

## Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus*



**Folk Name:** Carrion Crow, South Carolina Buzzard

**Status:** Resident

**Abundance:** Uncommon to Fairly Common

**Habitat:** Forage almost anywhere including narrow roadsides, especially in open country with abundant livestock or deer. Nest in sheltered cavities in old outbuildings, forests, ledges.



The Black Vulture is a permanent resident in the Carolina Piedmont, though individual birds move about a great deal, and migrants from the North increase the total numbers here in the late fall. Our highest one-day count was almost 300 birds tallied on the Southern Lake Norman Christmas Bird Count in 1999. Many of our early birders shared accounts of finding Black Vultures in the region. Many of these birders also reported finding nests in natural settings, whereas today, most nests that are reported are found in old buildings.

Leverett Loomis noted the Black Vulture as a common permanent resident in Chester County in the late 1800s. Elmer Brown shared this report about vultures with C.S. Brimley at the North Carolina State Museum:

On April 30, 1926, near Davidson in Mecklenburg County, I saw two Black Vultures with several Turkey Vultures near a partially buried carcass. [In Rowan County] On July 13, 1926, I saw one bird on the ground in a field in company with five or six Turkey Vultures. July 14, 1926, I saw two birds flying with a large flock of Turkey Vultures.

William McIlwaine photographed a Black Vulture nest he found within the Charlotte city limits on April 18, 1927. He described this special find in some detail:

Deep down in the tangled woods I saw a black buzzard sitting on a dead limb about three feet from the ground. My suspicions were aroused. Investigating, I found what looked almost like a bear's den. A blackened hollowed-out space in the midst of a tangle. Of course, no vegetation on the ground. Two or three little holes out of the tangle. And far back in a bare space under the overhanging bushes one lone egg about two or two and a half inches long, dirty white, with a few irregular lavender spots. A nasty place. After getting out after photographing I felt for an hour as though "things" were crawling on me.

The following year, on March 20, 1928, William McIlwaine wrote: "I paid a visit to my buzzard's nest of last season to see if there were any developments. No. Though it appears that the buzzards are around. But it will do to watch this nest." On April 5, 1928, he wrote:

I went to my buzzard's nest, and it has two eggs in it. These eggs are nearly three inches long, I should



*Black Vulture nest. (Kevin Metcalf)*



*Nestlings in an old barn in Huntersville. (Kevin Metcalf)*

say; with black and lavender spots, large spots, on them. Some spots pronounced, others faint. And we call it a nest for courtesy's sake. That's all. It was moved over a few feet from the exact spot of last year. On the ground, under a tangle of honeysuckle. No pretense at building or cover for the ground.

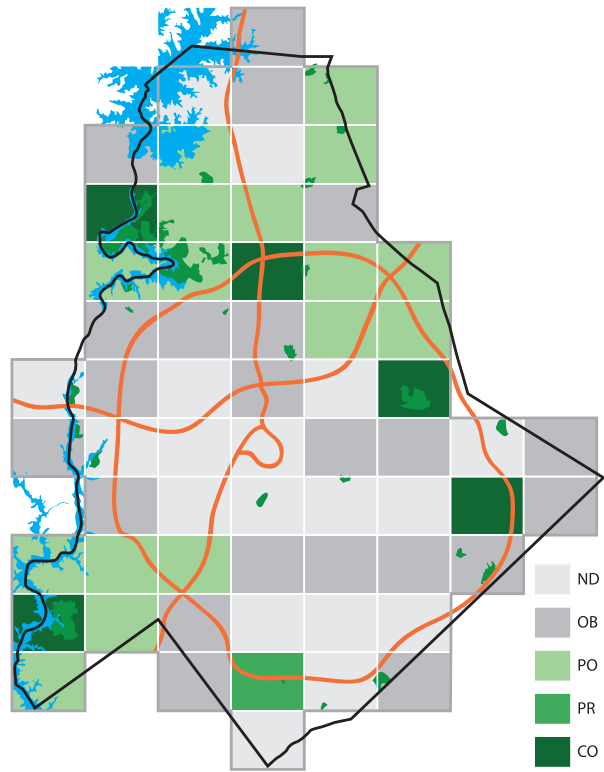
He returned on 2 May: "my buzzard in a few days will be presenting the city with two fuzzy snow-white babies." McIlwaine brought a friend to the nest on 22 June and found "two nasty grayish-white young buzzards, that blew at me, and fought my stick as Neida poked at them."

Rhett Chamberlain shared this report of finding new Black Vulture hatchlings:

On April 22, 1946, two baby vultures, covered with dirty brownish down, and estimated to be not over two days old, were found on Brier Creek within two or three miles of the South Carolina line below Charlotte. The nesting site was protected by a large fallen tree trunk in rather dense woods. The surrounding ground was black and boggy and obviously had been flooded during the past fall and winter rains. A single parent bird was seen leaving the site.

Black Vultures once regularly nested in Crowders Mountain State Park in Gaston County, but dramatic increases in public visitation and climbing activity over the past two decades have impacted breeding there. In the late 1980s, Mike Peters found one nest situated on the southeast face of Crowders Mountain above the Linwood Road access. It was located in a cavity about 3 feet in diameter and about 8 feet deep. The cavity was lined with leaf litter and sticks and was about 300 feet below the ridgeline (1,625 feet).

A total of five nests were confirmed during the Mecklenburg County Breeding Bird Atlas survey. Each of these was found in an old building in woods or on the edge of woods. Kim Garrett reported finding two nests. One was in an unused barn at Hope Farm in Mint Hill. The other was in Huntersville in an old outbuilding beside the Hucks Road General Store which has been in business for over a century. Kevin Metcalf reported our earliest local incubation date. He discovered a pair nesting annually



### Mecklenburg County Breeding Bird Atlas:

Local (PR/1, CO/5)



*Black Vulture feeding on roadkill. (Jeff Maw)*

in an old barn at the Stephen's Road Nature Preserve off Cashion Road in Cornelius. In 2013, he found two eggs being incubated on 13 February.