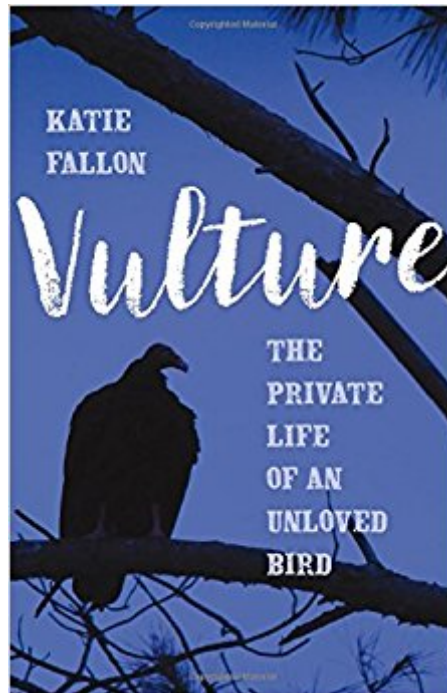




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Vulture: The Private Life Of An Unloved Bird



Synopsis

Turkey vultures, the most widely distributed and abundant scavenging birds of prey on the planet, are found from central Canada to the southern tip of Argentina, and nearly everywhere in between. In the United States we sometimes call them buzzards; in parts of Mexico the name is *aura cabecirroja*, in Uruguay *jote cabeza colorada*, and in Ecuador *gallinazo aura*. A huge bird, the turkey vulture is a familiar sight from culture to culture, in both hemispheres. But despite being ubiquitous and recognizable, the turkey vulture has never had a book of literary nonfiction devoted to it—until *Vulture*. Floating on six-foot wings, turkey vultures use their keen senses of smell and sight to locate carrion. Unlike their cousin the black vulture, turkey vultures do not kill weak or dying animals; instead, they cleanse, purify, and renew the environment by clearing it of decaying carcasses, thus slowing the spread of such dangerous pathogens as anthrax, rabies, and botulism. The beauty, grace, and important role of these birds in the ecosystem notwithstanding, turkey vultures are maligned and underappreciated; they have been accused of spreading disease and killing livestock, neither of which has ever been substantiated. Although turkey vultures are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which makes harming them a federal offense, the birds still face persecution. They’ve been killed because of their looks, their odor, and their presence in proximity to humans. Even the federal government occasionally sanctions “roost dispersals,” which involve the harassment and sometimes the murder of communally roosting vultures during the cold winter months. *Vulture* follows a year in the life of a typical North American turkey vulture. By incorporating information from scientific papers and articles, as well as interviews with world-renowned raptor and vulture experts, author Katie Fallon examines all aspects of the bird’s natural history: breeding, incubating eggs, raising chicks, migrating, and roosting. After reading this book you will never look at a vulture in the same way again.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Entertaining, well-researched. . . . [Fallon] displays great passion and enthusiasm yet writes knowingly and dispassionately on the science of her subject in an engaging, literary style.”—Library Journal (starred review)

“This book is about vultures in the human world, but nowhere in the story does the human aspect overly intrude. The great birds are front-and-center, consistently painted in a positive and empathetic light. It is to Fallon’s credit that she is able to coax the reader into the same love affair with vultures that she herself enjoys, without romanticizing her subject to the point of putting off her audience.”—Sense of the Misplaced

“Fallon truly loves these skillful gliders, and she hopes that readers will see the light. Every time I’ve seen a vulture this year, this book has come to mind, so I guess I’m hooked.”—The Exponent Telegram

“Fallon’s personal accounts of her field experiences are engrossing and entertaining. . . . Recommended.”—Choice

“Who would have suspected the astonishments of vultures? Katie Fallon has given us an ingenious, funny, delightful book.”—(Janisse Ray, author of *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*)

“Katie Fallon, who writes with elegance, humor, and restraint, tells the lost stories of the vulture tribe. This book will fill you with wonder.”—(David Gessner, author of *All The Wild That Remains: Edward Abbey, Wallace Stegner, and the American West*)

“Fallon shines a bright light on this clan of sadly unloved birds, which are not only vitally important ecologically, but are also among the most imperiled avian groups on the planet. A Vulture is an overdue love letter to a bird that deserves far better than we’ve given it.”—(Scott Weidensaul, author of *Living on the Wind*)

