

gurgitating pre-digested food. The young insert their bills into the mouth of the parent and drink the soupy food. They absolutely gorge themselves.

The Turkey Vulture performs a useful sanitation service by cleaning up dead animals. They usually hunt about 200 feet above the ground or just above the tops of the woods. Dad, in his eagerness, began to pick up road kill for the over-worked parents of our ungainly pair. Mom only hoped nobody would see him at this grisly task. Dad would place his contributions at the edge of the clearing near the old house. The parent vultures gladly accepted his offerings.

Dad set limits on how often we could go into the house and take a peek. We had to be quick, and once every two weeks was deemed often enough. At first we beheld two little frightened white fluff balls covered in the corner of the attic. The amazing

part was how they hissed. It sounded as if a hot air balloon was getting ready to take off, or that we had stumbled upon a den of rattlesnakes.

The youngsters grew quickly and we could soon see a trace of black feathers. Their naked gray heads contained large dark eyes and huge bills. Their feet and legs seemed sturdy and awkward. It was obvious that they were exploring the attic because old rags and paper were dragged from all corners and scattered about. One wall was white washed by their efforts to find a suitable bathroom.

Before long, when we came for a visit, our young Turkey Vultures would meet us at the top of the stairs. They would stand swaying back and forth, stamping their feet as if dancing, flapping their black and white wings, and hissing at the top of their lungs. Their breaths would turn away the hardest of souls! No wonder they survived.

On July 26 both parents and young were perched on the roof. The young fly when 70 to 80 days old. Our baby vultures flew on July 29 at the age of 82 days. All four soared over the river bottom and over the bluff where the old house stands. We imagined that they tipped their wings thanking us for such a wonderful summer home. We watched with joy at their success, but felt sadness too that no longer would we be part of their lives.

How fitting that the old house I grew up in and where I acquired my deep love of and appreciation for nature has many years later served a useful and exciting purpose.



Karen Forcum
Box 247
Mode, IL 62444

Turkey Vulture and nestlings drawing by Leslie A. DeCourcey.

