

Feathers in the Attic

Old barn provides nesting site
for Turkey Vultures

by Karen Forcum



This old barn in Mode provided the perfect spot for a pair of nesting Turkey Vultures the summer of 1992. Photo by Karen Forcum.



These young Turkey Vultures were born in a barn in rural Mode, the summer of 1992. Photo by Karen Forcum.

I grew up in the old farm house in rural Mode where my father was born. It was in the middle of nowhere, some might say. It was next to heaven as far as I was concerned. It was here that I learned of many of the wonders of nature.

What a thrill to hear the chilling call of a screech owl as Grandma tucked me into the feather bed, and to know I was safe and snug. No wonder was greater than the tiny nest of a Ruby-throated Hummingbird hid in the middle of a honeysuckle bush. I often found two marble-sized eggs nestled in its soft confines. I watched the Barn Swallows trying to toll their young out of the safe nest and into the big world. Would they fly or fall? I didn't realize then that I would feel the same fear I imagined they felt

when I had to move away from the old house and face my own new world.

My greatest thrill in early spring was catching the first glimpse of a Turkey Vulture effortlessly winging its way north. This was the true harbinger of spring. I never tired of watching these graceful, powerful creatures, rarely flapping, occasionally teetering, wings held dihedral, soaring across the blue expanse of sky. When they caught a thermal updraft, it seemed like they gained altitude until they climbed up past the sky. They are known to soar to heights of 5,000 feet.

I often go back to the skeletal remains of that old home place rejoicing that Dad allowed it to remain standing. On March 26, 1992, my husband and I were birding near the

old home place in Clarksburg Township. As we approached the house, poised majestically on top was a pair of Turkey Vultures. Spring had arrived.

We noticed that the pair frequented the vicinity of the old house; that they seemed to have staked a claim to it. One day Dad brought a flashlight and climbed into the rickety attic. There on the bare floor were two creamy white, blotched with brown, vulture eggs. We knew to insure their safety we should not frequent their nest site. Both sexes incubate the eggs 38 to 41 days.

On May 8, the eggs had hatched and one parent was brooding young. The adult flew out the window onto a nearby limb and regurgitated a foul smelling mass that looked like raw liver. It would take a brave soul to stick around in the face of that onslaught. We promptly took our leave.

The adults feed almost entirely on carrion, fresh to putrid. As summer wore on, the smells from the attic assured us it was mostly putrid! Parent vultures feed their young by re-

Meadowlark