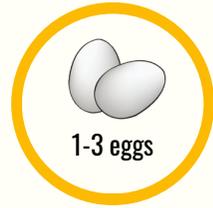
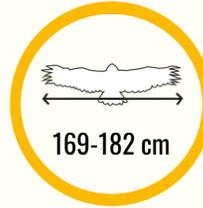




Turkey Vulture

Urubu à tête rouge, *Cathartes aura*



IDENTIFICATION

A large, dark-brown bird with long, broad wings, it has a featherless red head and white beak tip. Its tail is long and narrow, extending beyond the legs in flight. The underside of its wings, the remiges, are silver, contrasting with the darker coloring of its plumage and giving a two-tone appearance. It hovers with its wings slightly raised, forming a "V" when viewed from the front.



ECOLOGY

Nutrition

A scavenger, it feeds on dead animals (carrion). It prefers small, fresh carcasses, but will eat carcasses in a more advanced stage of decomposition. Unlike other birds of prey, it has a well-developed sense of smell, enabling it to detect carrion up to 1.6 km away! It has one of the most highly developed olfactory systems among birds.

Breeding

It nests on rocky escarpments, in crevices, caves or hollow tree trunks, but does not build a nest. The female lays her eggs on the ground. The young remain in the nest for around 8 weeks. They fledge for the first time at around 9 weeks. However, they remain dependent on their parents for several months after leaving the nest.

DISTRIBUTION

It frequents just about any type of habitat, except dense forests. It is the most widely distributed vulture in the Americas. It breeds in the farmlands and open forests of southern Canada. It spends much of its time in the air, sometimes at very high altitudes. Unlike other birds of prey, it is a social bird, living in groups of 2 or 3 individuals, sometimes more.

STATUS AND POPULATION

The species is considered secure.¹ It first appeared in Quebec in the 1970s. Since then, its population has been steadily increasing, attributed to the expansion of Quebec's road network. The carcasses of dead animals that dot the roadsides provide it with a continuous and abundant source of food.

¹ Wild species of Canada report, 2015

