

= Lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture =

The lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture (*Cathartes burrovianus*) also known as the savannah vulture , is a species of bird in the New World vulture family Cathartidae . It was considered to be the same species as the greater yellow @-@ headed vulture until they were split in 1964 . It is found in Mexico , Central America , and South America in seasonally wet or flooded lowland grassland , swamps , and heavily degraded former forest . It is a large bird , with a wingspan of 150 ? 165 centimetres (59 ? 65 in) . The body plumage is black , and the head and neck , which are featherless , are pale orange with red or blue areas . It lacks a syrinx , so therefore its vocalizations are limited to grunts or low hisses .

The lesser 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 lesser 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 lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture was first described in 1845 by John Cassin . It is sometimes recognized as having two subspecies . The first , *Cathartes burrovianus urubitinga* , described by Austrian ornithologist August von Pelzeln in 1851 , is the larger of the two and is found from Argentina north to Colombia , while the nominate subspecies , *Cathartes burrovianus burrovianus* , is smaller and found from northwestern South America through Central America to Mexico . The lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture 's genus , *Cathartes* , means " purifier " and is from the Latinized form of the Greek *kathartōs* / ????????? . The common name , vulture , is derived from the Latin word *vulturus* , which means " tearer " and is a reference to its feeding habits .

The exact taxonomic placement of the lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture and the remaining six species of New World vultures remains unclear . Although both 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 maintain 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 . Like other New World vultures , the lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture has a diploid chromosome number of 80 .

= = Description = =

The lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture is 53 ? 66 cm (21 ? 26 in) in length , with a wingspan of 150 ? 165 cm (59 ? 65 in) and a tail length of 19 ? 24 cm (7 @.@ 5 ? 9 @.@ 4 in) . Its weight ranges from 0 @.@ 95 to 1 @.@ 55 kg (2 @.@ 1 to 3 @.@ 4 lb) . Its plumage is black with a green sheen . The throat and the sides of the head are featherless . The head and neck are bare of feathers , and the skin is yellow , with a reddish forehead and nape and a gray @-@ blue crown . The irises of its eyes are red , its legs are white , 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 . The tail is rounded and relatively short for a vulture ; the tip of the closed wing extends beyond the tail . Immature lesser yellow @-@ headed vultures have browner plumage , a dusky head , and a white nape .

The beak is thick , rounded , and hooked at the tip . 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 the nostrils

lack a septum . Like all New World vultures , the lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture lacks a syrinx , and is therefore unable to make any sound other than a low hiss .

It differs in appearance from the similar greater yellow @-@ headed vulture in several ways . It is smaller and is less heavily built than the greater yellow @-@ headed vulture and has a shorter , thinner tail . The plumage is browner than the greater yellow @-@ headed vulture 's dark , glossy black plumage . Its legs are lighter in color , and its head is more orange @-@ tinged than the more yellow head of the greater yellow @-@ headed vulture . Its flight is also less steady than that of the greater yellow @-@ headed vulture . The lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture also prefers to live in savannas , as opposed to the preferred forest habitat of the greater yellow @-@ headed vulture .

Besides the greater yellow @-@ headed vulture , it is similar to the turkey vulture .

= = Distribution and habitat = =

It is found in Argentina , Belize , Bolivia , Brazil , Chile , Colombia , Costa Rica , Ecuador , El Salvador , French Guiana , Guatemala , Guyana , Honduras , Mexico , Nicaragua , Panama , Paraguay , Peru , Suriname , Uruguay , and Venezuela . Its natural habitats are subtropical or tropical seasonally wet or flooded lowland grassland , swamps , mangroves , and heavily degraded former forest . It may wander over dry fields and clearings . It is not generally found in high @-@ altitude regions .

This bird with its somehow crow @-@ like aspect gave foot to the naming of the Quebrada de los Cuervos (Crows Ravine) in Uruguay , where they dwell together with the black vulture and the turkey vulture .

= = Ecology and behavior = =

The lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture flies solitarily , with wings held in a dihedral position . It glides at a low altitude over wetlands while locating food , and perches on fence posts or on other low perches . When flying , it travels alone and is rarely found in groups . The flight of the lesser yellow @-@ headed is an example of static soaring flight , which uses thermals to maintain altitude without the need to flap its wings . This vulture rarely soars high in the air , preferring low altitudes . This bird is believed to be somewhat migratory in response to the changes in water level where it lives . The lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture , like other New World vultures , has the unusual habit of urohidrosis , in which it urinates or defecates on its legs to cool them by evaporation .

= = = Diet = = =

The lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture is a scavenger and subsists almost entirely on carrion . It will eat roadkill or the carcass of any animal , but is also known to hunt for food , especially small aquatic animals in marshes . It prefers fresh meat , but often cannot make the first cut into the carcass of a larger animal because its beak is not strong enough to tear into the tough hide . The lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture will no longer feed on a piece of carrion once the meat is in a state of extreme decay , as it becomes contaminated with microbial toxins . Like other vultures , it plays an important role in its ecosystem by disposing of carrion which would otherwise be a breeding ground for disease .

The lesser 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 foraging vultures .

King vultures , which lack the ability to smell carrion , follow the lesser yellow @-@ headed vultures to carcasses , where the king vulture tears open the skin of the dead animal . This allows the smaller

lesser 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 = = =

Lesser yellow @-@ headed vultures do not build nests , but rather lay eggs on the ground , cliff ledges , the floors of caves , or in the hollow of a tree . Eggs are cream colored and heavily blotched with brown and gray spots , particularly around the larger end . Two eggs are generally laid . The chicks are altricial ? they are blind , naked and relatively immobile upon hatching . The chicks do not grow their down feathers until 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 lesser yellow @-@ headed vulture is a bird of Least Concern according to the IUCN , with an estimated global range of 7 @, @ 800 @, @ 000 km² (3 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 sq mi) and a population of between 100 @, @ 000 and 1 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 individuals . Its population trend appears to be stable .