



FIRST P.E.I. RECORD FOR BLACK VULTURE

By Geoff Hogan, Charlottetown

On November 22, 1981 three members of the P.E.I. Natural History Society, Geoff Hogan, Winnie Cairns and Sue Stephenson, observed a Black Vulture near Cape Wolfe, Prince County. The bird, circling over farmland along the coast, was clearly much larger than the crows that were harassing it. Our first thought was that it was an immature Bald Eagle, as we had seen one earlier that morning at North Cape; however, several characteristics of a Black Vulture soon became apparent. The bird was generally dark all over except for two prominent white patches on the underside of each wing along the primary feathers. Also distinctive was the short, square tail and a flight pattern which consisted of quick short flaps alternated with periods of soaring. During the 20 minutes that the bird was observed it travelled approximately one and one half miles north and at times came within 50 feet of us, when its naked black head was evident. Several photographs were taken.

Black Vultures have an extensive range from Pennsylvania south to Northern Chile and Argentina. This species has been seen on several occasions in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick although not as frequently as its relative the Turkey Vulture. Both Black and Turkey Vultures rely on carrion for their food and do not, as a rule, attack living prey. The vulture seen on P.E.I. may have been relying on dead fish along the coast or road killed animals for food.

It is difficult to explain why this bird was so far from its normal range. One possibility may be that it was a young individual, as the young of many species often travel greater distances than mature birds. Winds were from the southwest and southeast during the weekend of November 22 and for several days previous. Possibly these helped carry the vulture so far north. Will it ever get back to its southern range? Unfortunately, we will never know the answer.