



CAPE VULTURE TASK FORCE REPORT
2013

“To stabilize the global Cape Vulture population”



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Executive summary

2013 Has been a tough year for vulture conservation and our vulture species. The poisoning through poached animals and laced carcasses, directly targeting vultures has had devastating effects on all vulture species across their range and our Cape Vultures have sustained huge losses in just two poisoning incidents in the last six months of 2013. Conservationists have exhausted themselves dealing with these issues as well as addressing ongoing threats to our vulture species and I fear we have not come close to winning the battle.

Unfortunately due to time constraints and life, not all colonies were counted as per the monitoring protocol and some counts are still being analyzed and completed. I have thus included counts which have been done and await further results in due course which will be added to the table next year.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Table 1: 2013 Breeding records (excluding KZN, Lesotho and some Eastern Cape)

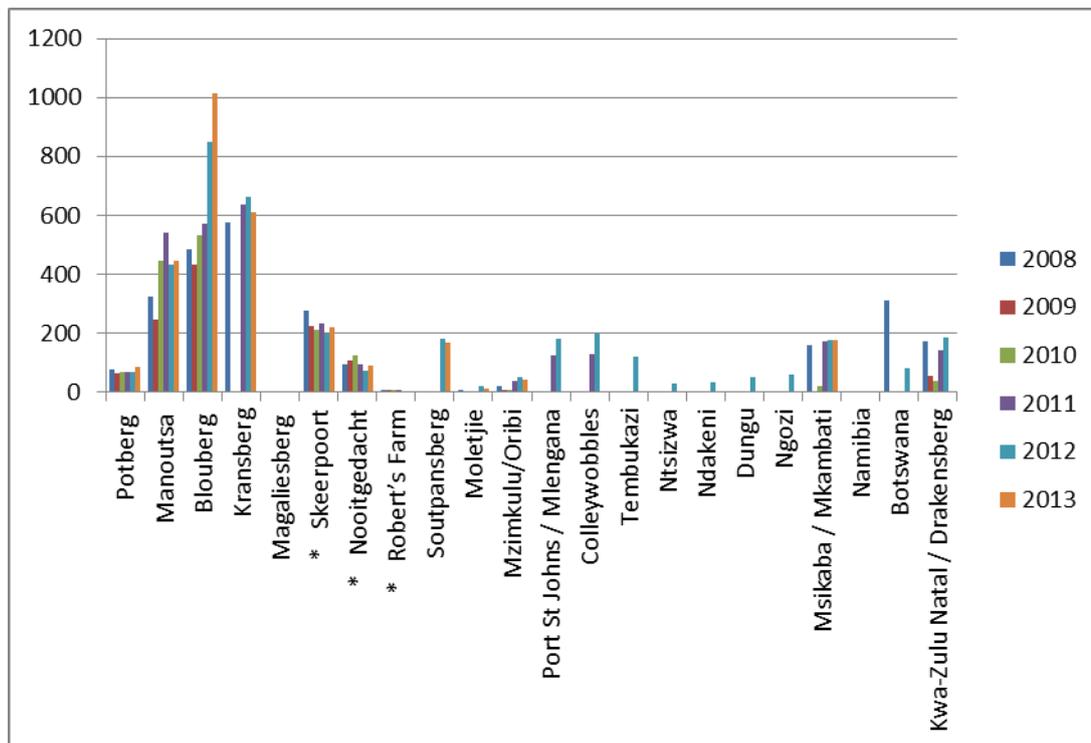
	Breeding Pairs	Nestlings	Fledglings
Potberg	84	50	Will complete in January/February 2014
Manutsa	444	456 nestlings seen 471 active nests in total	-
Blouberg	1015	-	-
Kransberg	611	513 nestlings seen 546 active nests in total	-
Magaliesberg			
* Skeerpoort	219	207 nestlings seen 225 active nests	189 fledglings seen 14 nestlings 214 Active nests in total
* Nooitgedacht	90	81 nestlings seen 90 active nests in total	71 fledglings seen 1 nestling 9 tenanted nests 81 active nests in total
* Robert's Farm	-	-	2
Soutpansberg	168	189 nestlings 192 active nests in total	-
Moletjie	13	12 nestlings seen 14 active nests in total	-
Mzimkulu/Oribi	-	42 nestlings 43 active nests	-
Msikaba / Mkambati	175	113	126
Total	Incomplete	Incomplete	Incomplete

