

Andean Condor

Scientific Name: *Vultur gryphus*

Class: Aves

Order: Falconiformes

Family: Cathartidae



The Andean Condor is one of the largest flying birds. The male has a wingspan of 10 feet and weighs about 26 pounds, with a length of 40 to 46 inches. The female is slightly smaller and weighs about 20 to 22 pounds. The condor's head and neck are bare because this bird feeds on carrion, and without feathers they do not run the risk of disease carried by bacteria from within the carcass. The hooked beak is designed for ripping and tearing meat. The male has a fleshy comb or crest of red or black and a white ruff at the base of the neck. The rest of the plumage is black except for a large patch of silvery gray on the wings. Wrinkled, fleshy wattles adorn the neck, and the eyes are brown. Females lack the crest and wattles, have red eyes, and are smaller in size. Young condors are a uniform brown. For both sexes the nasal septum is perforated. The legs and feet are flesh colored. The feet are suitable for walking, but not for grasping prey. Hence, condors must feed on the ground. Condors make no sound.

Range

South America, mainly Andean cordillera

Habitat

Mountain peaks, shorelines

Gestation

Incubation: 54 to 58 days

Litter

Clutch: 1 egg

Behavior

The condor's ability to soar for long periods and at great heights (up to 15,000 feet) is unsurpassed by any other species. Its sense of smell is very highly developed. Andean condors do not carry their food away, but feed on the ground. Gorged condors have been easily captured by Indians and others who know that a sated condor is unable to take off and fly. Like other vultures, condors will urinate on their legs in very hot weather. The evaporating urine cools them. They congregate in flocks until breeding season, at which time flocks disperse. In order to collect vitamin D from the sunlight the Condor needs, it spreads its wings and "sun bathes."

Reproduction

As with all New World vultures, it does not build a nest. Instead, eggs are laid on the ground in tree cavities or between rocks. During November and December two whitish-yellow eggs with brown spots are laid. Condors have a very low reproductive rate, producing at most one chick every two years. The actual nest is most often in crags, often exposed to wind and bad weather. Both male and female rear the young, which fly at 6 months and are almost adult in size and weight. When mating, the male bounces up with gaping and hissing bill-snapping. Both sexes perform wing-spreading displays. Condors reach sexual maturity at 7 to 8 years.

Wild Diet

Carrion, particularly dead sea lion pups and small animals