

BIRD OF THE YEAR 2017

LAPPET-FACED VULTURE

KEY FEATURES

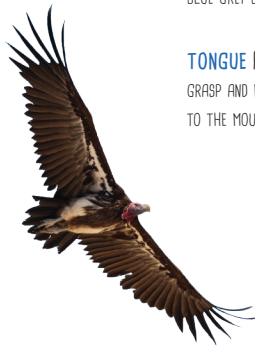
LAPPET-FACED VULTURE

TORGOS TRACHELIOTOS

THE LAPPET-FACED VULTURE IS AMONGST THE LARGEST AND RAREST OF ALL AFRICAN VULTURES. IT IS THE ONLY TRULY BALD VULTURE IN AFRICA. OTHER VULTURES RELY ON THE LAPPET-FACED VULTURE TO TEAR OPEN THE CARCASSES TO EXPOSE THE FLESH BECAUSE THEY ARE ALSO THE VULTURE WITH THE LARGEST AND STRONGEST BILL, ABLE TO TEAR THROUGH THE TOUGHEST HIDES. IT WAS FIRST NAMED ORICOU (FROM THE FRENCH OREILLE FOR EAR AND COU FOR NECK) BECAUSE THE LAPPETS ON ITS FACE LOOKS LIKE EARS.

IN FLIGHT HEAVY LOOKING HEAD AND NECK. LONG BROAD WINGS, SHORT WEDGE-SHAPED TAIL. UNDERWINGS MOSTLY DARK WITH NARROW WHITE BAR ALONG MEDIUM COVERTS. GLIDES AND SOARS ON FLAT WINGS.

WINGS 2.8 m
WEIGHT 5.4 - 9.4 kg
SIZE 102 - 115 cm
LIFESPAN 30 YEARS



BILL LARGEST BILL OF ALL BIRDS OF PREY, (10CM LONG AND 5CM DEEP) IS POWERFUL AND RIPS HOLES IN CARRION. YELLOWISH-HORN BILL COLOUR WITH SMALL DARK AREA ON TOP AND BLUE-GRAY BASE. CERE IS POWDER-BLUE.

TONGUE RASP-LIKE TONGUE HELPS GRASP AND MOVE CHUNKS OF MEAT TO THE MOUTH.



HEAD & NECK LOOSE FOLDS OF SKIN CALLED LAPPETS, ON THE SIDE OF THE FACE. HEAD AND NECK IS BARE AND REDDISH (CAN BLUSH TO BRIGHT SCARLET). THE JAW-LINE IS PURPLE. SHORT BLACK DENSE RUFF COVER THE REAR NECK.

EYES DARK BROWN AND VERY GOOD. CAN SPOT DEAD CARRION FROM OVER 15 KM AWAY.

CROP PATCH BLACK SKIN SURROUNDED BY WHITE DOWN FEATHERS. AN ENLARGEMENT OF THE ESOPHAGUS, CAN STORE LARGE AMOUNTS OF FOOD.

BODY BIG AND BULKY. PLUMAGE IS DARK ALMOST BLACK ON WINGS, AND PALE BROWN TO WHITE ON FLANKS AND THIGHS. ELONGATED FEATHERS ON SIDES AND PLAIN DOWNY THIGHS.

LEGS AND FEET MUCH WEAKER THAN OTHER BIRDS OF PREY. DESIGNED MORE FOR RUNNING THAN GRASPING. PALE BLUE TO BLUE-GRAY (JUVENILE GREY-BROWN).

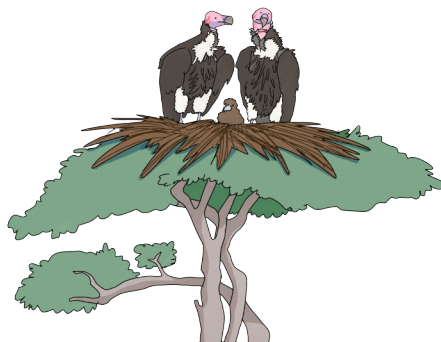


Habitat and Distribution

ONLY OCCURS IN THE NORTHERN PARTS OF SOUTH AFRICA. FAIRLY WIDESPREAD IN REST OF AFRICA AND THE DESERTS OF ISRAEL AND THE ARABIAN PENINSULA. PREFERS UNDISTURBED OPEN COUNTRY OF DRY SAVANNAH, GRASSLAND, THORNBUSH, ARID PLAINS, DESERT WITH SCATTERED TREES, AND OPEN MOUNTAIN SLOPES. NESTS IN THE SHORTEST TREES IN THE AREA, COMMONLY THORNY ACACIA.

Food and Feeding

DIET MAINLY CONSISTS OF ROTTEN MEAT FROM CARCASSES. SOMETIMES FEED ON SMALLER MAMMALS, BIRDS AND REPTILES THAT HAVE DIED FROM NATURAL DEATHS OR ROAD KILLS. CAN TEAR OPEN A CARCASS TO ALLOW OTHER SCAVENGERS TO ACCESS FLESH. THE STRONGEST, IT CAN BULLY OTHER VULTURES AND EAGLES INTO SUBMISSION AND WILL EVEN CHASE OFF HYPENAS. ITS LONG NECK CAN PROBE DEEP INSIDE A CARCASS WHERE BACTERIA AND GERMS THRIVE. THANKFULLY, ITS BALD HEAD AND BARE NECK PREVENTS GERMS AND BACTERIA FROM ATTACHING THEMSELVES TO THE VULTURE AND CAUSING INFECTION. IT HANGS AROUND THE EDGE OF THROG TO LATER TAKE SKIN, TENDONS AND OTHER COARSE TISSUE AS IT RARELY EATS ORGANS, MEAT AND INTESTINES. FEEDS HEAVILY AT EACH SITTING (400 - 500 G MEAT PER DAY), ONCE FOOD IS DIGESTED, IT REGURGITATES PELLETS OF HAIR AND FEATHERS.



Breeding

REACH SEXUAL MATURITY AT 5 - 6 YEARS OF AGE. SHY AND SOLITARY AND USUALLY SEEN IN PAIRS. ROOST IN PAIRS OR ALONE IN TREES AND MAY BREED IN CLUSTERS WITH INDIVIDUAL NEST BEING AS CLOSE AS 1 KM. LIFELONG PAIR-BONDING AND HAVE INTENSE NESTING DEFENCE, MATE-GUARDING AND COURTSHIP FEEDING. BREED IN DRY SEASON WHEN MORE UNGLULATES ARE LIKELY TO DIE. BOTH SEXES BUILD A HUGE FLAT NEST MADE OF STICKS, LINED WITH GRASS, HAIR AND SKIN, ON TOP OF A LOW TREE (ACACIA). ONE EGG (DULL-WHITE WITH REDDISH-BROWN BLOTCHES) LAID BIANNUALLY. MALE AND FEMALE WILL TAKE TURNS TO INCUBATE AND SEARCH FOR FOOD. EGG HATCHES AFTER 55 DAYS. CHICK IS FED REGURGITATED CARRION UNTIL IT FLEDGES AFTER 125-135 DAYS. FLEDGLING REMAINS DEPENDENT ON THE ADULTS FOR UP TO A 170 DAYS.

Regional and global status: ENDANGERED (2015)

Population size: 338 MATURE INDIVIDUALS (169 BREEDING PAIRS) OVER 84 668 KM²

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Sources: BirdLife International. 2016. Torgos tracheliotos. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2016: Source: <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/22695238/0>
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