



# THE VULPRO FLYER

## &

# RESTAURANT NEWSLETTER

## JUNE 2017

“ 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)



# Executive Summary

With a blink of an eye, 2017 has not only arrived but is already on the doorsteps of the halfway mark. This year has been nothing but that of a rollercoaster ride where we have shared major accomplishments but also some huge losses. It has left us breathless, exhausted and exhilarated and it is through the sheer dedication and closeness of the VulPro team that we continue to lead the way into saving Africa's vultures.

However, this is not possible without the incredible support of our collaborators, supporters, donors and volunteers and I simply cannot thank each and everyone of you enough. In this edition, you will meet some of our incredibly, dedicated volunteers. All of whom came through to South Africa, spent their own hard earned money for the purpose of making a difference to each and every single vulture possible. These hard working individuals have given me so much hope for the future and have inspired me to work that much harder for the plight of vultures. I am truly honoured and moved to have met each and everyone of them whom I know, will continue to fly the vulture and VulPro flag high.

As always, this edition will give you some insights into our rehabilitation work, some interesting and yet quite hilarious field excursions and then of course, the dreaded threats of power lines. Our captive breeding programme is always an exciting aspect in which we showcase and boast about the beauty and magnificence of having the opportunity of directly contributing to population supplementation programmes. Lastly, I am extremely proud to showcase VulPro's educational after school programme in collaboration with Roots & Shoots. This is another foundation in which VulPro has the opportunity to educate, motivate and influence young minds with the possibility of making the world a better place for all species.

There is always so much to share with you, we hope you enjoy some of these stories where you get a brief glimpse of our daily happenings and dedication towards saving OUR vultures.

With humbled thanks

Kerri Wolter

CEO

# The VulPro Flyer

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# Rehabilitation Update

	<u>Rescued and brought in</u>	<u>Released</u>	<u>Died</u>	<u>Euthanized</u>	<u>Transferred donated</u>	<u>Number resident on 1/6/2017</u>
<u>Cape Vulture</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>143</u>
<u>African White-backed Vulture</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>43</u>
<u>Lappet-Faced Vulture</u>						<u>8</u>
<u>White-headed vulture</u>						<u>2</u>
<u>Palm-nut vulture</u>						<u>2</u>
<u>Andean Condor</u>						<u>2</u>
<u>European Hobby</u>	<u>1</u>		<u>1</u>			<u>0</u>
<u>Wahlberg's Eagle</u>						<u>0</u>
<u>Spotted Eagle-Owl</u>						<u>0</u>
<u>African Fish Eagle</u>						<u>1</u>
<u>Black Eagle</u>						<u>2</u>
<u>Bateleur Eagle</u>				<u>1</u>		<u>0</u>
<u>Spotted Eagle Owl</u>	1					1
<u>Black Sparrow Hawk</u>	<u>2</u>					<u>1</u>
<u>Barn owl</u>	3	2				<u>1</u>
<u>White-faced owl</u>	<u>1</u>					
<u>White stork</u>	<u>1</u>			<u>1</u>		
<u>Black-breasted snake eagle</u>	<u>1</u>			<u>1</u>		
<u>Total</u>	60	17	6	6	0	206

# Rehabilitation Update



Vulture rehabilitation remains forefront amongst VulPro's activities.

So far, we have been kept very busy with our rehabilitation work, as grounded and injured birds continue to stream into our facility. This sadly emphasises the fact that the threats posed to vultures are still numerous and unrelenting. On the positive side, we are receiving more reports from the public concerning vultures, indicating that awareness and empathy for this species is on the rise.

January stands out with numerous cases coming in, most of which were requiring amputations. Sadly, many of the birds received are not releasable, but these individuals will continue to contribute to conservation through our captive breeding programme.

Our motto "We drive for birds", has truly come to light in the past few months, with travels all across South Africa including Bloemhof, Mokopane, SchweizerReneke, Thabizimbi, Swart Water, Poffadder, Vryburg, Kimberly, Eastern Cape and Lichtenberg to collect injured and grounded vultures. We are blessed with a fantastic team of dedicated staff, who willingly take on hundreds of thousands of kilometres of road, even if it is just to save a single vulture.

We have had many memorable moments in our rehabilitation this year, namely the stories of a vulture named Hope and another named Poffadder. We share these beautiful tales with you further in the newsletter.

DHL has continued to be amazing supporters of VulPro, couriering several vultures to us from the Eastern Cape. Without caring and dedicated supporters, staff and members of the public, many of these birds would have been lost.

Thank you





# A story of Hope



One of the cases that truly stood out this season is that of a vulture named Hope. Hope is a female African White-backed vulture which was collected after VulPro received a report from the Schweizer Reneke area.

This was a 12hour rescue mission just to collect the bird. Many more hours would be spent fighting to save her life.



Upon examination, it was revealed that Hope was a victim of an electrocution and had also consumed poison. She had severe damage to both wings and was barely strong enough to lift her head.

She quickly received critical care and initially had to be force fed and tubed for fluids as she was too weak to do this herself.

After 3 days, Hope showed that she had fight left in her. She showed amazing resilience and strength and soon started feeding herself.

Sadly, her wings were damaged extensively, and despite our best efforts, both had to be amputated.

Our general rule is that it would be more humane to euthanize in the case of a double amputation, but she fought so hard we could not bring ourselves to make this decision.

Now, Hope runs around with her companions in a way that can only be described as the Looney Tunes's Road Runner.

# Poffadder's Story



On the 7<sup>th</sup> of May 2017, VulPro received an urgent call about a African White-backed vulture in a very bad way. This poor boy was so dehydrated and emaciated that he was constantly having seizures. Now, anyone who is familiar with VulPro, knows that we drive for birds. So after watching the heartbreaking footage of this beautiful creature fighting to survive, we enquired about their location... Poffadder.

Now for those of you who do not know, Poffadder is a tiny little speck of a town, located in the Northern Cape, approximately 50km from the Namibian border.

At the time, we had never heard of this town, and quickly jumped onto google maps.

Mmm... 1014km travel distance. To anyone, this would seem a daunting task and many might ponder if saving a single bird is worth all this effort. VulPro does not ponder, VulPro drives.

So at 8pm on Sunday evening, Barend Craven and Kim Caldwell loaded crates and medical supplies, in Barend's private vehicle no less, and hit the very long road.

