



VulPro NPC [Vulture Programme for the Conservation of Vulture Species in southern Africa] Registration No. 2011/127419/08 (Section 14, Companies Act 2008)

The VulPro Flyer December 2013



Mission statement of VulPro: To advance knowledge, awareness and innovation in the conservation of southern African vulture populations for the benefit and well-being of society

IN THIS ISSUE

Page 1. Top story: Kerri meets Duke & Duchess of Cambridge

Page 2: Remembering Ian Geary with thanks - Exchanges with Monte Casino Bird Gardens - Kerri gives up Chair of CVTF

Page 3: Rescue & rehabilitation statistics - captive breeding update

Page 4: A VulPro story on hooded vultures

Page 5: Mass poisonings in Kwazulu-Natal - Media & Publicity

Page 6: Research activities - Educational & Community Outreach

Page 7: This issue's profile - Gala dinner & IVAD

Page 8: Sponsors & supporters

Top News Story from VulPro

Kerri Wolter meets the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge

Kerri's success in being shortlisted for the Tusk Trust's inaugural Awards for Conservation in Africa has now been well publicised. Although she was not the final winner, her shortlisting as one of five finalists among a huge list of candidates reflects the recognition of the cause she stands for and her dedication to it among the well qualified judges. The global importance of these awards is underscored by the fact that Prince William, Duke of Cambridge and second in line to the British throne presented the awards at the prestigious Royal Society in London on 12 September.



Kerri and other Award finalists with the Tusk Trust team and trustees



Kerri and Walter Naser talk with the Duchess of Cambridge after the award ceremony

The Duke was accompanied by his wife, Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, and the event attracted all the greater world attention in that this was their first public engagement since the birth of their son George (now third in line to the British throne) and reflected their deep concern for wildlife conservation in Africa and elsewhere. In one of the most singular five minutes of her life, Kerri talked with the Royal couple, Prince William stating he had been unaware of the problems faced by vultures or that they were endangered.

(continued page 2)

Kerri meets Duke and Duchess of Cambridge — continued from page 1

Inevitably this has drawn the plight of vultures to the attention of many others previously unaware of it. Furthermore, as part of the proceedings, Kerri was given wide airing through a live interview on a BBC show. Of great significance also were the valuable contacts with the winner and other candidates.

In the 3 months since the event, VulPro has received a considerable amount of publicity, which Kerri describes as “just fantastic”.

OLIM CIVES. Ian Geary

VulPro lost a great friend and colleague with the death of Ian Geary. Ian was Managing Director and founder of Computer Facilities, established in 1982 and now South Africa's leading Direct Marketing Specialist Outsourcing Bureau. Ian's concern for vulture welfare went back many years. He was instrumental in the process of the registration of VulPro as an NPC in 2011 and joined the new Board, serving, amongst other things, to guide VulPro in its financial management. In recognition of his passionate support for VulPro's causes, Ian's wife, Delyse, and family have established the Ian Geary Memorial scholarship bursary to provide a small bursary to students undertaking their practical year at VulPro. The first bursary has been awarded to Thelma Mabhikwa, with us this year from the National University of Science & Technology (MUST), Bulawayo (see Profile, page 7).

We welcome Ian's step son-in law, Carey John Roberts, who has most kindly agreed to take over Ian's role on the Board as VulPro's treasurer and Computer Facilities, now run by Delyse Geary, has agreed to continue managing our accounts as before. While greatly missing Ian, we are truly grateful to his family for their continued support and assistance as we work together to bring sustainability to the Project.

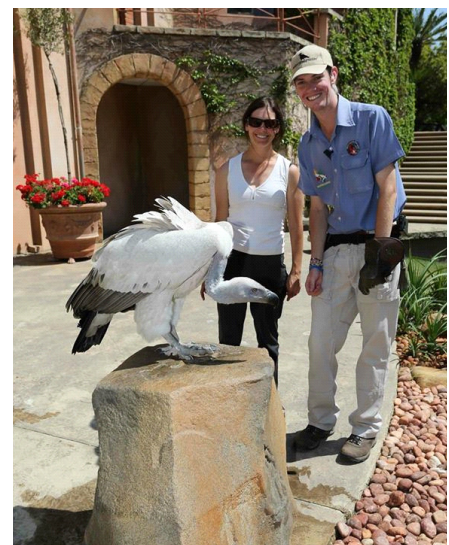


The Geary family with Thelma following their award to her of the first Ian Geary Memorial Scholarship bursary

Planned exchanges with Monte Casino Bird Gardens

Monte Casino bird gardens have donated their adult Cape Vulture to our breeding programme. In return, we are loaning them a young non-releasable Cape Vulture which they can train for their bird shows. Following receipt of the necessary permits we plan a continued roll out system whereby Monte Casino will take a young vulture until it reaches 5 years of age and then, it will return to VulPro in exchange for a younger non-releasable bird again. This will allow the birds to breed while also involving Monte Casino Bird Gardens in vulture conservation programmes.

