

Turkey Vultures

by Bill Trunick

While wandering through our beautiful county, one can often look up and see a large black bird soaring on the air currents. Some might call these gliders of thermals black buzzards but they are more correctly identified as Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*). Turkey vultures are easily identifiable by their black color and featherless red head. Their wingspan can reach up to five and a half feet. While soaring, the upward angle of their wings form a V shape. They often rock back and forth while riding on the air currents. Many birders consider them one of the most graceful fliers because they rarely flap their wings and seem to soar for hours on the air currents. Their body measures 18-inches from beak to tail tip.

The scientific name *Cathartes aura* means pacifier of cleanser. Turkey vultures can be considered part of nature's clean-up crew. The turkey vulture's feeding habits have given them a grim reputation. They eat the carcasses of dead and decaying animals. Without them and the other carrion eaters, the outdoors would be a stinky smelly place. Turkey vultures have adaptations that make it very reasonable that they are carrion eaters. They have very weak feet. So weak in fact that they cannot grasp things. They cannot even move their food from one location to another. That is why you can often see them in the road or along side the road. They may be feasting on the animal that did not successfully cross the road. Turkey vulture's featherless red head is also an advantageous adaptation because when they stick their head in the carcass if any of the other clean up crew (maggots...) gets on the head of the vulture they cannot infect it. Despite their looks and diet they are a very clean bird. They have been known to spend 2-3 hours preening themselves. Their digestive system is such that their pellets are germ free.

It is believed that turkey vultures are one of the few birds that have a very keen sense of smell. They are capable of detecting parts-per-trillion and even which direction that it is coming from.



They use this sense of smell to help them locate their food. This helps them because they eat only carrion and they do not know when they will be getting their next meal. Turkey vultures have a habit of eating until they are so stuffed that they cannot fly. This leads them to have another interesting adaptation for defense—they ward off attackers by vomiting the items that they just ingested. Talk about a revolting smell! They can keep vomiting until the purge themselves enough that they can fly again, though they seldom do this. It is believed that because they do not kill their prey that the Cherokee Nation gave the Turkey Vulture the honorific title of "peace eagle."

They are also a very social bird. One observer saw that when a field had a dead cow in it, the resident roost (a group of vultures) contacted another roost that was over thirty miles away to come join the feast. Before the feast was finished, another two cows had died. Yet another roost was contacted and joined the first two roosts. When all the clean up was done the neighboring roosts departed.

From the President's Desk

By the time you receive this, the *2004 Parks Conference* will just about be here. Hopefully you have already made arrangements to attend. It looks to be another great conference and I am really looking forward to it. The location will most likely ensure good weather for us with some top-notch training, field trips and social activities planned. Another big event at this year's conference will be the presentation of the first ever "PRAC Generalist Ranger" certificates to the first members that have fulfilled all of the requirements for this esteemed certification. I hope to see you in Anaheim where we will have a California Adventure and re-discover the magic!

When we went to print on the last edition, we did not have the *election results* back yet. With the results back I am pleased to announce that the members approved, with a vast majority, the creation of a Region 6 for park professionals from the State of Nevada. The members also soundly approved the creation of a new voting membership category for retired park professionals, which will give retired park professionals the ability to maintain voting membership in PRAC at a reduced membership rate. I hope you will join me in welcoming *Dave Updike* to the board as the new Region 4 Director who is replacing *Walt Young*. Walt, thank you so much for your many years of service to PRAC, you will be sorely missed but don't think you are off the hook! It is also my pleasure to welcome *John Lufrano* to the Board, as the first ever Region 6 Director. John will be busy working on establishing PRAC in the State of Nevada and helping PRAC fill the needs of the park professionals that live in Nevada. *Lee Hickinbotham* will be serving as the Region 2 Director for another 2 years, and I will have the pleasure of serving you as President again for another 2 years.

