

# *Vulture Fun Facts & Games*



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# Did you know?



A vulture's legs are not as strong as a Martial Eagle's



Grumpy & Loon



Vultures are heavy but comical on the ground

- 1. All in a name** - The name “vulture” derived from the Latin word “vulturus” which means “tearer”, referring to how it tears meat.
- 2. Ancient Symbols** - In ancient Egypt vultures were used as a symbol of femininity
- 3. Even vultures have Committees & Colonies** - A group of vultures is called a “venue” a “committee” or a “volt”. Vultures live in huge groups called “colonies”.
- 4. Police Dogs or Vultures?** - In Germany, police have trained Turkey vultures to help them find missing people.
- 5. Drugs are Deadly** - Vultures in south Asia, specifically India and Nepal almost died out completely due to the veterinary drug Diclofenac in animal carcasses. It has taken considerable effort and the banning of the drug by the government to help in saving them.
- 6. Spaghetti legs** - Unlike the Martial Eagle, vulture's legs are not very strong, they also have blunter talons.
- 7. Batty Beaks** - A vulture's beak or bill is strong for tearing meat off a carcass. If a carcass is too stiff for them to open, then they cleverly wait for another predator to do all the hard work and then they enjoy eating too.
- 8. Livestock are safe** - Vultures do not kill healthy livestock; they would only prey on sick or dying animals, especially if food has been scarce.
- 9. Food for thought** - Vultures feed their babies by feeding well at a carcass and then regurgitating food from their crop for their babies when they are back at the nest. A group of vultures feeding at a carcass is called a “wake”.
- 10. Wide wings** - The Andean condor has the largest wingspan of any vulture measuring 3 to 3.4 metres with wings extended.
- 11. Slightly smaller** - The crow sized hooded vulture (found in sub Saharan Africa), is the smallest vulture with a wingspan of only 1.5 metres.
- 12. Dead weight** - When threatened, vultures vomit. This is a defence mechanism against predators, but also lightens their body weight for a quick getaway.
- 13. Chatterbox** - Vultures don't sing, they mostly grunt, hiss and scold each other.
- 14. Disease Doctor to Detective** - Scientists are

# Did you know?

considering using vultures to help find bodies from crimes. Studying how a vulture finds a body and how quickly it can consume the body is useful for forensic analysis.

15. **Worldwide** - There are 23 vulture species in the world, with at least one type of vulture found on each continent, except Australia and Antarctica.
16. **Sad and Scary** - About 14 species are listed as threatened or endangered.
17. **Fabulous and Friendly** - Vultures are quite sociable and often fly, feed or roost in large flocks.
18. **Magical Meat** - Vultures are carnivores and eat carrion.
19. **Disease Doctor** - They prefer fresh meat but will eat carcasses that are too rotten for other animals; because of this they are VERY important. They help to stop the spread of disease!
20. **Bird's Eye View** - A vulture's territory is called his "range". They can fly so far that a range can be bigger than one country.
21. **On the Wing** - A group of flying vultures is called a "kettle".
22. **What big eyes you have** - Vultures have excellent eyesight and smell.
23. **Fly way up high** - Vultures soar on thermals, a beautiful sight to see when they circle overhead.
24. **Bald is Beautiful!** - Nature is very clever; vultures have bare heads and sometimes bare necks, so that when they feed on rotting carcasses, they don't end up with germs and rotten food stuck on their feathers.
25. **Safety first** - Turkey vultures urinate on their legs and feet to cool off on hot days. Their urine also helps to kill bacteria and parasites that they may have picked up when feeding.
26. **Splish Splash, I'm taking a bath** - Vultures LOVE water and wash themselves clean after each feeding.
27. **Heavy Weights** - Vultures soar beautifully on thermals, but actually don't fly well at all. They are just too heavy; nature being as wonderful as it is allows them to use thermals to soar over distances of up to 150km.
29. **Waste Disposal** - Vultures are the only true scavengers in Africa; they NEVER hunt their own



*Vultures love bathing*



*Bonnie a beautiful Cape Vulture*

# Did you know?



*A chick hatching*



*A young African  
White-backed vulture*

food.

