Vultures

There are 23 vulture species, which are divided into two distinct groups: Old World vultures and New World vultures. The two groups are only distantly related, but all vultures have a large wingspan and a sharp beak that ends in a hook that helps them eat carrion easily. Vultures found within Africa belong to the Old World vulture group. Old World vultures have strong talons and a voice box to vocalize.

**Fun Facts:**

1. A vulture—the Rüppell’s griffon vulture—is believed to be the world’s highest-flying bird, with confirmed sightings at more than 10,668 meters (35,000 feet).
2. Vultures cool off on a hot day by drenching their legs with their own droppings, a heat regulation technique known as urohydrosis.
3. The vulture’s gastric acid is extremely corrosive, allowing them to easily digest rotting carcasses infested with potentially dangerous bacteria.
4. Old World vultures may play dead when threatened.

**Habitat**

Vultures are fairly adaptable and able to survive in most environments. As long as there is food, vultures can generally survive. They avoid polar regions and most small islands.

**Diet**

Carcasses of dead animals

**Predators**

Adult vultures lack predators, as they are covered with bacteria from the carcasses they feed on, which would make most predators sick.

**Behavior**

Vultures spend most of the day in search of food. They fly high, increasing their field of vision to spot food. When they locate a carcass, they will circle above before descending. Different species use different techniques and approaches to eating, but generally they use their strong talons and hooked beaks to eat the carrion. Like many other birds, vultures have a throat pouch, called a crop, that can store food for eating at a later time or which can be regurgitated to feed their young. At night, vultures return to roost.

**Breeding**

Vultures generally attract a mate by soaring in the sky around one another. Normally, pairs will mate for life. Old World vultures will make a nest in a tree, overhang, or rocky crag constructed mostly of sticks. Depending on the species, vultures will lay between one and three eggs that will hatch after an incubation period that can last anywhere from 38 to 68 days.

**Size**

Length: 0.6-1.5 m, depending on species

**Weight**

1.7-15 km, depending on species

**Life Span:** 11-47 years, depending on species

**Incubation period:** 38 to 68 days, depending on species.

**Average number of offspring:** 1 to 3, depending on species