

VULTURES IN INDIANA

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There are two species of vultures in Indiana. Observing people in the southern part of the state know both of them. One they call the turkey buzzard. It is not a buzzard but the turkey vulture. The other they call the carrion crow. It is not a crow but the black vulture. (Fig. 1).¹

The black vulture (*Coragyps atratus atratus*) is resident in the counties along the Ohio River and ranges north almost to the National Road; it is accidental in Allen County and in southern Michigan.

Audubon (Birds of the United States of America, Text Vol. 2, 1834, p. 4) gives its range in this region thus: "continues the whole year in Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois and even in the State of Ohio as far as Cincinnati." After his account appeared, almost a half century passed before anything was again recorded of it in this region.

The next record, in Ohio, appears to be by Dr. Frank W. Langdon, near Cincinnati, December 20, 1876 (Bull. Nuttall Orn. Club., Oct. 1877, p. 109). The next record from Indiana was of two birds at Brookville, May 17, 1879, by Edgar R. Quick (Journ. Cin. Soc. N. H., Dec. 1881, p. 341).

Had they disappeared from this range for almost fifty years? Since the above dates they have been reported almost every year. They reached north as far as the counties of Knox, Monroe, Decatur, Orange, and Franklin by 1890, Morgan 1894, Putnam 1896. Reports indicate no change in many succeeding years. They were reported breeding in *Knox and *Gibson counties, where they had become common in 1895. In 1889 they nested near *Brookville, Franklin County (Butler, Birds of Indiana, Rept. State Geologist 1897, p. 768). In the winter of 1926-27 they were reported in numbers in *Jefferson County. McKim C. Copeland reported about 150 wintering in Clifty Falls State Park. A few stayed through the summer to nest.

November 12, 1934, while riding along the eastern edge of Clifty ravine, near Madison, Indiana, I was astonished to see on the opposite wall of the cliff a large number of vultures sunning themselves among the rocks and shelters. Most of them were perched on trees and rocks, some with wings outspread in the characteristic vulture way. Some were flying. I estimated that 150 birds were in sight. At least three-fourths of them were black vultures; the remainder were turkey vultures (*Cathartes aura septentrionalis*). So far as I have been able to learn, there is no other place in the Ohio Valley where so many of these birds congregate in winter. The number reported there in recent years varies from 150 to 500 in different winters. Miss Edna Banta, who was a nature guide in the park for three years, said they were common in the winter

*Indicates nesting records.

¹This figure is published through the courtesy of Professor William P. Allyn, of Indiana State Teachers College. It was previously used to illustrate an article in the Teachers College Journal (6:113, 1934), from which the following (p. 114) is quoted: "Of some nine nests under observation during 1933, only two were of the black species. The specimens shown in the photographs were taken at Hoosier Highlands from the caves about the rock cliffs. The black vulture is somewhat the smaller of the two, with a black head, black body, and ivory-colored shafts in the primaries. The turkey vulture is turkey-brown in color and has a red bald head as an adult."

of 1927-28, but in March they began to scatter. At least one pair nested each year she was there, and she saw young learning to fly. Some persons tried to drive them away by shooting. A C.C.C. Camp was later located near-by, and now one does not see so many of the birds. S. E. Esten, with the State Conservation Department, reported numbers of vultures there in winter and estimated ninety per cent to be black vultures. That is also the report of John C. Kirkpatrick. He says these birds were first noted in Jefferson County about ten years ago (1925) near Riker's Ridge. In 1931 they were abundant in Clifty Falls State Park, roosting in winter under the ledges by "dead man's trail"; but in summer they are not common. A nest was seen among a pile of rocks near the falls in 1933, and several young were observed in the park early in September. Floyd S. Carpenter, Louisville, Ky., reported them there in numbers in the winters of 1932, 1933, and 1934. He also reported one at the State Forest in Clark County, December 16, 1934. They occur in Clark County practically every month of the year; they are also reported there by Mrs. Genevieve B. Myers and S. E. Perkins III. April 28, 1935, Mr. Carpenter observed at "Buzzard's Cave" near Tobacco Landing, Harrison County, two black vultures and fifteen turkey vultures. That is regarded as a nesting place.