Fuelled by Ouma rusks and their own body weight in caffeine, these 2 vulture heroes drove for 12 hours non-stop to get to this vulture.

At 8 am on Monday morning, after a few panicked moments of believing that this town did not exist, they finally arrived at Poffadder.



# Poffadder's Story

As Kim slowly opened the crate, her heart stopped as this poor bird appeared to have already died. But a small flicker of an eye gave them hope. They quickly administered vitally needed fluids, and gave this poor bird its first meal in who knows how long. But there was no time for relief to set in just yet... it was still another 12 hour drive back to VulPro, now with a very weak bird on board.

These 2 vulture heroes continued undeterred, with no sleep, knowing that they had to get this bird back to VulPro. The road back entailed several pit-stops to give the vulture fluids every 2 hours, mainly backlit by the yellow lights of petrol stations and very odd looks from the inhabitants... Although we accept as vulture people, we have a little bit of crazy inside of us.

Finally, after a full 24 hours on the road, Barend and Kim arrived back at VulPro on Monday night, with the vulture looking much better than before, with an appetite to match.

He was affectionately named, Poffadder. After another meal and some medication to stop the seizures, Poffadder was retired to VulPro's CEO, Kerri Wolter's spare

bathroom for the night.

Poffadder is doing so much better and has now joined his fellow injured companions in one of VulPro's hospital camps. We are optimistic that he will make a full recovery and be re-introduced into the wild population.





# Interesting facts and humour

## Oldest Instrument (40,000 years old)

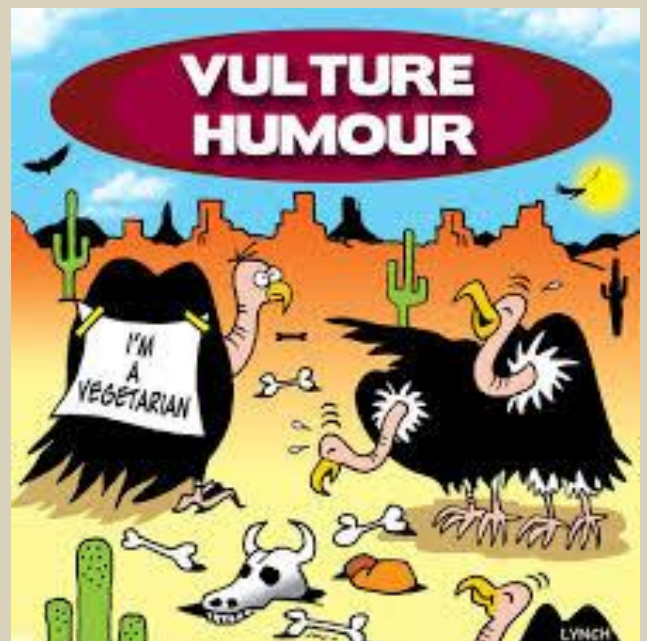


This 40,000-year-old vulture-bone flute was found in southern Germany. Some scientists believe that music may have given our ancestors a strategic advantage over Neanderthals.



KEEP  
CALM  
AND  
CARRION

BIRDORABLE.COM / VULTURES



# Our vulture breeding is EGGcellent

With breeding season in full swing, there is much excitement at our VulPro facilities. With many “oooo’s” and “awww’s” focused on our breeding enclosures, we are very happy to report we have had quite a few additions so far, sadly, not all are viable.

The first eggs is due to hatch on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June and we cannot wait! We will continue with our normal breeding protocol whereby we remove the eggs, incubate, and then hand rear the chicks for 2 weeks before returning them to their parents. This is done purely to increase their chances of survival.

Our breeding statistics for this season to date are as follows:

## African White-backed vultures

We have had a total of 5 eggs produced by our African White-backed vultures to date.

2 of these have been confirmed as fertile, 2 as infertile, and 1 egg was cracked before we could retrieve it, although we suspect it was infertile as there was no successful copulation recorded.

The fifth egg never saw the light of day. In this case, we noticed one of our African White-backed females showing a lot of discomfort and bloating whilst moving around. We suspected she may be egg bound and immediately took her to the vet for assessment. “Egg-bound”

refers to a situation in which the egg may become stuck within the female and she is not able to pass it. This sometimes results from an egg being too large. Our suspicions were confirmed and the vet had to burst the egg within the female and drain the cavity. If this was not done, it would have been fatal for the female.



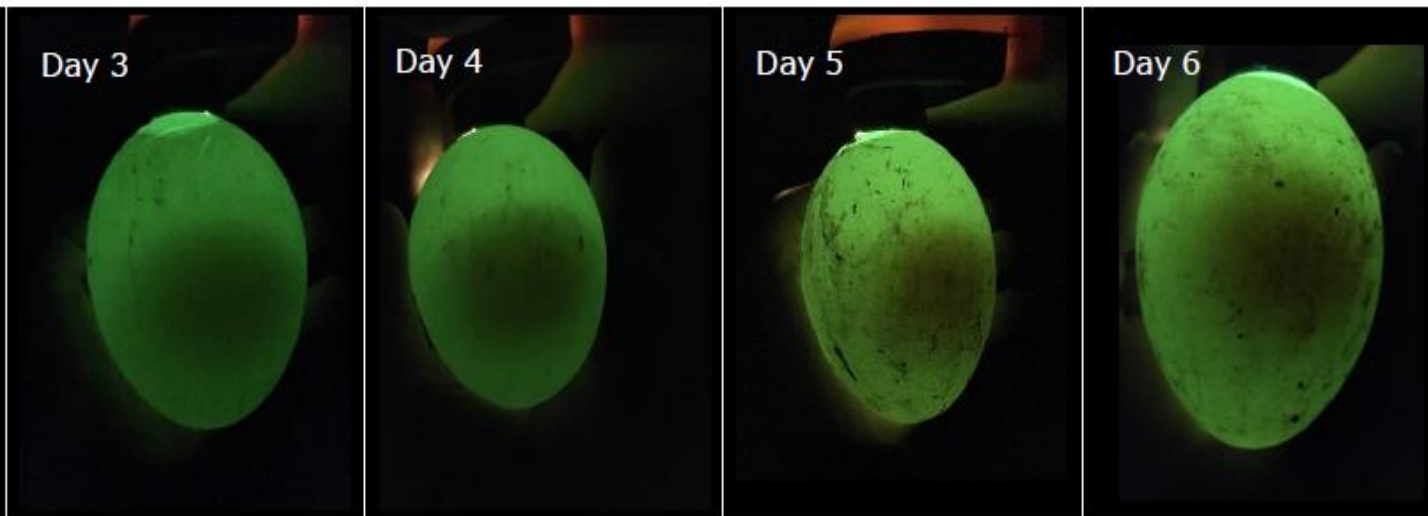
We have decided to double clutch 2 of our African White-backed vulture pairs. This refers to the process whereby we remove the egg from the nest and do not replace it with a dummy egg. This stimulates them to breed again and produce a second egg for the season. Our decision to do this is based on the 2 females giving us infertile eggs as they are single parents. As they have selected isolated nesting ledges and have our assistance, we believe they are fully capable of raising a chick on their own. We have never done this before but are optimistic..

