



# THE VULPRO FLYER AND RESTAURANT NEWSLETTER



**DECEMBER 2016**

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



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# Executive Summary

As 2016 draws to a close, we are reminded about our trials and tribulations throughout the year trying to save vultures and halt their current downward spiralling declines throughout Africa.

VulPro, with only 6 staff members, is trying to make the world a better place for our vultures and through our work, we have seen increased numbers of vultures needing rehabilitation with many not being able to be released again. The VulPro Centre continues to grow due to demands and with additional enclosures, more vultures being housed and much more field work and educational work needing to be implemented and undertaken, VulPro has been stretched to its limit.

However, with a strong and passionate team working together and always towards a common goal, we have achieved our objectives and goals set out for 2016 and we are proud of who and what VulPro has become.

None of this though would have been possible without the support of each and everyone of you and for this, we are extremely grateful to you all. Your support has seen us go from strength to strength and our relationships have strengthened and blossomed throughout the year.

As I wish you all happiness and every success for 2017, I am reminded that January 2017 marks VulPro's 10th year. I am truly honoured for the support, loyalty, love and care you have shown VulPro and of course our vultures. Thank you. May the coming year be kind to us all and may our vultures soar safely and freely across our beautiful blue skies.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kerri Wolter'.

Kerri Wolter  
Founder and CEO

# The VulPro Flyer

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# Rehabilitation Update

Maggie Hirschauer

## Rehabilitation cases between 01 July - 31 December 2016

	Rescued & brought in	Released	Died	Euthanased	Transferred / Donated	Resident at 31-12-2016
Cape Vulture	37	8	3	4	0	126
Lappet faced Vulture	4	1	0	0	0	8
White-headed Vulture	0	0	0	0	0	2
African White-backed Vulture	17	7	2	2	0	37
Palm Nut Vulture	0	0	0	0	1	3
Andean Condor	0	0	0	0	0	2
Martial Eagle	2	1	0	1	0	0
Whalberg's Eagle	1	0	0	1	0	0
Spotted Eagle Owl	1	0	0	1	0	0
White-faced Owl	2	1	0	1	0	0
European Honey Buzzard	1	0	1	0	0	0
Common Buzzard	1	0	0	1	0	0
African Fish Eagle	1	1	0	0	0	1
Black Eagle	0	0	0	0	0	2
Bataleur Eagle	0	0	0	0	0	2
Peregrine Falcon	0	0	1	0	0	0
TOTAL	67	19	7	11	0	183

# Rehabilitation Update cont'd

Our rehabilitation season has been very busy this year, with an unprecedented amount of birds coming into the centre with broken legs. Very rarely have we seen the opportunity to pin broken wings and legs, because when the break is close to the joint there is not enough space on the long bone to place pins. This season already we have had two opportunities to attempt and fix broken legs, the breaks being in the middle of the long bones. Unfortunately neither case survived. One juvenile's bone density was too low to allow the pins to hold. The other struggled to breathe and did not wake from the anesthesia.



*X-rays from 2 juvenile Cape Vultures with broken legs. The individual to the left has 2 broken tibia. The individual on the right has a broken femur.*

Through these cases, and just the large amount of incoming injured birds in general, our facilities have been pushed to their limits. At times we have had more than three birds in t-shirt slings (to give physiotherapy or remove weight from broken legs) with several hospital camps occupied.

Also noteworthy this season is the travel distance required to collect injured birds. Clearly word is spreading in southern Africa about the plight of vultures, or our existence as a rehab centre, or both. VulPro staff and volunteers have travelled to the Kalahari, the Karoo, and the Zimbabwean border to collect or treat poisoned African White-backed Vultures, grounded Lappet-faced Vultures, injured Cape Vultures, as well as other large birds of prey or endangered species (we attempted to rescue a Blue Crane but it died before we could reach it near Delareyville). Often we are alerted to injured birds several days after they are discovered, and on a handful of occasions we have collected birds only to have them pass away upon arrival at VulPro or very shortly after.

# Rehabilitation Update cont'd

One success story is worth highlighting here. A family in the Northern Cape, 65 km west of Upington, notified us of an injured / grounded Lappet-faced Vulture chick in mid-December found in a nearby vineyard. The bird was very skinny and weak but within 2 days the family and our staff arranged to meet in Vryburg to bring him to our care, over a 1,000 km journey for the young bird. We immediately treated him with vitamins, food and plenty of fluids, and antibiotics. Once he became stronger and was able to move normally, it was clear his right wing was drooping and that it was possibly broken or had sustained ligament damage. No breaks were found however, and within two weeks he was feeding on his own and holding his wings symmetrically. We suspect he collided with a power line or some obstacle and bruised his wing, causing him to become grounded. VulPro rarely receives injured Lappet-faced Vultures for rehabilitation and little is known about where they breed in South Africa. We are hoping he will enjoy a full recovery and we aim to source a sponsored GPS tracking device for this special individual.



*The Lappet-faced Vulture chick after he was found, being cared for by a family in the Northern Cape (left) and at VulPro after 2 weeks of treatment. Here he feeds on a piglet in our hospital camp with an adult LFV.*



# Captive Breeding Update

Maggie Hirschauer

Our Cape Vulture breeding programme has seen the most successful year to date. Currently our breeding pairs are caring for 7 chicks in the enclosure. All but one chick has yet to fledge from the nest. All chicks will be removed from the breeding enclosure in January (except the one yet to fledge) and placed in a separate enclosure for socialization with other birds of all ages.

Construction of a new acclimatization enclosure will occur in the beginning of the new year on the top of the Magaliesberg Mountains at the Nooitgedacht breeding colony. This location will house all captive bred chicks for several months before release as part of the Supplementation Programme.

