



Brunswick Wildlife Vultures

What's not to like about a Sunday brunch of sun-dried possum among good friends! You may have thought vultures were just vultures. You may call them all "buzzards". There are, however, two species of vultures in our area. The picture above was taken in a field near Winnabow...of a pair of Black Vultures and a Turkey Vulture... as if dining at a fancy restaurant.

The Black Vulture is smaller than the Turkey Vulture and that size difference accounts for many of the differences in behavior and niche. The Black Vulture in the flight picture only appears to be larger, as the two soared over Southport, because it is lower in altitude.

Though Brunswick County has both species all year long, Turkey Vultures are migratory while Black Vultures generally are not. Because of their weight, vultures depend on lift from thermals caused by heated air rising. They ride a series of thermals, soaring in search of food, thus minimizing their expenditure of energy. No doubt you have seen vultures soaring overhead in these large, spiraling formations called "kettles".

Since the Black Vulture has shorter wings for its weight, they have evolved to stay put instead of living far to the north like Turkey Vultures. Turkey Vultures have longer wings and less wing loading given their weight and therefore can live in a niche having weaker thermals but little competition for their favorite delicacies.

Other fairly obvious differences are the color of the face...Red for the Turkey Vulture...and the pattern underneath the wing...silvery at just the tips for the Black.

A hidden difference is that, while Turkey Vultures have possibly the best sense of smell in the animal kingdom, Black Vultures have a poor sense of smell. So Black Vultures sometimes arrive late at the Roadside Café.

Since you may be reading this while enjoying brunch yourself, I will skip the part about why vultures evolved to have bald heads. Bon appétit!

John Ennis