

## TURKEY VULTURES CARRYING CARRION

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New World vultures (Family: Cathartidae) are primarily carrion-eating scavengers. Where their ranges overlap Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*) tend to feed on smaller-sized carrion than do Black Vultures (*Coragyps atratus*), and may specialize in exploiting smaller carcasses (Kirk et al. 1998). Although both Palmer (1988) and Kirk et al. (1998) noted that Turkey Vultures occasionally fly short distances with carrion when disturbed, the behavior is not well documented. Here I report two observations of Turkey Vultures taking flight with small items of carrion and flying short distances. On 3 March 2003 at the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge near Titusville, Florida, I observed a Turkey Vulture standing on a gravel dike road consuming a small item of carrion. I stopped approximately 20 m from the bird and observed it tearing pieces of flesh from a headless siren (*Siren* spp.). After about 30 s, the bird took flight carrying the siren in its bill for approximately 70 m, then landed and resumed feeding. I approached the bird again and it flew away, this time leaving the carrion which I recovered. The remains were 33 cm long and weighed 79 g. On 27 December 1995 at the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Florida, I observed a Turkey Vulture in the center of a paved road eating a small item of carrion that appeared to be a flattened cotton rat (*Sigmodon hispidus*). The bird took off from the road with the carrion in its bill and flew approximately 100 m, landing in mowed grass beside the road, and began eating. About a minute later as a truck approached, the bird flew off again with the carrion in its bill. The bird soared in gusty wind several hundred meters and then landed on a sod-covered hill and resumed eating the carrion.

### LITERATURE CITED

- PALMER, R. S. 1988. Handbook of North American birds, Vol. 4. Yale University Press. New Haven, CT.
- KIRK, D. A., AND M. J. MOSSMAN. 1998. Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*). In The birds of North America, No. 339 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.