

King Vulture



Classification

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Aves
Order: Accipitriformes
Family: Cathartidae
Genus: *Sarcoramphus*
Species: *papa*



Range, Habitat, Conservation Status

- **Range:** Neotropics from the southern part of Mexico and throughout Central and South America to Northern Argentina.
- **Habitat:** Undisturbed forests and forest edges in the lowland and middle elevation tropics. Can be found at elevations of up to 1,200 meters or almost 4,000 feet.
- **Conservation Status:** Least Concern. Populations have been decreasing throughout much of the species' range mainly due to habitat loss.

Physical Characteristics

- **Body Length:** 28 to 32 inches (67-81 cm)
- **Wingspan:** 4.0 to 6.6 feet (122-201 cm)
- **Weight:** 6 to 10 pounds (2.7-4.5 kg)
- **Lifespan:** Over 30 years in human care. Little is known about their lifespan in the wild.
- **Identifying Traits:** Short and broad wings. White in color from the neck down with a black band running along the rear edge of the wings. A small collar of feathers is blackish gray at the base of the neck with bare skin above it that is orange, green, yellow, and purplish blue. The crown of the head is covered with small bristle-like feathers. The eye is white with a red eye ring. A fleshy wattle, called a caruncle, is located directly above the nostrils or cere. This typically does not form completely until 4 years of age. Both males and females have caruncles.



Behaviors

- **Feeding:** Primarily feed on carrion or dead animal remains, including large mammals, such as cows, oxen, and tapirs as well as smaller mammals like armadillos. May also eat large fish, reptiles, birds, sloths, monkeys, and palm fruits. Their very strong, curved beak enables them to tear open large carcasses.
- **Breeding:** Occurs during the dry season. Make loud, unique wheezing and snorting sounds while mating.
- **Nesting:** On the ground in tree stumps, hollow logs, and other natural cavities. Lay one single large and plain white egg. Incubation and feeding duty are shared by the female and male. Incubation of the egg takes about 8 weeks. Chicks begin fledging or practice flying after about 4 months post hatching.
- **Migration:** Not Migratory
- **Call:** Like other vulture species, they do not have a voice box. However, they can make a variety of noises, including grunts and hisses when threatened.

Resident Bird(s)

Name: Pishi

- **Age:** Hatched in 2004.
- **Sex:** Female
- **Background:** Came from the Comanche Nation.
- **Unique Individual Traits:** She was the star of CRC's first viral video on Tik Tok.

Fun Facts!

- The fleshy orange appendage located near the beak, called the caruncle, is thought to play a role in greeting and courtship displays.
- Unlike other vulture species that congregate in large numbers, only two or three King Vultures are seen together at one carcass.
- The King Vulture often appears in Mayan codices, which are books written by the Maya in hieroglyphic script.
- After the Andean and California Condors, the King Vulture is the largest vulture in the New World (North and South America).



Importance

- Like all vultures, the King Vulture is a scavenger and helps dispose of the rotting remains of animals. This helps keep the environment free of decomposing animals, which also reduces possible sources of disease.

Sources

- <https://peregrinefund.org/explore-raptors-species/vultures/king-vulture>
- <https://nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/news/fun-facts-about-king-vultures>
- https://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Sarcoramphus_papa/
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