## Cape vultures

We have had a total of 14 Cape vulture eggs. 9 of these are fertile, 2 infertile, 2 to be confirmed, and unfortunately, 1 died. We are currently unsure as to the cause of death.

We have also decided to double clutch 5 of our Cape vulture pairs in the hope that they produce a second egg for the season. Our reason behind this is to give the pairs with infertile eggs a chance to also raise a chick due to the heartache and passion these birds have in raising their own chick.

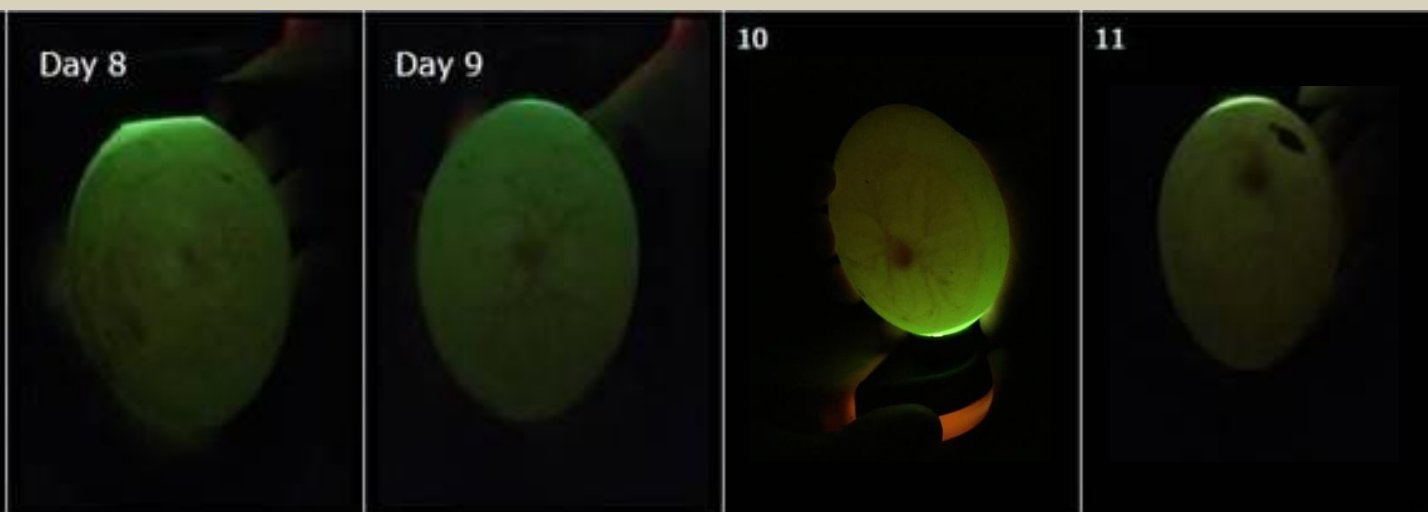
# Candling



Most of the excitement during breeding season is focussed on the period when the chicks hatch however, there is another very special event that takes place during this time... candling.

Candling refers to the activity whereby a light is placed against the egg, illuminating its contents. This allows us to determine whether the egg is fertile or not, and also allows us to monitor the development process.

Watching life develop within these eggs is truly a beautiful experience.



# Completion of Nooitgedacht Release Enclosure- A dream realised

During January 2017, we commenced the construction of a new release enclosure, located on the Nooitgedacht Game Reserve where the Nooitgedacht breeding colony is located.. This is a first of its kind in Africa.

The new release / flight enclosure will house captive bred and rehabilitated Cape Vultures anywhere from 6 months up to two years until release. In the past, we have found that those released at the VulPro facility, remain on the property.

Thus, by moving them here, allowing them to acclimatize for a period, and then releasing them, we hope they will remain and breed in this area. This is critical for the success of the population supplementation programme and is a small stepping stone to reintroduce vultures back to historical breeding sites in southern Africa..

It still feels very surreal to know that within the next two weeks, we will be moving the first vultures to this new release site, located on the highest point of the Magaliesberg mountain range. One thing is for sure, these will be vultures with a view!!!





# Powerline Survey Updates-

## Anzelle van Wyk

Power lines are one of the major threats that cause vulture populations to deteriorate rapidly, either by direct electrocutions or power line collisions. Vultures make use of power lines to roost on, as the structures are usually the highest roosting spots available which is preferred by vultures for safety purposes, as well as ease of taking off and catching thermals.

We are often asked why vultures collide with power lines and the main reason for this is that the birds are not adapted to worry about unnatural objects in the sky. They are too busy foraging ie looking around for carcasses, having fun in the sky, and watching other vultures and scavengers that they are not focused on obstacles in their flight path. Colliding with these wires then causes serious injuries, breaking their wings and / or legs etc resulting in many of these birds being permanently disabled.

VulPro started power line surveys towards the end of 2014 for the purpose of building up a database to get accurate, representative information on vultures utilizing these

structures and to estimate the mortality rates of vultures due to power line incidents. In addition, we are able to estimate hotspot areas in need of urgent mitigation in which to halt and reduce some of these mortalities and injuries surrounding breeding, roosting and feeding sites.