(Picture to right: Ryan Ferguson of Monte Casino Bird Gardens with Kerri and Moholoholo the Cape Vulture joining VulPro's captive breeding programme]



Kerri resigns as chair of CVTF but remains as member

Kerri Wolter has found it necessary to resign as chair of the Cape Vulture Task Force (CVTF) after 3 years in that position due to other pressures of work at VulPro. She will continue as a member and VulPro will continue to participate in the same CVTF tasks as before.

Rescue & Rehabilitation

Species	Resident at 01.01.13 (non- releasable)	Rescued/ brought in	Released	Died	Euthanased	Transferred or donated	Resident at 30.11.13 (non- releasable)
VULTURES							
Cape	72(65)	33	16	9*	4		76(73)
African White-backed	4(4)	3		1			6(6)
Lappet-faced	5(4)			1			4(4)
Palm-nut	2(2)	1					3(3)
White-headed	0	1					1(1)
EAGLES							
African Hawk	1		1				0
Fish	2(2)	2	2				2(2)
Black	1	1		1			1
Brown snake	0	1					1
OWLS							
Barn	0	1	1				0
Spotted-eagle	2(2)	4	3	1			4(2) [¶]
Giant-eagle	1(1)						1(1)
OTHER							
Yellow-billed kite	1(1)						1(1)
Steppe buzzard	3(3)						3(3)
Lizzard buzzard	0	1		1			0
Andean condor	2(2)						2(2)
Lanner falcon	1(1)						1(1)
Sacred ibis	1(1)						1(1)
White stork	0	1			1		0
Kori bustard	0	1		1			0

***Of unusual interest:** Three of these Cape vultures died when lightning struck the pylon they were perched on during a particularly violent storm in November

[¶]Two are captive bred and will be released in a few weeks' time

Captive Breeding Update

This year we managed to raise 2 chicks successfully, 1 has already fledged and the second one is due to fledge any day now. The total number of fledged chicks resulting from this programme is now 4. Our newest educational chick called PJ, offspring of Percy, who was VulPro's first ambassador, will now take over from Cody, who died in May (see June/July newsletter). The parent-raised chicks, together with last year's chicks will form part of a bigger project looking at the success and survival rate of released parent-raised chicks. After one more year of captive breeding all offspring will be released at their different age levels fitted with tracking devices.

A Happy VulPro Story

Southern Hooded Vultures, 'Obstacles' and why Kerri Climbed a Tree. By Walter Nesor

VulPro has recently been contacted by Keith Keith Bildstein of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in the USA, to request our collaboration on a study of the ecology and conservation of Hooded Vultures in Africa. For VulPro, this was a chance to learn about this lesser known species which breeds in trees and is much smaller than the *Gyps* species we are familiar with.

Time constraints and distance from the Olifants River Private Game Reserve adjoined to the Kruger National Park, where these birds occur in South Africa, prevented preparatory field work, so the concern was about finding four climbable nests with suitably aged chicks for fitting tracking devices and timing the visit was a something of a shot in the dark.

Upon arrival, Kerri and Walter were greeted by Mario, the park warden, who said there was a nest 300 yards from his office on the bank of the Olifants River, and that we could check that one first. We walked over, saw that the nest contained a good sized chick and excitedly returned to collect climbing gear and camera from the car.

Just a few minutes after returning to the tree and with one climbing spur on Walter's foot, Kerri calls "Oh expletive-deletive, there's an Elephant!" Initially we were not too surprised or concerned, and figured it would probably pass on by, but Walter suggested to Kerri that she should get up into the tree as a precaution. But then the elephant didn't pass on by. As it approached it became fairly evident it was not happy with Kerri's presence (there is something about Kerri that really irritate elephants!). When it was about 15 m from us, it gave a mock charge. Walter stopped putting on his second spur to shout at it and to keep the Go-Pro focused on the action. A young bull in must, it appeared irritated that there was this obstacle



(Walter) on the ground between himself and Kerri in the tree and gave a second charge, this time trumpeting and kicking up a bunch of sand and dust into the air to scare away the 'obstacle'. When this did not work, he finally gave up and moved away.

