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Birds of Prey and Carrion Eaters

Raptors are found throughout South Africa. Some have, however, adapted to such an extent that they are only found in specific habitats, such as the African Fish-Eagle and the Osprey at open water, and the Bearded Vulture in the Drakensberg.

Traditionally man regarded raptors as the biggest threat to livestock such as sheep and poultry, and took drastic measures to protect them. Raptors were not only shot, but poison was also used which indiscriminately and ruthlessly killed other birds as well. As a result, some species are already extinct in many areas while others are highly endangered. Many of South Africa's raptors are presently only found in larger reserves where they can move around freely, but since they sometimes move out of these areas, they remain targets for humans. Vulture colonies are presently restricted to secluded mountainous areas.

Raptors are mainly carnivores. They prey on birds, smaller mammals, rodents, reptiles such as snakes and insects such as locusts. The diet of some raptors includes carrion. Vultures and crows clean up the mess left behind by other animals. Raptors play a very important part in combating plagues such as rodents and locusts and in keeping the numbers of possible problem animals such as bats, snakes and the Red-billed Quelea under control. In areas where raptor numbers decline an outbreak of a pest is usually encountered.

Raptors include some of South Africa's largest and most majestic birds. Some larger raptors are highly territorial and are usually found near their nests. The underwing pattern of each raptor is unique. As raptors frequently glide majestically on the air currents, the keen bird watcher will be able to identify them from their underwing patterns.



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