

THE VULPRO FLYER



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RESTAURANT NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2019

“ To advance knowledge, awareness and innovation in the conservation of southern African vulture populations for the benefit and well-being of society.”



VulPro NPC - Vulture programme for the conservation of vulture species in southern Africa

Registration no.2011/127419/08 (The Companies Act 2008, Sec.14)



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Executive Summary

All too quickly 2019 has come to an end and what a year it has been. The team work shown by the entire VulPro family has been absolutely phenomenal and I cannot thank each and every member of this team; staff and volunteers together with my own immediate family, enough. I am so proud to be a part of this team and so proud to watch VulPro's staff continue to grow and show leadership in the field of vulture conservation, research, breeding and husbandry.

The last 6 months have truly been challenging with growths in both field related work as well as our own ex-situ breeding programme and of course, the ongoing demands of vulture rehabilitation given the increasing threats and challenges these birds face daily. We managed to undertake all tasks successfully and various reports and updates have already been distributed, and publications already in press, showcasing our work to both the scientific and conservation communities.

In this edition of our newsletter however, I would like to highlight and acknowledge our amazing volunteers. Volunteers that have come from abroad but also our dedicated and most loyal local volunteers. Your help, kindness, support and loyalty towards our goals and mission is incredibly appreciated and words cannot express my gratitude enough.

I hope you all have a peaceful festive season complete with love, joy and happiness. May you all be blessed and be safe and we look forward to continuing to showcase our work with you in the year to come.

With much appreciation, **Kerri Wolter, CEO**





The VulPro Flyer



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Vulture Rescue and Rehabilitation- Statistics

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<u>Species</u>	<u>Number resident at VulPro 15 June 2019</u>	<u>Rescued and brought in since June 2019</u>	<u>Released</u>	<u>Died</u>	<u>Euthan- ized</u>	<u>Transferred/ donated</u>	<u>Number resident at VulPro 10 December 2019</u>
<u>Cape Vulture</u>	145	32	9	1	3	0	163
<u>African White-backed Vulture</u>	51	9	3	0	1	0	56
<u>Lappet-Faced Vulture</u>	8	1	1	0	0	0	8
<u>White-headed Vulture</u>	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
<u>Palm-nut Vulture</u>	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
<u>Black Vulture</u>	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
<u>King Vulture</u>	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
<u>Andean Condor</u>	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
<u>African Fish Eagle</u>	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
<u>Hooded Vulture</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Black-chested Snake Eagle</u>	1	3	0	0	1	1	2
<u>Spotted Eagle Owl</u>	0	1			1		0
<u>Total</u>	216	4	13	1	6	1	240



Vulture Rescue and Rehabilitation- Rescues

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Rescues

VulPro's rescue and rehabilitation work continues to be of the utmost importance. Working with endangered and critically endangered species, every single individual matters, and there are no limits to the extent we would go to to safeguard this species.

The latter part of 2019 has seen quite a few individuals admitted, composed of a plethora of species including African White-backed Vultures, Cape Vultures, Lappet-faced Vultures, Black-chested Snake Eagles, as well as a few owl species.

VulPro is now gearing up for our own version of the "Silly Season"; the time of year where, in addition to our normal influx of rescues, vulture fledglings are taking their maiden flights. Inexperienced fledglings often find themselves making a bit of a wrong turn, ending up in less than ideal areas or situations, and in need of assistance to re-calibrate their GPS and find their way home.

Sadly, power lines still remain the largest threat faced by vultures, with the majority of individuals admitted having suffered from power- line collisions or electrocutions; often resulting in injuries too extensive to allow for release. These individuals are provided with a safe haven, and incorporated into our ex-situ conservation breeding programme, giving them a second chance to help save their species. Weather conditions, poisoning, and anthropogenic influences were some of the other causes individuals were admitted with, but with a more positive prognosis pertaining to the release rate of these individuals.

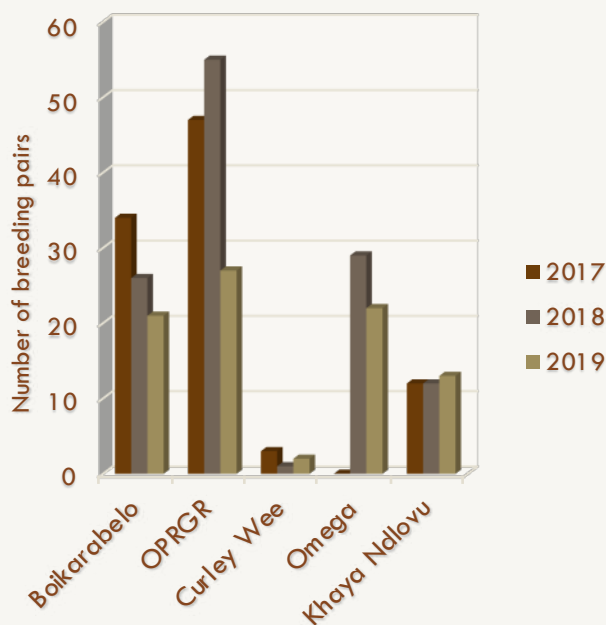


Vulture Breeding and Population Monitoring 2019

Tree Nesting Surveys

VulPro continued our vitally important Tree-Nesting surveys of African White-backed and Hooded Vultures across five study sites in South Africa. Comparisons between the number of nests active at the end of the breeding season during September/October from 2017 to 2019 are depicted below. The decrease at the unprotected sites, such as Boikarabelo may be accredited to poaching whilst at the Olifants River Private Game Reserve observed leopard and python predation has occurred at several nests. We continue to recommend management strategies to landowners to ensure the survival of these critically endangered species.

