

# King of birds

South African Folktale  
English





Once long ago, the birds had a meeting. They wanted a king, just like people and animals.

Which bird should be king?

"The Eagle, he is strong and kingly!" said one.

"No, he has no crown, and when he calls, he sounds too sad," said another.

"Then Ostrich, because he is the largest and roars like a lion," one called out.

"No, he can't fly. The king of the birds must be able to fly."





"I think I should be king," said Peacock, fanning his tail. "I am so beautiful."

"You are too proud," said Owl. "I have the largest eyes of any bird. I should be king."

"No, not you, Owl," they shouted. "You go to sleep when the sun rises."

And so they didn't get very far.

Then one bird had an idea. "He who can fly the highest will be king," he said.

"Yes, yes," they shouted, and they all flew up, up, into the sky.





The Goose flew for one day,  
straight over the highest  
mountains in the world.

The Eagle flew for two days into  
the blue above the mountains.

But the Vulture soared for three  
whole days without stopping,  
straight toward the sun.

Way above them, the birds  
heard Vulture cry, "I am the  
highest, I am king!"







But then just above him Vulture heard a tiny voice, "Tink, tink, tink! I am the highest, I am king." It was Ncede, the Neddicky, the smallest bird of all!

He had held onto the great wing feathers of Vulture as he soared into the sky!



"You won't beat me again," said Vulture, and soared straight up into the air.

He flew up and up until he could fly no more. "I am higher than any other bird. I am your king!" he cried.





But out from under his wing  
crept the tiny bird.

"Tink, tink! Tink, tink! It is I, the  
smallest one! I am your king."

Vulture was too exhausted to fly  
any further.

So down he sailed - with the  
little bird still under his wing.

The other birds were furious  
with Ncede.  
They waited for him, ready to  
pluck out all his feathers





But the quick little bird saw how angry they were, and flew into an empty snake hole.

"With your big eyes, you must keep guard at the hole and catch him when he comes out," they said to Owl.

So Owl sat in front of the hole.



But the sun was warm and soon Owl was fast asleep.

The little bird peeped out, saw that Owl was asleep, and z-zip, away he went.





Owl was very ashamed that he had let the little bird escape.

Now he only hunts at night.

In the day, he sleeps, away from the sight of the other birds.



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Writer: South African Folktale

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