

The vultures nest in a wide variety of settings, such as precipitous cliffs, caves, hollow stumps, logs, thickets, and even in man-made structures such as an old barn and an abandoned pig-sty. The typically two white eggs, marked with brown, are usually laid directly on the ground or whatever site the birds have settled on. Courtship involves "follow-flights" with occasional dives or swoops, and a variety of displays, including spread wings, tail dragging, rocking side-to-side, inflating the crop and neck air sacks, and making groaning or yapping noises. Individual displays are sometimes preceded by a group "dance," in which many birds hop about with spread wings.

Both sexes incubate for five to six weeks, and the eggs may hatch simultaneously or up to three days apart. They fledge in eight to ten weeks or more, and little is known of their post-fledging behavior. Both parents feed the young digested carrion. Terres described the feeding: ". . . the young insert their bills into the mouth of the parent and drink the soupy food much as a fowl drinks water." Reported food items range from grasshoppers, tadpoles, fish, snakes, turtles, and small birds to large mammals, including domestic horses and cows. Road kills have become a favored source of food. Controversy about whether vultures find prey by vision or smell dates back at least to Audubon. The evidence currently suggests that they use both.

The Turkey Vulture has benefited from its association with man in parts of its range but not in others. Deforestation may open the environment for vultures and make carrion easier to find. Certainly the automobile has provided a fast-food-restaurant equivalent for vultures. However, the downside has been the extensive use of agricultural pesticides and the prevalence of industrial wastes, including heavy metals and PCBs. In Texas, Florida, and California Turkey Vulture eggs showed evidence of eggshell thinning, linked to DDT, which has been associated with reproductive failure in other species. In Massachusetts the Turkey Vulture is currently increasing and becoming an ever more common sight, dark forms teetering above the tree tops or tiny spots against the clouds.

W.E. Davis, Jr.

### MEET OUR COVER ARTIST

Barry Van Dusen was the 1992 Audubon Alliance Artist of the Year and illustrator for *Birds of Massachusetts*. He recently returned from participating as an artist in a program developed by the Netherlands-based "Artists for Nature Foundation" and designed to raise funds to protect critical conservation sites throughout the world. Barry and other artists and concerned individuals met at the Extremadura area in southwest Spain, an important wintering grounds for many birds. Illustrations and papers prepared during and after the site visit will be published and sold by the foundation, with proceeds used for conservation efforts for the Extremadura area. Barry can be reached at 13 Radford Road, Princeton, Massachusetts 01541.

M. Steele