Calls for injured or poisoned African White-backed Vultures (AWBV) are becoming more common, and with these cases inevitably comes more non-releasable birds. We have two breeding pairs of AWBV and this year marks a milestone for our AWBV breeding programme. We successfully raised our first chick for the programme, but while attempting to return the chick to the parents it was rejected and did not survive the reunion. We have learned invaluable lessons through this experience for the future of the programme. Just this last month all of our flighted, non-releasable AWBVs were moved into a new breeding aviary. We are proud and hopeful this aviary will facilitate successful breeding and pairing for several more individuals.



*View from the location of the planned acclimatization enclosure on top of the Nooitgedacht Cape Vulture breeding colony in the Magaliesberg (above).*

*VulPro's new AWBV breeding enclosure (below) and a Cape Vulture breeding pair with their chick in August (right).*



# Immature Cape Vulture breaks species range record, captured with GPS

## Maggie Hirschauer

GPS tracking devices, specifically ones with the capacity to record data over several years, are becoming more common within the field of zoology, animal behavior, and conservation. Researchers are now able to gain insights into the seasonal patterns of range distributions, cross-continental movements and migrations, and many other aspects of animal ecology and life histories. GPS devices can also be useful to assess the threats species are facing and locate specific mortalities. Unfortunately for us, GPS trackers been instrumental in locating several injured, poisoned, and electrocuted birds.

Cape Vulture 017's GPS tracking device thankfully highlights a happier story. He arrived at VulPro from the Kransberg breeding colony in Marekele National Park, Thabazimbi, in late 2014. His malnourishment was so severe he was seizing and fading in and out of consciousness. We were able to bring him to a full recovery and finally release him in February 2015. He was fit with a 50 gram PTT-GPS device, mounted on his wing as well as patagial (wing) tags. He remained around VulPro for several weeks before heading north-west to Botswana.

Over the 20 months since his release, 017 has visited 7 countries and has displayed a range of 2,066,350 km<sup>2</sup> (as minimum convex polygon), the largest recorded for any Cape Vulture. His adventures have taken him into Angola and Zambia, into northern locations where Cape Vultures are rarely reported. His data, in conjunction with other Cape Vulture movement data, has alerted us to several vulture 'hot spots' in Botswana and Namibia. This data is being used to motivate and facilitate conservation actions.



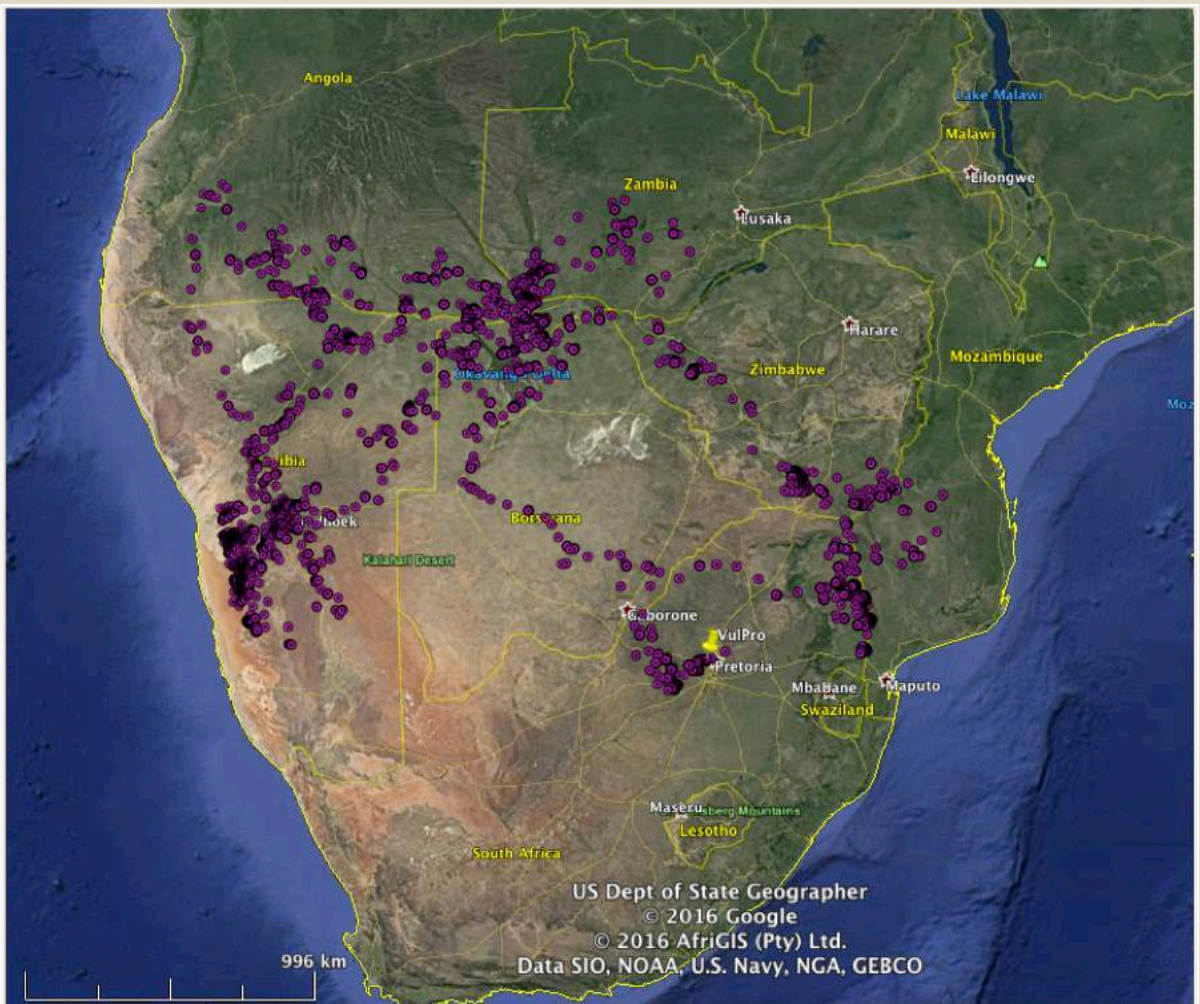
*Cape Vulture 017 undergoing treatment for severe malnutrition and head trauma in early 2015*



# Cape Vulture breaks species range record cont'd

Currently 017 has been spending much of his time in Kruger National Park. He arrived in the region months ago and has since foraged into Mozambique only briefly before returning and exploring all corners of the park. He has now left the park and is foraging in the Zeerust area. We are watching his movements as we anxiously await his return to VulPro's vulture restaurant in the North West Province.