Table 2: Some KZN results for 2013

		birds on nests	number of chicks	
Isiwa Simanqe	September	9	4	
Ganabu	June	0	0	
	September	6	0	
Ntabamhlope A	October	10	10	
	June			
Ntabamhlope B	October	10	10	
	June			
Vultures Retreat East Cliff	June	24 incubating, 1 tenanted	0	
	November		19	19 out of 24 nests were successful
Vultures Retreat North Cliff	June	3 incubating		
	November		2	2 of 3 nests were successful
Vultures Retreat West Cliff	June	23 definite incubating		
	November			14 chicks and 5 hidden out of 23 and 2 hidden
				Vultures retreat = 35 successful and 5 hidden out of 48 definitely incubating and 2 hidden
				so about 73% successful

David Allan has completed aerial surveys for most of the KZN, Lesotho and Eastern Cape colonies but has unfortunately not had time to analyse any of this data. He has however promised to send his results through to everyone during the first quarter of 2014. In view of this, I am unable to come up with a population figure for 2013 as well as a comparison from last year’s results, not only due to the lack of data but also due to the lack of comparative data.

Figure 1: Comparison between 2008-2013 breeding seasons



Conservation actions and threats:

Blouberg Reward Project:

- 53 Vultures came in from the Indermark village where most of them were tagged and released back into the Blouberg Nature Reserve. The community involved with the collection of these grounded birds were rewarded for their efforts as per previous years through the Sasol sponsorship funding.

Poisoning

- 1 dead immature CV was found at the Oripi vulture restaurant shortly after the Swartberg incident.
- Swart Berg incident in KwaZulu-Natal in June 2013, 65 Cape Vultures poisoned with carbofuran.
- Eastern Cape, Motlono in Queenston in December 2013 – 49 Cape Vultures poisoned with carbofuran.

Supplementation of food

- 145 Artificial vulture feeding sites have been confirmed active throughout SA with a handful in Namibia, Zimbabwe and Botswana only.

Research

- 16 chicks from the Potberg breeding colony were tagged and ringed.
- To-date, 884 Cape Vultures have been tagged and 3269 re-sightings recorded so far. Most of these re-sightings being at regular artificial feeding sites.
- A total of 9 adult Cape Vultures were fitted with GPS/GSM transmitters from the Mkambati vulture breeding colony:

Tracking data was used for an MSc thesis. Foraging range estimates were calculated (MCPs, 99% and 50% KDE) in addition to identifying the vulture's habitat use. The MSc thesis was formatted as papers for submission to international peer-reviewed journals. Compared to adults of the Northern Cape Vulture population node, foraging ranges from adults captured at Msikaba Cape Vulture colony are much smaller.

- Mzimkulu-Cape Vulture Project summary and update:

What are the movement patterns of immature Cape Vultures across southern Africa? Do immature Cape Vultures connect the remaining colonies? Which colonies are most isolated?

Between January 14th to 17th, 36 Cape Vultures were caught in a mass capture for a project run by the Conservation Ecology group from the Philipps-University of Marburg, Germany. All birds were marked with individual wing-tags, and faecal samples and blood samples were taken. Five first-year birds (born in 2012) were fitted with satellite transmitters (solar-powered GPS/GSM transmitters, www.e-obs.de). The birds moved on average 20 km per day after leaving their home colony (Fig. 1). They showed an activity range of up to 37,000 km² (Fig. 2), an area corresponding to the size of Lesotho. Moreover, the data show that the young birds frequently visit other colonies and roost sites. Up to now, their activity is mostly centered in KwaZulu-Natal, in the Drakensberg area. Unfortunately, one of the birds with transmitter (N104) died owing to collision with a power line in May 2013. With the help of the transmitter, Mike Neethling could locate the body and the data was forwarded to Eskom. Another tagged bird (N102) was found dead in October near Kokstad due to direct poaching.

