

= Greater yellow @-@ headed vulture =

The greater yellow @-@ headed vulture ( *Cathartes melambrotus* ) , also known as the forest vulture , is a species of bird in the New World vulture family Cathartidae . It was considered to be the same species as the lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture until they were split in 1964 . It is found in South America in tropical moist lowland forests . It is a fairly large bird , with a wingspan of 166 ? 178 cm ( 65 ? 70 in ) , a weight of 1 @.@ 65 kilograms ( 3 @.@ 6 lb ) and a body length of 64 ? 75 cm ( 25 ? 30 in ) . The body plumage is black , and the head and neck , which are featherless , range in color from deep yellow to pale orange . It lacks a syrinx , and its vocalizations are therefore limited to grunts or low hisses .

The greater yellow @-@ headed vulture feeds on carrion and locates carcasses by sight and by smell , an ability which is rare in birds . It is dependent on larger vultures , such as the king vulture , to open the hides of larger animal carcasses , as its bill is not strong enough to do this . Like other New World vultures , the greater yellow @-@ headed vulture utilizes thermals to stay aloft with minimal effort . It lays its eggs on flat surfaces , such as the floors of caves , or in the hollows of stumps . It feeds its young by regurgitation .

= = Taxonomy = =

The greater yellow @-@ headed and the lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture were distinguished as separate species and described in 1964 by Alexander Wetmore ; both species had earlier been known as yellow @-@ headed vultures . The greater yellow @-@ headed vulture 's genus is *Cathartes* , which means " purifier " , and is Latinized from the Greek *kathart?s* / ????????? . The common name , vulture , is derived from the Latin word *vultur* , meaning " tearer , " in reference to its feeding habits .

The exact taxonomic placement of the greater yellow @-@ headed vulture and the remaining six species of New World vultures remains unclear . Although they are similar in appearance and have similar ecological roles , the New World and Old World vultures evolved from different ancestors in different parts of the world . Just how different the two are is currently under debate , with some earlier authorities suggesting that the New World vultures are more closely related to storks . More recent authorities assert their overall position in the order Falconiformes along with the Old World vultures or place them in their own order , Cathartiformes . The South American Classification Committee has removed the New World vultures from Ciconiiformes and instead placed them in Incertae sedis , but notes that a move to Falconiformes or Cathartiformes is possible .

= = Description = =

The greater yellow @-@ headed vulture is 64 ? 75 centimetres ( 25 ? 30 in ) in length , with a wingspan of 166 ? 178 centimetres ( 65 ? 70 in ) , a tail length of 25 ? 29 centimetres ( 9 @.@ 8 ? 11 @.@ 4 in ) and a weight averaging 1 @.@ 65 kilograms ( 3 @.@ 6 lb ) . Its plumage is black with a green or purple sheen . The throat and the sides of the head are featherless . The skin on the head ranges in color from deep yellow to pale orange with a blue crown . The nape and the area near the nostrils are pale pinkish . The undersides of the wings are black , while the flight feathers are a lighter shade . The quills of the eleven primary feathers appear to be white when seen from above . The tail is rounded and long for a vulture , extending to or slightly beyond the tip of the closed wing . The sexes are outwardly similar . The head is dull greyish in juveniles , which otherwise resemble adults .

The irises of its eyes are red , its feet are black , and its beak is flesh @-@ colored . The eye has a single incomplete row of eyelashes on the upper lid and two rows on the lower lid . Its beak is thick , rounded , and hooked at the tip . Because of its habit of urohidrosis , the scaly portions of its legs are often streaked white with uric acid . The front toes are long with small webs at their bases and are not adapted to grasping . The opening of the nostril is longitudinal and set in a soft cere , and the nostril lack a septum . Like all New World vultures , the greater yellow @-@ headed vulture

lacks a syrinx , and is therefore unable to make any sound other than grunts or a low hiss .

It differs in appearance from the similar lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture in several ways . It is larger than the lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture , with a longer , broader tail . The plumage is a dark , glossy black in contrast to the lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture 's browner plumage . Its legs are darker in color and its head is more yellow and less orange / pink than that of the lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture . Its wings are broader and its flight is also steadier . Unlike the other members of the genus Cathartes , the greater yellow @-@ headed vulture has relatively dark inner primaries , which contrast slightly with the paler secondaries and outer primaries . The greater yellow @-@ headed vulture prefers to live in forests while the lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture prefers to inhabit savannas , and it is more heavily built than the lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture . The greater yellow @-@ headed vulture is also somewhat larger than the turkey vulture . It can be distinguished from that species only at relatively close range by the differing head coloration . The underwing coloration is similar to the turkey vulture but the greater yellow @-@ headed usually has a faint but broad and dark band vertically down the middle of the wings .