For more pictures of 017 or information on other tracked vultures, visit our website at [www.vulpro.com](http://www.vulpro.com) or check us out on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/VulProAfrica/>.



*Cumulative range map of 017's movements since his release in February 2015*

# Meet our Field Manager: Anzelle van Wyk

I am a passionate nature conservator, graduated with my B-Tech in Nature Conservation at Tshwane University of Technology in 2014. I have worked in a couple of different industries from field guiding, assisting vets, game captures, to being a production manager for a TV series “Keeping Up With the Kruger” and lecturing at Centurion Academy for the Nature Management Department.

I volunteered at VulPro in 2009 – 2010. Animals are my life but birds are my favourite and since I've been involved at VulPro my love for vultures grew. Now I am a full time assistant at VulPro. It is an honour for me to work with these amazing creatures and contributing to conservation to ensure a future for our vultures and birds of prey.

It is awesome to be a part of the great team here at VulPro and I look forward everyday to the new challenges that we face, every day is different and I believe where one's passion is... one's love is and when you do what you love, you'll be successful in what you do. By being a part of conserving these species, I believe, hope, and pray in the growing success of VulPro and all its feathered friends.



# Meet our volunteer:

## Lucie van Laethem

My name is Lucie Van Laethem and I come from Belgium. I work as zookeeper / falconer in a zoo since 6 years. I am passionate about birds of prey and even more by vultures. Every week, it falls bad news about them. There are days when I no longer have the strength to keep hope that one day, the numbers will rise or mentalities change. The Vulpro center, which I follow for a long time on facebook, gave me the strength to believe and not to give up because to their articles. I saw through these ones (articles) hard work and hope. That's why I have decided to spend 40 days here, at the Vulpro center, as a volunteer.

I wanted to help them on the ground and contribute in my own way to their cause. I must admit that I did not expect the center was so big.



Aviaries are just enormous and animal wellbeing is more than respected. They have a small but very efficient team that provides exemplary work despite temperatures above 30 ° C. Because of donations, they can afford to save birds on a larger scale, in almost the whole country. You know, Belgium (where I come from) has a maximum length of 320 km diagonally.

Well, last Friday, Me and Maggie traveled almost 1000 km to rescue a young Lappet to ensure his survival and to offer him the best chance to return to the wild life. In my country, it's just unthinkable. Nobody would do a such thing ... Vulpro did it and more than once !!! For them, every life is precious, every bird. They fight to save these majestic vultures but they also fight to preserve life by trying to make it better. It's just admirable. I am happy to know that such people still exist, people who sacrifice their lives in the service of Nature, this same one that feed our lives. The Vulpro team are the new heroes of the modern world !!! Personally, I am proud to have been able to serve such a fighting people. It will be with regret and sadness that I will return home but also with strength and hope. Thanks to them.



# Meet our attachee: Bhekinkosi Sibanda

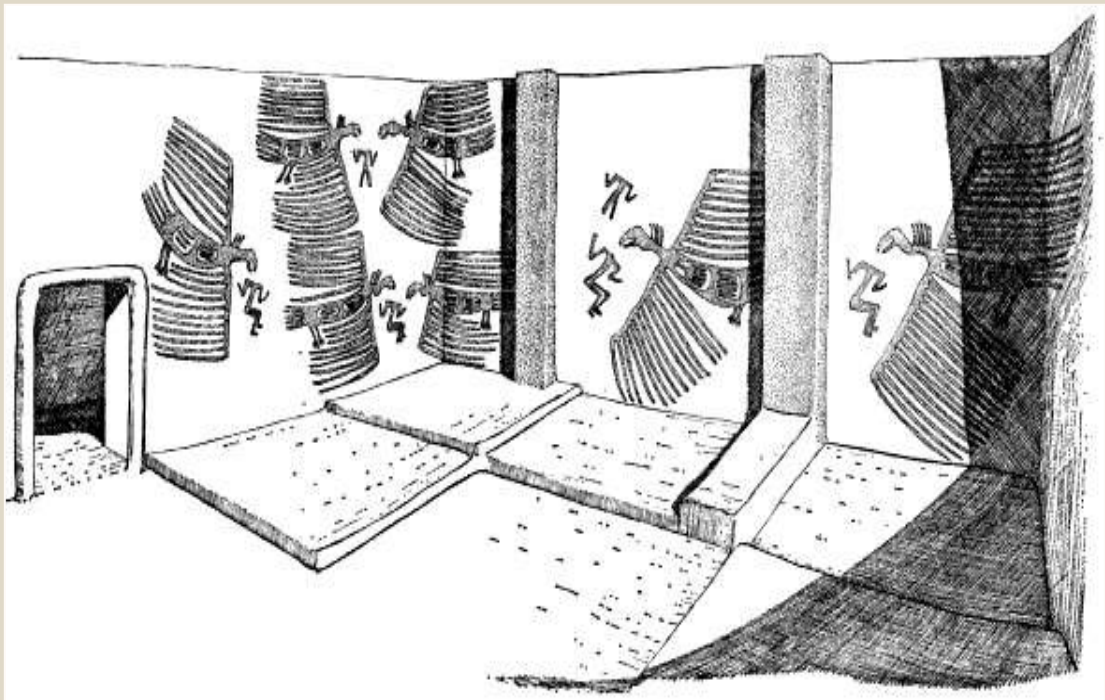
I am a student at National University of Science and Technology doing an honours degree in Forest resources and Wildlife Management (Zimbabwe).

