

2004 - 083

Colorado Field Ornithologists Sight Record Form

CBRC File # - _____

RESULTS _____

Species (common and scientific names) **Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus***

Date(s) of observation: **August 13, 2002 and August 14, 2002**

Number of birds seen: **one** Sex: **unknown** Plumage: **adult**

Exact Location: **Dam at John Martin Reservoir and Lake Hasty Campground**

County: **Bent** Nearest Town: **Caddoa** Elevation: **3800 feet**

Length of observation: **Approximately three hours** Time(s) of observation: **First seen at 12:30 p.m. on August 13th. Observed then for over an hour. I relocated the bird at 3:30 p.m. and watched it for another hour. Finally, I observed it at length around 8 a.m. on August 14th.**

Other observers who saw the bird(s) with you: **I was alone when I found it. I observed it with several employees of the Corps of Engineers, including Julia Davis, Bias Redding, Steve Kinser and Tom Prior. Van Truan (a birder) was in a meeting at John Martin Reservoir, and went outside with me around 1 p.m. We viewed it from the dam and from below the dam, both roosting and in flight. I called Stan Oswald (Rocky Ford), and he arrived at 3:30 p.m. We found it roosting with 15 Turkey Vultures east of the Hasty Campground. Stan got about 3 minutes of videotape of the Black Vulture.**

Other observers who independently saw the bird(s): **On the morning of August 14th, six Denver-area birders arrived shortly after dawn and relocated the bird. This group of six included Chris Wood, Joey Kellner, Brandon Percival, Dick Schottler, Andrew Spencer and Robert Spencer.**

Light conditions (quality; direction relative to bird(s) and observer(s) position: **The weather was optimal for observations, with clear skies and**

light winds. When the Black Vulture roosted inside of the dam structure, it was in shadow.

Optical equipment used: Found and identified by naked eye. Later looks included through 10 X B&L Binoculars and through a 15 X -60 X B&L elite Spotting scope.

Distance to bird(s) (estimated unless otherwise noted): I think I was within 150 feet as it soared above me, and within 200 feet as it roosted on the dam and in the Campground area.

Was bird photographed? Yes If so, are you submitting photos? I submitted photographs taken by Julia Davis and Chris Wood

Who took the photographs? Julia Davis (in flight and roosting on the dam structure) and Chris Wood (perching on a dead tree)

Describe the general and specific habitats in which the bird(s) occurred: The same habitats as used by numerous local Turkey Vultures: Structures for roosting, updrafts created by the huge dam for soaring and hunting, and large deciduous trees for resting.

Describe bird's behaviors, particularly those used in supporting identification, e.g., flying, feeding, habits: As a hawkwatch veteran, I clearly think that identification of raptors is easiest when they are in flight. I doubt if any raptor identification (OK, I know that taxonomically, they belong with Storks) is more straight-forward than a Black Vulture. The flight profile of this bird was a stocky black body, broad, short all-black wings (except for a very conspicuous white patch on the primaries), short, square tail and grayish unfeathered head were diagnostic of Black Vulture and no other soaring large bird.

Shortly after I saw this solitary Vulture, it joined in with numerous Turkey Vultures, and I got to compare flight styles, proportions and size.

DESCRIPTION: (include size, shape, group and kinship with similar species, plumage. Include all features seen, whether they were important to ID or not.

With shorter, broader wings and a shorter tail than Turkey Vultures, the Black Vulture looked smaller in flight, although bulkier than, a Turkey Vulture. However, on landing and perching next to Turkey Vultures, it transformed into a bigger bird than the Turkey Vultures. First, the legs were noticeably longer and stouter. Instead of reddish, they were whitish-gray. Perched, the black coloration was much darker than on neighboring Turkey Vultures, which appeared to be a medium-to dark brown. With the long legs and bulky body, the Black Vulture looked bigger than Turkey Vultures, accentuated by a longer, stouter bill. While Chris Woods' picture shows a dark bill, other photographs attached to this report show a pale distal half of the bill and highly wrinkled skin on the bare head, indicating an adult bird. Perched, the very short tail looks slightly notched, in flight, very square. There was an absence of red all the places it is seen on a Turkey Vulture (the head, legs and bill).

In flight, the profile was very distinctive, with rounded, short wings, bulging secondaries and broad to the tip of the rounded wing. In flight, the wings appeared to be thrust forward, but held flat while soaring (no hint of a dihedral as in Turkey Vultures). The long whitish legs extended nearly to the tip of the tail while in flight.

SIMILAR SPECIES: (how were similar species eliminated): Only the new world vultures have featherless heads. The distinctive wing shape, short tail and naked gray head, and long horn-colored bill eliminates Turkey Vulture. Turkey Vulture wings are longer and narrower, with dark wing linings and silver secondaries and primaries, not broad with black secondaries and inner primaries like a Black Vulture.

Previous experience: with this species and similar species. I spent four springs observing migrant raptors at the Dinosaur Ridge Hawkwatch (which I discovered in 1990). As a result, I was very familiar with flight shapes and soaring strategies of all regularly occurring diurnal raptors in Colorado. I have traveled quite a bit as a birder, and have studied Black Vultures in Florida, Texas, Arizona and Mexico.

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Resources used for identification: **I used no guidebooks when identifying this bird. However, in the past, I had studied many of the classic hawk-watching guidebooks including *Hawks in Flight* (Sibley/Dunne/Sutton), *Peterson's Field Guide to Hawks* (Clark and Wheeler), and other technical resources.**

Report made from notes taken at time of observation.

Date report submitted: **11/10/04**

Report made and prepared by:

Duane Nelson

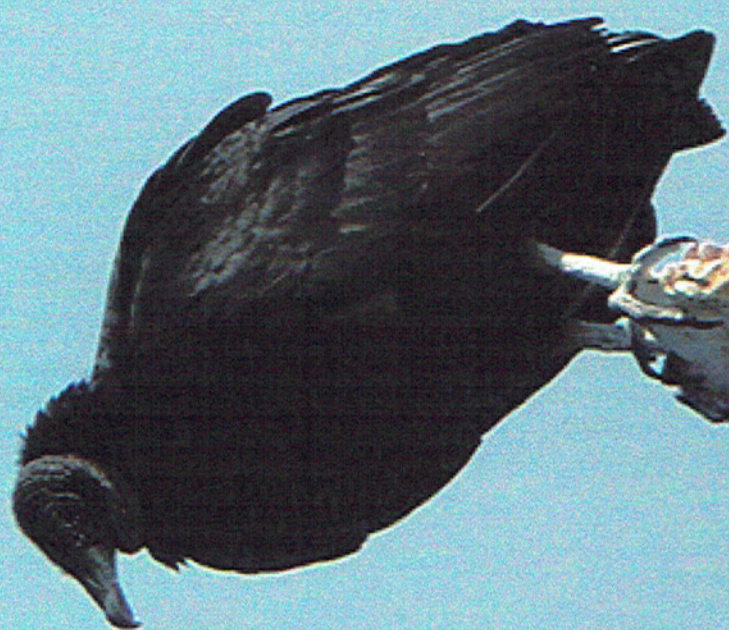
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