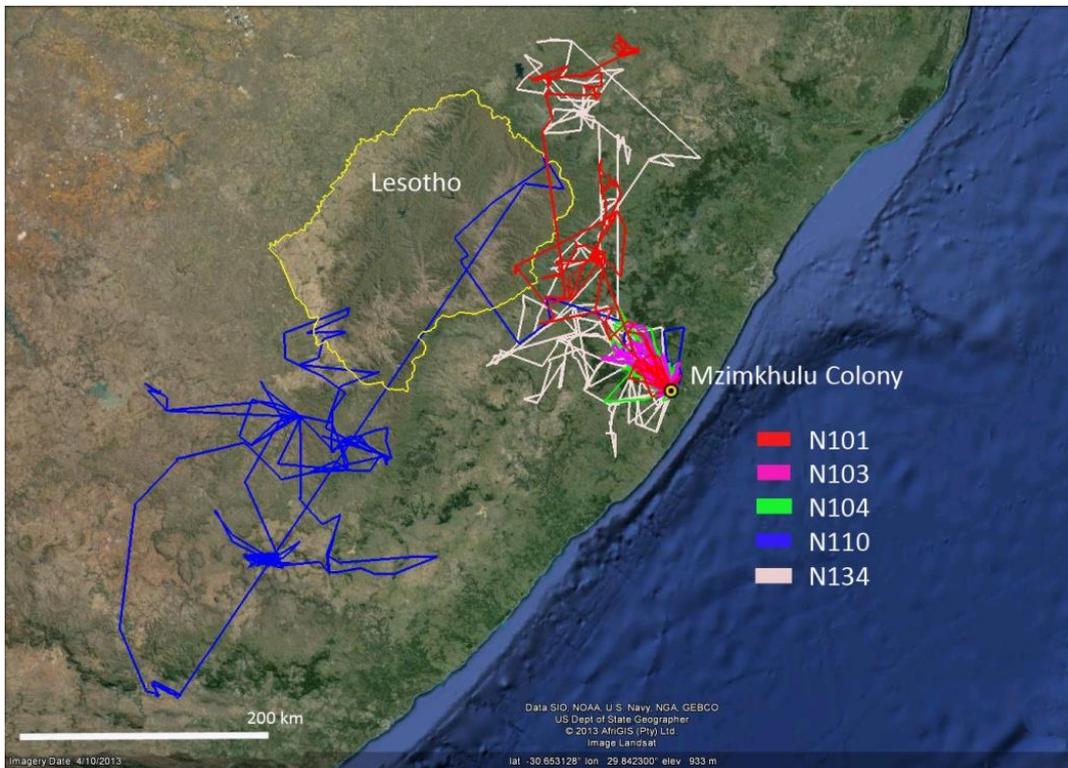


Figure 1. Daily travelling paths of the five first-year Cape Vultures between January and August 2013, revealed by satellite tracking (© Google Earth).

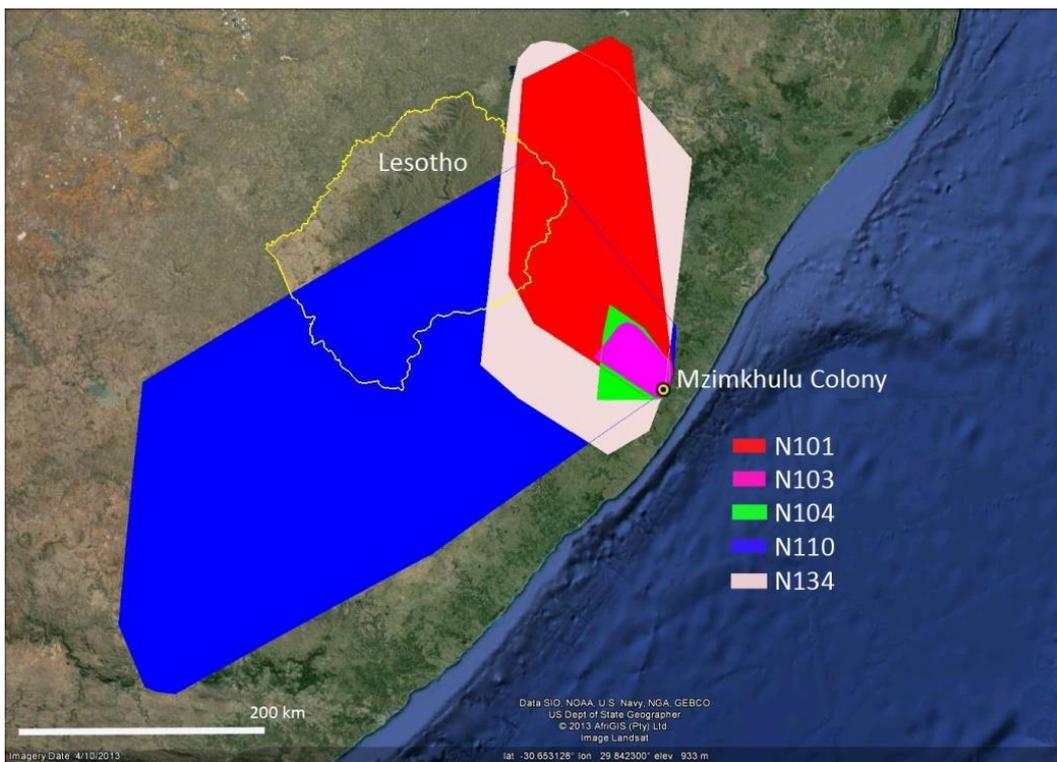


Figure 2. Activity ranges of the five first-year Cape Vultures between January and August 2013, revealed by satellite tracking (© Google Earth).

