

Vulture Scavenger Hunt

General Instructions

The Vulture Scavenger Hunt is an educational activity produced by the Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF), which is an international NGO working to protect and conserve Europe's four vulture species. The scavenger hunt aims to raise awareness about vultures, how they forage and the important role they play in nature among children aged 4-12 years old. A guardian/activity organiser is encouraged to accompany children during the activity at all times to assist when necessary. Depending on the location, guardians and activity organisers should indicate areas that are off-limits that may not be safe and adapt to the circumstances accordingly.

Each child will be given a 'Vulture Scavenger Hunt' sheet. The sheet will provide visual clues that the children need to find and check off to help vultures find food. These are visual cues that vultures look for when searching for carcasses, so this activity will show children how vultures find food quickly and efficiently. Visual cards with fun facts are available below, and can be used as the clues that children need to find, therefore allowing the activity to be easily adapted and carried out in several settings. For example, it can take place in zoos where they host animals that vultures use as visual clues or indoors where guardians/educators can place the cards around their home or school areas.

In the following pages of the document, you can find the Vulture Scavenger Hunt sheet, photographs of Europe's vultures that you can show to children, tips on how to explain the activity to children, the visual cards that can be used for the scavenger hunt, some frequently asked questions and answers about vultures and a design that can be used as a sticker or pin badge and given to children once they finish the scavenger hunt. These can be easily printed off and used. We hope you enjoy this family activity!

Vulture Scavenger Hunt

How to explain the activity to children

Do you want to play an exciting game and help animals?

Do you know what vultures are? Vultures are very large birds that do not hunt, but rather eat animals that already died. You can think of them as the garbage collectors of nature. Here you can see Europe's four vultures species — the Egyptian, Griffon, Bearded and Cinereous Vulture [show photographs found below]. They play an important role in nature and provide environmental services for free, which benefit the environment, other wildlife and humans! They are ready to undertake their next adventure in search of food and they want you to join them. Do you want to help them?

Here is the Vulture Scavenger Hunt Sheet. You can see several visual clues that vultures use to help them find food. As you can see, vultures spot and follow other animals to find food. You need to pay extra close attention to your surroundings to find these animals around the [name of location i.e. zoo] just like vultures do in the wild and check them off the list. Good luck! When you finish, show us your completed scavenger hunt sheet, as we would like to give you a gift on behalf of vultures!

Vulture Scavenger Hunt

Frequently Asked Questions

What do vultures eat?

Vultures are scavengers, meaning that they eat carrion (remains of dead animals) almost exclusively, which gives vultures a unique and important ecological role. To find food, most vultures depend on sight, using visual signs that help them detect carcasses quickly and efficiently.

Are vultures bad?

Vultures often get a terrible reputation but they are not bad. Like every living thing, they play an important role in keeping nature's balance. They eat carcasses, which helps clean up nature, recycle nutrients as well as potentially minimize the spread of disease.

Why are vultures bald?

Not all vultures are bald and each vulture species feeds differently. Due to evolutionary adaptation, vultures that poke their heads deep into a carcass to pick out the yummy parts tend to have bald heads so that their feathers won't get dirty, preventing bacteria and other parasites that cause infections from getting stuck onto them.

Where do vultures live?

There are 23 vultures species divided into two groups — New World vultures that are found in the Americas and Old World vultures that are found in Africa, Asia and Europe. You can find vultures on every continent except for Antarctica and Australia. A big difference between Old and New World vultures is that Old World vultures depend on sight to find food whereas many New World vultures also have a very good sense of smell, which helps them detect dead animals from a distance of up to two kilometres.

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Frequently Asked Questions

Why do vultures fly in circles?

Many believe that vultures fly in circles because they are waiting for a potential prey item to die, but this is not true. Because vultures are large birds, they use thermals (rising hot air) to lift them up and gain height by circling, enabling them to soar for long distances between thermals, rarely having to flap their wings. This is useful because, as carrion-feeders, it is often difficult for them to find food, and by utilising thermals, it helps them save energy.

Are vultures endangered?

Vultures are the most endangered group of birds. There are several threats vultures face due to human activity, including lack of food availability, wildlife poisoning as well as electrocution and collision with electricity infrastructures. This has led to a severe decline in the distribution of vultures, but thanks to conservation actions, some vulture species are making a comeback. For example, the Bearded Vulture that went extinct in the Alps has returned to the region thanks to the Vulture Conservation Foundation and its partners that were releasing captive-bred birds there since the 1980s. The reintroduction efforts of the species expanded into other areas, and it is now slowly returning to other European regions where it went extinct like in Andalusia in Spain.

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Frequently Asked Questions

Do we need to protect vultures?

