

Name: _____

Unusual Raptor

By Guy Belleranti

When you hear the words "raptor" or "bird of prey" what bird do you think of? Eagle? Hawk? Owl? How about secretary bird?

Secretary birds are primarily terrestrial. This means they spend most of their time on the ground instead of flying or perching in trees.

What do they do when they're on the ground? Hunt for food. They often walk 20 or more miles in a day searching the savannas and grasslands of southern Africa for dinner. They're well built for walking as well as for occasional running. Over 4 feet tall, secretary birds have the longest legs of any raptor. At the end of each leg is a foot unlike most other raptors -- one with short, fat toes and short, curved talons.

Secretary birds often hunt in pairs or family groups, stamping in the grass to scare up prey. They'll chase the prey, often flapping their big wings to confuse it. Then, they either grab the prey with their beaks or they stomp on it. What are examples of their prey? It commonly snacks on small mammals, such as hares, mice, and mongooses. It will also eat snakes, lizards, small birds, bird eggs, and frogs. Secretary birds sometimes swallow their food right away. Other times they carry it off in their beaks.

Although secretary birds spend their days on the ground this doesn't mean they can't fly. In fact, at night they nest high in the trees, especially in acacia trees.

Secretary birds usually mate for life. The couple builds a platform nest of sticks in a large tree. They often reuse and add to the size of this nest year after year. Both parents feed regurgitated food and water to their two or three young chicks. After three months or so the young are able to fly, hunt and kick. Then they move out on their own.



Where did the secretary bird get its name? One explanation is that the name comes from an Arabic word that means hunter-bird. This word then translates into French as "secretaire". A second explanation is that the bird's crest of long feathers at the back of its head looks like the quill pens that male secretaries of the 1800s stuck in their wigs.



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1. What is a raptor?
 - a. a bird that spends most of its time on the ground
 - b. a bird that hunts and eats animals
 - c. a bird with short, fat toes and short, curved talons
 - d. birds that cannot fly

2. On which continent do wild secretary birds live? _____

3. List eight examples of foods that secretary birds eat.

4. How tall is a secretary bird?
 - a. about as tall as a horse
 - b. about as tall as a bowling pin
 - c. about as tall as a chicken
 - d. about as tall as a 7-year-old child

5. The article says secretary birds mate for life. What does this mean?
 - a. Male and female birds choose new partners every year.
 - b. Male birds do not spend a lot of time with the female birds.
 - c. Male and female birds stay together year after year.
 - d. Female birds lay eggs, but only the males take care of the young.

6. Which other bird species is a terrestrial bird?
 - a. parrot
 - b. owl
 - c. hawk
 - d. ostrich

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. _____

l o w

hint: bird that hunts at night

2. _____

h n r e f c

hint: language spoken in France

3. _____

s g w i

hint: head coverings made of real or artificial hair

4. _____

s i p r a

hint: groups of two

5. _____

t o n l s a

hint: claws on large birds

6. _____

m o s p t

hint: move feet in a heavy and noisy way

7. _____

o n s i l o c c a a

hint: happening only once in awhile; not often

ANSWER KEY

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1. What is a raptor? **b**
 - a. a bird that spends most of its time on the ground
 - b. **a bird that hunts and eats animals**
 - c. a bird with short, fat toes and short, curved talons
 - d. birds that cannot fly

2. On which continent do wild secretary birds live? **Africa**

3. List eight examples of foods that secretary birds eat.
hares, mice, mongooses, snakes, lizards, small birds, bird eggs, and frogs

4. How tall is a secretary bird? **d**
 - a. about as tall as a horse
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 - d. **about as tall as a 7-year-old child**

5. The article says secretary birds mate for life. What does this mean? **c**
 - a. Male and female birds choose new partners every year.
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 - d. Female birds lay eggs, but only the males take care of the young.

6. Which other bird species is a terrestrial bird? **d**
 - a. parrot
 - b. owl
 - c. hawk
 - d. **ostrich**

ANSWER KEY

Unusual Raptor

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. owl

l o w

hint: bird that hunts at night

2. French

h n r e F c

hint: language spoken in France

3. wigs

s g w i

hint: head coverings made of real or artificial hair

4. pairs

s i p r a

hint: groups of two

5. talons

t o n l s a

hint: claws on large birds

6. stomp

m o s p t

hint: move feet in a heavy and noisy way

7. occasional

o n s i l o c c a a

hint: happening only once in awhile; not often