In order to gather baseline data for each survey, a strict protocol has been developed and followed. Ground surveys are done by walking below and along power lines, assessing each structure and collecting data relating to vulture and bird of prey usage. Over the past 3 years, there have been a number of power line surveys undertaken. A total of 76,35 kilometers in walking distance has been covered, 440 structures of power lines surveyed, with a total of 36 vultures found dead on these lines either electrocuted or collisions. See below the power line statistics summary:



# Powerline Survey Updates- Anzelle van Wyk

## Power line Statistics Summary

Year	Date	Area	Kilometers Surveyed (KM)	Structures	Fatalities
2014	03-Oct	Kransberg CV Colony , Thabazimbi	2,4	22	10
2014	13-Oct	Lichtenbur, Biesiesfontein	1,5	20	0
2014	18-Oct	Rietfontein,NW, S of R514	2,4	26	0
2016	08-Jan	Skeerpoort, NW, 6 km from colony	1,25	15	2
2016	30-Mar	Lichtenburg Game Breeding Centre	7,4	30	0
2016	23-Apr	N of PTA Road to S of R514	1,92	3	1
2016	20-Jul	Outside Derby	26,5	140	7
2016	02-Nov	De Rust D22, S of Skeerpoort CV colony	0,7	12	1 (2015)
2017	02 - 14 Mar	Mokopane, Off R101	15	109	3
2017	26-Apr	Upper Cathcart EC	2,28	12	10
2017	09-May	Askari Reserve	15	51	3
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>76,35</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>36</b>

Vultures all over the country are affected by power line collisions and electrocutions. The following photos are unfortunate losses of some of our captive bred vultures having succumbed to these threats. The first one (Tag 148) was electrocuted in Randfontein, Gauteng Province. It is clear that this was a horrific, explosive death as this bird was carrying a GPS device that was found 10 m away from his body due to the explosion. His left wing burst open revealing flesh and tendons (Figure 1). The second one (Tag 149) was electrocuted just outside of VulPro's property in Rietfontein, North West Province (Figure 2).

# Powerline Survey Updates- Anzelle van Wyk



Figure 1. Flesh and tendons revealed after the explosion with singed feathers seen underneath the wing.



Figure 2. Tagged vulture 149 electrocuted just outside VulPro's property.

## Conclusion

We cannot expect the wild vulture populations to stabilize and/or increase with the rate we are losing them due to power line collisions and electrocutions jointly with all other threats.

It is of utmost importance to work together in saving vulture species all over the world and make sure that the threats, which can be addressed, is done so sooner rather than later.

Power line structures and cables can be made safer and this threat can be successful addressed as long as we all speak the same language and work collectively and together. Where there is a will, there is a way.



# Wild captures at Olifants Private Game Reserve March 2017- Maggie Hirschauer

The jar of menthol rub was passed around, some electing to spread it under their nose before even approaching the vehicle. Awaiting us was an impala carcass, ripened by several unsuccessful days in the sun. We climbed into the vehicle and departed for the capture site.

At long last, after many days and hours, our persistence was rewarded. The blue sky showed its hidden secrets in the form of vulture silhouettes, circling above the carcass. When sitting in waiting, one has much time to think, and once again we were reminded of this species we are trying to save. The important role they play and how, if they were gone, the smell of decay would be the norm.

We sat in the vehicle from dawn, eagerly awaiting our opportunity as the vultures circled overhead. Patience is a vitally important trait in this field, and we had shown so much of it when finally, our luck seemed to be turning.





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Spotting the carcass in the mid-morning light, the vultures started to descend. At first hesitant, these creatures carefully assessed their surroundings for any potential threat/s before starting to feed. Soon, there were approximately 50 African White-backed vultures, 20 Hooded vultures and several Lappet-faced vultures, preening and adorning the surrounding bush veld with their presence. After many longing stares, a single brave White-backed vulture ventured the first mouthful, starting the feeding frenzy. Within 20 seconds, 2 vultures had stepped into our lassos which were laid around the carcass.

We slowly approached the vultures on foot, and once in range, we safely secured their heads and feet so we could free them from the lassos.

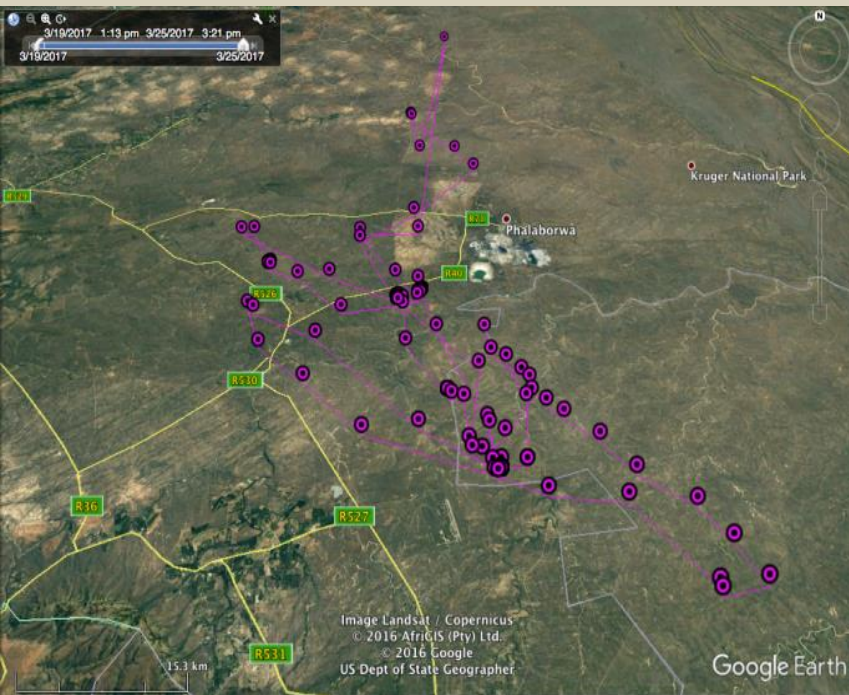
Both birds caught were immature African White-backed vultures, aged around 2 or 3 years old. To minimise stress, we place one individual in a

wooden vulture crate whilst we commenced working on the other. We followed our usual protocol which included fitting a SAfRing around the leg, placement of patagial tags, and the mounting of a 10 gram patagial GPS unit. We gathered additional data such as head measurements, condition and blood samples for the purpose of sexing. These samples are also given to the National Research Foundation's Biobank for record keeping. Fifteen minutes later, both birds had been processed and released.