Yes, the scavenging lifestyle of vultures makes them an essential part of functioning mountainous ecosystems. Today, many organisations work to protect and conserve vultures and their habitats, to restore their populations to their former ranges and to make sure they don't go extinct. There are different ways they attempt to achieve this. In Europe, to minimize mortality, the Vulture Conservation Foundation tackles various threats with partners, including fighting illegal wildlife poisoning, improving food availability and securing energy infrastructure to reduce the threat of electrocution and collision. Furthermore, they return vulture populations to areas where they went extinct by releasing birds that hatched in captivity as well as by transferring and releasing vultures that come from countries like Spain, which already has large vulture populations thanks to the success of similar conservation actions.

Vulture Scavenger Hunt



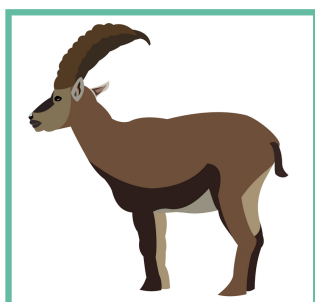
Search and find the visual clues below to help Europe's vultures detect their next meal!

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Vultures

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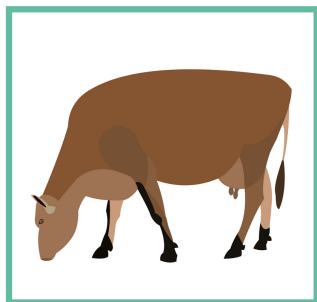
Wild herbivores

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Crows or ravens

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Farm animals

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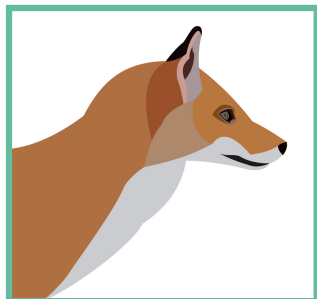
Wolves

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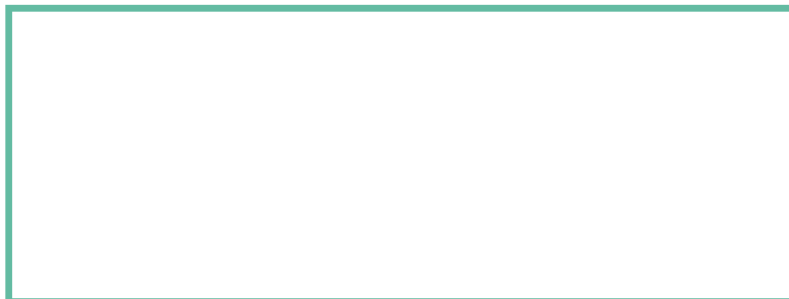
Eagles

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Foxes



Draw your favourite vulture below!



Photos of the European vulture species

Egyptian Vulture - Europe's long distance migratory vulture



Griffon Vulture - Europe's most social vulture



Bearded Vulture - Europe's rarest vulture



Cinereous Vulture - Europe's largest vulture

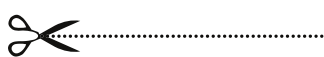


Cut out the visual cards and place them around to be found



Vultures

Vultures are social animals. Griffon Vultures, for example, live together on cliffs and search for food in groups. Vultures suspect that a nice meal is nearby if they see other vultures descending or gathering in big numbers in fields, and so, they follow them!



Wild herbivores

When vultures see herds of wild mammals like deer or goat-like animals called chamois and ibex, there is a chance that there is a dead animal among them, which can be their next meal.

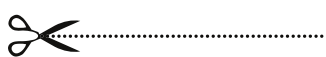


Cut out the visual cards and place them around to be found



Crows and ravens

If vultures spot groups of crows and ravens, they will start exploring the surrounding area as it often means that there is a carcass nearby. This is because crows and ravens also feed on dead animals and are excellent at detecting feeding opportunities.



Wolves

Wolves are amazing hunters and vultures know this. The Bearded Vulture that lives high in snowy mountains follows wolves and waits until they eat the meat of an animal, and then the Bearded Vulture dives in and eats the bones of the carcass. There is no competition between the two animals, as they eat different parts of carcasses!

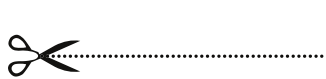


Cut out the visual cards and place them around to be found



Farm animals

Vultures eat dead farm animals like cows, goats and sheep. The smallest European vulture, the Egyptian Vulture, even feeds on the poo of farm animals, where small nutritious animals like insects are present.



Foxes

The fox has an excellent sense of smell, which helps it detect smelly carcasses from kilometres away.

Sometimes, they even locate carcasses buried underground. So, vultures sometimes follow foxes as this can lead them to a tasty carcass.

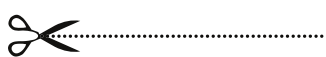


Cut out the visual cards and place them around to be found



Eagles

Eagles use their feet to catch live prey. Sometimes when an eagle is enjoying its meal, a large vulture, like the Cinereous Vulture, might come along and try to take a bite or grab the whole carcass for itself. This kind of competition for food is normal in the animal kingdom.



Sticker/pin badge design



Sticker/pin badge design