Eagles are my personal favourite birds of prey. But I chose VulPro (vultures) because they are the best in what they do thus it's good to learn from the best and also to learn a lot about vultures; breeding, handling and capture. Also I'm doing a project with conjunction with the organisation in trying to reduce mortality through power-line electrocution and collision with hope to conserve the already existing colonies from extinction. So far I have managed to learn the truth about vultures that cloud the myths in our society.



# Vulture culture: vulture shamanism 10,000 years ago

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[http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/cienciareal/esp\\_chaman\\_08.htm](http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/cienciareal/esp_chaman_08.htm)



The image above shows an impression of a room called the '*Vulture Shrine*' in the town of Çatal Hüyük, an ancient site still being excavated at Anatolia, Turkey. Çatal Hüyük culture dates back to 6,500 BCE and yet these people were surprisingly sophisticated. The vulture image appears to represent for them a god-form, responsible for removing the head (i.e. the soul?) of the deceased, as can be seen in the picture above.

They may have practiced 'sky-burials' (where corpses are left to the birds to eat) or the imagery may have been entirely metaphorical, or both. There is some evidence to suggest that over time as this culture developed the bird image evolved into that of a 'vulture-goddess'. But most importantly at least one of the murals from Çatal Hüyük apparently shows a human being dressed in a vulture skin.



# Vulture culture: vulture shamanism cont'd



Taking an eight-thousand year old image of a "human in a vulture skin" and turning it into an early *Vulture Shamanism* culture could be stretching things a bit... and one should always be careful of making assumptions when the evidence in support of pet theories is tenuous. However, in the last few decades archaeological research has come to light which, when added to the evidence from Çatal Hüyük, begins to lend very strong weight to the idea of a '*shamanic connection*'.

In the 1950's the archaeologist/anthropologists Rose Solecki and her husband Ralph began excavating a cave site near the *Greater Zab River* in Kurdistan. This cave had been used for burials by the *Zawi Chemi* people (as this small area is called) around 8870 BC (plus or minus 300 years, according to carbon-dating) - over 10,000 years ago - and 4,000 years before the beginnings of the various Mesopotamia cultures referred to here. What did they discover that was so significant?

They found a number of goat skulls placed next to the wing bones of large predatory birds, including the bearded vulture, the griffon vulture, the white-tailed sea eagle and the great bustard. The Soleckis had to ask themselves what the purpose of such a 'ritual burial' was, and why it was that only certain species of birds had been selected.

# Vulture culture: vulture shamanism cont'd

In 1977 the journal *Sumer* published an article by Rose Solecki entitled '*Predatory Bird Rituals at Zawi Chemi Shanidar*' where she described the findings, going on to suggest that the wings had almost certainly been utilized as part of some kind of ritualistic costume, worn either for personal decoration or for ceremonial purposes. She connected the finds with the *Vulture Shamanism* of the protoneolithic Çatal Hüyük community in Central Anatolia mentioned above (which was 2000 years later in time, and several hundred miles away in distance).

Recognizing the importance of their discovery, however, Rose Solecki concluded the article by saying:

"The Zawi Chemi people must have endowed these great raptorial birds with special powers, and the faunal remains we have described for the site must represent special ritual paraphernalia. Certainly, the remains represent a concerted effort by a goodly number of people just to hunt down and capture such a large number of birds and goats... either the wings were saved to pluck out the feathers, or that wing fans were made, or that they were used as part of a costume for a ritual. One of the murals from a Catal Hayuk shrine ... depicts just such a ritual scene; i.e., a *human figure dressed in a vulture skin*"

The ritual coats of *present-day Siberian Shamans* are cut to look like birds: they are cut to a point and tasselled in a way that is suggestive of feathers, and this is quite deliberate. And, although in all the forms of Shamanism across Asia there is little interest in creating any long-lasting images of winged humans, the notion of the Shaman being able to fly is nonetheless universal.

When stone-carved motifs do start to appear around 3,000 BC in Mesopotamia and the surrounding area, the wings of these winged beings seem to signify an ability to travel to places that ordinary people can't reach, along with an ability to 'mediate' between the human world and some other 'higher' state or states. Both of these qualities are (also) universally considered to be the main attributes of a Shaman. Undoubtedly this also helps explain why Shamen across the world generally tend to have a strong connection with birds.

The Shaman can 'fly' in trance, travelling to the realm of the spirits where he can then either do battle against malign entities, or try and persuade, flatter, cajole or otherwise entreat the spirits to act for the benefit of one or more human beings.

# Upcoming project: power line aversion training

## Maggie Hirschauer

In February 2015, 10 Cape Vulture chicks were released at the Centre as the first major supplementation programme release event. All surviving birds have yet to leave the property, with the exception of a few short 'excursions' by several birds. Two individuals have since died: one was found electrocuted in July 2016, the other disappeared in July 2015 and is presumed dead. This death, in conjunction with the already strong body of evidence that power line electrocutions and collisions are the leading threats to vultures in the Magaliesberg region, have motivated us to instigate a power line behavioural aversion programme for releasable birds (both rehabilitated and captive bred). Gallagher<sup>TM</sup> has come on board with this project to provide the electrical mechanism which will deter perching on dangerous power line infrastructure.

Starting in January, mock power line infrastructure will be placed inside the rehabilitation and pre-release enclosures, in addition to several other 'safe' perches. The top surface of each pole design will emit a small, approximately 6V, electrical current anytime a vulture lands, encouraging the bird to leave and deter future perching attempts.

This low voltage shock will not harm the birds but will be uncomfortable enough to deter perching. Fence energizers have been donated for these purposes. The birds will be monitored constantly via video and student observations to determine if this method does deter perching, if the birds learn over time, and if the birds can learn from watching other individuals. The proposed methods has been used successfully in the California Condor's reintroduction programmes in the USA, and if successful here, VulPro plans to extend the training to wild supplementary feeding sites.



