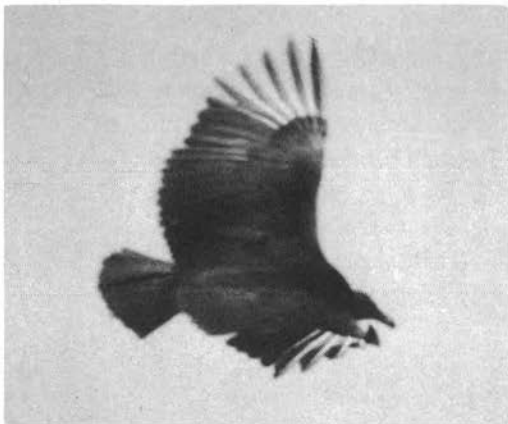


Raptors often provide a challenge to birders either because they are usually viewed from a great distance or because their plumage is variable due to differences in age, sex, molt, or as a result of polymorphism. Some diurnal raptors, however, are relatively easy to identify even at a distance and are straightforward in plumage. June's *At a Glance* photo depicts a raptor that should provide little difficulty in identification as long as several characteristic features are borne in mind.

First and most noticeably, the pictured bird has a well-defined white patch on the primaries at the end of the wing. Although not apparent in the photograph, this terminal wing patch is visible from beneath as well as above. Also noteworthy is the uniform black appearance of the entire upper-wing surface and tail. The photograph further suggests that the bird's dark head is small, the neck short, and the bill is rather long and slender, almost tubular. When these features are combined with the bird's distinctive shape (thick broad wings and short stubby tail) the identification points immediately to Black Vulture, *Coragyps atratus*.

Although always a rarity in Massachusetts, the Black Vulture occurs with enough frequency that observers should be on the lookout for it not only in spring and fall but at other seasons as well, since the species has a history of appearing at almost any time of year. Separating Black Vulture from the more common Turkey Vulture is not difficult when the birds are well observed. In addition to showing a shorter tail and a more horizontal gliding posture than the Turkey Vulture, Black Vultures typically exhibit a labored flight, usually punctuating their soaring with three to five intermittent flaps. The vulture in the picture was photographed by the author in south Florida.



*Black Vulture*

*Photo by Wayne R. Petersen*

## AT A GLANCE

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Photo by Oliver Komar



Can you identify this bird?

Identification will be discussed in next issue's AT A GLANCE.

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