



For Immediate Release

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Naples Zoo Celebrates *International Vulture Awareness Day* with Premiere of Black Vulture in Show

Naples, FL - With names ranging from condor to griffon, vultures soar the skies of our planet in order to cleanse the land. Although many people think of vultures as dirty, these misunderstood birds actually help prevent the spread of diseases by ridding the landscape of carrion and related pathogens. While some vulture species are doing well, others are critically endangered. To educate the public and help shift attitudes about these vitally important birds, Naples Zoo is welcoming a Black vulture to the line up of unusual species seen in the Safari Canyon theater. Best of all, the vulture's premiere will take place on September 4, 2011 coinciding with Naples Zoo's celebration of *International Vulture Awareness Day*.

During Vulture Awareness Day, Naples Zoo's new Black vulture will appear in both the 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. feature shows in the Safari Canyon Open-Air Theater. Born just this May on Friday the 13th, he was appropriately named Omen. And he's maturing rapidly. With a 54" wingspan and weighing nearly 4 pounds, Omen is nearly fully grown. Sometime during the next year, Omen is expected to join the ranks of other birds that free fly in the Safari Canyon shows.

On Sunday, September 4, keepers will also be speaking with Zoo guests about vultures before and after the feature Safari Canyon shows. Children can make a vulture mask and everyone will be able to see comparisons of wingspans and discover the fascinating world of vultures during this special day.

Far from their filthy reputation, these underappreciated birds actually help prevent the spread of diseases



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like botulism, salmonella, cholera, and anthrax by ridding the landscape of carrion. And they don't spread these pathogens because vultures are gifted with highly acidic stomachs. Bacteria and parasites don't survive long enough to harm the vulture nor does it get passed through in its waste. In fact, they even "wash" their feet by urinating these strong acids on their feet to kill whatever they may have picked up by standing on the carcass. In this manner, these scavengers safely dispose of diseased carcasses.

Because of the ecological services they perform, vultures play a vital role in our world. For vultures that are thriving, this is great news. Yet many face increasing threats and some are critically endangered. Contaminants in carcasses (from poisons to medicines that are deadly to vultures) and habitat loss have caused shockingly fast declines in areas like southern Asia where some species are facing extinction.

Besides their unearned reputation, many people are unaware some well-known birds are vultures. For example, the California condor is a vulture – as is the Eurasian griffon. Likewise, so is the bird with the world's largest wing area: the famed Andean condor. And what many Floridians call a turkey buzzard is actually a turkey vulture.

International Vulture Awareness Day was created through a partnership between England and South African bird conservationists. This year, awareness-raising events are taking place in Asia, North America, Europe, and Africa.

Did you know? While vultures do circle the sky over a located food source, it's not the only reason they circle. The circling behavior is also done while searching for food, riding a thermal to gain altitude so they can continue gliding, or just playing.

Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens is nestled in a 43-acre historic botanical garden and cooperates in conservation programs both in and outside the wild. This new 501(c)(3) nonprofit offers families a full day wild fun from apes to zebras featuring the opportunity to feed giraffes and enjoy wildlife shows, cruises and other entertaining educational programming. This nationally accredited zoo is open daily from 9:00 to 5:00 and is located at 1590 Goodlette-Frank Road. For more info, click www.napleszoo.org, call (239) 262-5409, or follow the Zoo at www.twitter.com/NaplesZoo.

Print Quality Images of Omen are available for immediate download at www.napleszoo.org/press



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