30. **Only Yolking** - They only lay one egg every year
31. **Lunch Break** - A vulture can eat up to one kg of meat in a sitting (that is 10% of their bodyweight)
32. **Necessity is the mother of Invention** - Egyptian vultures eat ostrich eggs and actually use rocks or sticks to break their thick shells.
33. **Fast Food or Sit Down** - Vulture restaurants have been set up to create safe feeding sites to help save our vultures. Tourists find them a fantastic opportunity to take photos and sit and enjoy these amazing funny birds.

## African Vulture Facts

34. **The African White-backed Vulture** - Is the most common scavenger of the Masai Mara. They are very sociable and feed in very large groups numbering in the hundreds.
  35. **Ruppell's vulture** - They can be identified by their white streaked feathers and yellow beak.
  36. **Lappet-faced vultures** - Are one of the biggest vultures, they get their name from their bald, red heads. They travel in pairs and are dominant over all other vultures
  37. **White headed-vulture** - Is one of the rarest vultures of the Masai Mara. Smaller than the Lappet-faced these red beaked, pale faced birds are shy and solitary.
  38. **Hooded vultures** - Is one of the smallest vultures and pick from the edge of the carcass. Their diet is more varied than the other vultures, sometimes eating the dung of other animals or feeding at garbage sites.
  39. **Muti and Magic** - The vulture is a powerful symbol of wisdom and far sight, no doubt linked to their extraordinary sight. Sangomas have long revered them and owning a vulture head is said to bestow their strengths on the wearer. Fortunately for vultures, people are better educated and realise the damage caused to wild vulture populations by killing them for muti.<sup>28</sup>
- Eye Spy** - Vultures rely on their sight for all sorts of details from finding food sources to recognising the fact that other vultures may have found a thermal.

# Loon's Word Games 1

Loon our crazy cartoon Cape Vulture says, "Train your brain. How well did you read our "Did you Know?" section"

1. 2. Which two continents are the only ones, that don't have vultures \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
2. A group of vultures is called a \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_.
3. A group of flying vultures is called a \_\_\_\_\_.
4. A group of vultures feeding at a carcass is called a \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Vultures live and breed in large areas called \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Cattle eat grass and are herbivores. Vultures eat meat so they are \_\_\_\_\_, just like lions.
7. A vulture's territory is called its \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Vultures \_\_\_\_\_ on thermals.
9. Vultures \_\_\_\_\_ on their legs to keep them cool.
10. Vultures have bald heads to stop food and germs from sticking on their \_\_\_\_\_.
11. Which vulture species has a bald, red head?  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. White headed vultures are the rarest species of the \_\_\_\_\_.
13. When a vulture is threatened it \_\_\_\_\_.
14. An \_\_\_\_\_ vulture uses tools to help it break eggs open.
15. The veterinary drug \_\_\_\_\_ caused the vulture crisis in Nepal and India.
16. \_\_\_\_\_ vulture has white streaked feathers and a \_\_\_\_\_ beak.
17. A vulture can eat up to 1 kg of meat at a meal which is \_\_\_\_\_ of their body weight.
18. The \_\_\_\_\_ is the smallest vulture.
19. Vultures leave broken \_\_\_\_\_ around which other animals eat to get calcium and aid digestion.
20. There are \_\_\_\_\_ vulture species in the world.



Grumpy &  
Loon say  
"How much  
will you  
remember?"



## *Tagged vultures @ VulPro's Vulture Restaurant*

Part of VulPro's work is rescuing, rehabilitating and releasing vultures. These vultures are tagged with Patagial Wing Tags and the numbers are recorded as a way of monitoring behaviour, movement and population numbers



# Understanding a Vulture's senses

*Vultures like all birds depend on their senses for survival, their senses have adapted to give them the best chance to thrive and survive.*

## Bird brains or bird sense?

Birds have the same senses we do – sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell. Theirs are specialised and more developed to help them survive. The importance of certain senses varies from species to species. Vultures have a particularly well developed sense of sight and some a sense of smell.

