



Is Janesville becoming the City of Vultures?

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"They're gross," my Gazette carrier told me.

"Bring your gun," a woman in my neighborhood told me.

I was instead shooting photos of the big black birds during my recent furlough. They're turkey

vultures and have red heads. See the photo below.

More of these vultures seem to be around here every year. They soar with wings outstretched in evenings and congregate atop large pines.

So what are they doing here? My guess is the lure of the landfill is too great.

City staffer Peter Riggs acknowledges that might be one possibility.

"I'm not sure where they feed," he told me by e-mail. But then he added, "We do have several that frequent the landfill, so it is reasonable to assume that is a food source for them. I know that Lake Koshkonong has numerous turkey vultures that feed off washed-up dead fish. So perhaps the local flock is feeding off the Rock River. This is pure speculation."

Riggs says those by Lake Koshkonong have a bizarre roosting habit.

"About 30-40 of them fly in just before the sunset and roost in a large dead tree just off of the Mounds Country Club Golf Course. It is an eerie but interesting sight."

The birds are found throughout North America and have some disgusting habits. Their keen vision and sense of smell help them detect the gasses produced by the dead and decaying animals they feed on. They defecate on their own legs, evaporation in the feces or urine helping cool them. They feed their young by regurgitation. They also puke up semi-digested meat, a foul-smelling substance that deters most potential predators that might raid a nest. These puke balls, by the way, annoy my neighbor who wanted me to shoot them with a gun, not a camera.

Still, the birds have few predators. They do roost in large "community" groups, and flocks can grow into the hundreds. The Web site [here](#) says they generally raise two chicks each year. At that rate, how long before Janesville has hundreds?