

# turkey vulture

## *Cathartes aura*

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Carthartiformes

Family: Cathartidae

### ILLINOIS STATUS

common, native

### FEATURES

An adult turkey vulture is 26 to 32 inches long. This bird has a bare, red head and red feet. The underside of the wing feathers is black near the body and gray at the outer edge. The body feathers are black. This bird has a very small head for its body size. The wingspan of a turkey vulture is nearly six feet.

### BEHAVIORS

The turkey vulture is a common migrant through Illinois, a summer resident and an occasional winter resident in the southern two-thirds of the state. It may be seen perching on dead trees or feeding on the ground. It is associated with woods but needs open areas to search for food. It is commonly seen in hilly areas with bluffs. It spends most of its time soaring in the sky. The turkey vulture feeds mostly on dead organisms. Its wings form a shallow "V" during flight. This bird soars high in the sky in a wide circle pattern as it searches for food. When the turkey vulture is on the ground, it wobbles when it walks. A defensive measure used by this bird is vomiting. Migrating turkey vultures begin arriving in Illinois in February. This bird nests in hollow sycamores and other trees, old barns, hollow stumps and rock crevices. Two eggs, white with brown spots, are laid in the nest in late spring. Fall migration peaks in October.

### ILLINOIS RANGE



adult



adult





© Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 2021. *Biodiversity of Illinois*.  
Unless otherwise noted, photos and images © Illinois Department of Natural Resources.



### **Aquatic Habitats**

bottomland forests

### **Woodland Habitats**

bottomland forests; southern Illinois lowlands; upland deciduous forests

### **Prairie and Edge Habitats**

edge; hill prairie