I am very pleased to announce the *2003 Scholarship* award recipients. *Christal Niederer* is the recipient of the 2003 Thomas A. Smith Scholarship. Christal is a West Valley College Park Management student and is transferring to San Jose State University to continue to pursue her education goals. *Heather Robertson* is the 2003 recipient of the PRAC Scholarship. Heather is a former West Valley College Park Management student and is currently attending Humboldt State pursuing a degree in Natural Resources Planning and Interpretation. Congratulations to Christal and Heather on your accomplishments and I wish you both the best in the pursuit of your goals.

Don't forget the *2nd Annual Park Advocacy Day* is just around the corner. With the uncertainty many agencies are facing with budgetary issues, it is as important as ever for us to rally around and show the legislators and the public the importance of parks and park funding. It is important for as many of us as possible to join together in *Sacramento on Monday, March 22*. You should have received a notice in the mail about Park Advocacy Day with the details. If you would like more information please visit the California State Parks Foundation web site at www.calparks.org.

The planning committee for the *2005 Parks Conference* is starting to form. This will be a northern venue and will most likely be in one of the coastal counties near the Bay Area. The location will be announced at the 2004 Parks Conference with more details to follow. If you are interested in helping plan the 2005 conference, please let me know.

That is all for now, I hope to see you in *Anaheim* at the conference or in *Sacramento* at Park Advocacy Day. I hope you all have a great spring.

Stay safe,

Mike Chiesa

Placement of Belt Gear

by Chris Kemp

Look around at ranger duty belts and you will quickly assess that there are many different ways people place gear on their belts. From articles I have read and seminars attended, I have learned that there are ways to place items on your duty belt to reduce injuries and promote officer safety.

Over the years, more and more safety equipment has started to appear on law enforcement officer's belts. Gone are the good old days of just a revolver and a row of bullets. The addition of safety equipment is a leading cause of back problems, repetitive strain issues, and body soreness of items rubbing the wrong spots. Thus, weight reduction of the duty belt is a good place to start.

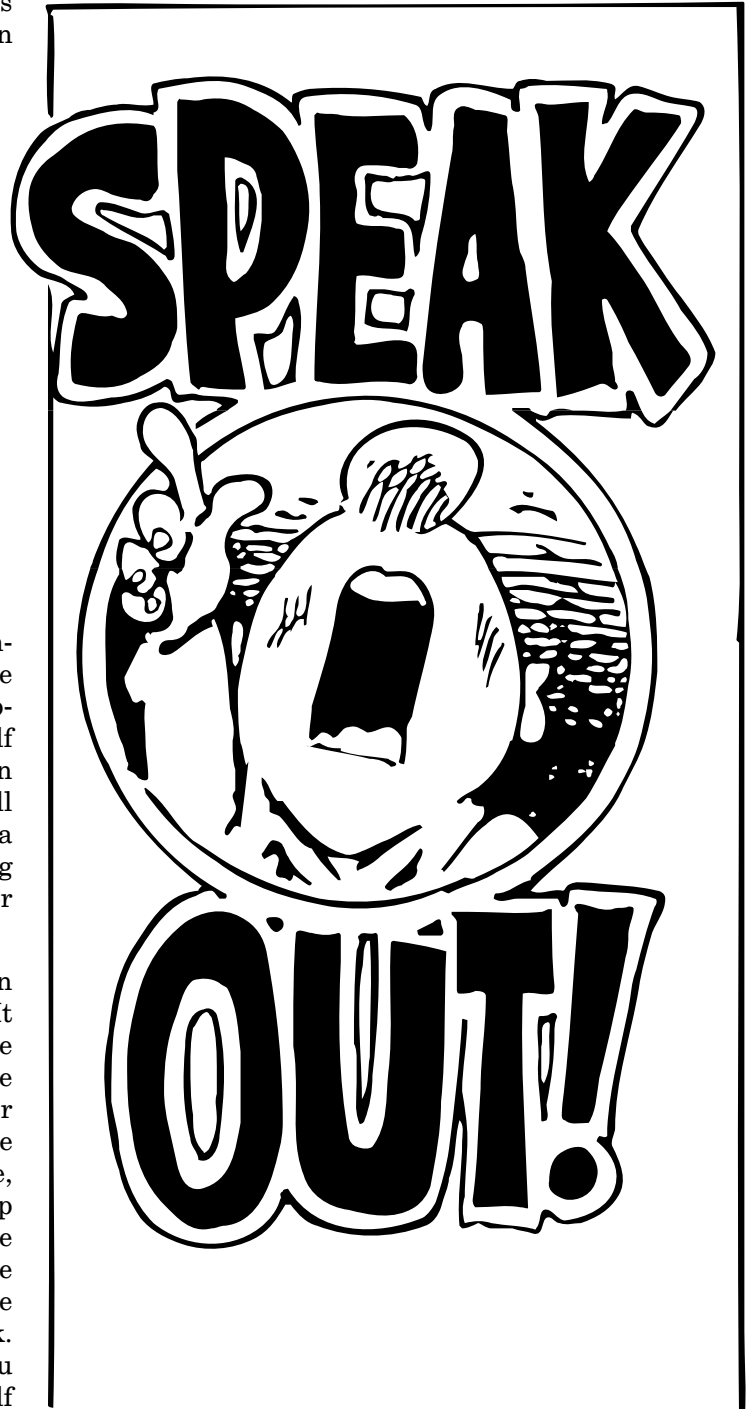
- *Keep only the keys you use everyday on the key ring.* The rest can go on a ring kept in a bag in the truck. This alone took a virtual fifteen pounds off my belt.
- *Consider lighter handcuffs and an expandable baton.* This is a costly investment up front but the lighter weight models of handcuffs and expandable batons on the market can greatly reduce duty belt weight. This is particularly true if you carry two pairs of handcuffs while on duty.
- *If you don't already, consider wearing a nylon duty belt instead of a leather belt.* The nylon belts weigh much less than their leather counterparts.
- *If you carry one, remove the multi-tool from your belt.* I keep mine in my duty bag to lighten the load.

