Californian Turkey Vulture .

the edges sharp, towards the end decurved. Nostrils oblong, large, pervious. Head oblong. Tongue deeply concave or induplicate, its edges serrate with reversed papillæ. Œsophagus dilated into an enormous crop; stomach moderately muscular; duodenum convoluted. Head and upper part of neck denuded, being only sparingly covered with very short down. Wings very long and extremely broad; third, fourth, and fifth primaries longest, first much shorter. Tail of moderate length, nearly even. Tarsus short, rather stout, roundish, reticulate. Hind toe very small, second a little shorter than fourth, third very long, all scutellate for more than half their length. Claws strong, arched, compressed, obtuse.

CALIFORNIAN VULTURE.

†*CATHARTES CALIFORNIANUS*, *Lath.*

PLATE I.—ADULT MALE.

Of the three species of Vulture which inhabit the southern parts of North America, this is so much superior in size to the rest that it bears to them the same proportion as a Golden Eagle to a Goshawk. It inhabits the valleys and plains of the western slope of the continent, and has not been observed to the eastward of the Rocky Mountains. Mr. TOWNSEND, who has had opportunities of observing it, has favoured me with the following account of its habits.

“The Californian Vulture inhabits the region of the Columbia River, to the distance of five hundred miles from its mouth, and is most abundant in spring, at which season it feeds on the dead salmon that are thrown upon the shores in great numbers. It is also often met with near the Indian villages, being attracted by the offal of the fish thrown around the habitations. It associates with *Cathartes Aura*, but is easily distinguished from that species in flight, both by its greater size and the more abrupt curvature of its wing. The Indians, whose observations may generally be depended upon, say that it ascertains the presence of food solely by its power of vision, thus corroborating your own remarks on the vulture tribe generally. On the upper waters of the Columbia the fish intended for winter store are usually deposited in huts made of the branches of trees interlaced. I have frequently seen the Ravens attempt to effect a lodgement in these deposits, but have never known the Vulture to be engaged in this way, although these birds were numerous in the immediate vicinity.”

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In a subsequent notice, he continues:—"I have never seen the eggs of the Californian Vulture. The Indians of the Columbia say that it breeds on the ground, fixing its nest in swamps under the pine forests, chiefly in the Alpine country. The Wallamet Mountains, seventy or eighty miles south of the Columbia, are said to be its favourite places of resort. I have never visited the mountains at that season, and therefore cannot speak from my own knowledge. It is seen on the Columbia only in summer, appearing about the first of June, and retiring, probably to the mountains, about the end of August. It is particularly attached to the vicinity of cascades and falls, being attracted by the dead salmon which strew the shores in such places. The salmon, in their attempts to leap over the obstruction, become exhausted, and are cast up on the beaches in great numbers. Thither, therefore, resort all the unclean birds of the country, such as the present species, the Turkey-Buzzard, and the Raven. The Californian Vulture cannot, however, be called a plentiful species, as even in the situations mentioned it is rare to see more than two or three at a time, and these so shy as not to allow an approach to within a hundred yards, unless by stratagem. Although I have frequently seen this bird I have never heard it utter any sound. The eggs I have never seen, nor have I had any account of them that I could depend upon.

"I have never heard of their attacking living animals. Their food while on the Columbia is fish almost exclusively, as in the neighbourhood of the rapids and falls it is always in abundance; they also, like other Vultures, feed on dead animals. I once saw two near Fort Vancouver feeding on the carcass of a pig that had died. I have not seen them at roost. In walking they resemble a Turkey, strutting over the ground with great dignity; but this dignity is occasionally lost sight of, especially when two are striving to reach a dead fish, which has just been cast on the shore; the stately walk then degenerates into a clumsy sort of hopping canter, which is any thing but graceful. When about to rise, they always hop or run for several yards, in order to give an impetus to their heavy body, in this resembling the Condor of South America, whose well known habit furnishes the natives with an easy mode of capturing him by means of a narrow pen, in which a dead carcass has been deposited. If I should return to the Columbia, I will try this method of taking the Vulture, and I am satisfied that it would be successful."

CATHARTES CALIFORNIANUS, Aud. Birds of Am., pl. 426; Orn. Biog., vol. v. p. 240.

CATHARTES CALIFORNIANUS, Bonap. Syn., p. 22.

CALIFORNIAN VULTURE, Nuttall, Man., vol. i. p. 39.

The head and upper part of the neck are bare, but the middle of the fore-

head to beyond the nostrils, and a semicircular space before the eye, are closely covered with very small firm feathers; the fore part of the neck is longitudinally, the occiput and hind neck transversely wrinkled. Plumage full, compact; feathers of the ruff and fore part of the breast lanceolate and acuminate, of the upper parts ovato-elliptical, broadly rounded, and glossy. Wings very long, ample, concave; primaries finely acuminate, secondaries rounded; the first quill two inches and a half shorter than the second, which is half an inch shorter than the third, the latter exceeded by the fourth by half an inch, and equal to the fifth. Tail of moderate length, nearly even, of twelve broad, rounded feathers.

The horny part of the bill yellow; the cere and naked part of the head and neck yellowish-red. Iris dark hazel. Feet yellowish-grey, claws brownish-black. The general colour of the plumage is greyish-black, the feathers of the upper parts narrowly margined with light brown and grey; the secondaries light grey externally, as are the edges of the primaries; the margins of the inner secondaries toward the base, and those of the secondary coverts, with a large portion of the extremity of the latter, are white. The feathers on the sides under the wing, the axillaries, and many of the lower wing-coverts, are white.

Length to end of tail 55 inches; bill along the ridge $4\frac{3}{4}$, along the edge of lower mandible $3\frac{5}{12}$; wing from flexure 34; tail 16; tarsus $4\frac{1}{4}$; hind toe $1\frac{4\frac{1}{2}}{12}$, its claw $1\frac{1}{2}$; second toe $2\frac{1}{2}$, its claw $1\frac{10}{12}$; third toe $4\frac{1}{4}$, its claw 2; fourth toe $2\frac{9}{12}$, its claw $1\frac{4}{12}$.

The young have the horny part of the bill dusky yellowish-grey; the head and neck covered with dull brown very soft down; the feet greyish-yellow, the scutella darker, the claws brownish-black. The general colour of the plumage is blackish-brown, the feathers on the upper part strongly tinged with grey, especially the secondary quills; the feathers of the back edged with light brown, the secondary coverts tipped with brownish-white. The feathers on the sides under the wing, the axillaries, and some of the lower wing-coverts white, with the centre dusky.

Length to end of tail 48 inches; bill along the ridge 4; wing from flexure 32; tail 16; tarsus 4; middle toe 4, its claw $1\frac{9}{12}$.

Audubon, John James. 1840. "Californian Vulture, *Cathartes californianus*, Lath. [Pl. 1]." *The birds of America : from drawings made in the United States and their territories* 1, 12–14. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.319114>.

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