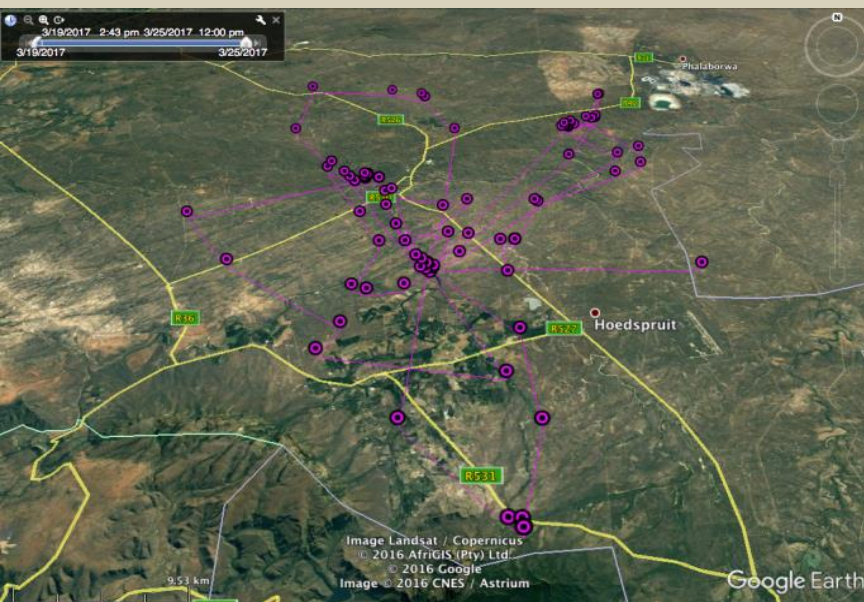
As can be seen on the satellite maps, both these individuals have shown some interesting range movements, both venturing through Limpopo and Zimbabwe, before parting ways with one heading back to South Africa, the other into Mozambique. Now, 2 months down the line, both vultures are back in South Africa, mainly ranging through the Limpopo Province.



# Wild captures at Olifants Private Game Reserve March 2017- Maggie Hirschauer



Movements of AWB 382



Movements of AWB 392

This capture was one of several taking place at the Olifants River Private Game Reserve. VulPro aims to send staff on a regular basis for captures, fitment of tracking devices, and annual breeding surveys in order to gain more information about the birds ranging in the reserve. To track these birds, follow African White-backed Vultures tag 382 and 392 on VulPro's 'Vulture Tracking' website, at <http://www.vulpro.com/vulture-tracking/>.





# Meet our General Assistant-Charne Wilhelmi



Charne joined the VulPro team in March of 2017. She has taken the role of General Assistant of VulPro.

Here's a little bit about her: I have had a passion for nature and conservation from a very young age. I finally got to pursue these passions in 2008 when I spent a few months obtaining my Field Guiding License.

Soon after, I left this field to pursue further studies in Nature Conservation. I graduated in 2014 with my BTech Degree in Nature Conservation Cum Laude.

I have been very blessed to gain various forms of exposure in this field including field guiding, veldt management, game farm management, guest relations and various other aspects of Conservation. After spending a year in the field in North-West Botswana, I returned to Pretoria. Here I joined the Rietvlei Nature Reserve where I spent a year and a half working intimately with Rhinos and Lions.

At this point I realized it was time to pursue another passion of mine... Vultures.

When presented the opportunity to join the VulPro team, I grabbed it with both hands. It has been an amazing experience so far filled with so many different and new adventures that I cannot wait to see what the future holds.



# VulPro Fundraising Gala Extravaganza!

The poster features a central white background with a large, stylized feather graphic in shades of green, blue, and purple. At the top, the VulPro logo is displayed with the website address www.vulpro.com. Below this, the Leopard Lodge logo is shown, identifying it as a function venue and conference centre. The main title 'Presents VulPro's Fundraising Gala' is written in a decorative, purple font. Key event details are listed in purple text, including the date (1 September 2017), venue (Leopard Lodge Hartbeespoort), and time (18:00 for 19:00). The poster also highlights welcome drinks on the lawn, the 'Extravaganza' theme and dress code, the MC (Simon Gear), and the ticket cost (R400.00 per person). It mentions a cash bar, prizes for auction, and that all proceeds go to VulPro. The ticket purchase email is charnewilhelmi@gmail.com, and the RSVP date is 10 August 2017. Silhouettes of a person in traditional attire are visible on the left and right sides of the poster.

**VULPRO**  
www.vulpro.com

**&**

**LEOPARD LODGE**  
FUNCTION VENUE & CONFERENCE CENTRE

**Presents VulPro's  
Fundraising Gala**

**Date: 1 September 2017**  
**Venue: Leopard Lodge Hartbeespoort**  
**Time: 18:00 for 19:00**

**Welcome drinks to be served on the  
lawn overlooking Hartbeespoort  
Dam**

**Theme and Dress code:  
EXTRAVAGANZA**

**MC for the night: Simon Gear  
and Guest Speakers**

**Cost: R400.00 per person  
(includes welcome drinks, 3 course  
meal & entertainment till late)**

**Cash Bar\*Prizes up for Auction\* All  
proceeds go to VulPro\***

**TICKET PURCHASES: CHARNEWILHELM1@GMAIL.COM**

**RSVP: 10 AUGUST 2017**

We are very excited to announce that we will be holding our fundraising gala on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2017.

This is a very important event for our organisation as it assists with raising funds which are used to continue our vitally important conservation work.

The gala evening will be taking place at the beautiful Leopard Lodge in Hartbeespoort Dam and we promise it will be a night to remember!

This year's theme is "Extravaganza!". The evening will be filled with bold colours, beauty and eloquence. It will be the largest event ever hosted by VulPro and may hold a few surprises.

There will be fantastic entertainment, beautiful gourmet food, a variety of welcome drinks and of course, some phenomenal prizes up for auction.

So be sure not to miss out on the event of the year!

Tickets: R400.00 per person- This includes welcome drinks and a 3 course gourmet experience.

Cash bar is available.

To reserve your tickets please contact: [charnewilhelmi1@gmail.com](mailto:charnewilhelmi1@gmail.com).