Individually these steps don't amount to much but combined they can give your back a break. Also, balance the load on your belt so both sides are equal in weight. Keeping the small of your back clear of items can save yourself from injury during a fall. You don't want a handcuff case in the center of your back separating a spinal disk as you fall backwards while easing away from a savage Chihuahua off leash. It's worth it to think of your belt now; keeping in mind you will be wearing it for 40+ hours per week for the rest of your career.

Placement of items on the belt is critical. All items that can be used to save your life must be immediately accessible. It helps to have everything up front. For example, keep the expandable baton, handcuff case, and pepper spray at the front of the belt. Some Rangers like to carry their pepper spray behind their handgun, but that limits the draw to one hand. Switching to a smaller model of spray (for example, a Mark 3 can size instead of a Mark 5) that can be put up front makes it accessible by either hand. The expandable baton should be kept up front for the same reasons. The handcuffs can be kept up front by switching to a double handcuff case instead of two individual cases in the back. If you are reaching for a critical item such as these, you want your hands in front where you can defend yourself and not behind the back in a more vulnerable position. Also,

during an "adult time-out" (meaning arrest) you cannot anticipate which hand you will need free to grab for the baton, pepper spray, or handcuffs on your belt. Thus, it's a good idea to be able to reach for things with either hand by having the equipment up front.

These are things I've done to increase my chances of retiring safely that also promote ranger safety and maintaining physical well being.



Taking Care of #1

Officer safety teaches us that the most important person to take care of is you. You can't help anyone if you become part of the problem. But how many of us follow that advice on our personal time. Come on, when was the last time you went in for a check up? Had your blood pressure and cholesterol checked recently?

I know most of you are now saying to yourself, "I'm a ranger. I'm young, healthy, active and work outside. Of course I'm healthy."

New evidence shows you may not be as healthy as you think. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has identified "Pre-Hypertension" as a significant health issue for Americans. Hypertension, or high blood pressure, has long been recognized as a silent and deadly disease. Hypertension is a leading risk factor for heart disease, stroke and kidney damage. Government studies state that over 50 million Americans (1 in every 4 adults) suffers from high blood pressure.