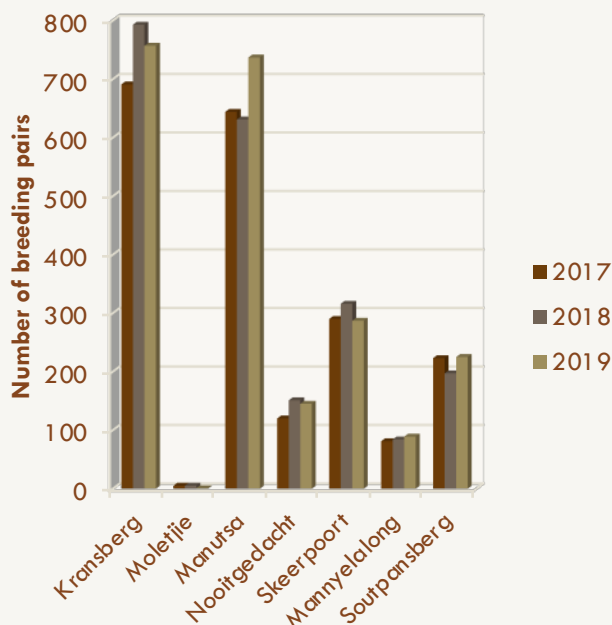
Tree- Nesting Surveys: Comparison in number of breeding pairs still active at end of breeding season 2017-2019



Cliff Nesting Surveys

Since 2007, VulPro has monitored Cape Vulture populations at seven cliff-nesting sites throughout the North-West, Gauteng and Limpopo Provinces of South Africa and one breeding colony in Botswana since 2014. The graph below compares the number of nests from the first survey in May/June from 2017-2019. Although we are positive that three colonies have shown an increase this year; it is concerning that four colonies have decreased due to a range of environmental and man-made factors such as Verraux's Eagle predation, drought and human disturbance. We continue to closely monitor population trends.

Cliff Nesting Surveys: Comparison in number of breeding pairs at the start of the breeding season 2017-2019



Ex-situ Conservation Breeding

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VulPro's 2019 breeding season came early this year with some of our first chicks hatching whilst others were still being laid. We are extremely happy to have 13 chicks, 11 Cape Vultures and 2 African White-back Vultures from our breeding programme. Currently there are only four chicks still on the nest as the others have already fledged. Below are some photos of them at various stages of growth.



Threat Mitigation- Power Line Updates

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Year	Date	Area	Province	Kilometers Surveyed	Structures	Fatalities	Injured birds
2019	29 May	Steynsburg /Burgersdorp	Eastern Cape	0.2	3	1	0
2019	30 May	Upper Cathcart / Happyvalle	Eastern Cape	0.8	5	2	0
2019	13 June	Nooitgedacht	Gauteng	2.67	22	2	0
2019	17 July	Kubusie / Wrigglesware	Eastern Cape	2	14	1	0
2019	25 September	Jamestown	Eastern Cape	1.2	6	5	0
2019	22 October	Leeuwfontein/Mdala Nature Reserve	Limpopo	3.3	17	0	0
2019	23 October	Nooitgedacht	Gauteng	0.5	7	2	0
2019	29 October	Kei Road	Eastern Cape	1.1	10	1	1
2019	04 November	Tylden Line (TYL 64)	Eastern Cape	3	25	0	0
2019	18 November	Carltonville / Randfontein	Gauteng	3.08	18	0	0
2019	18 November	Carltonville / Randfontein	Gauteng	2.05	5	0	0
			Totals	19.9	132	14	1

VulPro continues with our Eskom collaboration, working in unison to minimize the number of vulture - power line incidents through informed mitigation efforts. Eskom has actively aided in our conservation efforts, and recent analysis has showed that of the total number of 298 incidents which VulPro has reported to Eskom, 45 incidents are on track for mitigation measures; 249 reports have been closed with mitigation measures implemented; and only 4 incidents remain overdue.



Eastern Cape Report

Kate Webster

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Rehabilitation:

The winter months tend to be a quiet in this province, however on the 25th of June a call came through of an injured Cape Vulture in the Elliot/Ugie area found under a power line with another bird electrocuted. This is an area where I have not really collected birds in the past, however, still well within their foraging range. The bird seemed paralysed and despite finding no fractures in the spine of hip areas, was unable to utilize its legs. I put the bird in a sling and despite therapy (in consultation with Kerri) for a further 2 weeks, it was still unable to utilize its legs. We decided to euthanize the bird.



My second call in early August from Kei Road where a very dehydrated and thin young bird was caught close to a very successful vulture restaurant. This bird was caught and clearly had survived a negative interaction with powerlines. After a couple of weeks at Rookwood, it was able to be released back into the wild. Sadly though, a second bird was found to be electrocuted in the area at a much later stage, when we were doing a power line report and training with DEDEAT officials.



Early in October a message was sent through from Erica Erasmus in the Bolo area of Stutterheim for help with a young bird. This bird turned out to be a very young fledgling (probably barely 2 weeks out of the nest) with bad burns on the wings and permanent damage. This young fledgling has now been transported up to VulPro to learn to be a vulture but will be a permanent resident there.

Other rehab cases have included 2 Barn owls (neither survived), a young Greater Kestrel, which can be released shortly, and sadly 2 very young Secretary birds which had been very prematurely taken out of their nest. One had already suffered a fracture in the leg. This bird has subsequently passed on with the second bird showing distinct signs of tendon damage and unable to stand. This is a result of bad handling/treatment when they were taken from the nest and then poor diet prior to coming to me.

Dr Werner Wentzel and I have been building up a good working relationship with regard to assistance on the medical side. Not only is he prepared to do examinations and X-Rays, but also willingly receives the smaller raptors and treats and feeds until I can collect them. This is extremely useful as I sometimes just cannot get to town (35kms away) to receive these birds when they come in. I am hoping that this partnership will continue in the future.

Eastern Cape Report

Kate Webster

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Eskom reporting:

Eskom power lines continue to negatively impact the vultures within this province with virtually not a single month going by where electrocutions and collisions are not reported.