*Cape Vulture perching on a mock 'staggered vertical' power line structure in captivity at VulPro.*

# Notes from the field:

## Boikarabelo breeding surveys

### Anzelle van Wyk

Each year VulPro conducts surveys at Boikarabelo Coal Mine and surrounding private properties to monitor African White-backed Vulture breeding success. VulPro's staff does these surveys 3 times a year, once in June to see how many breeding pairs, then again in Aug/Sept to see whether they are incubating their eggs, and then lastly in November to count the fledglings seen on the nests.

These surveys are not only rewarding if we see that there is success rates in these species breeding but also an awesome adventure to take on, as we walk for several kilometers each day for a week at a time to conduct these surveys, the beauty of these natural surroundings are indescribable. The area borders Botswana so it is as wild as you can get with the spectacular Ana thorn (*Acacia galpinii*) forests and great views over the Limpopo river spotting all different kind of birdlife and wildlife. There is never a dull moment for us. The last survey Maggie Hirschauer, my work colleague, and I had several funny and interesting encounters.

As we arrived the first day we came across a monitor lizard on the road. He stopped dead in his tracks still looking up into the sky with his one foot still lifted as he was in the position of walking across the road when we came around the corner, it was hilarious as he probably thought we did not see him. For several minutes we looked at him through our binoculars he was frozen in that position, not blinking an eye staring into the sky not even looking our way once, until we drove closer he realized it's maybe a good idea to run along.



# Notes from the field cont'd

The property we stay on at the mine is great in the middle of this warm semi-arid climate zone and shrubby savanna biome. There are a lot of Shepard trees in this area and we were there in the middle of the blooming Tumbleweed, scientifically known as *Ammocharis coranica*, *Ammo* meaning sand and *charis* meaning grace/beauty. Hence the beautiful flowers of this weed grows in the sandy soils of this northern province.



We saw a lot of bushbuck in the bushy vegetation surrounding the rivers, always in flight mode, running away from us. Tortoises, oh my, we have never seen so many Leopard tortoises on a daily bases, easily 6 a day. At one stage we saw two males chasing after a female, great sighting! The warthogs were full on in numbers, that brings me to this story. As Maggie and I were walking inside a dry riverbed, crossing to check on a vulture nest hoping to spot a fledgling on a marked nest, this warthog clearly did not notice us approaching.

There was a little puddle of water that hadn't dried up yet. As we all know it's always nice to get closer to water to look at footprints and spot fishes, etc. This warthog stood dead in his tracks as well as Maggie and I. He was hiding behind the reeds, hoping that we didn't spot him, but we did, and he realized it. We stood still and this warthog jumped out of the reeds down from a little hill into this muddy water area right in front of us, his front feet sunk deep into the mud and whoop (!) he summersault flipped right over onto his back flat in the mud, struggled to get up, eventually jumped up and ran with his tail straight up, all confused running to the same side of the hill, only to cross over to the other side again. Maggie and I stood there, it was like watching Animal Planets funny videos live, playing right in front of our eyes, all in slow motion. It was so funny that we couldn't stop laughing and playing it all over in our heads over and over again as we carried on with our surveys.

Some of the vegetation was very dense for us to walk through, but through we had to get! We got to a point where the only option was to cross the dry riverbed filled with spikey reeds.



# Notes from the field cont'd

It was not the nicest experience walking through it with shorts, stinging our legs and arms all the way through, but I wouldn't exchange it for anything after seeing the warthog episode.

Spotting the fledglings on their nests was the best when they didn't know we were there and we could see them play by themselves, picking up sticks as if they were rearranging their nests, preening themselves. On the other hand when they spotted us, they dived down so low that it was sometimes even impossible to see them again, and Maggie and I would just wait for those moments where their heads popped out of the nest again. The inquisitive behavior these vultures have! It is the most amazing feeling to see these birds wild in their natural environments.

Never mind the odd leopard that could be lurking in the bushes and the Brown Hyena dens we came across looking like The Lion Kings forbidden land – “The Elephant graveyard” except there were no elephants. We saw baboon, bushbuck, tortoise and duiker skulls, various bones and some porcupine quills! We could see those dens were active as there were the bones and skulls and then the flies around the big entry holes of the dens. We didn't stay there too long as we didn't want our skulls part of the skull gallery too (wink).

The trip was full of excitement and we couldn't end it off better than with the Supermoon on 14 November. The moon was the closest to the earth it has been since January 26, 1948. So it was bigger and brighter than ever, especially being in the open and out of the city. Knowing the vultures are still doing okay and are still active on their nests we will be back there soon for our ongoing monitoring survey program.



# Restaurant highlight:

## VulPro's vulture restaurant

VulPro's restaurant has been ongoing for almost 5 years. We have wild vulture visitors daily, and at times we get up to 350 vultures. The vast majority of the visitors are Cape Vultures which come from the Skeerpoort breeding colony located 50 km from VulPro situated just above Leopard Lodge on the Magaliesberg mountain range.

Our restaurant is thriving, due to the fact that we feed on a daily basis. We have several regular piggery sponsors, namely GH Braak, Longside, and Belhuis Investments. GH Braak delivers carcasses monthly, but we also collect carcasses from nearby farms. Our restaurant menu consists of pigs but also private farms sponsor us with their cattle, sheep, goat, and horse livestock and the odd wildlife carcass as well. As long as we know where our meat sources come from, it's great to have the community help feed the birds.



VulPro supplies an average of  $\pm 10,000$  kg of meat each month, meaning around 2,500 kg of meat is consumed by the vultures on a weekly basis at our restaurant alone. This highlights the large amount of rotting meat vultures consume and ultimately how important they are to clean up our planet. On average, about 3,000 vultures visit our restaurant every month.

We have a south-facing permanent viewing hide 20 m from the restaurant providing us with an awesome way to monitor the birds and their health, keep count, and conduct re-sightings of tagged individuals. Our hide is also available to book for the day for small groups of photographers, filmmakers, and/or bird enthusiasts.



