

First Nesting of Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) in Bronx County – Spring 2009

On 24 May 2009, we observed a lone Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) perched on a 10m high snag in the north woods of Van Cortlandt Park, Bronx County. On a return visit three days later, we found two Turkey Vultures perched in the area. After we retreated to a nearby hidden location, one vulture made a short flight and entered a rock outcrop at the top of a small hill (Figure 1, p. 336). The outcrop was about 8m above ground level. On 31 May we returned again, and did not see any Turkey Vultures in the area. Climbing up to the top of the rock outcrop, we peered down inside and saw a large, single egg (Figure 2, p. 336). We concluded it was that of the Turkey Vultures we had seen here recently. We quickly left the area. On 2 June, on another visit, and after not seeing any Turkey Vultures in the area for more than an hour, RDC climbed to the top of the rock outcropping. Only egg fragments remained inside below. There was no sign of what might have happened at this nest site that resulted in the destruction of the egg. One year later, in May 2010, we returned to see if there was any activity at this nest site, but we only saw the artifacts of what we assumed to be a homeless person who might have taken up temporary residence there. This breeding record of Turkey Vulture is the first confirmed one for Bronx County.

In *The Second Atlas of Breeding Birds in New York State* (McGowan, K. J. and Corwin, K. (eds.) 2008. Cornell University Press. Ithaca, NY), data are presented to show that Turkey Vultures bred in one block (#5649A) on northwestern Staten Island in 2000. If true, this would be the first record of Turkey Vulture breeding within New York City. In their account for the species, mention is made of a “fledgling” seen on Staten Island on 5 August 2000. However, McGowan and Corwin (2008) also write, “...unlike most other species covered in this Atlas, many of the blocks with Possible and Probable records might not have had breeding [Turkey] vultures. Many of the codes that result in a Probable ranking are not strictly applicable for this species, and

should probably have been downgraded to Possible.” The observation of a fledgling is sufficient to confirm breeding in an atlas block. However, if a fledgling is capable of sustained flight, though still being fed by its parents, it is possible that it was reared in a nest in another area. Similar cautions apply to other species like Barn Swallows that often feed fledgled young some distance from the nest.

In July 2014, we had email exchanges with several birders familiar with the area where the Turkey Vulture was suspected of nesting in northwestern Richmond County in 2000 in Breeding Bird Block 5649A. All agree that there are numerous abandoned concrete shipyard ruins in that area near Mariners Marsh Park that would be suitable for a breeding pair (or the abandoned buildings nearby in central Richmond County within the Seaview Property). However, the shipyard ruins near Mariners Marsh Park are off-limits to birders and everyone else, and cannot be surveyed for breeding birds. Disagreement arises about the possibility of nesting Turkey Vultures, versus physical evidence to confirm that Turkey Vultures nested on Staten Island in 2000 or since. Some birders who visited Mariners Marsh Park in northwestern Richmond County often throughout 2000 recall seeing a fledgling Turkey Vulture there in August, but do not believe Turkey Vultures nested in that area. It is not unusual to see a fledgling Turkey Vulture in August atop buildings in parts of Richmond County, in association with other older vultures, such as atop the library of the College of Staten Island. There is also a large Turkey Vulture roost at the intersection of Rockland Avenue and Richmond Road. We recommend that until physical evidence of an occupied Turkey Vulture nest on Staten Island is provided, that the Turkey Vulture in Richmond County be listed as “Possible” or “Probable” breeder; and consideration be given to regarding the nesting Turkey Vultures in Bronx County in 2009 as the first pair that are definitely known to have nested in New York City.

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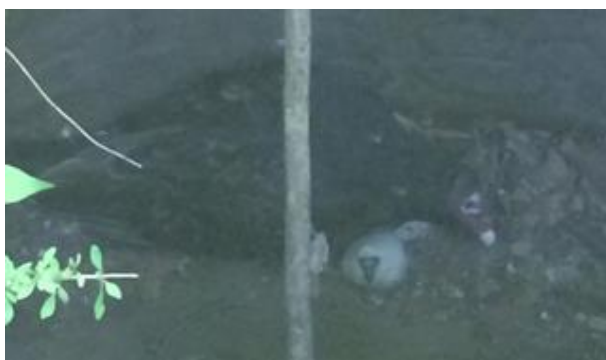




Figure 1. Habitat surrounding the Turkey Vulture nest in Van Cortlandt Park, *Bronx*, on 2 Jun 2009. Photograph © Robert DeCandido, PhD. See pp. 305-306.



Figure 2. Single egg in the Turkey Vulture nest located in a rocky outcrop (cave), Van Cortlandt Park, *Bronx*, 31 May 2009, © Robert DeCandido, PhD. See pp. 305-306.



As described in the note by DeCandido and Allen (pp. 305-306), the nest sites of Turkey Vultures can be very difficult to find. This adult Turkey Vulture with downy young and an unhatched egg was found in the Northwest area of East Hampton, *Suffolk*, 21 Jun 2014. The image is © Will Courtney, with thanks to Richard Poveromo, Mike Bottini, and Eric Salzman for directing it to *The Kingbird*.