Walter then helped a rather reluctant Kerri out of the tree and headed up to the nest. When he was about halfway up, Kerri 'reported' that there was a second elephant approaching and she looked like she was about to fly up to join the chick in the nest this time. Luckily this one passed on by without further ado.

With the bird brought down, our first Hooded chick could be processed on the vehicle's tailgate and returned to the nest without further incident. The rest of the visit was spent walking the river banks searching for and plotting nests, climbing to the active looking ones and processing the suitable sized chicks, noting which others would be suitable on subsequent visits. In all, three of the four devices were deployed, eight Hooded vulture nests and 15 White-backed vulture nests were mapped. In a second visit mid-November, the last device was fitted to a nestling. The 3 previously fitted nestlings were doing well, with one having fledged successfully.

Notes:

It is thought that this species of vulture only breeds every second year. We are now in a position to confirm this. It might be beneficial to look at patagial tags for adult Hooded vultures, which are more suited to their size rather than the large tags placed on *Gyps* species. We can then organise additional captures of Hooded vultures at Olifants and try capture adults for tagging purposes. In this way, we can record pairs, identify them and record which nests each pair uses and whether this is annually or not.



An Unhappy Vulture Story

Mass poisoning of vultures in Kwazulu-Natal

Reminiscent of the horror story in Zimbabwe last year (covered in our June/July 2013 issue of VulPro Flyer, page 8), at about 10:15 on 21 November 2013, whilst on routine patrol in the Masinda Section of Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife field rangers came across the carcasses of 37 white-backed vultures. All were found in the immediate vicinity of a carcass of an elephant that died a month previously. Indications are that the vultures had been poisoned. 29 of the vultures had their heads removed, a familiar sign of their use in the muthi trade. Of the 37 white-backed vultures, three were adult birds, nine were sub-adults and 17 were immature. The age of eight of the vultures could not be determined as they had already been scavenged. "This loss represents a significant number of young vultures which should have been recruited into the system and could have an effect on the future breeding potential of vultures in the Zululand area" said Dr Dave Druce, Park Ecologist for Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park. The loss of adult birds during the breeding season means that additional juvenile birds may die on their nests. Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife is taking this event extremely seriously and has opened a case with SAPS. Vulture carcasses have been taken for toxicology analysis to determine the type of poison used and the Organised Crime Unit has investigated the scene. The remains of the elephant and the vultures have now been burnt to ensure further deaths from scavenging from the poisoned elephant carcass do not occur.

All vulture species are declining and are recognised as priority species within KZN. Annual aerial surveys are conducted by Ezemvelo in the Zululand area to determine the trends and breeding success of tree-nesting vultures (white-backed, lappet-faced and white-headed vultures). The population of white-backed vultures at Mkhuze Game Reserve has declined by two thirds as a result of several poisoning incidents over the last few years.



Photograph from the "Report on Kwando Vulture poisoning investigation 16 November 2013" prepared by JW McNutt, PhD, Director, BPCT, & J. Bradley, PhD, KRC.

Collected skeletal structures at Carcass 1; Synsacrum (fused pelvic back bone (top)), Sternum (breast keel bone (middle)), skulls (bottom). Synsacrum (top) proved to be the most easily found as most birds appeared to have died breast down, resulting in heads and breast bones being buried in debris, while the back pelvic bone was more exposed to weather making it easier to find. Minimum count of number of dead vultures was derived from the number of synsacrum bones counted.

VulPro Media Interest & Publicity

Past issues of the VulPro newsletter have listed the month-by-month interviews, articles, features, etc. by the many broadcasting stations, newspapers and magazines and film makers that have always taken a deep interest in VulPro since its inception. Unsurprisingly the Kerri Wolter's invitation to the Tusk Trust awards event with the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge in attendance, and the Prince William presenting the awards, and Kerri's meeting with them, resulted in a surge of global media interest in the weeks leading up to the event, as well as after the event. CNN, BBC World News, Sky TV and the UK's widely read Mirror Sunday People, as well as South African media all gave VulPro and Kerri's nomination considerable cover. As we state on page 2, Kerri describes the publicity as "just fantastic" and wonderful for drawing worldwide attention to the plight of vultures.