Below is a list of the incidents since June 2019

Date	Infrastructure type	Comments
25.06.019	Distribution line	2 x Cape Vulture electrocution 1 survived but had to be euthanized later as it was unable to stand on its legs
19.07.019	Distribution line	1 Cape Vulture electrocuted
31.07.019	Transformer	1 Cape Vulture electrocuted Sadly a bird I had rehabilitated earlier in the year (the bird that had come from Steynsburg)
22.08.019	Distribution line	1 Cape Vulture found alive but very weak and unable to fly This bird subsequently was soft released. A 2 nd bird was found electrocuted on this site at a later power line report.
03.09.019	Distribution line	2 x Cape Vulture electrocutions 3 x Cape Vulture collisions (historical) Including the following species collisions: Spoonbill, Egyptian Geese, Yellow-billed Duck and Lanner Falcon
25.09.019	Transformer	1 x Cape Vulture 1 x Martial Eagle (historical)
09.10.019	Distribution line	1 x fledgling Cape Vulture in Bolo area near the Kubusi River. This bird is now at VulPro with permanent injuries.

Eastern Cape Report

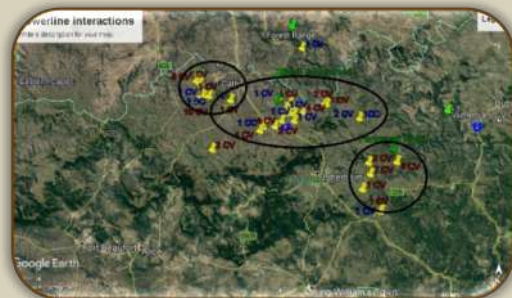
Kate Webster

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Summary

Cape Vultures affected in total	13
Other birds affected	5
Cape Vultures permanently damaged	1
Cape Vultures released	1
Cape Vultures killed/dead	11 (still too many birds)

All these incidents have had reports sent through to Eskom for attention. The numbers remain high and of major concern for this species within this province. Aphelele Tomsana from the Environmental division of the Southern Region of Eskom and I continue to work together to improve this situation. He continues to push Eskom with regards to mitigation and aiming for the 'zero tolerance' that was promulgated many years ago within the EWT/Eskom partnership. We have also 'trained' with practical experience the working group within the Department of Environmental Affairs (the Green Scorpions group that I referred to in my earlier report this year). I continue to thank Div de Villiers of DEDEAT (Green Scorpions) for establishing a working group under the leadership of Dean Ricketts, who are tasked to monitor this situation with regards to vultures and power lines in this province. It is also so good to see that their attitude and willingness to learn about the whole power line issue is so positive.



I would also like to proudly announce that my daughter, Meagan Bromfield has passed her GIS Masters of Science degree at Wits University with distinction. Her subject: Power related mortality of the Cape vulture (*Gyps coprotheres*) within the Eastern Cape, South Africa: modelling terrain characteristics in hotspot areas using GIS. I am extremely honoured that she had considered using my information as the basis of her studies and truly hope that this modelling now can be used to cover the rest of the country for the benefit of the species. I was so proud to attend her graduation ceremony last week!



Eastern Cape Report

Kate Webster

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DHL supply chain and transport

DHL have once again assisted us in transporting the young fledgling up to VulPro. The staff, Nadia, Graham and drivers remain so helpful and willing. I cannot sing their praises more often. Thanks guys, you will always rock for me.

Training

During August I met up with the DEDEAT special working group in Ugie and gave them a presentation on power lines and vultures. Dean Ricketts and I agreed that we would then do some practical training in the field when the situation arose. This we did with one group of the team on the farm of Mr Johan Nel in the Jamestown/Lady Grey area (and they then subsequently doing a report afterwards of another incident) and the second group down at Kei Road on Mr Gareth Smith's property. Their attitude and willingness to learn was wonderful and rewarding.

General:

The Venterstad Farmers Association requested I come and do a presentation for them in August and even though they do not have many vultures in their area, they were interested and my presentation was well received. My enclosure at Rookwood constantly seems to hold 5 birds, all permanently injured. I know that possibly early next year most of the present group will need to be relocated to VulPro as they are closer to breeding age. The resident pair of leguaan (water monitors) are still sneaking in to assist disposing of their carcasses that are fed to the vultures. I need to sneak up on them to take a picture or two as well.

No 2 Piggeries continue to supply food for me (under strict supervision of the State vets that did an inspection the other day!) which is a huge weight off my shoulders as constant supply of food for my birds has always been a big concern.



Eastern Cape Report

Kate Webster

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General

The vulture restaurant at Rookwood, still has regular visitors other than vultures, including the Fish Eagle, Jackal buzzard and Verreaux's Eagles. Recently there have been younger vultures seen at the restaurant and it makes one feel good that you know at least food is available for them.

I have been inundated with video footage from Mr Gareth Smith down Kei Road way, with his very active restaurant where up to 300 birds have been counted. It is great to know they are utilizing this site and to know that many of these birds (most probably from the Kei River area) are at least finding food in this area. Keep up this good work Gareth and Elsa.

Wind farms continue to be a threat for our Cape Vultures in this province with news of more fatalities. I am on the constant lookout for more potential developments that would be to the detriment of the vultures and register whenever necessary as GIS. As much as it is seen as renewable energy, it is also a very destructive development especially with regard to our vultures and raptors with some endangered birds being killed by the turbines. Sadly all information of fatalities remains a HUGE secret with parties involved all signing non-disclosure documents! I regularly get asked about information of vultures in various regions and development is often in the very same foraging zones of the Cape vultures of this province. I reiterate that this industry remains skewed with post-monitoring very dependent on the integrity of the specialists involved. Officially we are informed of 16 Cape Vultures that have lost their lives to these turbines. The latest is a taller turbine and longer blades proposed for one of the wind farms in the Bedford/Cookhouse area. This is just another example of the many obstacles for these poor birds.



