

The Andean Condor



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Background

The Andean Condor is the largest bird in the world, measured both in wingspan and weight. (Only the great albatross has a longer wingspan but is smaller in body size.) To illustrate, if you were to position an Andean Condor vertically, on the tip of one wing, the tip of the other wing would reach higher than even the tallest NBA player. For that matter, it would extend above the hoop itself, with its wingspan up to 10 feet, 10 inches. Head to tail, this bird can reach over four feet in length. Not your household parakeet!

These impressive birds are found throughout the Andes mountain range stretching the entire length of South America, from the Caribbean coast (north) to Tierra del Fuego (south). They nest in mountain perches 16,000 feet above sea level and choose mates for life, breeding one or two hatchlings every two years. The average lifespan of one of these birds is *fifty* years! They are such graceful and beloved creatures that five Latin American countries (Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru) claim the Andean Condor as their national bird.

Avian-Facts

Name: The name “condor” comes from a Quechua Indian word, *kuntur*, which reflects the class of birds to which they belong, the *vultures*. Their bald head and neck are a trait of this species. The Andean Condors, however, have a distinctive ring of white feathers at the base of their necks.

Flight: These birds are soaring birds; they rarely flap their wings except on takeoff and can stay aloft on drafts for hours at a time. The longest time a condor has been recorded soaring without resting is over five hours. Their territorial range can be as wide as 150 miles.

Beak: Although technically birds of prey, they rarely hunt their own food. Andean condors are really scavengers, carrion-eaters, more like the buzzards and vultures we associate with the business of cleansing nature of disease-carrying carcasses. They have thick, curved beaks for this purpose and generally feed on large dead animals like cattle and deer.

Feet: Their feet are made for walking and hopping on the ground around their food source rather than for predatory grasping. Their talons, likewise, are not sharp and curved but blunt and straight.

Weight: Condors are among the heaviest flying birds (only the Asian Bustard species and some full grown male swans top them). The male condors can reach up to 33 lbs. and the females 24 lbs.



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