

# Apparent Breeding Record of Turkey Vulture along South Saskatchewan River

by Dave Santy, Beechy

In mid-September, 1961, Mr. Gordon Prior caught a young Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) in the South Saskatchewan River hills near his farm in the Demaine district. The bird had a broken wing tip. By the efforts it made to escape at the time of its capture, Gordon believes the bird could have taken flight but for the broken wing. The appearance of the wound suggested that the accident had happened some time before, possibly when the bird was still a fledgling. After capturing it, Gordon provided food for it for over two weeks—its daily diet was a jack rabbit weighing more than the bird itself.

Showing fear at first, the vulture soon became used to people and even

demanded attention. In the end it was taken to the Moose Jaw Wild Animal Park.

The head of the young vulture had not yet turned red. It had a sparse growth of black hair which Gordon described as a "crew cut"!

We have seen vultures in this territory at intervals dating back to the early 1920's. As they were usually in pairs we formed the belief that they nested here, but this find of a young bird is the first tangible evidence to support the belief.

**Editor's Note:** Among the birds sighted by Ralph Carson on a 10-day expedition into the South Saskatchewan River area this past summer for the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History was an adult Turkey Vulture observed June 15, 1961, at Swift Current Creek.

# Unusual Nesting Sites of Brown Thrasher and Yellow-Shafted Flicker

by P. Laurence Beckie, Bladworth

On June 11, 1961, I photographed a Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*) at its nest in an unusual location. I had found the nest several days before when I took some empty cans to a stone pile. As the cans fell with a rattle a Brown Thrasher flew out from somewhere in the garbage heap. I soon found a nest with eggs built on a branch of a fallen dead tree. The dead branch protruded into an old round wash tub standing on its side, so the nest was sheltered in a quite unusual way. I visited the nest a few days after and found the Brown Thrasher sitting tight in defiance of my close approach. On my next visit in late July, the nest was naturally deserted; but I trust that the young were safely raised in this unusual nest site. For notes on a somewhat similar nest-site of this species see **Blue Jay**, 15:103.

In 1944 I had a Brown Thrasher nest in a box in some poplars. The nesting box was a crude one, placed in a tree about 12 feet above the ground. Bent (1948. **Life Histories ... Thrashers...**) cites two records

of the Curve-billed Thrasher (*Toxostoma curvirostre*) nesting in old woodpecker holes in trees, but the habit is certainly rare in this group. Apparently neither the Curve-billed Thrasher nor the Brown Thrasher has been recorded nesting in nest-boxes and such a site must be unusual.

Another oddity I found last summer (1961) was a family of Yellow-shafted Flickers (*Colaptes auratus*) nesting in a telephone pole below ground level. The dwelling had been chipped out years ago by predecessors of the 1961 tenants. Then the pole had rotted off and was reset with the entrance to the hole now being only six inches above the ground level. The inside cavity was about one foot deep, so the young were actually raised below ground! The elusiveness of the parents was unbelievable. I drove past the post nearly once a day during their occupancy and I didn't know it was in use until my brother Sam heard the buzzing of the young as he passed on his way to school.

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The percentage of survival was further reduced to 16 by August 30. Although disease accounted for most of the larval loss, it appeared probable that some of the larvae were destroyed by birds and predaceous insects.

Predation of the pupae also takes place. Frequently cocoons are torn open or totally removed. Many cocoons covered by snow which lodges in shelterbelts during the winter months, are chewed, and the pupae destroyed. These depredations appear to be the work of small rodents. In 1960, 118 cocoons containing pupae were marked in a box elder plantation and in two adjacent hedges. Few cocoons were lost before September 14, but between September 14 and September 28, all but two had been removed or destroyed. The cocoons, with few exceptions, had been torn from the stems and branches and carried away. Those destroyed on the trees had been torn open and the pupae removed. Pictures taken with a field camera triggered to 'planted' cocoons showed Black-billed Magpies (*Pica pica*) tearing at the cocoons to remove them from the trees. Similar depredations in previous years had also been attributed to magpies.

#### Other Factors

Infertility of the eggs and failure of larvae to hatch caused small population losses. In samples comprising more than 2000 eggs these losses were less than three per cent.

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S.N.H.S.) states that in March, 1904, a rufous specimen was taken at Regina for the Chicago Natural History Museum. In December, 1931, a specimen was taken at Tregarva (also rufous). Another was taken in March, 1934, by Mr. Fred Bard (this specimen being found in a store basement). Also Miss Belcher mentions a number of sight records: in December, 1932, a red-phased Screech Owl was seen by Mr. Bard; another was seen in November, 1935, by Knowles; and Mr. Bard identified an owl seen by Mrs. J. Couturier in the fall of 1940 as a red-phased Screech Owl. It is interesting that most of these birds had the rufous plumage.

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Besides that nest ¼ mile north of us, we had another family of flickers, in a post planted for that purpose in our yard. Now that's a lot of flickers in one year for our locality—in comparison with the past. The young flickers in our yard survived quite an experience. When they had begun to feather, our children along with some visiting youngsters filled the nest full of stones. When I went out into the yard the next morning, the adult was noisily flying about. I wondered at her behaviour. Then about noon my young daughter Theresa gave me an inkling of what had happened and I was able to remove the stones. The stones were in the nest from 8:00 p.m. until 12 noon the following day, and yet three of the four young survived.