# Restaurant highlight cont'd

The Cape Vulture breeding season is coming to an end and now is the time for fledglings to set flight for the first time. Here at the restaurant it is always interesting to spot the fledglings to be able to do a count and estimate more or less how many fledges we see compared to the adults. With a congress of vultures, they all stick together and the young learn from the adults so they will follow their parents to a feeding site, this way it makes it easy for us to sit in our hide and do re-sightings of our regulars as well as the tagged vultures and then of course the fledglings. We spotted our first wild fledgling at our restaurant in mid November. At first we noted them only one each day. Now in late December we are seeing more each day, up to 20 fledges per sighting. On average the fledglings now account for 16% of the total vultures feeding at one time.

We also spot other birds at our restaurant. Some are only here seasonally like the White Storks and Yellow Billed Kites that come to feed in summer. We will at times have dozens of White Storks present for days. Currently the kites are increasing with only a handful present in late December. Other curious visitors include Marabou storks, Pied Crows, Cattle Egrets, Sacred Ibis, Egyptian Geese, Indian Mynas, and pigeons. The more we feed the more the restaurant flourishes with all different types of birds. If anyone feels “hungry” (hungry for nice bird sightings) this restaurant at VulPro is the one to come and see.





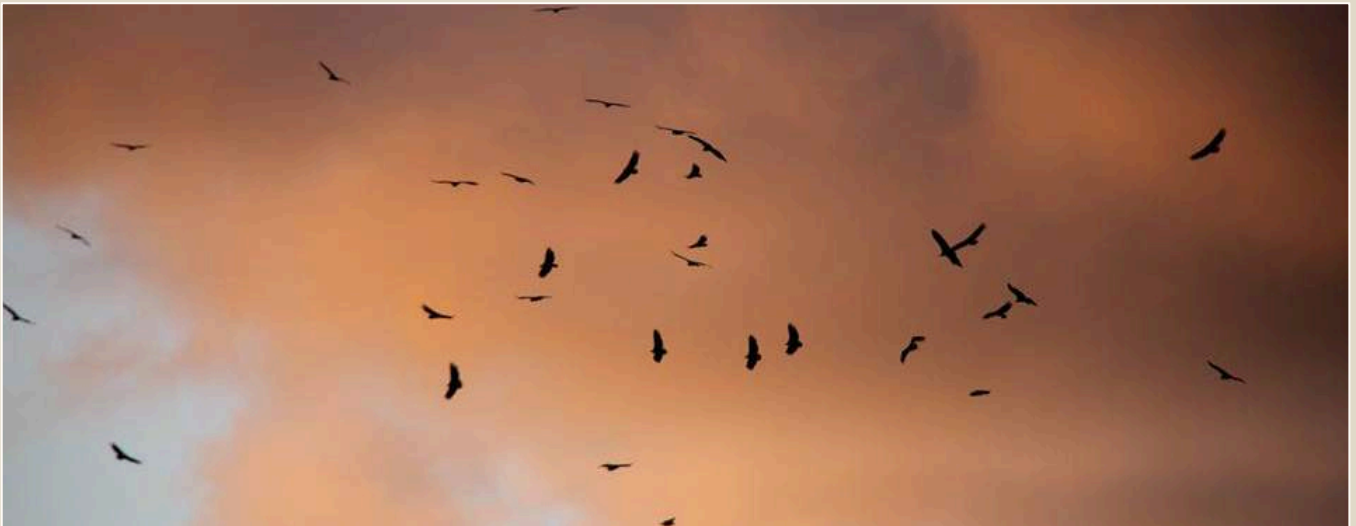
# Vulture conservation in Spain

Kerri Wolter

As founder and CEO of VulPro, I travelled to Spain from the 13 - 21 December where I visited various vulture breeding and feeding sites as well as visited GREFA and met the infamous Fidel Jose Fernandez y Fernandez-Arroyo. Apart from a semi break from VulPro work, I wanted to learn about vulture conservation programmes and projects in Spain given their successes in bringing back the Griffon Vulture so successfully, in the hopes of bringing back new knowledge and ideas to VulPro.



*Eurasian Griffon Vultures gather near a vulture feeding site in Spain and fill the sky.*



# Vulture conservation in Spain

cont'd

## PART 1: Montejo Raptor Refuge

Fidel Jose Fernandez y Fernandez-Arroyo is probably one of the most eccentric vulture gurus that still lives today. Reminding me a lot of the late Prof. Steven Piper, Fidel has been monitoring the Montejo vultures within the Montejo Raptor Refuge now for over 42 years during his spare time and can tell you exactly where each nest is on the many cliff faces within the gorge. By day, he is a mathematician and thus is meticulous about numbers and good monitoring statistics. Fidel welcomed me with open arms into his home and had great pleasure in showcasing his many 'thank you' awards and other 'achievement' praises together with newspaper clippings and articles wherever his name was mentioned. He has one small apartment but several years ago, ran out of space for all his vulture files and paper work and thus bought out the unit adjacent to his residence purely for his vulture work. He is so incredibly proud of his work and any contact with other vulture conservationists that he dug out correspondence between himself

and Prof. Peter Mundy, highlighting their correspondence in English and willingness from both sides to share each others work.

Fidel loves sharing his work and thus produces an annual newsletter for Montejo Raptor Refuge which is now over 500 pages on all species accounts for the region. I had the great pleasure of visiting the Montejo Raptor Refuge during one of my field trips and it is without a doubt, one of the most breathtaking sites I have seen and experienced. The refuge is unspoilt and vultures and people live in harmony with one another with equal respect. The area is pristine and is picturesque with vultures soaring in front of the cliff faces and above you, unperturbed by your presence. It is my hope to join them next year for the annual weekend census which takes place during the first week in November.