Should you require accommodation, please contact Leopard Lodge: [reservations@leopardlodge.co.za](mailto:reservations@leopardlodge.co.za)



# Meet our Volunteers



**Bernette Louw**

As a volunteer at VulPro, you are given the opportunity to be involved – you are encouraged to participate in all the work and duties and I really enjoyed that. I quickly became comfortable with the daily chores and tasks and loved how the staff involved me in so many areas, from feeding to cleaning, from picking up birds to holding them.

Being so close to these magnificent birds has given me new insight.

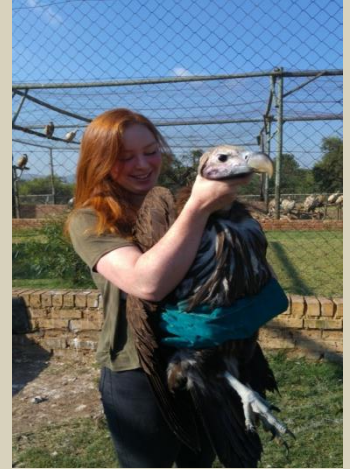
Vultures are curious, fun and have a comical way about them when investigating new things, they show excitement and appreciation, and they express a tenderness towards their mates that is truly touching. They are also serious, sensitive and intense. When they looked at me, their piercing stare touched my heart, every time!

I have come away from VulPro with a deeper knowledge and understanding, more commitment to these birds than ever before and so much gratitude.



**Daniel Colin**

All in all I had amazing time with VulPro, there was never a dull moment and I consider it nothing short of an honour to be able to have had a firsthand view of their work and helped them out with what they are doing for these magnificent species. While I initially started out passionate about vultures I left with an absolute love for them. I saw a side to vultures I never dreamed of and I wish this organisation every bit of luck in their endeavour of safeguarding these natural marvels. I can't thank Kerri and the team enough for making my stay a memorable one and I hope to see the place again very soon.



**Jennifer White**

March 2017 was an unforgettable part of my life and I will always continue to support Kerri and her team and all the work they do. I hope I will be able to return in the near future to see everyone again and make even more of a difference. I recommend to anyone who reads this that they do their research and support this incredible organisation, whether that be a simple donation or getting on a flight to South Africa and physically joining in at VulPro and I can guarantee you'll be welcomed and valued by all members there.

# Education- Collaboration between VulPro and Roots and Shoots- Rita Groenewald



Roots & Shoots is the global humanitarian and environmental youth outreach programme of the Jane Goodall Institute. Their purpose is to inspire and empower people to become responsible citizens and environmental stewards through education, programmes and grassroots initiatives, by promoting an understanding of the interconnectedness between communities, the environment and animals. The programme is about making positive change happen—for people, for animals and for the environment.

In South Africa, there are now several groups that are active in 5 provinces. VulPro has joined this team and we are thrilled to have this after school educational programme up and running at VulPro. Weekly lessons are being held on Wednesdays after school at VulPro's lovely educational centre. The group is primarily made up of youngsters from Kameeldrift Primary school, and they attend with wonderful enthusiasm. We would also like to thank the school, particularly Jaco Joubert, who has shown wonderful support of this initiative and enabled the school bus to transport the participants to VulPro.

After discussing ways that our group could

become more compassionate towards other people in their community during the previous school term, our attention is currently on animals. These youngsters are so privileged to be able to be learning about the plight of many endangered animals in South Africa at VulPro, since they see first-hand how many of our actions impact various birds of prey, and of course the vultures.

Roots & Shoots is guided by Dr Jane's philosophy that "every individual matters, every individual has a role to play, every individual makes a difference." Roots & Shoots members learn the importance of caring for others and at the same time develop self-respect, confidence in themselves, and hope for the future.

The program connects people of every age, race, culture, religion or economic background in a vibrant global network, and we look forward to Skype chats with similar groups in other countries later this year.

If you would like to join us on Wednesdays please contact Rita on [rita@rootsandshoots.org.za](mailto:rita@rootsandshoots.org.za) or Charne on [charnewilhelmi1@gmail.com](mailto:charnewilhelmi1@gmail.com)



# Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden's Kitso Eco-Centre promoting vulture conservation with VulPro.- Alice Aubrey

Recently my 12 year old daughter asked me what kind of animal I would be if I could choose, I was able to answer with little hesitation, 'a vulture'. When the inevitable 'why Mommy?' came, my answer was something like this; imagine being able to fly so high and see so far – travel across the whole of southern Africa in a matter of days. You wouldn't have to hunt or kill for food and you generally still get to hang out with other vultures. How cool would that be?!

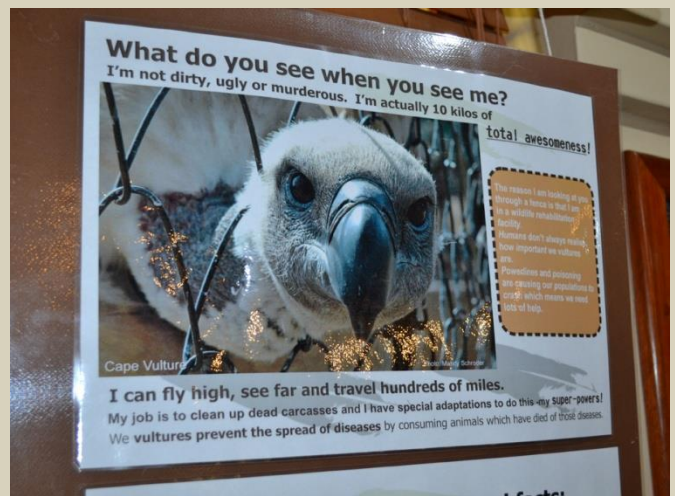
I have always loved vultures but confess I didn't really know much about them until I was working on revamping our Kitso Eco-Centre(visitors' centre) at Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden (WSNBG).

The underlying theme of the visitor's centre is the importance of 'underdog' species which are often feared by people. Ironically many of these persecuted creatures perform vital services for humankind.

I met Kerri and her team at VulPro in July 2016 to see the work being done there and to find out more about people's perceptions of vultures. I decided to devote a whole section of the centre to these fascinating birds. VulPro very generously supplied artefacts for display, beautiful images and lots of VulPro educational booklets.