**All the better to see you with!** - A vulture's eyesight is critical to it finding food, evading predators and avoiding hazards like power lines. Vultures have a thicker retina than people and their eyes are larger in proportion to their head size. They also have a higher density of cones and rods packed into the retina, giving them far superior vision to us. They see movement and detail much better than we do, and their eyes are set further apart on their head's giving them a wider field of view.

Because their eyes are so important, they have a nictitating membrane (an inner eyelid) that helps to protect their eyes and cleans them often.

**Hearing a pin drop!** - The ears are located slightly behind and below the eyes, and are covered with soft feathers called auriculars – for protection.

Vultures may not sing, but they hold a conversation all of their own. Using noises like hissing, grumbling and squawking at each other they hold some very funny conversations at our vulture restaurant.

**Tender Touch!** - Touch or feel, is vital for flight. They are incredibly sensitive to changes in air temperature, pressure and wind speed. The sensations are transmitted down the feathers to the nerves in the skin. They have fewer nerves in their legs and feet, this allows them to perch or stand on hotter or colder surfaces.

**Taste - Smaak so lekker!** - Birds do have a sense of taste, but it is not well refined. Depending on the species they have less than 50 or up to about 500 taste buds. (Humans have 9000 – 10 000 taste buds)

**Nose knows best!** - Birds in general don't have a wonderful sense of smell; some Vultures however have a better developed sense of smell than others. Sight is still the most important of the 5 senses.

**Why a Vulture's senses matter?** - Food has become really scarce for them, due to so many areas now being developed and becoming highly populated. Vulture restaurants help, and the vultures quickly learn where there is a reliable food source and fly great distances to get to it.

Power lines are a huge threat to vultures; the thin top wire is not visible to them. If "bird flappers" are placed on the top wire, then the vultures' superior eyesight helps them avoid a dangerous accident.

They communicate with each other, with their own form of language, a warning to stay away from a piece of food, or a parent talking to a chick, it all aids their survival.



*A vulture's gaze is intense and intelligent*



*A vulture can sense and feel air temperature and pressure*

# Disease Doctor - Vultures to the rescue!

Some people refer to Vultures as the “garbage men” of the animal world. While that is true, as they eat all the left over carcasses and leave everything clean and healthy for us. Thinking of rubbish does make us think of something dirty and smelly. Vultures leave everything squeaky clean for us and even leave some clean bone pieces which other animals need to eat as a vital source of calcium. Vultures are in fact very clean birds and their ability to eat rotten food and metabolise certain diseases are legendary.



*Vultures have almost bare heads and necks for hygiene and health safety*

## Carrion eating

While vultures do eat carcasses and rotten meat, they actually prefer to eat fresh meat. Their ability to eat rotten meat means that we don't have smelly disease ridden carcasses left lying around. Imagine the smell if the carcass of a dead animal was just left to rot and bloat in the hot sun.

## Turbo Tummies

A vulture's stomach acid is a lot stronger and more corrosive than other animals and birds, this is why they can eat rotten carcasses and not get sick. Diseases such as Cholera, Anthrax and Botulism which are deadly to people and other animals are cleaned up and destroyed by the vultures' powerful tummy.

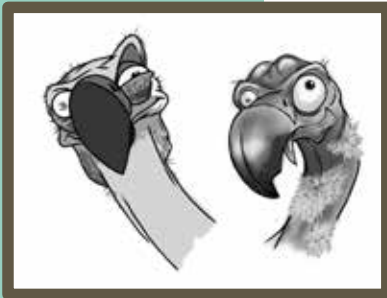
## Germ Patrol

As any good doctor knows, hygiene and cleanliness are two really important factors for preventing the spread of disease. Vultures do this by bathing after each meal, and their bodies have adapted over time, so that they have hardly any feathers on their heads and necks.

Bits of blood or meat don't stick as easily to bare skin as they would to feathers. This means that the vulture doesn't get sick or develop skin sores, as we would have thought. It also means that they don't spread germs wherever they go.