Vultures and Power lines

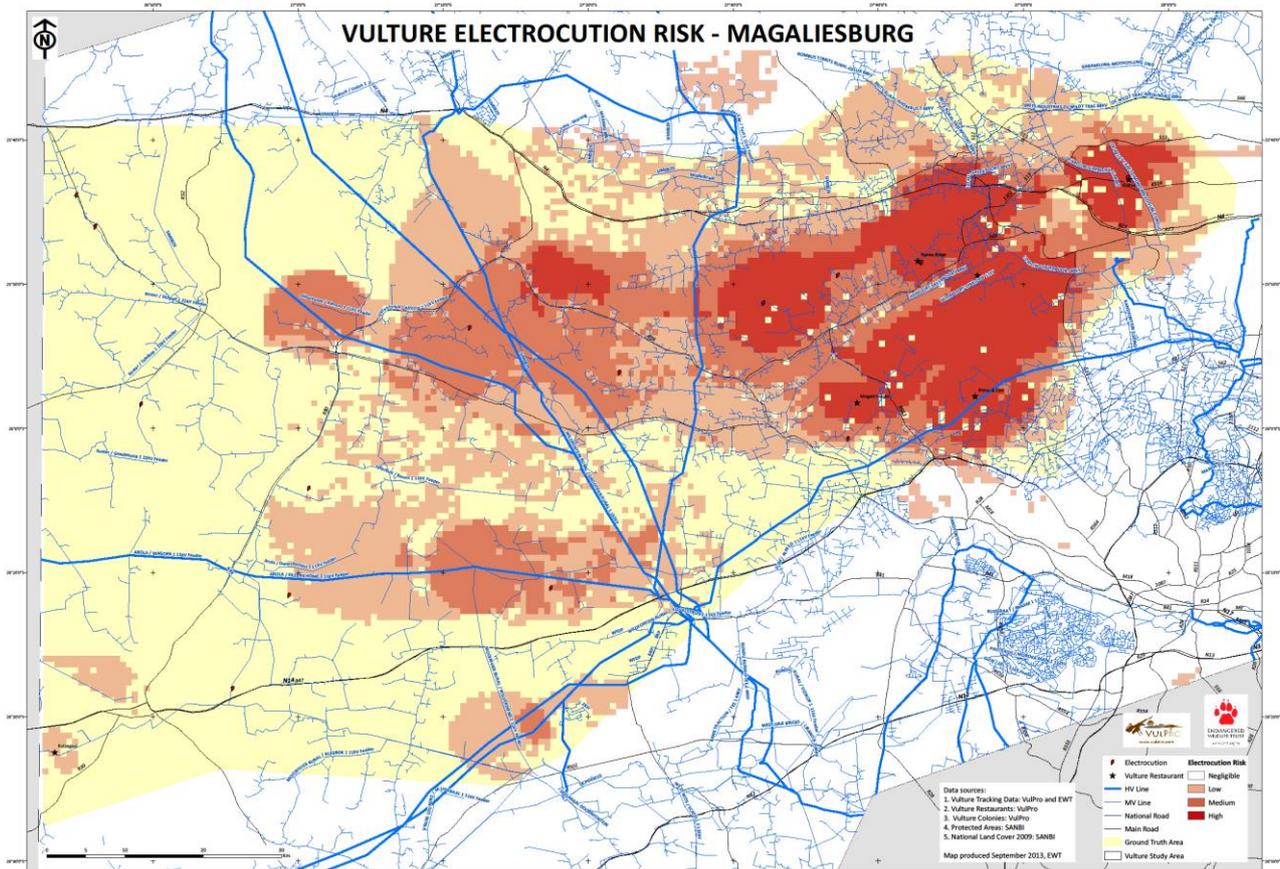
It has been busy year for all involved with power line mitigations and strategies and the below highlights some of the achievements for 2013:

