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## *News Release*

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### **Vultures wait for eagles to find food, then swoop in, study shows**

Vultures track scavenging birds of prey to lead them to food, then swoop in large groups to steal it, a study of birds in Kenya shows.

The new research into vultures, which eat only dead animals, shows that they take their cue from tawny and steppe eagles.

The eagles' keen eyesight means they are better equipped than vultures to spot carrion.

The vultures not only follow the eagles to animal carcasses, but wait until the eagles have torn open the hides with their strong beaks. The vultures then chase off the eagles and tuck in. Scientists say eagles do manage to eat before being chased off, and can continue hunting.

A team of zoologists, including University of Edinburgh researchers, used mathematical models together with data from fieldwork in Kenya to study feeding behaviour. They filmed interactions between eagles and vultures at animal carcasses to confirm their findings.

Researchers say their new insights highlight the importance of conserving eagles in order to protect vulture species, which are endangered because of loss of habitat, inadvertent poisoning, and hunting.

Vultures play a key role in cleaning up dead and decaying animals, which reduces the risk to other animals of dangerous diseases such as anthrax. In their absence, dogs that carry rabies could increase in number and pose a threat to humans.

The study, led by Trinity College Dublin and supported by the Wellcome Trust, was published in *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*.

Dr Luke McNally, of the University of Edinburgh's School of Biological Sciences, said: "Vultures already have a reputation for eating what other animals have already killed. Now we know that they also let other birds find this food and prepare it for eating. These remarkable results remind us that no species exists in isolation, and highlight the vital importance of taking an ecosystem approach to conserving vulture populations."

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