Frank N. Wallace found a nest containing one egg and one young among the rocks in *McCormick's Creek State Park in 1935. Both Prof. Wm. P. Allyn of Terre Haute and Clyde Volkers report them having nested for the past four years in *Putnam County (Allyn, *Journal Indiana State Teachers' College*, v. 6, 1934, p. 114, and *Indiana Audubon*

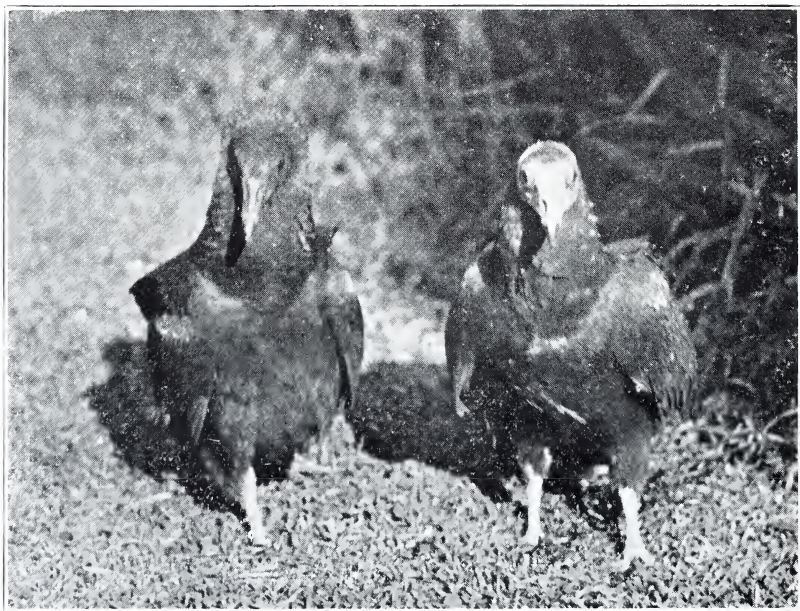


FIG. 1. Vultures in adult plumage (black vulture at left).

Soc. Year Book, 1935, p. 19). Prof. Allyn says he found them nesting at "Hoosier Highlands" in that county each of the past four years. He brought young of different ages home with him and says they make interesting pets, one of which, taken this year, he still has. These young, he says, stay in the nest from eight to ten weeks, which would indicate that their nesting probably began in May.

C. W. Brown, Vevay, Switzerland County, reported them there the past two years. Charles K. Muchmore, Laurel, Franklin County, found January 8, 1935, twenty-five black vultures in the center of a wooded tract lying between the old canal and the Whitewater River two miles south of that town. They were still there January 28, and evidently they had roosted there for some time. Later he found about the same number in woods north of Laurel. In a recent letter he says he found 44 in about the same locality in Fayette County, October 23, 1935. They have been about all summer, and, while he believes they bred, he did not find a nest.

The black vulture has also been reported from the following counties: Jackson, R. J. Fleetwood; Morgan, John Harris; Orange, Hurst Shoemaker; Knox, Roy Chansler, Clyde E. Swope.

In the bird records of the late Charles A. Stockbridge of Fort Wayne, Indiana, occurs this memorandum: "Black Vulture, May 3, 1914, Flock of 20". There is in his collection presented to the local Historical Society, a specimen labeled "Ft. Wayne", but having no date. (Esten, Ind. Audubon Soc. Year Book, 1935, p. 75). Mrs. Etta S. Wilson reported three of these birds near Tecumseh, Michigan, October 1, 1924 (The Auk, 1925, p. 442).

Prof. L. E. Hicks says they have been found nesting in the following Ohio counties: *Adams, *Scioto, *Highland, *Ross, *Lawrence, *Jackson, *Vinton, *Hocking, and *Fairfield. Stragglers in winter or in migration have been seen north to the counties: Montgomery, Franklin, Knox, and Monroe. They are resident in the southern Ohio counties but nowhere have they been reported in winter in such numbers as have been found in Jefferson County, Indiana.

