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Unusual feeding behavior by a population of Black Vultures.—Vultures are usually characterized as carrion feeders. Black Vultures (*Coragyps atratus*) are often referred to by the vernacular name “carrion crow” (Townsend, U.S. Natl. Mus. Bull. 167, 1937). There are, however, numerous reports in the literature indicating that it is not unusual for vultures to use other foods, including vegetable matter. For example, the Vulturine Fish Eagle or Palm Nut Vulture (*Gypohierax angolensis*) is primarily vegetarian, subsisting mainly on oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) fruits (Brown and Amadon, *Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of the World*, 1968; Brown, *African Birds of Prey*, 1971). Crafts (Wilson Bull. 80(3):327–328, 1968) observed Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*) feeding on coconut and Green (Bird-Lore 29:117–118, 1927) reported this species eating pumpkin. Haverschmidt (Condor 49(5):210, 1947; *Birds of Surinam*, 1968) mentions that Black Vultures feed on oil palm fruits and copra in addition to offal.

However, except in the case of the Vulturine Fish Eagle, each of these reports implied that vegetable matter is incidental to the normal carrion diet. Both Crafts (1968) and Green (1927) emphasized that vegetable matter was not a preferred food and was probably taken only because of a lack of carrion. We have observed an instance in which a population of Black Vultures may have developed a preference for vegetable matter over carrion.

The plantation “La Arenosa” is located near the town of Turbo in northwestern Colombia. About half of the 200 ha-plantation is devoted to African oil palm. Vultures were feeding on harvested oil palm fruits to a degree sufficient to alarm the plantation operators. Racemes of fruit are harvested from the palms throughout the year, and piled on platforms at various points along roadways throughout the plantation. They remain there for a short time (up to a day) awaiting transport to the oil extraction plant. Vultures congregate at these platforms in groups of 10–50 and feed on the small (4 cm) fruits, generally removing the soft husk and discarding the nuts. Though we observed some birds feeding in the trees, this behavior was not common; most feeding was at the platforms, primarily during the morning and evening hours, and according to the plantation manager, occurred year-round. Vultures are protected by law in Colombia, hence we did not attempt to collect any. We did examine 10 birds killed and brought to us by workers (presumably on orders of the manager). We visually estimated the crop content to be 95% or more oil palm fruit and the remainder unidentified material. On the basis of the estimated number of birds in the population (about 500) and the weight of fruit in the crops, we calculated a potential daily loss of \$150–200 (U.S.), a substantial loss over a year’s time. Although the sample was probably biased (i.e., birds killed while feeding on the palm fruit), this does not detract from the significance of the economic impact.

Carrion was not readily available on the plantation, and among various remedies tried was deliberate placement of four livestock carcasses on the plantation. These were left in place for over a week. During this time they were completely ignored by the vultures who continued feeding on oil palm racemes. This, plus the fact that carrion was available on lands surrounding the plantation, suggests that the vultures may have developed a preference for the oil palm fruit. The Vulturine Fish Eagle reportedly will reject meat in favor of oil palm husk. Oil palm fruit is rich in carotene (a precursor of Vitamin A) but the suggestion that the need for this vitamin is the basis for the food preference of the fish eagle is unfounded; apparently oil palm nuts are a favorite food (Brown and Amadon 1968). Oil palm is a relatively recent crop in this area of Colombia and it may be that Black Vultures simply prefer it to carrion when they have a choice.

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