

14 Facts About Vultures

1. There are 23 total species of vultures. 16 found in the Old World (Europe, Asia, Africa) and seven, including the two condors, found in the New World (North and South America).
2. Old World are evolved from the eagle family and the New World vultures from the turkey family. However they evolved to be very similar by performing the same scavenging role in the eco-system.
3. Old World vultures do not have a good sense of smell. They rely exclusively on incredible eyesight to locate food, a soaring vulture can spot a 3-foot animal carcass from 4 miles away.
4. The Rueppell's griffon vulture is the world's highest flying bird. In 1973, one collided with an airplane off the Ivory Coast. At the time the plane was flying at 37,000 feet.
5. Vultures can eat up to 20 percent of their own body weight in one sitting.
6. Vultures are equipped with a digestive system that contains special acids that will dissolve anthrax, botulism, and cholera bacteria.
7. Vultures do not go after healthy prey, but will very occasionally attack wounded and dying animals.
8. The bald, or lightly-feathered, head is specially designed to stay clean even when confronted with blood and bodily fluids present in the carcasses. Any remaining germs are baked off by the sun.
9. A group of vultures is called a venue, and when circling the air, a group of vultures is called a kettle.
10. By consuming the carcasses of diseased animals, vultures prevent the spread of life-threatening diseases such as rabies and anthrax among animals and humans.
11. Most vulture keep the same mating partner for life.
12. Most vultures are social and several species can often be seen feeding together on the same carcass.
13. One of the few animals to use tools, Egyptian vultures use rocks to break open ostrich eggs.
14. An Indian White-backed vulture was observed once flying down onto a cattle carcass, but accidentally in the mouth and got stuck and died. On another occasion a vulture either on take-off or landing and flew through the window into a moving car.