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Top news stories from VulPro

Kerri Wolter shortlisted for The Tusk Conservation Award

A Press Release from Tusk Awards (Tusk Trust) in partnership with Investec Asset Management, dated 10 May 2013, announced that VulPro's founder and CEO, Kerri Wolter, was one of the five conservationists shortlisted from many nominations from across Africa for one of Tusk's two new awards launched in autumn 2012. The Tusk Conservation Award, for which Kerri has been shortlisted, and which is supported by Land Rover, recognises an up-and-coming conservationist whose work has already demonstrated an exceptional commitment to conservation and has made a significant impact.

Needless to say, we earnestly hope to be able to report in the end of the year issue of The VulPro Flyer that Kerri was the nominee finally chosen.

OLIM CIVES

Ambassador Cody (18.6.09-24.5.13)

& ambassador-in-waiting, Bonnie (29.8.12-27.5.13)



Above: Cody the dignified ambassador. Below: Cody the friend



May brought VulPro the saddest moments of its existence. Cody, who took over from Percy as VulPro's second ambassador in 2010, died unexpectedly on 24 May. Just 3 days later, Bonnie, our last year's Cape Vulture chick which we hand-raised for educational purposes, also passed away. As most of our readers know, Cody became the face of VulPro showcasing in both the Mazda Wildlife fund adverts, links: <https://vimeo.com/25229363> and <https://vimeo.com/14970609>. Bonnie was due to take over from Cody as ambassador in due course. For Kerri Wolter it was the intense loss of two friends, children and ambassadors for the cause of vulture conservation.

Both Cody and Bonnie were captive bred at the Pretoria Zoo. Cody was handed over to us when he was 7 weeks old. After a week of being with us, his wings broke from a lack of calcium in his diet. He was given emergency veterinary treatment, including calcium injections. He was never able to fly and could only perch (continued page 4)



Above: Bonnie as a chick September last year. Below: Bonnie in May this year



We have changed the title of our newsletter

To avoid possible confusion with *Vulture News*, the journal of the IUCN Vulture Specialist Group, we have changed the title of this newsletter from *VulPro News* to *The VulPro Flyer*.

Come to our Gala dinner, tying in with the 2013 International Vulture Awareness Day (IVAD)

Our faithful readers will recall our note last year that, while the amazing popularity of our IVAD day at VulPro represented a success in its own right, it had become a problem for us in other respects, diverting our limited management resources from attention to our main functions, as well as producing overexposure of releasable and captive bred birds to potential "human imprint". Consequently we felt unable to continue to hold IVAD events at VulPro. However, we will continue to celebrate IVAD within our second Fundraising Gala Dinner (the first, very successful Gala Dinner was held two years ago) on 6 September.

We can, once again, accommodate 150 guests and will again hold an auction during the evening. Our host is the well known radio personality, DJ Darren Scott, who will work together with us in making the evening a great success and we will, once again, be entertained by Rike with her saxophone throughout the evening. The evening will highlight VulPro's successes over the past few years, thanking our loyal sponsors and, of course, the general public for their support. We will also show case the relationship between Boehringer-Ingelheim and VulPro. **DO JOIN US FOR THIS GLITTERING EVENT!**

VULTURE PROGRAMME

Fundraising Gala Dinner Invitation

Hosts: VULPRO, Leopard Lodge and Boehringer Ingelheim

MC: Darren Scott (Live Auction will also take place)

Date: Friday, 6th September, 2013

Time: 18H30 for 19H00

Venue: Leopard Lodge, Hartbeespoort

Latitude: -25.7620783356299/

Longitude: 27.76723623275757

Dress: Formal

Cost: R280 per person



R.S.V.P. DATE: 26TH AUGUST, 2013

Kerri Wolter: kerri.wolter@gmail.com | 082 808 5113

Lana Dyer: lane.dyer@boehringer-ingelheim.com | 079 522 7933



Rescue & Rehabilitation

Comings and goings at VulPro January-June 2013

Species	In residence at 1.01.13 (non-releasable)	Rescued/ brought in	Released	Died	Euthanased	Transferred or donated	In residence at 30.06.13 (non-releasable)
VULTURES							
Cape	72 (65)	16	12	3	3		73(70)
African White-backed	4 (4)	4			1		7(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-eagle	2	1	1				2(2)
Black	1	1		1			1
OWLS							
Barn	0	1	1				0
Spotted-eagle	2 (2)						2 (2)
Giant-eagle	1 (1)						1 (1)
KITE							
Yellow– billed	1 (1)						1 (1)
BUZZARD							
Steppe	3 (3)						3 (3)
OTHER							
Andean Condor	2 (2)						2 (2)
Lanner Falcon	1(1)						1(1)
Sacred Ibis	1(1)						1(1)
White stork	0	1			1		0