Past medical practices considered a blood pressure of 120/80 to 130/90 to be normal to high normal. Multiple recent studies have shown that that may be too high and a new classification scale for hypertension has been established.

Blood Pressure Classification

Normal less than 120 mm Hg / less than 80 mm Hg

Pre- Hypertension..... 20-139 mm Hg / 80-89 mm Hg

Stage 1 Hypertension 140-159 mm Hg / 90-99 mm Hg

Stage 2 Hypertension 160 or greater mm Hg / 100 or greater mm Hg

Why would this change affect you? Studies conducted by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) estimate that 22% or 45 million people fall into the pre-hypertension category. The NHLBI researchers state that new evidence show that damage to arteries begins at fairly low blood pressure levels—those formally considered normal and optimal. The risk of death from heart disease and stroke begins to rise at blood pressures as low as 115/75 and that it doubles for each 20 mm Hg systolic and 10 mm Hg diastolic increase.

Researches from NHLBI also state that unless steps are taken, stiffness and other damage to arteries worsen with age and make hypertension even more difficult to control. The pre-hypertension category helps the public and medical practitioners recognize this risk and take preventative action at an earlier stage.

Current guidelines don't recommend drug treatment for pre-hypertension unless other medical conditions exist. They do strongly recommend making important life style changes such as losing excess weight, becoming physically active, limiting the intake of alcoholic beverages and salt, and following a heart healthy diet.

So, isn't it about time to look after #1? Make that appointment with your medical practitioner to have a check-up, and don't forget to talk to him or her about pre-hypertension and your risk level.

More information can be found at the following web sites

National Institutes of Health

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov>

Department of Health and Human Services, Federal Occupational Health

<http://www.foh.dhhs.gov>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov>

American Heart Association

<http://www.americanheart.org>

Interview Tips

by Lee Hickinbotham Jr

It's that time of year when agencies start interviewing for their summer help. This can be both rewarding and painful for the interviewer and the interviewee. I have sat in on a fair amount of interview panels and the one thing that remains constant is the lack of interview skills. Every once in a while a well groomed and prepared candidate comes along. One that will dazzle the panel with his/her knowledge and personality.

I have seen candidates show up drunk, unkempt and unprepared. I have seen candidates with no personalities, great personalities and even some with a pleasant sense of humor.

However, only about one in ten have all the qualities an interview panel is looking for. So for those of you that are looking for a job or might have an interview lined up soon, I want to share some interviewing tips I have accumulated over the years.

Prior to applying for the job, make sure you read the job announcement all the way through. Make sure that you meet most of the qualifications before applying. Fill out your application based on the information in the job description.

Do your homework: Start doing your homework ahead of time. Don't wait until an interview is scheduled before you start, by then it may be too late to gather enough information to make you a viable candidate. Find out everything there is to know about that agency. Go on numerous ride-alongs with different staff at different times of the day. This is the time to pick their brains about the duties of the job, what their policies say and to observe the cohesiveness of their team. Ask to review their operations manual or the park master plan. Ask to participate in a volunteer day or arrange for an internship.

Prepare: Once the interview is scheduled, take the time to prepare for the interview questions. To get an idea of

what they might ask, just review the job description. The questions asked would be a result of what the agency does. Do a mock interview with a friend. Practice by using some of these standard generic questions:

- Why do you want to work for that agency?
- What skills do you possess for this position?
- A coworker does something against policy, what do you do?
- What are your goals?
- Make up a scenario that has something to do with EMS or Law Enforcement.

Dress to impress: The interview panel will take the time to look their best and you should too. Always dress like a professional. If you are a male, wear a suit or at least wear a coat and tie. Females should also wear a suit or slacks, something business-like and professional.

Be on time: Show up at least 15 minutes before the interview. Introduce yourself with a firm handshake and eye contact. Remember that a first impression is established in the first 27 seconds of contact. Try and resist the urge to answer the questions as soon as the interviewer is finished asking. **Wait a few seconds; calculate your thoughts and answer in complete sentences.** Look at each person on the panel as you answer the question.

