

NERI Report 05-01  
OLYMPIC VULTURE STUDY – 2005

In 2005, we had our second highest count: 2,152, all arriving in a six-day period. The 21<sup>st</sup> of September had the highest day count of 878 turkey vultures. The highest count was in 2002 when just under 3,000 turkey vultures passed by Salt Creek County Park in a 3-week period.

Water barriers are not a turkey vulture's delight, but each year hundreds of these large, soaring birds gather at the southern tip of Vancouver Island. They seem to wait for just the right air currents and temperatures to make the 12-mile, often treacherous, crossing of the Strait of Juan de Fuca. They are heading south on their annual fall migration and will meet land, for the most part, between the Salt Creek County Park area and the Elwha River basin on Washington state's northern Olympic coast.

In twelve years of monitoring this turkey vulture population, nearly 20,000 vultures plus almost 800 raptors have been seen at the Salt Creek site, not to mention the large numbers of waterfowl, alcids, songbirds, and even sandhill cranes.

This is the northern extent in the Pacific Northwest of the turkey vulture's range. They nest on Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands, and the Sunshine Coast of northwestern British Columbia, Canada. Little is known about how much further north they might nest. During a seven-year, continuing demographic study in the northwest, I have not received reports farther north than the Sunshine Coast.

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