

**CRITTER CREEK WILDLIFE STATION  
WINTER OPEN HOUSE  
SATURDAY, Dec. 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
11:00 AM until 2:00 PM**

**Gate will close at 1:30 pm** to allow you enough time to tour. The Open House will be unguided, so the pace is leisurely offering more opportunities to take pictures (the critters have on their winter coats).

Our volunteers will be on hand to answer your questions and to share stories about some of our permanent residents.

Visit our gift shop where you'll find unusual, handcrafted gifts for the holidays. We now accept credit and debit cards for items totaling over \$5.00.

Relieve the stress of the season with a visit to the foothills with family. We have a picnic area, so bring a lunch, or the country store next door has refreshments. Admission is by donation. We now accept donations through PayPal using a QR code. **Call (559) 338-2415** for information or look online at [www.crittercreek.org](http://www.crittercreek.org)



CIRCLE OF SUPPORTERS  
MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Categories	Annual Dues
Student .....	\$ 15
Senior .....	\$ 15
Individual.....	\$ 25
Family .....	\$ 50
Sponsor .....	\$ 100
Patron .....	\$ 250
Corporate or Life .....	\$ 1000

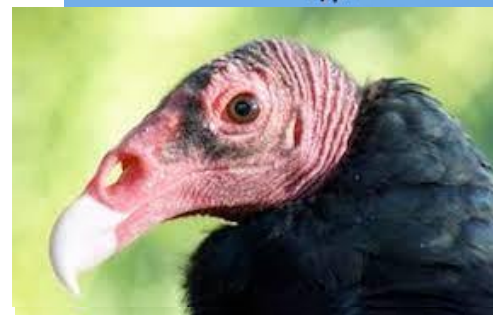
Make checks payable to:  
Animals for Education

Mail to:  
Critter Creek Wildlife Station  
36710 Sand Creek Road  
Squaw Valley, CA 93675

Members receive our quarterly newsletter  
Visit [CritterCreek.org](http://CritterCreek.org) to see back issues of the Chronicle

# Say Goodbye to the Turkey Vulture until the Spring

The turkey vulture is one of the largest birds you will see flying over the Central Valley. It can have a wingspan of 63-72 inches and weigh 2-5 pounds. It is brownish black with the flight feathers being a distinctive silvery-gray underneath which contrasts with the darker wing linings. Both males and females have identical plumage and similar size, so it is not easy to tell their gender. The turkey vulture's head is small in proportion to its body. The adults have a reddish head color while the youngsters' heads are gray. It has a relatively short, hooked, ivory colored beak. Its feet have long, front toes with small webs at their base. Neither the feet nor the beak is equipped to catch and kill live prey. The turkey vulture is a scavenger feeding almost exclusively on carrion. To find its food, it has keen eyes and sense of smell. The nostril at the top of the beak is large and penetrates completely through the beak. Uncommon in the avian world, this sense of smell allows it to pick up the scent of decaying animals as it flies low over the ground. Turkey Vultures generally live in open areas throughout the Central Valley.



The Turkey Vulture is communal and roosts in large groups at night, breaking away to forage alone during the day.

At night the group prefers dead, leafless trees to roost in. We see them each year come in for the night at Critter Creek. The Turkey Vulture is awkward on the ground having to hop/walk to move. It is an ordeal to take flight having to flap its wings while pushing off the ground. Once in the air, it is the master of what is called static soaring flight meaning that all it does is flap its wings infrequently while taking advantage of rising thermals to stay soaring.

It is amazing to watch a group of vultures prepare, at first sun light, for their day of foraging. They stand at the top of tree, fence posts, power poles, etc. in a spread winged stance like a radar dish turning in the sunlight to get the full benefit of the warmth. The stance is believed to serve multiple purposes: drying the wings, warming the body, and baking off bacteria.

Studies have shown that around the end of September and through October, Turkey Vultures gather in huge groups called kettles and migrate south into Mexico and even into South America for the winter months. At Critter Creek we have seen the increase in activity during September and October. Currently in November, we are only seeing a few die-hards who winter over at Critter Creek. I suspect the others travel over the coastal range and spend the winter in the milder coastal temperatures.



These birds have few natural enemies. They do have a couple of defense mechanisms. Especially in the summer, the Turkey Vulture often defecates on its own feet, using the evaporation of the water in the feces/urine to cool itself. This shows up on the legs as white streaks. This makes the bird rather smelly;

then add the fact that it spends most of its time hanging around decaying dead stuff and you have a smell that clears a vet's waiting room single handedly. Should a Turkey Vulture get attacked despite its foul smell, its primary form of defense is regurgitating semi-digested meat which will sting if the predator is close enough to get the vomit in its face and eyes. Also, if flight is the vulture's only escape, it will rid its crop of the heavy, undigested meat to take off to escape.

Most Turkey Vultures we get at Critter Creek are from being hit by a car. They get involved in eating roadkill and, since flight is laborious for them, they can't always get out of the way of a speeding car. Getting hit by a car seldom ends well for the vulture. Despite outlawing lead ammunition, we also see cases of lead poisoning. Vultures are attracted to dead animals left out in fields and lake shores. Over time, they consume enough lead that it builds up in their system usually causing paralysis and death. Despite these threats, Turkey Vultures can live around 16 years in the wild and some have lived over 40 years in captivity.

Turkey Vultures are amazing animals, serving as the clean-up crew for nature. We look forward to the spring when they return a few at a time each week until they are back to their usual numbers.

## Project for 2023 Receives Funding

The small birds we get in each spring are currently housed in an area we call The Quad. These enclosures are not suitable for the safety and care of small birds. They do work for doves and pigeons. This new enclosure will be able to house various insect eaters like scrub jays, mockingbirds, robins, starlings, larks, woodpeckers, orioles, warblers, swifts, etc. In a separate partition, we can house smaller birds like finches, sparrows, wrens, nuthatches, etc. The third enclosure we can house quail, killdeer, and other ground dwelling birds. It sits on a concrete slab ensuring that no predators can dig in. There are double door passageways, so we are able to care for them without fear of an unscheduled release.

We wish to thank the Native Wildlife Rehabilitation Grant Program for the money to pay for most of the caging. We still need to raise money for the shipping and to pour the concrete slab. The grant money does not become available until the spring of 2023, just in time for the influx of baby songbirds. If you appreciate these birds, please consider a donation earmarked for the completion of this badly need enclosure.



## Additional Ways to Donate

After several years of people asking, we now can accept Credit and Debit Cards, as well as, Apple Wallet and Google Pay in our Gift Shop for donations. We also can accept PayPal QR Code donations at the front table during Open House as long as you have the PayPal app installed on your phone. To use our QR Code, open the PayPal app, then scan our QR code. You will be asked for the amount of your donation, enter the amount, and you will see a confirmation of your donation amount.