#### = = Distribution and habitat = =

The greater yellow @-@ headed vulture is found in the Amazon Basin of tropical South America ; specifically in south @-@ eastern Colombia , southern and eastern Venezuela , Guyana , French Guiana , Suriname , northern and western Brazil , northern Bolivia , eastern Peru and eastern Ecuador . It is not found in the Andes , in the lowlands west or north of the Andes , in the relatively open regions of northern South America , eastern South America , or in the southern subtropical regions . It has a large range , with an estimated global extent of occurrence of 6 @,@ 700 @,@ 000 square kilometers ( 2 @,@ 586 @,@ 884 @.@ 5 sq mi ) . Its natural habitat is tropical moist lowland forests . It is not generally found in high @-@ altitude regions . It is common in heavily forested regions . It may wander over grasslands , but rarely strays far from forested areas , which provide shelter and nesting areas .

#### = = Ecology and behavior = =

The greater yellow @-@ headed vulture roosts on high , exposed dead trees to observe surrounding terrain . When flying , it travels in pairs or alone and is rarely found in groups . Flight is heavy and steady . It flies with its wings held flat or very slightly above horizontal , in what is called the dihedral position . The flight of the greater yellow @-@ headed is an example of static soaring flight , which uses thermals to maintain altitude without the need to flap its wings . The greater yellow @-@ headed vulture also has the unusual habit of urohidrosis , in which it urinates or defecates on its legs to cool them evaporatively . This behavior is exhibited by storks and New World vultures .

#### = = = Diet = = =

The greater yellow @-@ headed vulture is a scavenger and subsists entirely on carrion . It will eat roadkill or other animal carcasses . It prefers fresh meat , but often cannot make the first cut into the carcass of a larger animal as its beak is not strong enough to tear into the tough hide . After a few days , the greater yellow @-@ headed vulture will no longer feed on a piece of carrion , as the meat will begin to decay and become contaminated with microbial toxins . It will drink water from a pool , pond , or any receptacle provided . Like other vultures , they play an important role in the ecosystem by disposing off carrion which could otherwise be a breeding ground for disease .

The greater yellow @-@ headed vulture forages using its keen eyesight to locate carrion on the ground , but also uses its sense of smell , an ability which is uncommon in the avian world . It locates carrion by detecting the scent of ethyl mercaptan , a gas produced by the beginnings of decay in dead animals . The olfactory lobe of its brain responsible for processing smells is particularly large compared to other animals . This characteristic of New World vultures has been

used by humans : ethyl mercaptan is injected into pipelines , and engineers looking for leaks then follow the vultures .

King vultures , which lack the ability to smell carrion , follow the greater yellow @-@ headed vultures to carcasses , where the king vulture tears open the skin of the dead animal . This allows the smaller greater yellow @-@ headed vulture access to food , as it does not have a bill strong enough to tear the hide of larger animals . This is an example of mutual dependence between species . It is generally displaced from carcasses by both turkey vultures and king vultures , due to their larger size .

#### = = = Reproduction = = =

Greater yellow @-@ headed vultures do not build nests , but rather lay their eggs directly on cliffs , the floors of caves , the ground , or in the hollows of stumps . Eggs are cream @-@ colored and blotched with brown spots , particularly around the larger end . Clutch size ranges from one to three , though two is the norm . The chicks are altricial ? blind , naked and relatively immobile upon hatching , and grow down feathers later . The parents feed their young by regurgitating pre @-@ digested food into their beak , where the chicks then drink it . Young fledge after two to three months .

#### = = Conservation = =

The greater yellow @-@ headed vulture is listed as a species of Least Concern by the World Conservation Union ( IUCN ) . It has an estimated global range of 6 @, @ 700 @, @ 000 square kilometers ( 2 @, @ 600 @, @ 000 sq mi ) and a population of between 100 @, @ 000 and 1 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 individuals . There is evidence that suggests a decline in the species ' population , but it is not significant enough to warrant an upgrade in conservation status .