Their legs and feet are also bare, for the same reason. Vultures also have another wonderful trick to stay clean and germ free. Their regular bathing after every meal, also helps to keep everything squeaky clean, and more to the point, they LOVE it.

So the next time that you see a vulture, forget thinking about how “dirty” you think they are, you can now surprise everyone by telling them how vultures are the Doctors of the animal world.



*Grumpy & Loon say "Hope you are listening, we have a Loon Game coming up"*

# Loon's Word Games 2

Loon says, "How well did you read the, "Understanding a Vulture's Senses" & "Disease Doctor – Vultures to the Rescue?" sections?"

1. What three really scary diseases can vulture's tummies destroy \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Why are their heads and necks bare?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Vultures don't spread germs because they \_\_\_\_\_ after each meal.
4. What is so strong that vultures can eat rotten meat?  
\_\_\_\_\_.
5. A vulture's \_\_\_\_\_ is better than their sense of smell.
6. When they fly vultures are incredibly sensitive to \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Vultures prefer \_\_\_\_\_ meat, although they will eat rotten meat.
8. The soft feathers behind the ears are called \_\_\_\_\_.
9. How are a vulture's eyes different to a human's?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_,  
and \_\_\_\_\_.
9. We put \_\_\_\_\_ on the thin wire on power lines, so that the vultures can see them.
10. What is the special membrane in their eyes called?  
\_\_\_\_\_



Grumpy &  
Loon say  
"How much  
will you  
remember?"

# Feeding Vultures



*Vultures have almost bare heads and necks for hygiene and health safety*



*Vultures will eat rotten meat, but they far prefer fresh carcasses given a choice. Their eye sight is so good that they normally spot carcasses very quickly, before they have a chance to rot.*

## Vulture restaurants need:

### 1. Open space

Vultures need space to land and take off to fly. Being such large birds they need space to get going. Ideally no power lines or telephone lines should be in the immediate area, or if there are then they need bird flappers on the top wire to make the wire easy to see.

### 2. Trees

A few trees or tall structures close by give them some security for roosting, if they want.

### 3. Water

Vultures love to clean off after a good meal. Messy eaters, they love nothing more than splashing around afterwards.

### 4. Food Source

They can eat any type of animal as long as the meat is a regular supply of safe, drug free carcasses for them to eat every day.

Vultures on farms

Vultures can help farmers by telling them that there are dead animals. Their circling over carcasses is a wonderful warning sign to a farmer that he has a problem.



Blushes

## *Yes, Cape Vultures “blush”*

The bare spots on their collar bones are called blushes and they are a good indication of their mood. When blue the vulture is content, when red they are a warning that the vulture is feeling threatened, afraid or angry.

