

# Tagged Turkey Vultures & Raptor Research

## We need Your Observations of Tagged Turkey Vultures

Pete Bloom PhD, a renowned raptor biologist and a long-time member of Sea and Sage Audubon Society, has been tagging Turkey Vultures in southern California since the 1990s. While most of those early tagged birds are no longer around, vultures tagged between 2005 and 2020 are still frequently observed in Orange County.

Research goals for tagging these vultures have varied from studying lead exposure, to mapping long-distance movements (see the story below), and studying population dynamics of our local Turkey Vultures.

To assist in his studies Pete marks vultures with conspicuous white wing-tags (Patagial Tags or P-tags) that have black numbers/letters painted in them. These tags are easily viewed when the birds are perched with binoculars or a spotting scope. In-flight viewing of P-tags with optics such as binoculars is more difficult but can be done. Photographing tagged vultures, both perched and in flight, with modern quick shooting and high-resolution digital cameras can be quite successful.

Pete and Sea and Sage receive many excellent observations and photos from Sea and Sage's members, greatly increasing the success of Pete's studies, for which we are very grateful.

If you observe a turkey vulture, with a white P-tag with black letters/numbers (such as in the picture of F 9) we ask that you report your information in two ways:

1. Send you information to:

Pete Bloom at [petebloom@bloombiological.com](mailto:petebloom@bloombiological.com) and/or

Scott Thomas at [redtail1@cox.net](mailto:redtail1@cox.net)

**2. Report the observation to the USGS Banding Laboratory at:**

- <https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/BBL/bblretrv/>

**Data Needed**

- Your Name and Contact Info
- Photos (if available)
- Location of Sighting
- Date of Sighting
- Tag info such as: *white tag with black letters and the letter/number on left wing*
- Brief behavior notes such as: *perched, soaring, foraging, etc.*



Turkey Vulture F9, reported & photographed by Bob Cheung in Yorba Linda, 2013

## **2006 MIGRATION STUDY AND P-TAG #26**

In 2006, Pete Bloom, Scott Thomas, Jeff Kidd, and Spence Porter, trapped Turkey Vultures for a joint project with Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, PA. The purpose of the project was to track the migration routes of the vultures from their nesting grounds in

the U.S. and Canada to their wintering haunts in Mexico and beyond. Other biologists across the U.S. also completed the same process so that Hawk Mountain could track vultures traveling across different regions of North America simultaneously.

Pete's group was tasked with trapping five local Turkey Vultures as they passed through our area towards their breeding grounds to the north. Vultures migrate in large groups that often mix for short periods with local residents as they pass through. Inevitably only four of the vultures fixed with transmitters turned out to be migrating vultures. The four did provide a wealth of information about the routes these birds travel, how far they travel, their destinations, and other information. The fifth transmitted vulture gave Pete some interesting insights to local population movements.



Pictures of #26 observed at Bolsa Chica Preserve submitted by local Sea and Sage Audubon Members

While trapping these vultures, Pete also captured three other vultures that were fitted with P-tags only (no transmitters). One of these turned out to be a local resident, a young bird tagged with P-tag # 26.

Despite the fact that # 26 and others have not provided the information Hawk Mountain was seeking, they have provided some very interesting data, including that some local vultures travel farther around southern CA than previously thought.

#26 has lived very long and is still frequently observed most often near the Bolsa Chica Preserve in Huntington Beach. It was last reported in early 2021 is one of the oldest wild flying Turkey Vultures on record. This critical information is almost impossible to glean from any other research method other than marking and re-sighting wing-tagged (P-tag) vultures.

Recently, Pete Bloom and his associates have tagged additional Turkey Vultures at locations such as Irvine Lake, Caspers Park, the Santa Ana River in Anaheim, and as far away as Fallbrook. As with the reports of # 26, all observation of all these birds are important and your continued assistance reporting observations valued and appreciated.