I want to specifically thank Kerri and Charne of VulPro for their continuous support. I would also like to thank my sponsors Lomas Wildlife Protection Trust and DHL Supply Chain as I would not be able to do the work without them. I would also like to thank the support I get from specific specialists with regard to the wind energy development side. I have truly learnt a lot over the year and remain amazed at how our National Department of Environment just seem to be so apathetic about Cape Vulture losses in this industry even though it is a TOPS species. Thank you too to Mr Tim de Jongh for the renewal of my permits to be able to continue to handle/fetch and rehabilitate vultures legally. My family and staff, who are always willing to handle, hold, catch and assist with treatment whenever necessary. To the landowners who always make the effort to contact me for assistance with regards to our precious Cape Vultures, this is always very valuable.

Introduction to VulPro

Research

Alexandra Howard



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VulPro is one of the leading vulture research organisations in the world as we have pioneered many projects on vultures since 2007. We ensure that top scientific principles and research methods are incorporated into our daily activities to ensure best conservation principals are undertaken which give the species the best possible chances of survival.

We strive to share this research with scientists, conservationists and the general public through projects, conference presentations and publications to create awareness and appreciation of vultures and make sure the optimum possible techniques are used.



The impressive record of the number of national and international conferences VulPro has been invited to in the last six months is testament to our work as being recognized in the scientific and conservation community.

Vulture on the Wire Project – High risk areas of power line mortalities in the Cape Vulture and the African White-backed Vulture in South Africa

VulPro is currently co-supervising an international postgraduate student, Ms Sarah Aspenstrom-Oguguo, from the Edinburgh Napier University in collaboration with Eskom to understand the high-risk areas of vulture-power line mortalities. This project has long been identified as a top priority by VulPro due to the large number of rescues and rehabilitation cases of vultures that we receive on a weekly basis caused by electrocutions and collisions with power lines. As the greatest daily threat and the biggest cause of injuries resulting in non-releasable vultures at VulPro, we pioneered this project with Eskom based on our previous studies and power line surveys. Since 2007, more than 41% of the vultures admitted to VulPro are due to power line injuries with a new case every week. Unfortunately the severity of collisions and electrocutions means less than 20% of Cape Vultures and only 8% of African White-backed Vultures can be released after rehabilitation from their skeletal and soft tissue injuries.

Our rehabilitation statistics further emphasize the distressing nature of power line injuries as the mortality rate is approximately 30% for both species. This necessity to understand and address the threat of unsafe power line structures led to this novel project as the first to consider so many different factors that may affect vulture-power line incidents in South Africa. The aim is to map the areas where power line incidents happen frequently and identify the structures and resources which may be influencing these mortalities and incidents in Cape and African White-backed Vultures in South Africa by combining the home ranges of all tracked individuals, the recorded incidents reported to the Eskom database, the land use of the area and the flight altitude when foraging and crossing power line structures. Our previous studies have suggested 50 kilometre zones around vulture colonies and restaurants as a buffer area for priority conservation efforts so this was incorporated to identify areas for power line mitigation as Cape Vultures frequently use transmission lines for roosting while African White-backed Vultures have been observed nesting on power line pylons.

Introduction to VulPro

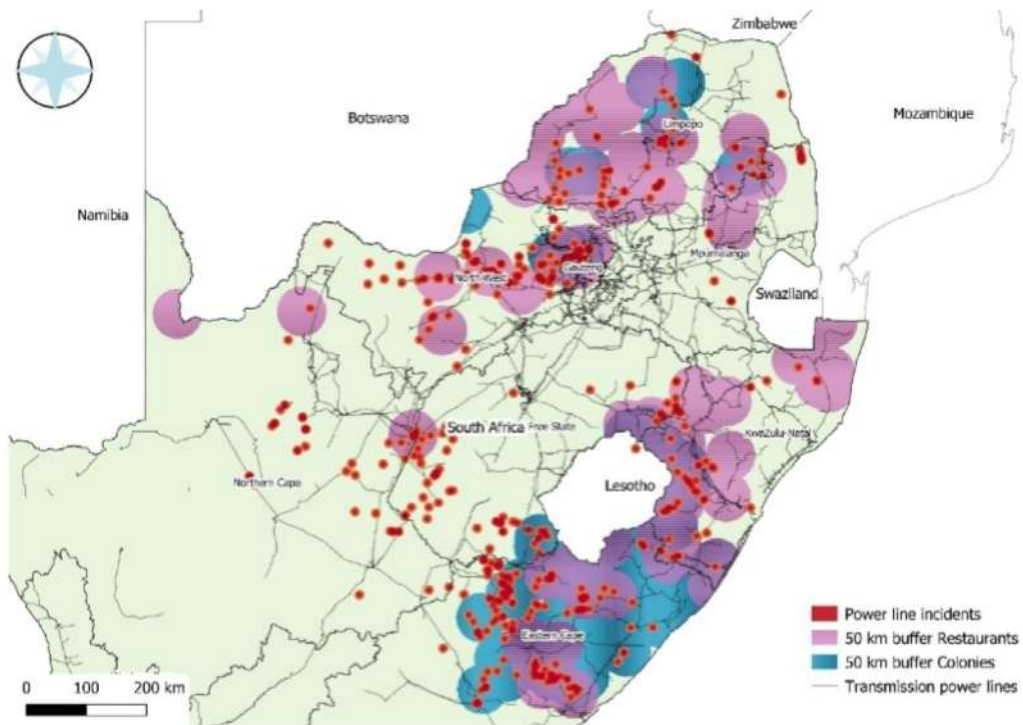
Research

Alexandra Howard



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Using VulPro's tracking data of Cape and African White-backed Vultures, Sarah's preliminary results show that most power line incidents happen near vulture restaurants and colonies as the birds are flying at lower altitudes and are choosing power lines as roosting sites after actively selecting restaurants as feeding sites. This highlights the importance of making power lines safe for vultures in the proximity of vulture colonies and restaurants as the wooden distribution lines were more frequently involved in mortalities in contrary to the assumption that transmission lines were more often at fault. We are hopeful by Eskom's interest and participation in this project that they will use these results to mitigate dangerous power lines in priority areas as an urgent conservation step towards saving South Africa's remaining vultures.



