

Vultures Serve as Janitors of the Environment

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla., Sept. 5, 2012— While vultures may not be known as king of the jungle, they do play an important role as janitors of the environment. Through their scavenging habits, these endangered birds help maintain a balance in the eco-system.

Guests at Disney's Animal Kingdom were able to learn about these often misunderstood birds during International Vulture Awareness Day Sept. 5. This special celebration originated in South Africa in 2006 and was designed to raise awareness and learn more about conservation efforts to protect vultures

Guests participated in a variety of activities that included trying on a replica of vulture wings, creating a craft vulture or vulture mask, learning about digestion and even taking part in a vulture meet-and-greet.

Between Disney's Animal Kingdom and Disney's Animal Kingdom Lodge, three species of vultures are on exhibit including:

- Lappet-faced vultures, which unlike the other species of vultures, lack a good sense of smell;
- Black vultures, are smaller in comparison and have a wingspan of five feet, while others can reach nearly eight feet;
- Ruppel's griffon vultures are highly social, can fly more than three miles in six minutes and are able to stay in the air for as many as six to seven hours a day.

"Awareness and knowledge about the environment are the first steps in appreciating vultures, which help to keep the earth cleaner and disease-free," said Jackie Ogden, Ph.D. vice president of Disney's Animals, Science and Environment for Disney Parks and Resorts. "People also can support conservation efforts that help vultures survive in their ecosystems, such as the Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund."

Since the first International Vulture Awareness Day six years ago, the event has expanded around the world, focusing on issues and conservation programs that are affecting these birds.