# *Saving our Vultures – Captive Breeding of Cape Vultures*



*Common power line injuries*



*Bird Flappers  
fitted on power  
lines help birds to  
see the wires.*



*One of VulPro's captive  
bred Cape Vulture Chicks*

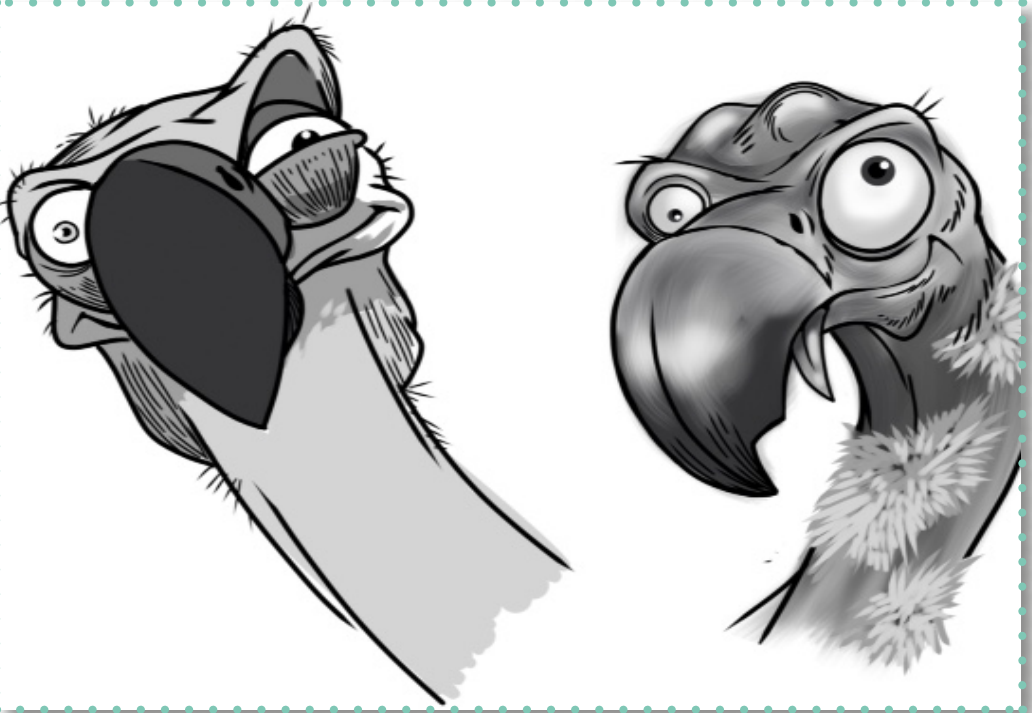
VulPro deals with a huge number of injured, poisoned or grounded vultures that need their help. Every vulture that VulPro collects is treated and rehabilitated and tagged and released if at all possible.

## **Non releasable vultures**

Sadly many birds can not be released after accidents such as power line collisions. Very often they fracture a wing so badly that we have to amputate it. These vultures have a home for the rest of their lives at VulPro and are able to live as naturally as possible, by being used in the Cape Vulture Captive Breeding Programme.

## **Breeding Habitat**

A breeding cliff has been built at VulPro in a specially dedicated breeding habitat. The vultures pair up naturally and breed. The chicks are allowed to grow up at VulPro and when they are old enough they are tagged and released to supplement the surrounding wild populations.



## *Grumpy & Loon need your help*

Teach your friends and family about what you have learnt, how clean vultures are and how important they are for all of us.

Show them this booklet and encourage them to read it.

Visit our website at [www.vulpro.com](http://www.vulpro.com) with your parents or friends, you can also visit our Kid's Corner website at:

<https://vulprokidscorner.wordpress.com/> we have wonderful articles, games and pictures that you can download and enjoy.

Grumpy and Loon and their friends would love it if you became our "Child Champion", you can do that by raising awareness about vultures, a talk at school, selling cakes to raise money. It could be anything that you think would help. Send us your information and what you did, so that we can put it on Kid's Corner.

# Loon's Word Games - Answers

Loon says, "How well did you do, are you a potential VulPro Child Champion or does Grumpy need to grump at you?"



## Answers: Loon's Game 1 (1 - 10)

1. Australia and Antarctica
2. committee, venue or volt.
3. kettle
4. wake
5. colonies
6. carnivores
7. range
8. soar
9. urinate
10. feathers



# Loon's Word Games - Answers

Loon says, "How well did you do, are you a potential VulPro Child Champion or does Grumpy need to grump at you?"

## Answers: Loon's Game 1 (11- 20)

11. Lappet faced vulture
12. Masai Mara
13. vomits
14. Egyptian
15. Diclofenac
16. Ruppell's, yellow
17. 10%
18. Hooded vulture
19. Bones
20. 23



# Loon's Word Games - Answers

Loon says, "How well did you do, are you as clever as a vulture?"

## Answers: Loon's Game 2

1. Cholera, Anthrax and Botulism
2. to prevent blood and meat from sticking to it making it easy and hygienic to clean
3. bath
4. stomach acid
5. sight
6. air temperature, pressure and wind speed
7. fresh
8. Auriculars
9. They have a thicker retina, eyes are larger in proportion to the head and a greater number of cones in the retina.
10. Bird flappers
11. Nictitating membrane



# *Vultures in Need*

## **Contact one of the following:**

Kerri Wolter (VulPro):

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*Our vultures thank you, their numbers  
are so low, that every vulture counts!*