

## Turkey Vultures *Cathartes aura* scavenging on a floating marine mammal carcass in Big Sur, California.

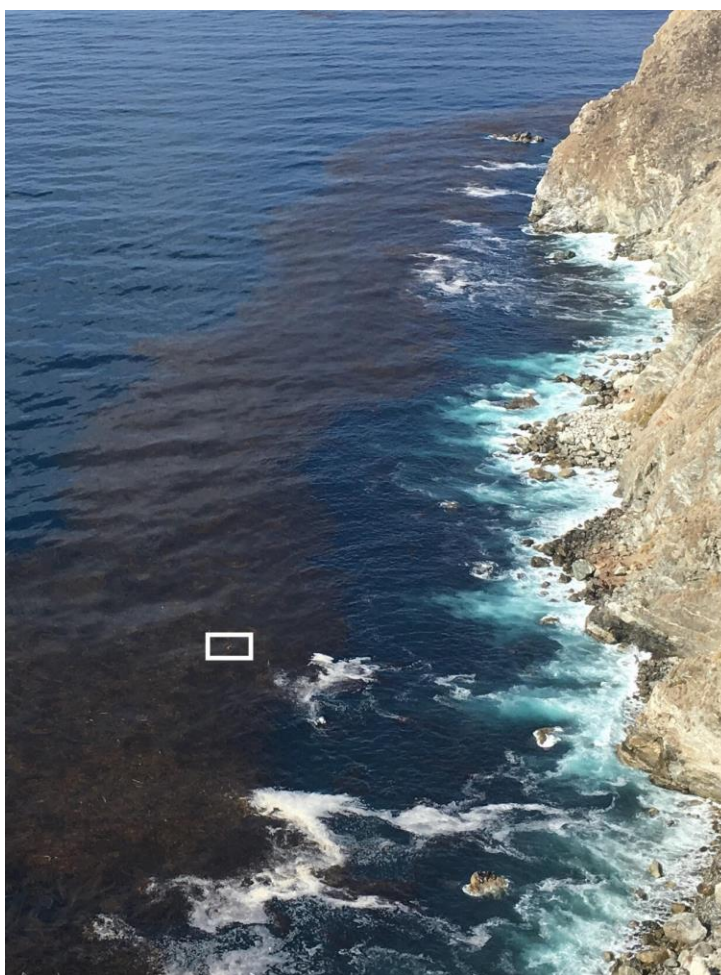
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On October 10 2018, I observed several adult Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*) scavenging on an unidentified floating marine mammal carcass,

approximately 100 meters from the shore in kelp forest (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Marine mammal carcass in a kelp forest off the coast of California

The carcass was a probable sea lion, based on the noticeable forelimbs (Figure 2 and 3). This was observed from an overlook along Pacific Coast Highway 1 approximately 180 meters

away from the carcass, above a small inlet known as “Sea Lion Cove” (N36.202, W121.731) on the coast of central California in Big Sur.



**Figures 2 and 3:** Probable California Sea Lion carcass, floating, with feeding Turkey Vultures

The cove is a resting spot and rookery for California Sea Lions (*Zalophus californianus*), and is active with Turkey Vultures, Common Ravens (*Corvus corax*), and California Condors

(*Gymnogyps californianus*), although no condors were observed on this day. The water that morning was relatively calm, with mostly clear skies and a temperature around 50°F

(10°C). The floating carcass never supported more than two Turkey Vultures at a time, and when another individual approached in flight, one or both of the Turkey Vultures currently scavenging would cede position and fly back to shore (Figure 2 and 3). The Turkey Vultures appeared to be well-balanced as they perched upon the floating carcass, and I observed no peril to them from the water or waves during their landing, scavenging, or take-off for flight back to the shore. Turkey Vultures have been observed feeding on floating carcasses prior to

this observation, which included an American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) and Manatee (*Trichechus* sp.) (McCabe et al. 2016). However, this observation is the first, to my knowledge, of Turkey Vultures feeding on a floating marine mammal.

#### **Acknowledgements**

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#### **References**

McCabe, R. A., Baun, C. L., Master, T. L., Goodrich, L. J. & Bildstein, K. L. 2016. Turkey Vulture scavenging prey at a Broad-winged Hawk nest. *Journal of Raptor Research* 50: 424-425.

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