



Turkey vulture holds its wings in a 'V' as it banks. Note small, red, featherless head.

Vulture rides the wind

SCHOOL is about to end, and vacations are about to begin. As families travel to their destinations, passengers and drivers can pass their time looking for wildlife along the countryside.

When driving during the early morning hours, travelers may observe and count red-winged blackbirds in the cattails next to the road.

Passengers might even look for red-tailed hawks that may be sitting on telephone poles, dead limbs of trees, or soaring over open fields.

IF YOU SEE a large bird soaring over an open field in Michigan it may not be a red-tailed hawk, though. It may be a turkey vulture. Though they are called "buzzards" by some people, ornithologists call them vultures. They are a common bird in Michigan, but are often mistaken for hawks. Turkey vultures are about 25 inches long, have a wingspan of six feet, and are black except for a red featherless head.

In the sky, they are masters of the air currents and seldom flap their wings. When seen from the ground, their heads look so small that they



nature

Timothy Nowicki

look like wings and a tail.

As a bird turns and banks, note how its wings are held in a slight "V" shape. Hawks hold their wings outstretched flat.

Most hawks in our area are not black like the turkey vulture, though they may be about the same size. If you consider all these characteristics, next time you see a large bird flying overhead, you should be able

to determine if it is a vulture or a hawk.

TURKEY VULTURES are the only vultures found in Michigan. They nest in hollow logs, rock crevices, or even under the ground.

Vultures do not kill their food, but scavenge dead animals which they find by their keen sense of smell. Most birds have a very poor sense of smell.

With a little practice, vacation travelers can begin to enjoy and learn about nature even from a moving car.

When my wife and I drove north along I-75 from Florida one winter, we counted one hawk every seven miles. If you have young birders in the car, this activity may help keep them occupied for awhile.

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