Map of power line incidents of vultures within conservation buffer zones of colonies and vulture restaurants in relation to transmission lines in South Africa. Copyright: Sarah Aspenstrom-Oguguo, Edinburgh Napier University

Research- Skeerpoort Cape Vulture Chick Ringing Escapade

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On the 15th of October 2019, VulPro in collaboration with the Max Planck Institute in Germany, undertook a ringing operation of Cape Vulture nestlings directly on their breeding ledges at the Skeerpoort colony on the Magaliesberg Mountains.

This was the second such operation undertaken by VulPro and the first study of its kind for the Magaliesberg Cape Vultures; as twenty nestlings were fitted with state of the art E-obs 42g solar mounted tracking devices, in addition to each having their lead levels screened and fitted with not only SAFRING metal leg bands but individual coloured leg bands for visual resightings. The entire process took just short on 3,5 hours which was pretty impressive given all 20 nestlings were successfully processed on a 1,5 metre wide ledge which was approximately 20 metres long.

Five of us abseiled down to the main breeding ledge with safety being of paramount importance and the rest of the team remained at the monitoring viewing point on the south side to assess conditions, birds' behaviour and record individual nest numbers for correct record keeping as we processed each individual. So far, only one of the nestlings fitted with a tracking device has left the breeding site with several others undertaking short flights above the colony and returning back to their ledges.

.....continued on next page



Skeerpoort Cape Vulture Chick Ringing Escapade

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We hope to monitor each individual for several years, identifying survival success rates, threats specific to this colony, movement and dispersal patterns and eventual breeding selection sites.

Special thanks to Willem who allowed us to hike through his property, reaching the breeding colony on the north side of the mountains and assisting us with equipment transport. To Max Planck for not only donating all 20 tracking devices but assisting with the actual processing work in addition to facilitating research questions and advice on the software system and Auckland Zoo for the financial support.

To Walter Neser, Craig Nattrass and Sarel Pretorius a huge thank you for leading the cliff work and keeping the team safe.



Research- Wild Vulture Captures & Processing - Omega Farm

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VulPro's undertook wild Vulture Marking and Sampling project at Omega Game Reserve.

This project forms part of our *in-situ* conservation work and encompasses the "on nest" processing of wild vulture chicks, before they fledge and leave the nest. This entails ascending to the nests, in order to mark each individual with a metal SAFRing and coloured leg band for identification and records while we also take blood samples to facilitate lead testing. This is a critical component of our work as it allows us to identify individuals, monitor their movement, dispersal and nesting behavior, as well as facilitates the collection of data pertaining to the occurrence of lead in wild vulture populations.

We are most grateful to Phillip Els, the landowner of Omega Game Reserve and to Erine Rawlinson from Eskom for the Cherry Picker truck to gain access to nests located high in the Acacia trees. Thanks to Malcolm Wilson (Ringing) and Carol Smith (volunteer) for your assistance.

A total of 11 individuals were fitted with SAFRings, coloured leg bands and had blood samples taken. We hope to monitor each individual for several years, identifying survival success rates, threats specific to this colony, movement and dispersal patterns and eventual breeding selection sites.



Research- Tracking Vulture Movements

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Tracking vultures throughout 2019

The information we get from tracking devices is vital to our research and understanding of vultures' survival, dispersal, foraging ranges, roosting spots and habits. It also allows us to detect when a vulture is no longer moving, potentially injured or fatally wounded as well as giving us a better understanding of the survival rate of the different species in their ranges across southern Africa.

We currently have 52 birds active with trackers that we have monitored daily this year which have travelled through seven countries in southern Africa!



A wonderful example of information received via a tracking device is from a young captive-bred Cape Vulture born at VulPro on the 8th of July 2018 and released at the Nootgedacht colony and release site on the 9th of April 2019 tagged with a red legband 55.

In the 8 months since his release, this young 18-month bird has travelled more than 9900 kilometers (6 151 miles) by crossing borders into 5 other countries in southern Africa as seen in the map adjacent.



He has flown from South Africa to Zimbabwe to visit Chizarira and Hwange National Parks, then to the Okavango Delta in Botswana before returning to Zimbabwe and then South Africa in the span of a few weeks! He then returned to Botswana, into Namibia to see the Caprivi Strip from where he briefly crossed the borders into Zambia and Angola before returning to Botswana. He is now flying around South Africa after returning from his third trip to Botswana. After a quick flight to KwaZulu-Natal he returned to Hartbeespoort before heading up to the Northern Cape.

Whilst in South Africa, he has visited the vulture restaurants at VulPro, Nootgedacht and the Lion and Rhino Park. We're very excited to keep tracking this wanderlust young guy!



Adoption Programme

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We asked a few of our adoptive parents why they chose to adopt a vulture...

Mariza Hamman, “One sees rhino anti-poaching and save the giraffe messages everywhere in the media but it seems we've classified a few animals as ugly or gross (vultures, hyenas, warthog) and to me it feels like it is easy for the world to try so save the pretty ones, but only a handful of people are fighting for the 'ugly' ones. My love for vultures started whilst doing a hike on the Olifants, having White-headed Vultures as our neighbors. Every time they flew over, it felt like we could touch these magnificent creatures. They were the most beautiful things. Everything about them fascinates me: their size, their beauty, their job in the ecosystem, the differences between them. It would be heartbreaking not to see them anymore, so LETS SAVE THEM.”

Mariza Hamman is the adoptive parent of three Cape Vultures, a breeding pair, Isolde and Tristan and a 2019 fledgling, Fidelio. The fledgling will be released in 2020.