“This is a book that begged to be written. . . . Fallon allows that the study of flying turkey vultures is akin to meditation. Rarely hurried, coursing the heavens like a setter seeks quail, this most widespread of North American vultures invites both contemplation and envy. . . . A book as inspired as the bird that is its focus.”—(Pete Dunne, New Jersey Audubon’s ambassador for birding and author of *The Wind Masters: The Lives*

of North American Birds of Prey) – “A heartfelt and authoritative account of the world’s most numerous and misunderstood avian scavenger. Writing in a style reminiscent of Edward Abbey and John McPhee, Fallon successfully captures the natural history of the species and its ability to succeed in both natural and man-made landscapes. Destined to change the mind of anyone who reads it.” (Keith L. Bildstein, Sarkis Acopian Director of Conservation Science at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary)

Many years ago, I visited Hawk Mountain Sanctuary for the first time. It was a crisp October afternoon and the mountain was very crowded. Being relatively new to birding, I listened to some of the other more experienced hawk-watchers as they quickly identified the approaching birds. Several times, I heard a group of guys right in front of me seem excited only to later bemoan, "never mind, it's just another TV." I honestly wasn't sure what they were talking about until a "TV" banked over everyone assembled at the north lookout giving me an incredible view of its brown-black feathers which showed an iridescent sheen in the sunlight, and then the silver trailing edge of its wing as it rocked with its wing fixed in a V. I can't remember ever really noticing a turkey vulture before that day, but they never went unnoticed to me again. I have found surprisingly little literature about turkey vultures (or other vulture species) - even though they are such ubiquitous birds. Finally, we have a beautifully written book that pays them their due! If you do not know anything about vultures and how beneficial they are to our environment, this book is definitely for you. If you do already know about and appreciate them, this book is definitely for you. Ms. Fallon's enthusiasm for her subject leaps forth from every page. In addition to detailing the work she and her husband do for vultures and other wildlife at their rehabilitation center, she also embarks on a bucket list of destinations for vulture enthusiasts! There is a thorough coverage of the threats to vultures around the world included as well. So many species have suffered stunning declines in both Asia and Africa. It's hard to imagine that species which were once as numerous as our turkey vultures are now perilously endangered. You will root for the injured vultures that her rehabilitation facility cares for, and especially for her education bird, Lew, as she documents their individual journeys. There is no debate that vultures are among the most under-appreciated members of the animal kingdom, and I certainly hope that Ms. Fallon's book in addition to her education work will go a long way toward changing hearts and minds about these vital avian scavengers.

Fascinating. The weave of facts with personal experience is compelling. Beautifully written. Excellent for anyone with curiosity--one of the noblest of human virtues.

If you love Turkey Vultures, you will definitely want this book. If you are even mildly interested in vultures, or birds in general, you will want this book. Although Turkey Vultures are the star of this book, Black Vultures, and Old World Vultures also have their own chapters. As a full disclosure I must say that I came to this book already head over heels in love with vultures, especial Turkey Vultures. As a raptor handler for the Draper Museum Raptor Experience, Suli, our Turkey Vulture, is one of the birds I handle the most, and it didn't take me long to discover how much I adore the species. I originally debated whether to purchase this book, as I have done a lot of reading and research on vultures and was concerned that it would be too repetitive. I am so delighted that I made the decision to purchase the book. Katie Fallon's love for Turkey Vultures is expressed beautifully, and mirrors my own feelings about the TVs. If you have not yet fallen in love with these wonderful birds, it is likely that she will convince you that they are worthy birds to love. Introducing each chapter with a short paragraph, written to resemble a Turkey Vulture's biography, is a delightful, and often beautiful way to begin the chapter's topic. Beware that although many of the passages are heartwarming, others are very sad. The information contained within the book not only deals with interesting facts about these birds, but also the tragedy of what can happen to them. The book was so beautifully written, that it kept my attention from the beginning to the last page, including pages that covered facts that I am already very familiar with. And yes, if you are wondering, I also gained new knowledge. I highly recommend this book to anyone who loves birds, even if vultures are not a favorite. Reading this book, may give you a whole new perspective on a bird that so many people misunderstand. As an added note, this review states that my edition was a Kindle, but I purchased the hardcover.

If you are a bird lover, or a nature aficionado, you will find this book very entertaining and educational. If you know nothing about vultures, or have a negative view of them, your perspective of them will be changed. Their role in the environment worldwide is important and often overlooked. I learned a great deal.

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