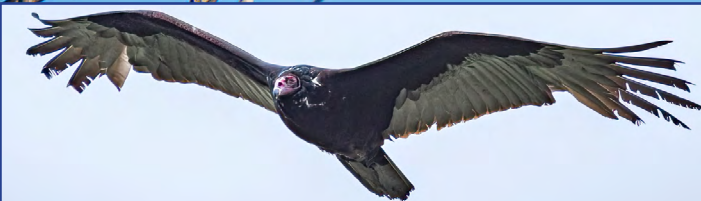




TURKEY VULTURE



Photos by James Kendall



The stately Turkey Vulture makes an impactful appearance as it slowly glides in lazy circles high above the Urban Forest on a sunny day. This massive scavenger, with a wing span of six feet, rarely flaps its wings, conserving energy by riding on thermal updrafts of air, holding its broad dark wings in a V formation, known as a dihedral, and gently rocking while surveying the broad expanse below.

They rely heavily on their extraordinarily keen sense of smell to find fresh carcasses. They fly low enough to detect the gasses produced by the early process of decay in dead animals and have been known to smell carrion from over a mile away.

As a consummate scavenger, they clean up the countryside one bite of their sharply hooked bill at a time. Once one Turkey Vulture discovers a fresh carcass, others will soon join in, picking the remains clean and thereby helping to keep the ecosystem healthy and disease free. It is vital that carcasses fed upon are free of Rodenticides or other man-made contaminants so that this ecological relationship continues to flourish.

The average Turkey Vulture lives 20 years or more and congregates nightly to sleep in large communal roosts. In the early morning hours you may see Turkey Vultures sunbathing in a tree with their wings spread out. This is done to increase their body temperature after a cool night. They will then head out on their far-ranging daily foraging flights after the sun has sufficiently warmed the ground and thermal updrafts of air begin to occur.