acids in the stomach.

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# General Information on Black Vultures

## IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS

The black vulture is a large black bird with a wingspan of 4 1/2 to 5 feet. It has a rather short tail and can be easily identified in flight by the presence of a conspicuous white patch underneath each wing tip. It differs in appearance from the turkey vulture primarily by its slightly smaller size, the white wing patches, and the very noticeable bare head which is black in coloration, in stark contrast to the red head of the turkey vulture.

## RANGE

Found throughout southeastern North America through Mexico extending down into South America. It has expanded its range north, especially northeasterly, in recent years. In east/southeastern U.S., it is relatively more abundant near the coasts. It is usually absent in higher elevations, while being more numerous in lowland areas.

## HABITAT

Open country, roosts in large congregations in secluded woods.

## NESTING

Black vultures nest on the ground under cover, in tree stumps or sometimes in caves. They lay 2 eggs.

## FEEDING HABITS

Black vultures feed on carrion, which they locate by vision or possibly smell. They are often seen feeding in groups on large items but will eat almost anything.

## CONSERVATION STATUS

Numbers appear to be stable, if not increasing as indicated by their expanding range. The black vulture is long-lived, usually about 25.5 years, and without natural enemies as adults. Its lifestyle (carrion feeder) enables it to adapt well to human interactions and habitations.