VulPro Research Activities

MSc, feeding behaviour among Cape Vultures

C.W. Vermeulen completed his MSc on “The behaviour of Cape Vultures (*Gyps coprotheres*) around a carcass” in the Department of Natural Science, North West University, Potchefstroom, in August. CW carried out the project work at VulPro, looking at ages and sex of the vultures feeding at the restaurant and their ‘pecking order’ for feeding. His poster on the work won first prize out of 75 groups in his class. The conclusions of the work were (i) adult vultures are dominant at a carcass and show aggression towards sub-adults or juveniles, (ii) vultures spend an average of 33 minutes at the carcass after they have landed before they start to feed, (iii) in the Magalies area the females initiate feeding, and (iv) only a small percentage (24%) of the total number of vultures present at the carcass were feeding at one time, with the remainder waiting on the perimeter.

Publications

Do Power Lines and Protected Areas Present a Catch-22 Situation for Cape Vultures (*Gyps coprotheres*)? WL Phipps, K Wolter, MD. Michael, LM MacTavish, RW Yarnell. PLoS ONE 8(10): e76794, 2013.

This study with experts at Nottingham Trent University in the UK, involved tracking adult and immature Cape vultures across southern Africa using GPS technology, to build up a picture of their movements and home ranges finding that the vultures’ movements had become closely associated with the distribution of power lines. The structures appear to have enabled the vultures to extend their ranges widely into areas devoid of natural perch sites, such as trees or cliffs. This, however, represents a ‘Catch 22’ situation, as while they are able



to increase their foraging opportunities, they are also at greater risk of colliding with overhead wires. The research showed how the ranges of the tracked birds corresponded with the known locations of Cape vulture mortalities caused by interactions with power lines. The distances recorded during the study were among the largest for any vulture species, with the birds travelling more than 1,000 km across five different countries - from the North West Province of South Africa into Lesotho, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

Effect of rehabilitation on survival rates of endangered Cape vultures A. Monadjem, K. Wolter, W. Naser and A. Kane. Animal Conservation (ZSL), 2013. Print ISSN 1367-9430.

This collaborative work with the Department of Biological Sciences, University of Swaziland, the Institute, Department of Zoology and Entomology, University of Pretoria, and the Department of Zoology and Centre for Biodiversity Research, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, concluded that, despite receiving treatment, rehabilitated birds suffered significantly lower survival rates when compared with wild conspecifics of identical age underscoring the importance of tackling the causes of harm to Cape vultures before rehabilitation becomes necessary. The work utilized the ongoing monitoring activities of VulPro. More than 2610 sightings have now been made of tagged Cape vultures, with 80% of these being from birds VulPro has tagged.

Educational & Community Outreach

In keeping with VulPro’s commitment to its outreach activities, 21 small groups from within South Africa and 3 from other countries were hosted at the Centre since our June/July issue. In November, Edwards LifeSciences hosted an educational function with 20 children and 10 adults. New educational posters on the Andean Condor, the Fish Eagle and the Black Eagle were prepared to be posted outside the respective enclosures at the Centre and further interactive educational worksheets and posters on vultures of Africa were printed.

This Issue's Profile

Nobuhle Thelma Mabhikwa

Thelma Mabhikwa is our third student VulPro has hosted on a 9-month study programme from the Department of Forest Resources and Wildlife Management, National University of Science & Technology (MUST), Bulawayo following Sipuwe Moyo in 2010-11 and Mllue M. Nsikani in 2011-12. We value enormously the enthusiasm of these young persons and the dedicated input into VulPro that results in and believe this exchange programme has been entirely win-win. The following is Thelma's profile of herself:

"I am Nobuhle Thelma Mabhikwa, 21 years of age, born in Zimbabwe. I am currently in my third year studying for my BSc in Forest Resources and Wildlife Management at MUST with the National University of Science and Technology in Zimbabwe. Joining the VulPro team for the next academic year has been a dream come true and is a life time experience that marks the beginning of a thrilling journey in life with these beautiful creatures and will bring so many positive changes in my life. It is my hope that by the time I leave this place I will have learnt so much more about vultures and other birds of prey. I am hoping with time that something like the vulture conservation centre (VulPro) can be established in Zimbabwe to reverse the decline in the population of these birds and to increase people's awareness of how they are bringing about this decline, highlighting appropriate approaches to saving what Zimbabwe has left of these birds. And remember "we did not inherit the earth from our forefathers but borrowed it from our children", let's save the vulture species and leave our children something to benefit from enjoy."



