

Secretary Bird, Features, Hunting, Conservation, Significance

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The **Secretary Bird** is a distinctive terrestrial bird of prey found across the dry uplands and open grasslands of sub Saharan Africa. It is the only living bird of prey with mainly terrestrial habits. The species is known for its long legs, black crest feathers and unusual ability to kill snakes by stamping them against the ground. It also holds cultural significance in South Africa.

Secretary Bird Features

The Secretary Bird has several unique physical, behavioural and ecological features that distinguish it from most other African raptors.

- **Scientific name:** Its scientific name is *Sagittarius serpentarius*. It belongs to the family Sagittariidae and is a bird of prey.
- **Distribution:** The Secretary Bird occurs mainly across the grasslands, savannas and dry uplands of sub Saharan Africa, where open ground supports walking based hunting.

- **Physical features:** It can reach about 1.2 metres in length with a wingspan of nearly 2.1 metres. Its body is light grey with black thighs and flight feathers.
- **Distinctive crest:** About 20 black crest feathers resemble quill pens tucked behind the ears, which is commonly linked with its name.
- **Hunting method:** Unlike most raptors, it hunts mainly on foot. It kills snakes by stamping them or striking them against the ground like a kick, sometimes dropping prey from above.
- **Diet:** Snakes are important prey, while its diet also includes lizards, grasshoppers, mice, amphibians, small mammals and bird eggs.
- **Adaptations:** Thick scales on its legs provide protection against snakebites. Its long legs also help it move efficiently through open grasslands.
- **Nesting:** It usually builds large stick nests in thorn trees. Usually two chicks hatch after about seven weeks and both parents feed them by regurgitation.
- **Conservation:** The species faces habitat loss, deforestation, grassland decline and collisions with telephone and power lines. It is protected in most African countries and is listed as Endangered on the **IUCN Red List**.
- **Cultural significance:** The Secretary Bird appears on the coat of arms of South Africa, where it represents protection and vigilance.

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