The booklets have proven enormously popular with both the school groups passing through the centre, and with weekend family

visitors. The WSNBG's Environmental Education Unit runs a learning programme which offers curriculum-linked environmental educational tours for schools. I find I need to replenish the VulPro booklet stock every few days, even daily if there are lots of groups. The colourful layout and fun activities contained in the booklets are hugely appealing to children.





# Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden's Kitso Eco-Centre promoting vulture conservation with VulPro.- Alice Aubrey

Regarding the display, the vulture's egg and the size of the flight feather seem to evoke the biggest reactions. I have witnessed children spotting these and then rushing off to drag their parents in to 'come and see!' They usually want to know if the egg is real (our one is, and not a dummy egg) and I explain that it was most likely an infertile egg which has been emptied out.

The poster displays are predominantly created from laminated paper signs (made in-house) and with reclaimed materials such as lath pole offcuts and old marketing banners as backing.

In addition to the vulture feature in the centre, there are displays relating to insects and pollinators, snakes, the biodiversity of the WSNBG and the global plastic pollution crisis. There is also a taxidermy display which dates from the original centre installation, approximately 2004.

The centre was reopened in early December 2016, in time for the school holidays. Special thanks go to all who helped (and still help) with making it all happen.





# Meet our Long term volunteers- Tamsyn and Tim Overton



I have always had a calling to work with the wildlife of southern Africa. I was born in Namibia but have spent most of my life in the United Kingdom. I trained as a veterinary surgeon at Bristol University. Since graduating I have worked in several domestic animal clinics and spent a year working at the largest wildlife hospital in the UK. My passion for conservation and the chance to work with African wildlife meant that volunteering at VulPro was an opportunity that I couldn't miss. I only recently discovered the huge crisis that vultures are facing throughout the world. I hope to put my veterinary skills to use; as well as discover how through husbandry, research and conservation management techniques, we can provide these vulnerable species with the greatest chance of success.- Tamsyn



I have spent the last three years working as an engineering consultant in the power and waste industries in the United Kingdom. During this time, the importance of sustainability and human impact on the environment is something that has been continually evident. Although the work at VulPro is very different to anything that I've previously experienced, my focus remains on trying to help where I can with wider environmental issues. The team at VulPro have been extremely welcoming and I look forward to continuing to contribute.- Tim

# Eastern Cape Report-

# Kate Webster

## Rehabilitation:

Rehabilitation started off with a young Cape Vulture reported to be 'poisoned', standing in a maize field below the Barkly Pass by Carlen Marais on the 1<sup>st</sup> of this year. A trip to Elliot brought home a young fledgling which was subsequently called Elliot. The poor bird was extremely dehydrated and spent a period of time in my pantry, 'recovering' and rehydrating himself before being transferred into the outside enclosure. Although there was nothing physically wrong with him, in discussion with Kerri, it was decided to transfer him (via DHL Supply Chain) to VulPro to allow him to reintegrate with other Cape Vultures before release.

Towards the end of January, I was alerted to a badly injured vulture found under transmission lines between Burgersdorp and Aliwal North. This juvenile had a very bad break of a joint in the leg and after consultation with the local vet, Dr Brent Catherine and Kerri from VulPro, it was decided to euthanize the bird.

In February, a call came through from Mr van Niekerk of the Patryshoogte area of Bedford regarding a badly injured, tagged Cape vulture. Sadly the bird died before collection; however I still visited the site to ascertain the extent of injuries and cause of death. The bird had collided with an older Eskom power line due to an inefficient and poorly executed EIA process creating a problem with the older Eskom line.

Later that month, a call came from Walter Price of Burgersdorp district, with a downed Cape Vulture after a collision with the transmission lines on their farm (a site I have visited quite often over the past couple of years). This bird too, was transferred to VulPro where it recovered well enough to be released at Nooitgedacht in the Magaliesberg two months later.

During March, I collected two badly electrocuted birds from the Molteno district and subsequently

collected a third bird from the same area about a week later. Sadly, none of these birds were viable for release, with one bird requiring an amputation from a badly burnt wing.

During March, information came through of a young, dehydrated African White-Backed vulture that had been found walking on the road in the Smithfield area. This individual was very weak, and after a week in my care, he was transported with DHL to VulPro for release in an area more suitable for the species.

My last rehab bird for the season came from the Baviaans Valley as a result of a negative interaction with the transmission line that descends down that valley towards the Patryshoogte Poseidon substation in the Bedford area. Sadly this young bird will not be release-able and is presently in my rehab facility.



# Eastern Cape Report-

# Kate Webster

## Eskom reporting;

With the exception of Elliot and the young White-backed vulture, all the above birds are results of negative interactions with our power line infrastructure. Of all these incidents, the most horrific being the Molteno group of birds where I witnessed a bird being electrocuted while visiting the site. Fortunately, it seemed to recover and flew off before I could reach the site of where the bird fell to the ground. The tagged bird in the Patryshoogte area, was as a result of a very poor EIA work with little or no regard to existing structures. A summary below gives one an indication of the extent of this problem. All of these birds are Cape Vultures.

Date	Infrastructure Type	Comments
21.01.017	Transmission line	Bird euthanized due to break in leg
15.02.017	Transmission line	Bird died due to badly fractured wing
21.02.017	Distribution line	Adult bird died due to electrocution
28.02.017	Transmission line	Bird transferred to VulPro recovered and re released
17.03.017	Distribution line	Collected 2 badly injured vultures One transferred to VulPro for wing amputation The second bird has permanent damaged wing ligament 4 other birds dead from electrocution
21.03.017	Transmission line	1 immature with permanent damage to wing
27.03.017	Distribution line	Part of primary feathers broken off and dehydrated
24.04.017	Distribution line	Walked and found 10 vulture mortalities

A total count of **22 birds** is found in the table above, which covers a mere 4 months!



# Eastern Cape Report-

# Kate Webster

Sadly, while down in Patryshoogte area completing a report on the tagged vulture (tagged by Dana Berens in KZN), I witnessed how the Cape Vultures were flying between the turbines of the wind farms in the area and realized it would be a matter of time before we would experience our first turbine collision vultures. This held true as a mere two weeks later, Birdlife issued a statement in this regard informing the public of 4 casualties due to turbine collisions.

On the positive side, the Molteno site was fast tracked for mitigation and within two weeks of collecting the last injured bird, contractors were on site and mitigation took place. I have also had feedback from other landowners of previous areas that have been mitigated.

