

## KING VULTURE

updated March 2017



<b>Range</b>	Mexico, south to northern Argentina
<b>Habitat</b>	Lowland tropics usually associated with undisturbed forest, but also in open savannas
<b>Diet (wild)</b>	Carrion
<b>Diet (captivity)</b>	Bird of prey diet, dead mice
<b>Description</b>	Length: 28–32 inches; wingspan: 6–6½ feet; weight: 8–9 pounds. Plumage is white shading to buff on the back and shoulders. Flight feathers, wings, and neck ruff around the shoulders are gray-black. The skin of the head and neck is bare; the neck is bright orange, shading to yellow on the throat; the head shows a variety of shades of purple, with a red crown. A large, bright orange wattle hangs from the cere (the skin located above the beak where the nostrils are).
<b>Lifespan</b>	40 years in captivity
<b>Reproduction</b>	One egg is laid with incubation shared between the sexes in some pairs, while in others the incubation is entirely done by the female. Hatching occurs after 53–58 days. Fledging occurs at about three months but the parents continue to attend the chick well after fledging. Chicks are covered in pure white down; the adult plumage develops over about four years. Nothing is known of the courtship rituals of this bird in the wild. In captivity, they will display by bending their head down to the crop, filling it with air, and bowing down with a couple of grunts. Then they will rise up, move back and forth, and tremble their wings to make a ruffling sound while breathing fast and heavily.
<b>Behavior</b>	Vultures have well-developed massive wings and a large body size that provides them with a perfect frame adapted for soaring. They can travel for miles without ever flapping their wings, expending very little energy. They fly high above the ground, providing them with an excellent view over a large area. King vultures do not appear to have a well-developed sense of smell as do other vultures. They rely on other vultures to find prey and then descend to take part in feeding. Little is known about the population status of any of the South American vultures. It is thought that the king vulture is one species rapidly finding it difficult to survive in areas of disturbed forest, presumably because the declining food supply.
<b>Our animals</b>	2 males. Born: 07/23/1967 (wild born in South America); 04/23/2006
<b>Cool stuff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The bare skin on the head and the neck of vultures is an adaptation to prevent their feathers from becoming soiled with gore when they poke their heads into carcasses. Vultures have adaptations like deep grooves and backward-facing barbs on their tongues for quickly gulping hefty portions of carrion.</li> <li>• King vultures, as well as all vultures in the family Cathartidae, lack a voice box. They are not completely silent though; they do make very low croaking sounds.</li> <li>• King vultures have more powerful beaks than other South American vultures and are able to break through the tough hides of the carrion. It is often necessary for king vultures to make the initial tear through the hide so that other vultures, with less powerful beaks, can feed.</li> <li>• Vultures help limit the spread of bacteria and diseases such as anthrax and rabies because they can quickly devour large amounts of flesh and their stomach acids neutralize pathogens. As the only land-based vertebrates that can thrive solely on scavenging, vultures are crucial to ecosystem balance.</li> <li>• Vultures can consume more than two pounds of meat in a minute; a large flock of vultures can strip a 600-pound zebra, nose to tail, in 30 minutes.</li> <li>• Vultures can vomit their entire stomach contents when threatened, making it easier to take quick flight.</li> <li>• Excluding the two species of condors (Andean and California), the king vulture is the largest of the New World vultures.</li> </ul>

Phylum  
ChordataClass  
AvesOrder  
FalconiformesFamily  
CathartidaeGenus  
Sarcorampusspecies  
*S. papa*