The northern range in Ohio seems to be about the same as in this state. We can now say that the black vulture in Indiana ranges north to about the National Road, or Fayette and Putnam counties. They breed throughout their range. In winter, at times associated with turkey vultures, they gather in large numbers in quiet, protected places. Only one record for northern Illinois is given. (Birds of the Chicago Region, p. 31, 1934).

The turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura septentrionalis* Wied) is the one you know best. It was described by Prince Maximilian of Wied from a specimen taken near New Harmony, Indiana. The type specimen is unknown. When the Smithsonian Institution some two years ago wanted a specimen from the type locality, Dr. Herbert Friedman appealed for help, and Mrs. Louise M. Husband and Mrs. Nora C. Fretageot of New Harmony, with the help of Norman Conyers, obtained it. The specimen proved to be, as was expected, typical *septentrionalis*. It is present there throughout the year. Its range includes Indiana, Ohio, Illinois,

*Indicates nesting records.

and southern Michigan, the bird breeding throughout that range and wintering, usually, in the southern part of it. It is rare in northwestern Indiana, especially north of the Kankakee. In 1934 there are given three records from that territory (Birds of the Chicago Region, Edw. R. Ford, Colin C. Sanborn, and C. Blair Coursen, 1934, p. 31). Edw. R. Ford reports it (1929) from Lake County, Indiana, on the authority of Dr. Lewy. J. G. Parker, Jr., reports that he has often observed it at Kouts, Starke County (Birds of Indiana, 1897, p. 767).

Ned Barker says it occurs and nests along the Kankakee in *Newton County. Archie T. Wilson gives it as a rare summer visitor—one reported July 13, 1935. Prof. C. W. G. Eifrig noted three at Tremont, Porter County, July 4, 1917 (Proc. Ind. Acad. Sci., 1918, p. 290). Chas. H. Reider also reports it from Valparaiso, Porter County, January, 1935. S. E. Perkins III gives four Starke County records, August 17 and September 27, 1934, and March 27 and September 7, 1935. Mr. Perkins also gives the following records: Marshall County: 1925, July 21, September 12; 1929, August 10; 1934, August 3, 14, September 3; 1935, March 27; Cass County, July 15, 1933; Fulton County, flock of 80 seen soaring six miles south of Kewanna, September 3, 1934. They have been recorded in the following counties: *Posey, Harrison, Clark (present practically every month), *Jefferson, Switzerland, *Franklin, Brown, Monroe (H. T. Gier), Orange, Jackson (remaining mild winters, Fleetwood, Am. Mid. Nat., Jan., 1933, p. 19); Knox, *Putnam, *Parke ("Buzzard's Roost"), *Marion (Jan. 7, 1935, Lawrence Allison), Montgomery, Delaware (S. R., Apr. 11 to Oct. 19, H. A. Zimmerman I. A. Year Book 1931, p. 46), Wayne (Feb. 26, 1935; Jay 3, May 5, 1935), Tippecanoe (not common, Dr. L. A. Test), *Wabash, *Wells; Allen (May 15, 1910, Stockbridge, Ind. Aud. Soc. Y. B., 1935, p. 75). Although scarce north of the Kankakee, these birds may reach northeastern Indiana and Michigan by way of the Wabash River. They are reported as wintering in Calhoun County, Michigan, Dec. 22, 1929 (The Auk, Apr., 1930, p. 251) and nesting at Ann Arbor, Mich., Mar. 24, 1935 (N. A. Wood). A western form, *teter*, ranges east to southern Wisconsin and south and south-central Michigan (H. Friedmann, epist.).

The distribution in Ohio corresponds to that indicated for Indiana. Milton B. Trautman (Birds of Ohio, Bull. Ohio Dept. Agr. 1:6) gives it "common summer resident, nests locally." Probably, as in Indiana, it nests more or less frequently locally throughout its range.

The food habits of both species are similar. They are essentially scavengers. They eat carrion and also fresh meat and insects and other objects. In warmer parts of America they are the chief sanitarians. We shall probably see still further extension of the range of one, if not both of these birds. Their association with Clifty Falls should be an added attraction to the State Park if they are properly protected by the authorities. They should be recognized as an asset by the Department of Conservation.

*Indicates nesting records.