Isolde & Tristan



Fidelio

Nicole Schoppner, “Vultures are not really native to Germany. The first time I saw them was in Disney’s “Dschungelbuch” when I was a little child. At this time I found vultures just funny. “As an adult I traveled five times to Africa by now and saw many vultures and became more and more fascinated about this fantastic and (for me) beautiful birds. Last year in Botswana we had an excellent guide. He told a lot about the importance, but also how endangered they are. After a while, back home, I started searching for a project. It was my very big wish to do something, to help if I can. So I found VulPro’s homepage and the possibility to adopt vultures. As you know, I adopted two and I love them. My husband Frank and I come to visit Shujaa and Elani and of course all the others and you in March, I am so excited!!!!”

Nicole is the adoptive parent of a Cape Vulture called Elani and an African White-backed Vulture called Shujaa.



Elani



Shujaa

Adoption Programme

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We asked a few of our adoptive parents why they chose to adopt a vulture...

Andrea Schreier, "I chose to adopt Johnny because I have a great love for wildlife, in particular African wildlife. I met Kerri at the IUCN re-introduction conference and she told me about VulPro's great efforts to conserve vultures and I got very excited about the opportunity to participate in some way. Vultures are such unique animals and they are so critical to our ecosystems. Adopting Johnny, who is named after Johnny Clegg, by the way, was my small way of helping out. I am a professor in an Animal Science department and I have a photo of Johnny on my door for students and other faculty to see. I hope they will ask me about him so I can tell them about VulPro and the very important work they do in South Africa."

Andrea Schreier is the adoptive parent of a Lappet-faced Vulture.



Johnny

Clive Vardakis, "I think it must be five years ago when I first adopted Brizzle. I was at work chatting to another Brit who had moved to South Africa some years ago and not sure how we got on to the conversation but vultures came up and he knew Kerri and passed on her details. After some communication I visited VulPro with my children, and we picked a vulture to sponsor. There was even a sign on the breeding pen originally. I really like vultures and I think they are kind of handsome in their own way and so comical when they are all feeding but more importantly, they do such an important job in the wild clearing away dead animals that they need our help and they are often overlooked as they aren't traditionally pretty like other animals."

Clive Vardakis is the adoptive parent of a Cape Vulture in our breeding colony.



Brizzle

Suzanne Corrigan, "I adopted Fionnbharr after I saw the BBC programme - Beauty in the Beast. I cannot believe what damage is being done by humans, with the use of toxic veterinary drugs and poaching. Totally destroying the basic ecosystems that all of us need now and in the future.

Maybe if a few more people like me (who are not loaded!) gave a little each month, then these essential birds can be saved. In the long run - saving ourselves and future generations."

Suzanne Corrigan is the adoptive parent of an African White-backed Vulture called Fionnbharr.



Fionnbharr

Adoption Programme

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We would like to introduce the following birds who have been adopted.

Our grateful thanks to the adoptive parents who decided to make a meaningful contribution to our conservation efforts by sponsoring the day-to-day living expenses of the bird/s they decided to add to their family.



CV PJ
John Turner



CV Ruth
Tony Weedon



CV Steve
Tony Weedon



CV Holly
Craig



Tjay
Tracey Robinson



WB Kira-Mathilda
Alexander



Bacchus Carlo (L)
Alexander



WB George
Ian



CV Lexi
Glenda Maguire



CV 2019 Poochy
Carol Smith



WB 2019
Bettina Boemans



CV 2019 Roger Poppins
Foxfeather Zenko



CV 2019 New Dawn
Jan Walker

The VulPro Vulture Restaurant and Hide

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The VulPro Vulture Restaurant and the Sean Williams Living Creatures Trust Hide.

The main objectives for our restaurant is to supplement the ever-decreasing food supply for vultures; to provide bone fragments which is an important source of essential calcium and provide safe food i.e. free of poisons and harmful drugs. We also get to monitor the vultures coming in to feed and are able to record numbers of visiting birds and those with patagial (wing) tags and leg bands. We can also determine the ratio between adult and immature vultures feeding at the restaurant on a regular basis.

We put out food on a daily basis during breeding season and thereafter on a regular basis as and when food is available. We are averaging 200 birds visiting at a time. In additions to vultures we get other bird species coming to share the carcasses we put out.

Situated approximately 12 meters away from our vulture restaurant, the Sean Williams Living Creatures Trust Hide offers both experienced and inexperienced photographers and bird watchers the opportunity to view and photograph vultures in close proximity. This is also where we do our monitoring without disturbing the birds as they feast.



Cultural India

Indian Folk-tales



The Blind Vulture is one of the most interesting stories/ tales from the collection of Hitopadesha Tales.

Once upon a time, there was a hill that sloped down to the banks of a river. At the bottom of the hill, there was a tree which made shelter for many birds. One day, a blind old Vulture came to live in the hollow of the tree. The birds welcomed the blind vulture and decided to give him a share of their food since he was old.

When the Blind Vulture saw birds' concern for him, he was overwhelmed with gratitude. He thought to himself, "As these birds are being so kind to me, it has become my duty to protect their young ones when they are away gathering food". After this, the Vulture used to get his food from the birds and in return, he took care of their young ones while they were away. So like this, all of them were passing their days happily.

One day, a cat passed by that tree when the birds were away. Hearing the noise of the young ones, she came near the tree with the hope of catching and eating the baby birds. But when the young ones saw her coming, they made a chirrup. The blind Vulture heard them and shouted, "Who is there?" On seeing the Vulture, the Cat got frightened and said to herself, "O God! I am as good as dead. But I need to be brave. I should try to gain his confidence".

At once, the Cat replied, "O wise one! I just came to pay my homage to you". The Vulture asked, "Who are you?" The Cat answered, "I am a Cat". The Vulture shouted, "Go away otherwise I'll eat you up". The Cat was clever and she made quick responses to the Vulture. She innocently said to the Vulture, "Sir, Listen to me first then you can decide further. It is not good that you are discarding me as I belong to a particular race".

