

# Turkey Vulture

LATIN NAME: *Cathartes aura*  
CLASS: Aves  
CONSERVATION STATUS: Least Concern



Turkey Vultures get their name because their **bald red heads** from a distance resemble a **turkey!**

They can travel up to **200 miles** a day.

They are often mistakenly called **buzzards**, which is a British word for certain hawks.

Turkey Vultures are the only **scavenger bird** that can't kill their prey because their feet are cannot rip into prey.

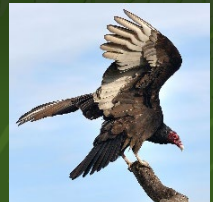
They average **2 1/2 feet** tall and have a **6-foot** wingspan, but only weigh **3 lbs.**

Turkey Vultures have the **largest olfactory (smelling)** system of any bird.

Their average lifespan is **20 years!**

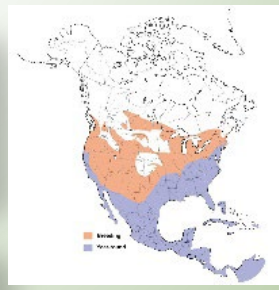
They have **powerful beaks** that can tear through even the toughest cow hide.

Turkey vultures prefer their meat as fresh as possible and won't eat extremely rotted meat. They can smell only 12–24-hour old dead meat. They also help to clean up the environment by eating the flesh of dead animals before it rots and causes disease.



For any wildlife-related concerns, please call the LaRC Environmental Office (Ande Remington) at 864-8332  
[environmental.larc.nasa.gov](http://environmental.larc.nasa.gov)

Data obtained from the National Wildlife Federation and the National Geographic



Turkey Vultures live in most of the United States, Southern Canada, and Mexico



They lack vocal cords, so they make a low, guttural hiss. In flight, they make a nasally whining noise.



Turkey Vultures will eat pumpkins, Juniper berries, coconuts, and dead animals such as birds, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates.