The kirkiban or gizzard, is the stomach of the bird. Most birds eat primarily seeds which need to be digested. As a prerequisite to digestion the seeds must be broken down. For this reason, many birds swallow pebbles, which are rubbed against the seeds which the bird eats. The gizzard is a very muscular organ, as it must be able
to grind the seeds to a digestible form.

Inspecting the Gizzard

If the gizzard is punctured, then it is forbidden. It is not unusually for birds to swallow nails or other objects which can cause a rupture in the gizzard. Particularly, ducks and geese, tend to swallow large metal objects and as such their gizzards should be inspected. If there is a problem in the gizzard, there is usually a significant amount of inflammation, and thus it is quickly noticed. In the event that there is such an inflammation, and there is the possibility that something punctured the gizzard a rabbinical authority should be consulted.

Kashering the Gizzard

The gizzard is essentially a muscle, the inside is lined by a latex like substance. This inside membrane is very rough and not edible. To kosher the gizzard, cut the gizzard open, remove the inside membrane and then soak and salt the gizzard as you would any other piece of meat.

How the Gizzard is used to Identify Kosher Birds

One of the physical characteristics of kosher birds is that they have a gizzard which is composed of the two membranes just described. There is no bird, which is currently accepted as kosher, which does not have a gizzard which separates into two membranes. To separate the membranes there should be no need to use a knife, but rather the membrane should separate easily in the hand.

As shown in the images (Gizzard 1:7, 1:8, 1:9) the gizzards of most kosher birds look similar. They are similar in coloration, texture and the ease with which the two membranes can be separated. Obviously, there are significant differences in size depending on the size of the bird from which they are derived.

There are certain birds of prey, such as the owl, which has gizzards similar to that of the kosher birds. The membranes can be separated, but the bird is an accepted bird of prey listed as such in the Torah. Hence, while all kosher birds have this type of gizzard, it is not true that all birds with this type of gizzard are kosher.
Picture Guide
Gizzard 1:5 Shows a greatly magnified cross section of a chicken gizzard, prior to the separation of the membranes. The rough, latex like, yellow membrane can still be clearly seen. From the cross section, it is also clear that there are two separate, but attached, membranes in the gizzard.
Gizzard 1:6 The yellow, latex like, membrane has been removed. The gizzard once rinsed will be ready to be soaked and salted. There are tiny bits of the membrane which remains on the lower left. The ability of the two membranes to separate easily in the hand, without the use of a knife, are one of the four signs that bird is kosher.
This is a gizzard which has just been removed from a chicken. The gizzard is covered with fats, and the actual gizzard can just barely be seen. The amount of fat found around the gizzard can vary from chicken to chicken. This chicken was raised for eggs, and these chickens tend to have much more fat than chickens which are raised for meat.

This is the same gizzard pictured in 1:1, after all the fats have been moved and the gizzard has been cut open. Almost all the gizzards of kosher birds have the same basic look.

This is the gizzard with the membrane separated. As can be seen the yellow membrane separates easily and almost in one piece from the chicken. It is not always this easy. Sometimes, it takes quite a bit of work to separate the membranes, but as long as the membranes separate then the bird is considered to have the kosher kind of gizzard.

The open gizzard prior to the separation of the two membranes.

This is the infected gizzard of a Long Island White Pekin duck. The duck was taken from a children's petting zoo, and it had swallowed a coin prior to the shechitah. The coin remained in the gizzard at the time of the shechitah. The coin had caused significant irritation in the gizzard (notice the difference in coloration between this gizzard and the one shown in pictures Gizzard 1:5 and Gizzard 1:6) and had actually rubbed through and was thus lodged in the side of the gizzard. This gizzard and hence the duck was rendered treif.