The Vulture decided to listen to her. The Cat said, "I live on the other side of the river. I don't eat meat and take bath everyday in the river. I am doing great penance for my sins. I have heard much about your intelligence from the birds on the banks of the river. They told me that I should learn more about religion from you as you possess all knowledge. So, I came here to become your disciple and seek your blessings".

She further said, "But, I don't feel what the birds told me is true, when you got ready to kill a poor cat. You should have treated me well, after all guests are form of God. Even if you don't have any food to offer me, at least you could say something kind to me". The Old Vulture replied, "How can I trust you since you are carnivorous and young birds reside here". The Clever Cat was well-versed in tantrums.

She touched the ground and her ears as a sign of her honesty and replied, "I've read all scriptures and came to know that killing is immoral. The entire forest is full of herbs and vegetables. So why should I commit sin by killing birds?" The Vulture believed her and allowed her to stay with him in the hollow of the tree. With the passing days, the Cat started eating the young birds one by one without the knowledge of the Vulture.

When the birds found that their young ones were missing, they started looking for their kids. As soon as the Cat realized that situation is not in her favor, she quietly slipped away. Unknown about the happening, the blind Vulture lay down near the hollow of the tree where the Cat had thrown the bones of some of the birds eaten by her. When the Birds saw the bones of their young ones, at once they shouted, "The blind Vulture has eaten our innocent kids".

All of them got enraged by the ingratitude of the Vulture and they pecked him to death. The poor Vulture didn't even get the chance to defend himself.

Moral: Never treat someone whom you hardly know as a friend.



Comic Relief

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Q. What is a vulture's favourite game?

A. A Scavenger Hunt

Parent Vulture: "Let me tell you a story from when I was young..."

Chick: "oh okay, as long as it doesn't carrion too long."



"UGH, A CONTACT LENS. I WISH HE'D HAD CORRECTIVE SURGERY BECAUSE I HATE ARTIFICIAL INGREDIENTS."

Volunteering at VulPro at different times of the year

by Bettina Boemans

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Hi there! My name is Bettina Boemans from Germany and I have been volunteering at VulPro on a regular basis for the past 8 years. In 2013, I had the privilege of staying at the VulPro for a six month period, and have just made my 13th trip to the center! To put this into context, that is a total of 36 weeks spent volunteering at VulPro, with never a dull day!

Maybe you are also considering volunteering at VulPro, but you are not sure which season might be the best for you? I have been at VulPro throughout all the months of the year, so I'd like to describe the different seasons, the climate and the kind of work you can expect during your stay. As experience has shown, there are special seasons with special tasks, but things can change in the blink of an eye. Vulture emergencies always have first priority over other tasks, so schedules might not always go according to plan.

Let me take you on a journey to VulPro and enjoy the seasons together!

We start in January, South African summer. When you arrive in Johannesburg and take a one-hour drive to VulPro, make sure to bring some water. It's the hottest time of the year and there can be easily temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius. You will get the chance to see fantastic thunderstorms in the evenings and beautiful rainbows crossing the Magaliesberg Mountains.

The grass and bushes are green thanks to the rain. Summer means rehabilitation season at VulPro! Many vultures are struggling with the heat and will end up being exhausted and dehydrated. We often get calls and immediately head out to rescue any injured and grounded birds, ensuring that they are stabilized and treated as fast as possible.

From January through to March, before the breeding season, VulPro undertakes health checks on all vultures at the centre, to assess condition, status, and ensure that all the birds are in good health. This means lots of contact with the birds. We are catching each of them, taking blood samples for lead tests, feather samples for sexing, checking their weight, conditions etc. To make it less stressful for the birds we need to be quick and helping hands are always welcome.



Volunteering at VulPro at different times of the year

by Bettina Boemans

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Throughout the year, but mostly in the first quarter, VulPro is spending long days in the field doing power line surveys. This means we are walking along the power lines close to breeding colonies or in areas with increasing numbers of reported power line collisions for many kilometers, noting the GPS coordinates of the power line pylons and the type of structures so we can send a report to the electricity supply company and force them to react and mitigate the unsafe structures.

Many of those structures are not safe for huge birds like vultures with a wingspan of almost 3 metres. They can easily touch two lines at the same time while roosting or touch earthing lines, causing fatal electrocutions. Vultures can even electrocute by sitting on a pylon and defecating, known as streamers. Vultures can't see thin power lines while flying and often collide. Mostly the vultures end up falling from the sky with broken wings and are easy prey to predators. Alternatively, they will slowly die from starvation when they are not able to fly and look for food anymore. Unsafe power lines and power line pylons are one of the main reasons for vulture injuries or fatalities



March is the beginning of the breeding season. The vultures in the breeding enclosure are busy copulating and building their nests. You can hear them all over the place enjoying each other. We supply many bags of nesting material every day and you will not believe how fast the birds grab as many branches as possible and take it to their nests. Some nests are smaller; some nests will be massive within a few days. Monitoring breeding behavior, and identifying breeding pairs is a critically important during this period.



In April, the temperatures drop a little and we are heading to the dry season. When I lived at VulPro for 6 months during the South African winter, I did not see any rain for 5 months. However, the South African winter is much better than German summer! You will experience the special moment, whilst checking the breeding birds in the morning and the first vulture starts incubating the first egg of the season. Most eggs will be replaced by a dummy egg and taken to an incubator. It is important to always have the perfect temperature and humidity there and turn the eggs 3 times a day. The eggs will be candled in the evening to see if the vulture embryo is growing. Literally allowing you to witness the development and growth of new life. Hope for the species.

Volunteering at VulPro at different times of the year

by Bettina Boemans

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During May, the captive-bred chicks from the previous breeding season will be released from the purpose built release enclosure on the Magaliesberg mountains, after an acclimatization period. The moment you open a crate to release a captive-bred or a rehabilitated vulture, is one of the best moments you will experience at VulPro. Every time it gives me goose bumps when I get the chance to give a healthy vulture back to nature, and see how it enjoys its freedom. That's what we are all fighting for!!!



