

12 million years from now, the world's apex predator is a rather unusual one. A bird, the texilihua is an almost exclusively aerial animal, spending most of its life on the wing aside nesting. It is the world's largest flying bird, bearing a wingspan of twenty meters. In the rather moments it is grounded, it launches by rotating its wings furiously, creating a vortex that allows for rapid launching. This is derived from its unique wing structure: only the finger supports the wing feathers, the rest of the arm concealed next to the body.

Its ancestors used this unique wing morphology to hover. They were nectar-drinkers, occurring across what were then the Americas. Some time after mankind's extinction, one of these diminute flutterers discovered a new food source: blood. It wasn't as nutritious as nectar, but it was more abundant and reliable. Over time, secretions in its mouth allowed to dissolve meat, and so these animals converted to full carnivory.

From then on, an increase in size followed, alongside a shift from fluttering to gliding (not an extreme shift, as another related lineage, the swifts were already apt soarsers, just without the rotation capacities of the hummingbird wing), and eventually a cosmopolitan distribution. As soarsers, their heart beat didn't need to be as high, and in fact it is often quite slow as the bird mostly glides and soars, though it can still go through moments of activity unparalleled by any other vertebrate in occasions such as launching or hovering.

Eventually, one species became a large sized, prolific carnivore. And much as the evolution of the orca altered the dynamics of the sea, so did on land all the large carnivores perished before this new one, aside from the dense forest biomes where it cannot reach.

Like its distant ancestors, the texilihua has bright reflective plumage. It offers it a metallic blue colouration, with dashes of purple on its head and back. On low light conditions, this brightness is traded by a still striking but natural orange and red. The eyes are adorned by white patches of naked skin, and a wattle descends from them like a teardrop. The overall wing and tail shape haven't changed too much, being still useful in an agile aerial predator, though the former have a more curved shape in order to be more effective at soaring.

The texilihua occurs all over the world, there being no geographic barriers to it, flying wherever it pleases whenever it pleases. It usually occurs alone or in pairs, though unlike its territorial ancestors it has no compulsion to defend territories or even fight with others of its species, aside when selecting nesting spots. Spending most of its life in the air, it is cathemeral, sleeping at high altitudes for a few minutes before descending down to hunt, all throughout the day and night.

Large as it is, there is no need for ambush. The bird swoops down at high speeds, far outspeeding most of its prey, the only escape being last moment turning, though even this may not suffice as the texilihua is quite agile for its size and can turn at tight angles with ease. The prey is speared on its 5 meter long beak while the bird is still flying, and as it ascends the prey's corpse descends, a combination of dissolving acids and beak serrations emptying it of its soft tissues. The corpse usually meets a halt near the beak's base, so the bird often flies as high as it can and it dislodges the carcasse, letting it fall and stabbing it again midair. The process repeats until only a husk remains, and the emptied corpse is left to fall on the ground, while the texilihua looks for new prey.

The bird's preferred targets are animals from 1 to 100 kilos. Larger prey cannot be lifted, but the bird gets around this by simply stabbing them, injecting them with its saliva. The initial stab alone is violent enough to shock the victim, and so all the bird has to do is hover and slurp up the quickly dissolving victim. As hovering is extremely demanding, however, it usually only attempts to do this on large animals such as elephants.

Unlike its polygamous ancestors, the texilihua is permanently monogamous, forming lasting pairs that breed across the year. They usually build their nests on mountains or

tall trees, though they can also do so on open ground. The incubation of their single egg lasts for two months, during which the parents take turns incubating and hunting. The continues when the chick hatches and afterwards for a period of fifteen months, until it can fly. But unlike raptors, in which the parents simply abandon the chick to prompt it to fly, the texilihua stick around, luring it into the air by hovering with prey on their beaks. Once the young learns how to fly, it still stick with its parents for over two years, learning how to hunt, before it gradually leaves them.