

# Southern Ground Hornbill

*Bucorvus leadbeateri*



**Class:** *Aves*

**Order:** *Coraciiformes*

**Family:** *Bucerotidae*

## Characteristics:

The African Ground hornbills (also known as the Southern Ground Hornbills) weigh approximately 3000 grams. They are meat eaters and use their powerful bills (able to get through vinyl coated chicken wire). Ground Hornbills limited binocular vision to allow for successful hunting even though their bill seem to be in the way. Hornbills have also developed eyelash-like feathers above their eyes that filter out intense light ([Martin & Coatzee 2004](#)). Hornbills are the only birds with the first two neck vertebrae (axis and atlas) fused together. The throat skin is inflatable and sometimes inflates when making its guttural call. The throat skin on males are orange while female hornbills have a patch of blue on their neck ([Stevenson & Fanshawe 2002 plate 125](#))

## Behavior:

The word “ground” in the Southern Ground Hornbill comes from their being more frequently found walking rather than flying ([Stevenson & Fanshawe 2002](#)). Ground hornbills are often found in family groups and will hunt in groups and take down a large snake together.

## Reproduction:

Slow breeders. The female will lay and incubate two eggs for 40 days in trees and cliff sides. The older sibling usually outcompetes the younger sibling, lowering the potential reproductive success ([Mabula Ground Hornbill Project](#)).

## Diet:

Wild: Feeds on “anything that they can overpower” ([Martin & Coatzee 2004](#)). This can include hares, mice, lizards, squirrels, scorpions, termites, among others ([Kemp 1995 p.97](#)).

Zoo: Mice, chicks and insects.

## Conservation:

IUCN considers the birds as vulnerable while South Africa considers them endangered. The principle reasons for their decline are loss of habitat, secondary poisoning, and electrocution ([Mabula Ground-Hornbill Project](#)).

## FYI:

- Traditional African cultures saw ground hornbills as omen of rain. Killing them was taboo ([Robert Godfrey](#)).



## **Range & Habitat:**

Open savannah



## **Lifespan:**

Up to 70 years in captivity, 50 years in the wild.

**Special Adaptations:** A large bill, wielded by powerful muscles. Unique guttural call

## **IUCN Conservation Status:**

Vulnerable