One very special, magical vulture moment you might witness during the month of June, is when the first chick hatches. I will never forget the moment when I was turning an egg in the incubator and suddenly the egg started talking to me! I had no idea that you could hear a vulture chick inside the egg and this incredibly cute sound immediately brought tears to my eyes. When the chick internally pips it won't take long and you can see the most precious gift on earth: A baby vulture!!! Sometimes the chick needs hatching assistance. Piece by piece the dry eggshell will be removed over an extended period, always making sure no intact veins will be cut. Once the chicks are strong enough, they are returned to the breeding enclosure to be parent reared.



More and more chicks are hatching and second clutches might be laid. The following weeks and months are incredible, as you can see

how fast vulture chicks are growing. From the almost naked, helpless chick, to a cute and always hungry bundle of fluff, to a massive chick that looks like a stuffed Thanksgiving Turkey, to a proud young vulture with fast growing feathers...

It is tempting to spend all day next to the enclosure watching this miracle of creation.



Volunteering at VulPro at different times of the year

by Bettina Boemans

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From May to October, VulPro undertakes their population monitoring of Cape and African White-backed Vultures; an experience that will never be forgotten. At the beginning of the breeding season, counts are undertaken to determine the number of active nests at each site. Follow up surveys are undertaken around July in order to determine the number of chicks at each survey site. While in many colonies the numbers of vultures are still decreasing, it remains a testament to the hard work VulPro undertakes to keep the last remaining individuals alive.

Every first Saturday of September is International Vulture Awareness Day and the world is celebrating the birds. What do you think about celebrating this special day at VulPro, the leading Vulture Conservation Programme in Africa? Sometimes we'll organize a gala dinner to raise funds and awareness, sometimes school kids will visit VulPro for a tour or we'll have vulture information stands in public areas. To me, every day at VulPro is a perfect Vulture Awareness Day!



In October the first captive bred chicks will fledge and explore the enclosures. They need to learn to fight at the carcass or they will stay hungry. That's a young vultures' challenge. They also train their muscles and you can see the excitement when they take their first careful flight from one corner of the enclosure to the opposite one. The temperatures are getting hot and the first raindrops finally fall. South Africa's nature and colors are coming back to life after several dry and dusty months. November is the beginning of the rehab season mentioned above and we are removing the nests from the breeding enclosure. The vulture pairs need to recover from the exhausting breeding season and prepare for the next one, the never-ending circle of life.



In addition, we are working hard feeding the vultures, cleaning the enclosures, crushing bones, fixing perches, guiding tours, giving talks, doing awareness campaigns, go out to rescue injured vultures, do re-sightings in the vultures' restaurant, giving each other a helping hand, sharing our ups and downs, get stronger, and grow together. At the end of a tough and challenging year, with many heart-breaking losses, overwhelming magical moments and the wild vultures circling peacefully in the sky we are all celebrating Christmas together as a huge, happy family with the same passion for vultures and the shared desire to change the world for the better.

Meet our Volunteer

Ron Webb

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Ron Webb
Senior Bird Keeper
San Diego Zoo Safari Park

I live in Escondido, California, USA. I have been working at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park for 23 years. I am a Senior Bird Keeper and have cared for California condors and Andean condors for the past 21 years. Duties include caring for the breeding pairs, artificial incubation of the eggs, puppet-rearing chicks (if necessary), preparing fledglings for release to the wild, and working with our partner organizations to transport the birds to the release sites. Most of my experience is with New World vultures, so my time spent at VulPro was especially enriching for me in that I was able to be immersed in the world of Old World vultures. It was great working with the variety of vulture species living at VulPro, but a close favorite of mine was the White-backed vultures... so cute! VulPro is a very exciting and effective organization that makes an immediate difference at the grassroots level. Kerri and her entire staff are so inspirational and full of admiration, passion, and enthusiasm for vultures and the African ecosystem. My short time at VulPro left a wonderful impression on me and is definitely a highlight of my career. I can't wait to come back!



Meet our Volunteer

Gen Anderson

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Gen Anderson
General Curator

St. Augustine Alligator Farm Zoological Park

Gen Anderson is the General Curator of the St. Augustine Alligator Farm Zoological Park in Florida, an accredited zoo by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), and a Steering Committee member for the African Vulture SAFE program. The zoo is world-renowned for its crocodilians, but it also maintains an impressive bird collection which includes African vultures. She first fell in love with avian scavengers after first meeting and working closely with a Black vulture beginning back in 2000. St. Augustine constructed a “Birds of Africa” habitat in 2006 for Cape and Hooded vultures, Marabou storka, and Black-crowned cranes, focusing in particular on the vultures. Consistent breeding successes with Cape and Hooded vultures resulted in receiving an AZA Plume Award Long-term Propagation award in 2018.

Gen’s trip to VulPro was financially supported by her zoo’s conservation fund in order to gain first-hand knowledge and experience with the organization and wild South African vulture populations. Her experience was well-rounded as she was able to participate in daily husbandry, data collection, vulture re-sightings, releases, and breeding colony field research.

VulPro is a phenomenal organization and a leader in the field, committed to all aspects of vulture conservation in southern Africa.



Meet our Volunteer

Adriano Kälin

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Adriano Kälin

I studied Veterinary Medicine in Zurich, Switzerland. I have always loved working with birds and have a special interest in avian orthopaedics.

VulPro was a perfect opportunity for me to learn about these big birds of prey. The daily tasks showed me how much work and resources are needed to care for vultures, and provide them appropriate animal welfare. I was lucky enough to be there during the breeding season which allowed me to gain insight into the breeding program at VulPro, as well as undertake critically important field work such as population monitoring.

The people at VulPro are wonderful to be around. They are a joy to work with and swap ideas, as well as fun people to be around after work. It definitely will not be my last time there!



With thanks to our Sponsors

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