**The Importance of Vultures**

**From *Percy the Victorious Vulture***

Vultures are *scavengers*, meaning they eat other animals that have already died, which are called *carrion*. Vultures have many tools to help them eat carrion effectively and safely. We should be very grateful to vultures because if they weren’t around, we would have some serious problems on our hands!

Vultures provide a great service to nature by cleaning up and recycling dead animals. In this way, we could call them nature’s “clean-up crew.” By consuming carcasses, vultures help process and return nutrients to the ground, which helps create healthy soil for plants. If it weren’t for vultures, rotting carcasses would sit around for a lot longer, attracting insects and diseases such as brucellosis, tuberculosis, and anthrax that could spread to our pets, livestock, and even us!

Because they clean up the environment they actually help humans save money. In some parts of the world, farmers have to pay to have carcasses removed if vultures are not there to do the work for them, so in this way vultures help out by cleaning up the landscape for free! Vultures also can help humans *make* money - after vultures thoroughly clean off the bones of dead animals, some people in Southeast Asia then collect the bones and turn them into fertilizer that can be sold and shipped to people for use in gardens and food production.

In some parts of the world, vultures are in endangered because of threats such as toxins, including lead and veterinary drugs. In those places, people have noticed that where there are less vultures, there is more carrion available and therefore more feral dogs. This is a problem because the number of people bitten by dogs each year then goes up, which can lead to an increase in a dangerous disease called rabies. So by keeping the landscape clean, vultures also help protect human health!

Vultures also give us helpful clues about how our environment is doing. Since they feed on a variety of animals that have already died, they are more likely to become threatened than other raptors because their food often contains pesticides, lead, or other harmful toxins. Since they feed together in large groups, it is easier for scientists to tell if there are harmful substances in the vulture’s food because many vultures will become sick all at once. Scientists can then determine where the pollution is coming from and hopefully the source can be removed. This would benefit not only vultures but other scavengers and predators that share their habitat.

And the importance of vultures doesn’t stop there. In some cultures, vultures have been an important tradition for many years. Ancient Egyptians worship a vulture goddess named *Nekhbet,* Hindu mythology tells of a holy vulture called *Jatayu,* and Native Americans have included the beautiful California condor in many of their ceremonies. If these birds disappear, some communities would lose a valuable member of their cultural story.

Finally, scavengers like vultures are also becoming popular in ecotourism, meaning that many people will travel to watch and photograph these incredible birds in the wild. This can be a wonderful way for communities to support themselves while also educating the world on how awesome and important vultures really are!

Although we might not want to share a meal with a scavenger, we can still thank them for filling a very special role in our environment and for keeping our land healthy and clean. By telling our friends and family what we know about vultures, we can spread the word that they are valuable friends that deserve to soar in our skies for many years to come.

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