*Kerri meets Fidel in his home in Madrid*



# Vulture conservation in Spain

cont'd

The gorges of the Riaza River (Montejo Raptor Refuge and its surroundings, Segovia, Spain) are renowned as one of the most important areas in Europe for the Eurasian Griffon *Gyps fulvus* and the Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*. It was one of the first protected vulture populations and it is also the best monitored colony in Spain since the Refuge was established in 1975. The Refuge (and its surroundings) is the northernmost place in Spain where the Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus* has attempted recently to breed (three years), and where the Rüppell's Griffon *Gyps rueppellii* has been sighted seven times. The Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus* has also been observed there. In the Refuge and its surroundings, 325 species of vertebrates have been observed including 240 species of birds. Of these bird species, at least 127 breed in the Refuge, with another 14 species breeding in the nearby areas. The Refuge and its surroundings is also a key area for steppe birds.



The spectacular Griffon Vulture breeding cliffs at Montejo Raptor Refuge

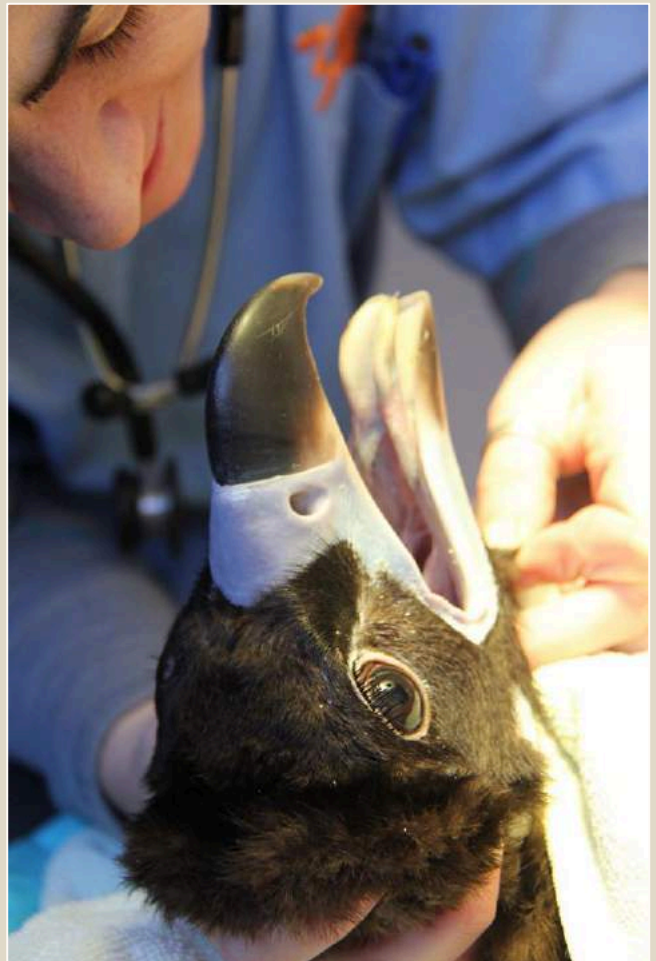
# Vulture conservation in Spain

cont'd

## PART 2: GREFA centre for rehabilitation of native fauna and habitat

GREFA is a non-governmental non-profit organisation which was established in 1981 as an association for the study and conservation of nature. It is run by passionate people who see and understand the destruction and deterioration by human activities and greed.

As VulPro does, GREFA undertakes rehabilitation, education, captive breeding for release programmes and is currently the biggest rehabilitation centre in Spain. It is also currently one of the most experienced and successful facilities undertaking captive breeding of cinereous vultures. Their hospital facilities is top class with 4 permanent vets. Adjoining their hospital, is their rehabilitation facility and again, this is world class and I believe, both these two very important aspects is something which VulPro lacks. Although our rehab is of world standard, we lack the facilities in which to undertake operations, x-rays and some of the veterinary procedures directly at the Centre and I believe that this is something which VulPro needs to consider very seriously going forward.



# Vulture conservation in Spain

cont'd

During my visit to GREFA, two vultures were being treated and the ability of undertaking x-rays to check for lead, calcium bone levels and any bone fractures or organ abnormalities is so incredibly important and assists with immediate and correct decisions and treatments for each case. Again I believe this is the starting point of VulPro's future hospital requirements and an x-ray machine should be on the top of our needs list.

Over and above their incredible facilities, GREFA has a world class release site where they are releasing their captive bred and rehabilitated Cinereous Vultures. Now the biggest difference here is the fact that none of these birds see humans at all. Feeding takes place at night through a closed door system with a pulley rope, water is filled via tubes and the enclosure does not get cleaned whilst birds are resident inside. The back of the enclosure has wooden panels to avoid the birds seeing people and the only monitoring that takes place is via 'peep' holes and a camera system. This system is the minimum and accepted standards for vulture releases and has proven successful in order to minimise human exposure and any chance of imprinting or association to food by humans. Again I think this is an important lesson for VulPro to follow for our captive breeding and release programmes as this method has been tried and tested in Europe for years and its success is already proven.





# Eastern Cape Report

Kate Webster

## Rehabilitation

Fortunately, or possibly unfortunately (as one always worries about the birds that are never found), I have not had any birds to rehabilitate in the latter half of this year. I was called out to a bird that had wing damage in the Upper Cathcart area however we were unable to catch it. Despite returning the following day, it was like looking for the proverbial “needle in a haystack”. We did not find the bird. However, we did come across an electrocuted bird in the area. Sadly this bird had been utilized for muthi trade which is not good news.

‘Adelaide’ is a Cape Vulture we fitted with a device in April 2015. The bird originally came from Bedford area picked up by Mr Alex Pringle, a farmer in the area. We lost contact with us via her GPS unit in early



July that year. Luckily, she was photographed in July 2016 at Mockford vulture restaurant near Polokwane.