Be honest: What ever you do, don't make up an answer or lie. If you do not have an answer to a question, tell the interviewer you don't have an answer. If the panel is writing as you are answering, that is a good thing. It means that you are hitting all the key words they are looking for.

Relax and be yourself. It's only 45 minutes of pain or pleasure. It's all up to you.

A Book to Report On

by Lee Hickinbotham Jr

Have you ever gone hiking and tried to live off the land? Do you often wonder if certain plants are edible? As a park ranger I like to catch my visitors off guard by eating plants that they thought were not edible.

In order to do this without dying or becoming deathly ill, I need to gather as much information as I can to be safe for both my visitors and myself.

So, I did what I do best. I bought a book. This book identifies plants that are edible and medicinal. It enables the average person to determine the identity of poisonous and non-poisonous plants. It also provides information on more than 100 most nutritious herbs and wild plants in the United States.

The book is titled **"Edible Wild Plants & Useful Herbs"** by Jim Mueninck. The price of the book is around \$8.00. This book is great for the interpreter, park ranger, backpacker or the average person who wants to live off the land.

So take the time to read and enjoy the book.

Region 5 News

by Lori Charett

A Career Opportunity: The City of San Diego Park & Recreation Department will soon be opening its application filing period for the position of Senior Park Ranger. Here is a summary of the experience and educational requirements, as well as duties.

Salary: \$3,574 to 4,331 monthly

Experience: Two years of full-time experience supervising the daily operation of a regional, resource-based or open space park. Qualifying experience must include: (1) enforcing park regulations and/or having the authority to do so; and (2) writing/presenting historical and natural science interpretive programs. **Note:** Experience maintaining park grounds is not qualifying.

and

Education: A Bachelors Degree or equivalent education (i.e. minimum completed units = 120 semester/180 quarter). A Bachelor's Degree in Resource Management, Public Resource Protection, Park Management, Outdoor Recreation, or a closely related field may be substituted for lack of experience in "writing/presenting historical and natural science interpretive programs" (see Experience Requirement #2 above). Proof of degree awarded or college units completed must be submitted with your application.

and

Certificates: (1) Proof of successful completion of a California Penal Code 832 course (or equivalent, if out of state) is required within six months of hire; (2) Employees must obtain a CPR/First Aid Certificate within six months of hire.

License: A valid California Class C Drivers will be required at time of hire.

Notes:

Highly Desirable Qualifications: Experience in supervising, training and evaluating subordinate Park Rangers; natural resource management experience, including habitat and trail management; experience enforcing regulations and issuing citations; and ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing.

Physical Demands: Depending upon assignment, some duties may involve hiking long distances and lifting/carrying objects weighing up to 50 lbs.

Persons hired must furnish and wear standard apparel as prescribed. Costs for the initial uniform will be reimbursed to the employees after completion of the probationary period and attainment of permanent status as a Senior Park Ranger.

Duties: Plan and oversee the daily operation of a resource based, open-space, or regional park; assign, train, and evaluate the work of subordinate Park Rangers, other park personnel, and volunteers; design interpretive programs on the park's natural and historical features; design and direct the preparation of exhibits and publications; plan, monitor, and implement special events; serve as a liaison to advisory community groups, and other City departments, other agencies, and the public regarding park services and improvements; develop and administer park maintenance; plan, coordinate and supervise habitat restoration/re-vegetation enhancement projects, including non-native plant removals, provide emergency assistance; enforce park policies and regulations; issue misdemeanor citations, prepare correspondence and reports; and perform other duties as assigned.

Go to: www.sandiego.gov/empopp for more information.

Or call the 24-hour Job Hotline at: (619) 682-1011

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You may also contact me if you have any questions.