Thelma receiving the first Ian Geary Memorial Scholarship bursary from Delyse Geary on 3 November (see page 2)

Gala Dinner & International Vulture Awareness Day

The second VulPro fundraising gala dinner was held on 6 September and the occasion was also used to mark the now annual International Vulture Awareness Day (IVAD). The event was, as previously, a great success. The 201 guests were hosted by Leopard Lodge who did a fantastic job with the food and decor. Rike Coetzee once again donated her time on the sax and enthralled the guests during the main course and the opening of the evening. Boehringer-Ingelheim, together with Leopard Lodge sponsored the evening in which they helped with auction items and took 4 tables on the evening. The auction items alone raised R75 000 and the evening in all raised R90 000. Our MC, Darren Scott, did an exceptional job in getting the guests to participate in the auction and through his enthusiasm and manner of involving everyone, all items were sold. Leopard Lodge, Boehringer-Ingelheim and all the guests did us proud, and we are most grateful to all.



Natasja Saunders (volunteer and big supporter of Vulpro) assisting our MC, Darren Scott in holding up some of the auction items during the auctions

SHOP WITH A CAUSE



APPLY FOR YOUR FREE **MYPLANET** CARD TODAY AND HELP US SAVE OUR VULTURE SPECIES.

EVERY SWIPE COUNTS!

CONTACT:
www.myvillage.co.za
OR
kerri.wolter@gmail.com


www.vultureconservation.co.za

MySchool MyVillage MyPlanet

VulPro Sponsors & Supporters

Monte Casino Bird Gardens supports VulPro

The Monte Casino Bird Gardens, Fourways Johannesburg, held weekend activities 7-8 September to mark International Vulture Awareness Day. Throughout the weekend, they had a collection box to raise funds for VulPro. Posters, booklets and brochures on VulPro were displayed at the entrance to the Bird Gardens and a total of R4573 was raised. VulPro extends its warmest thanks to the Monte Casino Bird Gardens and the kind people contributing to the collection box. (Right: Ryan Ferguson of Monte Casino Bird Gardens "hands over" donation)



Castle2 Palace presents crane

Castle 2 Palace has generously presented VulPro with the vehicle crane shown right for lifting carcasses into our buggy. Castle 2 Palace is a team of South African motorcyclists and 4x4 enthusiasts striving to make an impact in the lives of those less fortunate and to bring about global awareness of Africa's limited natural resources. They will embark on a return trip between Cape Town Castle through Africa and Europe to Buckingham Palace, England, in May 2014 to raise funds for these causes, travelling 40 000kms through 39 countries over eight months. You can watch their progress on the website www.castle2palace.com and social media platforms including Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. The donation to VulPro is an 'opening initiative' to start off the trend of giving throughout this journey.



Appropriate birthday present

Mike Behr's birthday present from his family was the vulture adoption of our second captive bred chick and first chick for 2012. Mike is founder and owner of Wild Exposure, which, as can be seen from the logo below, specialises in landscaping with artificial rocks. Through Wild Exposure and together with HERNIC Ferrochrome, Mike sponsored and built the artificial cliff in the breed-

ing enclosure carrying out a doubling of its size last year (picture below). The vulture is now into his second year, only reaching adulthood at age 7 years. He is still at Vulpro, scheduled to be released next year with all captive bred vultures as part of a bigger project looking at best age to release captive parent raised vultures (see bottom of page 3).



Beluit Investments	BIOWEB (PTY) LTD	Boehringer Ingelheim
Bioweb (Pty) Ltd		
Boehringer-Ingelheim		
Chester Zoo		
Cheyenne Mountain Zoo		
Computer Facilities		
Copper Sunset Sand (Pty) Ltd		
DHL Supply Chain		
Eland Platinum Mines		
Hernic Ferrochrome		
Living Creatures Trust		
Lomas Wildlife Protection Trust		
Mazda Wildlife Fund		
National Birds of Prey Trust		
Natural Encounters Inc		
Rand Merchant Bank (RMB)		
Samancor - Western Chrome Mines		
The Tusk Trust		
Virtryx		
Wild Exposure		

ALSO —

The many donations from individuals and groups, including Monte Casino Bird Gardens and the Castle 2 Palace team (above) and

ADOPTIONS

ABC Autoparts, the male bataleur and Cape Vultures, Harry and Mafuta.

Jika Africa, Cape Vultures, Flaps and Ziggy.