## Eskom reporting

The finding of the electrocuted bird led to a 10km patrol along a much neglected line, with some side branches. Sadly, as I had suspected I came across more electrocutions and a full report has been sent through to Eskom/EWT for mitigation and much needed maintenance. I wrote a blog called “Walking the Lines” ([www.farmlifeec.blogspot.com](http://www.farmlifeec.blogspot.com)).

During early September I inspected two collision cases – one in the Thomas River area and the second in the Penhoek/Bird's River area, where both resulted in extensive veldt fires.



*Adelaide getting fitted with a GPS device*

# Eastern Cape Report cont'd

Both birds died and the grazing lost was immense and very valuable given the drought conditions in the E Cape. This could have led to a very negative attitude by the farming community towards both Eskom and vultures, however working together with the Eastern Cape Umbrella Fire Protection Association (ECUFPA), we have hopefully prevented this.

Later that month, I visited Mr. Kosi Slabbert in the Dodrecht area who had reported an electrocuted bird to complete a report for Eskom/EWT. A Verreaux's Eagle had also collided with the line historically. Sadly he pointed out a once utilized set of kranzes that used to be used by the vultures as a roost, in his youth.

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

## Wind farm and mining developments

I am actively involved in two potential wind developments (with possibly a third in the future) in the E Cape – one in the Cookhouse area (where I am registered as an Interested and Affected Party or I&AP) and the other in the Upper Cathcart area. I assist in supplying information needed regarding the negative information and understanding of the vultures in this regard. The E Cape is experiencing unprecedented potential development in this field which will definitely have a negative impact on the vultures in this province. I have also recently had input into a potential guideline document regarding wind development and vultures of the E Cape to be published by Birdlife South Africa.





# Eastern Cape Report cont'd

The potential coal mining development in the Molteno/Sterkstroom area seems to have been badly compromised with possible development imminent despite irregularities regarding granting of prospecting licences. I have registered as an I&AP and together with Agri Eastern Cape have attended meetings and will continue to put my weight behind this negative development as it will definitely affect the birds that forage in this area.

## Restaurant activities

The vulture restaurant at Rookwood is still being supplied with food from the local abattoir, Peace Abattoir. I am now also getting food offered from the neighbouring farmers (obviously being very careful as to what I accept regarding safe food). I have interacted with No. 2 Piggeries (thanks to Andrew Tucker from CS VETS) regarding the supply of pig food, however the logistics regarding the storage and transportation of this food still remains a problem.

I still set up the camera trap and also record Jackal Buzzards, African Fish Eagle, Verreaux's Eagle, Pied crows, White-necked Ravens, and Sacred Ibis together with mongoose making use of this facility. The Cape Vultures have identified the site and at times there will be a good number of birds seen. The vulture restaurant set up at the Trollip's with the food supplied (kindly transported by Fred Leask from Tsolo) has been a huge success with the birds utilizing the food regularly.



# Eastern Cape Report cont'd

Thomas the vulture (released in January this year) 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 this province. Thanks must go to Dean Ricketts and Ms. Nosisi Ntola from the Department of Environment in assisting with looking for Thomas. Very valuable information regarding a small colony was the result of this search. It is wonderful to know they were willing to go out and look for him.

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 and 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.



*Thomas the vulture with GPS tracker and patagial tags after release (left) and map of his total movements since release in January 2016 (below)*





# To Our Vultures

Anzelle van Wyk



Vultures of the world, you all are so beautiful but so hurled by the threats thrown at you of this century, you made it through different stages, oh how far have you come to have reached these ages.

You all are so diverse and how vastly you disperse, you fly for thousands of miles with eyesight that can spot something so small in all the isles. You fly so high, soaring through the winds of our magical sky.

God knew we needed you to clean up our earth through and through, that's why He created you. You are perfect for what you do, you are a committee of vultures so you stay in your crew.

Your feet are so big and pretty to jump on the carcasses so witty. You have such sharp sharp beaks to tear of that meat. You are quite of size to devour your prize, with a wingspan so large you deserve the title as a sarge.

You have beautiful feathers that help you roam through our Fathers heavens. But it's a tragedy that you are so fragile now, being endangered due to societies destructions that we so senselessly allow.

It's electrocutions, power line collisions, it's your habitat that we destroy, taking away your life's joy. You die of poisons because of our human choices. For *muti* they take you, as if you are ours, but you are not...you belong to Higher Powers.

The good people that are left, the ones that cares and caress. We assure that we are trying to conserve you, it is our passion and our pride too. Sometimes it feels like we are fighting a losing battle, we feel your pain, it's our hearts you rattle.

But we promise to take care of you till the day that we die, you're the ones we won't give up on, we can hear you cry. We will fight for you with all that is in us, we know in this world if we don't, you'll turn into dust.

Between society and you there is a massive strife, but you deserve the best there is, freedom and life. The world will not be the same if you all disappear, we hope that you'll be safe and forever stay here!

But if you go before we do, may God carry you through. Each and every one of you we have to let go, may your spirits roam free and with His angels you be!

# SAVE Project Partner

Kerri Wolter

## Saving Asia's Vultures from Extinction

VulPro, together with its project partner, the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Veterinary Sciences, has been involved in the Asian Vulture Crisis now for more than several years. Together, VulPro has proven the toxicity of diclofenac sodium to both Asian and Africa's Gyps species. We have also proven and tested the only safe non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug to vultures, namely meloxicam, and have been instrumental in testing many other hoped potential alternatives that could replace the usage of diclofenac. Through the years, VulPro has been directly involved in the testing trials on vultures and is currently the only facility able to undertake such studies all for the primary goal of saving Asia's critically endangered vultures (which declined by more than 95% through the exposure of diclofenac whilst feeding on treated carcasses) in addition to learn as much as possible on the potential dangerous affects of drug exposure to vultures globally and southern Africa.

For this reason, SAVE has formally welcomed VulPro as one of their 17 full partners within this founded organisation. VulPro is extremely proud of this partnership and of our work we have undertaken over the years for vultures not only in Asia but globally through our research and scientific conservation work through these testing trials.





# Sponsors