I continue to work with an MSc (GIS) student, Mrs Meagan Bromfield, who is utilizing my data of electrocution and collision vultures in the Eastern Cape. I am sure once completed, this research will assist us in understanding the problems and formulating solutions in this regard.

Sadly, as I travel through many parts of the Eastern Cape, there are still numerous unmarked/unsafe structures within the foraging ranges of the Cape Vultures; I can only hope that landowners continue to be vigilant and inform me where these lines need to be mitigated. I still feel that we are only touching the tip of the iceberg though.

### **Liaisons and talks:**

In February, I made contact with Mr Eckhardt Neuhaus (farmer in the Fauresmith area) regarding problems involving vultures and livestock. He was grateful for the assistance and his problem was alleviated. A construction engineer, Mr Serfontein, from Grinaker Road construction, responsible for the EMP of the N2

road construction through the Transkei, made contact with me regarding the blasting for the proposed N2 toll road in this area, requesting advice with regards to the possible problems that could be associated with this activity. On request, VulPro also supplied him with a lot of material he could utilize to equip and educate all personnel involved in this construction. Despite requesting that blasting take place outside the breeding season, we subsequently have heard that a consultant was brought in to monitor reactions from the nearby Msikaba Colony whilst blasting was taking place during May!!

I gave a talk on the work VulPro does throughout the Eastern Cape to the North Eastern Cape VLV congress attended by at least 60 guests.

I have also been approached by local school children regarding the work done with the vultures for school projects.





# Eastern Cape Report-

# Kate Webster

## Media:

The Bee Eater magazine of Birdlife Eastern Cape published an article I wrote on the “Cape vulture Tracking in the Eastern Cape”. (*The Bee-Eater Volume 68 no. 1*)

The PMF April edition newsletter ran a full page on the “Kragdrade en Aasvoëls” after the Moltano incident involving Lynx as a predator on sheep, creating a food source for the vultures. This you can read in the April edition at [www.pmf.co.za](http://www.pmf.co.za).

## Wind farming and Mining developments:

The visit to the wind farm conglomeration in the Patryshoogte area near Bedford, prompted me to write a letter to Sam Ralston-Paton of Birdlife, concerning the presence and the unabated development of these farms, regardless of the presence of the vultures. This ultimately led a joint letter from VulPro, Birdlife SA and EWT, to the developers, DEAT and Environmental consultants titled “*Call for Appropriate Spatial Planning and Rigorous Impact Assessment to Minimise the Risk Wind Farms pose to Cape Vultures*” I attended the joint meeting of the Upper Cathcart FA’s association and Innowind, a potential wind farm developer for the area. The meeting was held to inform all parties by a neutral facilitator, of the impact (positive or negative) this development would have in this area. This development has now subsequently been shelved, which is extremely good news for the vultures in the area. I submitted comments on the development of the Spitskop West Wind (south of Patryshoogte area) farm potential development and presently the applicants now have to resubmit their application, as their time frame for their final EIA has expired. I will monitor this development. We have submitted

comments, to the Minister of Environment, regarding the delineation of the REDZ zones, and the flawed SEA process that preceded this. We await the outcomes of this. Sadly the E Cape continues to experience unprecedented development in this field which will and has already definitely have a negative impact on the vultures in this province.

I remain registered as an I&AP for the coal mining development in the Moltano/Sterkstroom area. Should there be any more developments, I will definitely participate.

## Other activities;

The vulture restaurant at Rookwood is still being supplied with food from the local abattoir, Peace Abattoir. This supply of food is also now assisting in feeding the vultures that I have had in for rehabilitation, as well my now permanent resident birds. Other bird species continue to feed at the restaurant site, including Jackal Buzzards, African Fish Eagle, Verreaux’s Eagle, Pied crows, White-necked Ravens and Sacred Ibis together with mongoose.



# Eastern Cape Report-

## Kate Webster

The Cape vultures have identified the site and particularly in the summer season, utilize it well. I have recently acquired a 2<sup>nd</sup> deepfreeze, which assists in holding some food supply especially for the captive held birds.

I am working with Fynn Weakley, a local building contractor, to complete the vulture holding facility at Rookwood. In discussion with Kerri, we have agreed that the young, non breeding birds that are not in need of immediate medical treatment can remain with me until such time they reach breeding stage. We would like to acknowledge Mr Charles Kieck CEO/owner of Dukathole Brickworks Queenstown for the wonderful donation of 600 building blocks for the completion of the vulture holding facility at Rookwood. This will also alleviate the pressure at VulPro ever so slightly!

Once again the DHL Supply Chain assisted us with the transportation of the capture enclosure material which had to be returned to VulPro. Thanks must go specifically to Messrs Gawain Visagie and Graham Geldenhuys of DHL, who co ordinate this, as well as to Messrs Lynn and Matthew James of the local Ultra City in Queenstown for the utilization of their site for DHL to collect the birds. Special mention must also be made of the drivers who transport these birds safely through the night up to VulPro. This is indeed a wonderful team and always great to be able to work with people like this. Thank you.

The Department of Environmental Affairs, with special mention to Tokoza Twalinga and Mr Tim de Jongh, have now issued me with a standing permit for transferring birds to VulPro as well as temporarily holding and fitting with tracking devices. This is a huge step in the right direction and has facilitated processes tremendously.

Thomas the vulture, (released in January 2016) continues to give us 'scares' as his tracking device is faulty, however, while he continues to

log in (irregularly), we are picking up valuable information on the movements of Cape vultures in particular in the Eastern Cape province. He has also been of great assistance with regards to potential wind turbine development areas, as well as the utilization of power line structures. He has flown within kilometres of Rookwood (5km) but has not returned to his site of rehabilitation as of yet!!

Elliot is presently living happily at VulPro <http://lowvelder.co.za/385785/jong-aasvoel-kies-luilekker-lewe-bo-vryheid/>. I do understand there are other plans scheduled for him though.

Lastly, I cannot do all the above without the tremendous support from VulPro staff, in particular Kerri Wolter and my sponsors namely **Lomas Wildlife Protection Trust, DHL Supply Chain** and lastly, to my family and staff of Rookwood for those 'extra' hands (or feet) that are always there to assist me when needed.



# Sponsors