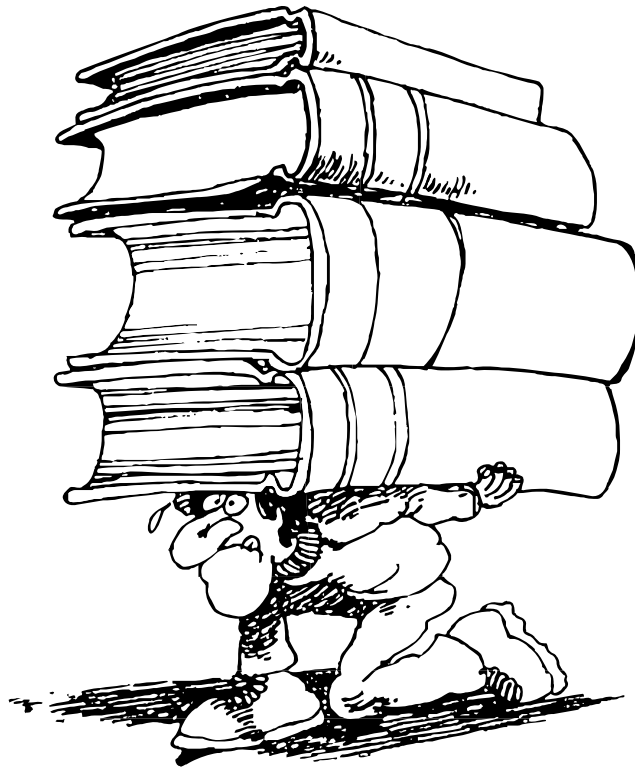
I hope to see you all at the conference, don't miss this great opportunity for networking, training and fun!

Region 5 members, I especially want to hear from you about future training workshops you would like to have and any other ideas!

A Book Review

by: Lori Charett

If you are a Nevada Barr fan, like me, you will get a kick out of her latest book *“Seeking Enlightenment...Hat by Hat.”* You should know that it’s nothing like her previous books and you may find yourself as surprised as I to find it in the *“Inspirational”* section of the bookstore. Many of us know her for her best selling Anna Pigeon mystery series that take place in our National Parks. In this book, she writes with a different goal in mind and you definitely get to know her better. The book is filled with candor, insight, humor and reflection. During her years as an actor, a writer, and adventuress, a non-believer, and a seeker of truth and amusement, Nevada Barr has said to be cursed and blessed with the question of “why?” Although the things she wanted to know were mostly in the realm of the unknowable, she sought answers through reading, thinking and talking—looking outward for signs and truths. But she found that while her quest for meaning provided inspiration, it afforded her little in the way of proof. Then she began to look inward for answers. *“Seeking Enlightenment... Hat by Hat”* is the beguiling story of her journey from arrogance and atheism toward humility and a sense of being part of something greater than herself. Hat by hat, step by step, Barr leads her readers down her path to enlightenment by sharing personal episodes, some of them funny and revealing, others painfully honest. Each chapter offers a truth or an answer forged through experience and a deep reflection and a nugget of insight certain to encourage thought and discussion among readers. This is not your average book and it’s a keeper!



Director, Region 6—Who Am I?

by John Lufano, Park Ranger III

Douglas County Parks and Recreation, Nevada

I sort of fell into my lifetime career as a park ranger in the Lake Tahoe area. As a high school student in 1980, I walked down to the local park’s office in Douglas County, Nevada, and was hired as a seasonal Park Aide. I spent the next eight years working summers in parks maintenance for the county before being promoted to Park Ranger at the same facilities. I became POST certified in 1994 and have served five years as a reserve deputy for our local sheriff’s department. I am now responsible for law enforcement, maintenance and facility scheduling for three parks and a bike path.

Through the years in Lake Tahoe, we’ve taken on a better understanding of nature and ecology as it relates to parks management. Awareness has grown about the importance of keeping the lake clean and preserving the natural beauty of our surroundings while we continue to find venues for the public to enjoy our parks. It’s a balancing act to maintain areas for the public and increasing tourist population while keeping parks clean, natural and safe.

I’ve always had an enormous appreciation for the great outdoors. Working in parks allows me to continue learning and experiencing what our profession has to offer. I look forward to meeting and networking with other parks professionals in our field through PRAC and hope to draw several Nevada rangers into the association to increase our membership.

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