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Ageing the Turkey Vulture

HY to ASY

Ranger Ed Henckel

The Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) can be aged by coloration of the maxilla or beak from hatching year (HY) to second year (SY) and after second year (ASY).

The HY birds will be all dark to three-quarters dark from the tip to the cere. Birds of this age could still have signs of down plumage and will not have acquired the adult red head, retaining the juvenile dark head coloration.

The SY birds will have reddish heads but will not have acquired a completely white beak. Any sign of dark coloration at the tip of the beak would signify a second year bird.

The ASY birds will have completely white beaks and reddish heads.

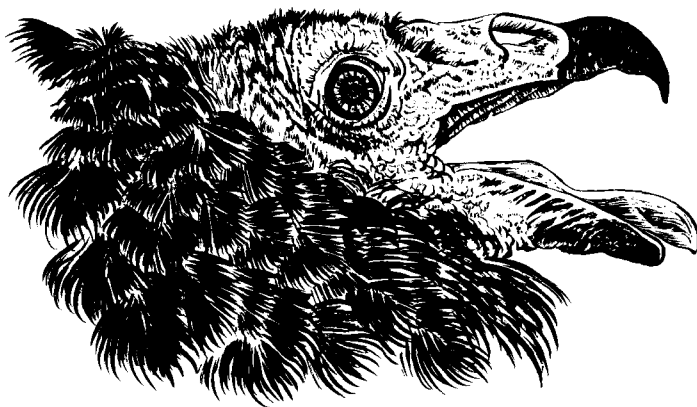
Caution must be used in determining head color while

handling. As a defense mechanism the Turkey Vulture will sometimes assume the "TV Stupor", or play 'possum. During this act the blood is drained from the head and neck skin area and from the neck muscles. The bird will have no control of the neck and the normally reddish surfaces will become any shade from light red, to gray and to almost white in some areas. This condition is not long-lasting nor harmful to the bird. Normal coloration returns moments after release.

The number and size of facial and head warts on the Turkey Vulture cannot be used as an age indicator. ♦

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(This note has been submitted to the Vulture Group for inclusion in their publication with NABB's knowledge and permission.)



First year



Pinda Leg
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Adult



Second Year