- Magaliesberg risk assessment completed successfully, see below for summary and map.
- Eastern Cape vulture mitigation plan finalized and in process (committed to have all infrastructure in the Eastern Cape bird electrocution friendly by 2017)

- Limpopo vulture project completed successfully with the assistance of Vulpro and the EWT Birds of Prey Programme
- Eskom/EWT/, assisted by VulPro “Adopt a vulture project” where all 9 general managers in Eskom adopted a vulture.
- Continuous mitigation on both Transmission and Distribution lines
- New mitigation devices: To be tested at Vulpro and Witsand in the Western Cape is a nocturnal device with an LED light that switches on when the light conditions fade

Highlights:

- Magaliesberg risk assessment:



The Magaliesberg Risk Assessment came about due to the apparent and numerous unsafe structures in the area that pose a significant risk to the resident vulture population. Thus, taking the tracking and tagging data, over laying this with vulture restaurants, colonies and important ‘hotspot’ areas and putting together a map, pinpointing areas and power lines which need urgent attention and mitigation with the next step ensuring that all unsafe structures within this Magaliesberg Risk Assessment map be mitigated and changed to become bird friendly.

The Limpopo vulture project was finally successfully completed with a total of 25 vultures fitted with tracking devices:

- 14 x Cape Vultures
- 8 x White backed Vultures
- 1 x Lappet faced Vulture
- 1 x White-headed Vulture
- 1 x Hooded Vulture

This also forms part of the ‘adopt a vulture’ project for all Eskom distribution general managers which we hope will have an impact by:

- Making the Operating Units aware of how important it is to conserve our vultures

- To use the adopted vulture as a mascot in a campaign in the Operating Units to promote reporting of wildlife incidents and the conservation of vultures.
- To commit that all new and existing infrastructure within the different Eskom Operating Units will be made safe for vultures.

Vulture powerline related fatalities

- A total of 73 vulture mortalities were reported between April 2013 to date
- 51 Cape Vultures in total
- 22 African White-Backed Vultures
- 48 Cape Vultures on Eskom Distribution lines
- 3 Cape Vultures on Eskom Transmission lines
- 16 African White-backed Vultures on Eskom Distribution lines
- 6 African White-backed Vultures on Eskom Transmission lines

Publications and posters

Publications

- Do Power Lines and Protected Areas Present a Catch-22 Situation for Cape Vultures (*Gyps coprotheres*)? WL Phipps, K Wolter, MD. Michael, LM MacTavish, RW Yarnell. PLoS ONE 8(10): e76794, 2013.
- Effect of rehabilitation on survival rates of endangered Cape vultures A. Monadjem, K. Wolter, W. Nesar and A. Kane. Animal Conservation (ZSL), 2013. Print ISSN 1367-9430.
- Paper in press. 2013. Pfeiffer, M., Venter, J., & C. Downs. Identifying anthropogenic threats to Cape Vultures (*Gyps coprotheres*) using community perceptions in communal farmland, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. Bird Life International.
- Allan, D. G., Benson, P. C., Pfeiffer, M., & N. Theron. 2013 Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres* caught in gin trap. Vulture News 64: 50-54.

Posters

- MSc, feeding behaviour among Cape Vultures C.W. Vermeulen completed his MSc on “The behaviour of Cape Vultures (*Gyps coprotheres*) around a carcass” in the Department of Natural Science, North West University, Potchefstroom, in August.
- Pfeiffer, M., Venter, J., & C. Downs. 2012. Foraging range, breeding success, and community perceptions of the Cape Vulture in the Mkambati Nature Reserve, Eastern Cape Province. College of Agriculture, Engineering, and Science Postgraduate Research Day, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa.
- Pfeiffer, M., Venter, J., & C. Downs. 2012. Foraging range, breeding success, and community perceptions of the Cape Vulture in the Mkambati Nature Reserve, Eastern Cape Province Pan-African Ornithological Congress, Arusha, Tanzania
- Pfeiffer, M., Venter, J., & C. Downs. 2012. Foraging range, breeding success, and community perceptions of the Cape Vulture in the Mkambati Nature Reserve, Eastern Cape Province. South African Wildlife Management Association Symposium, Klein Kariba, Limpopo Province, South Africa.

Acknowledgments

Particular thanks to all landowners and National Parks for allowing us onto their properties to undertake this work. Most importantly, special thanks to all our sponsors for their ongoing sponsorship towards vulture conservation.