Cases of special note this period

Release of 2 captive bred Spotted Eagle Owls. This happened in December 2012 but since the last newsletter. The two captive bred birds were the progeny of VulPro's non-releasable pair. The release was a success; monitored for several weeks to ensure they

were hunting successfully and getting enough food. Food was also supplied to the released owls, in case hunting was not successful but not enough to keep the birds from hunting themselves, on top of the enclosure where they were bred. Both owls were also sighted and

monitored each morning until they went their separate ways. We were also fortunate enough to witness one of the first released captive, parent raised owl breeding at VulPro and producing its own chicks to fledgling age.

Continued on page 4

Cody and Bonnie (continued from page 1)

a meter above the ground. However, despite his disability, he had an amazing zest for life. He became VulPro's 'clown' and was loved by everyone who met him. He was used not only in the Mazda advert but for the UK series 'Wild at Heart' where for 2 weeks every day he went into work. the most accommodating vulture who loved being with people and loved making everyone laugh. He was always the centre of attention and made sure everyone watched him and knew who he was.

Cody's and Bonnie's deaths were unexpected and basically unexplained. A postmortem on Bonnie revealed gout which implied some form of toxicity had occurred, but the nature and cause of this was not established. Blood samples taken from other vultures for comparative analysis failed to shed light on the matter. We have also considered malicious poisoning but ruled this out as a possibility. VulPro is looking at all our procedures and focus areas to make sure that this never happens again.



Cody liked to keep an eye on things (left), to check everything out (middle) and to give pleasure to all (in this case, right, to children from the 'Children of fire' children's home)

Cases of special interest (continued from page 2)

(Cases of special interest. Continued from page 2)

Release of 2 Cape Vultures and 1 captive bred one. In January we successfully released two Cape Vultures which were rescued/brought last December. One was from the Blouberg Nature Reserve and had a limp but had recovered. The other was from Hekpoort and had been found weak and dehydrated; he also recovered sufficiently well for release. We also attempted a release with the captive bred chick hatched in June 2012 and fledged in November. He stayed at the release site for a day, then left, only to relocate for two days at a nearby mining site from where we collected him. This is our second release of a captive bred Cape Vulture. A second attempt to release him to the wild will be made in 2014 as part of a larger research project on identifying the best ages for release of captive bred parent raised chicks so as to optimize their survival in the wild.

High uric acid levels in Johannesburg Zoo African White-backed vultures.

In January VulPro was asked to collect an African White-backed vulture (AWB) from the Johannesburg Zoo. This was their last AWB vulture following the deaths of their others from toxicity due to high uric acid levels. As with Cody and Bonnie, subsequent investigations failed to reveal the cause. The symptoms were essentially the same but no further conclusion was possible. It appears there is still a lot we don't know or understand about this species and perhaps some unidentified infectious disease or other syndrome is at play. After investigating all food sources, we are satisfied that it is not related to any of the food fed to the birds.

We tried. On 16 February we collected a young adult Cape Vulture from the Blouberg Nature Reserve with a broken leg. The bird underwent a 2.5 hour operation to pin the fracture. Sadly, on 19 February, the leg had not healed and the bird was in

severe pain. The decision to euthanize the bird had to be made.

A white stork joins, then leaves, our menagerie. On 2 March we collected a white stork which had flown into a power line and broken its wing. In the end it was necessary for the wing to be amputated. The bird joined our residents, making friends in particular with our Sacred Ibis with its fractured wing (picture below). Sadly, however, we subsequently found him with an injured leg — knocked down, we believe, by one of our horses — and he had to be euthanized.



2013 - Walter Naser

Meetings of special interest

VulPro shows the way and sets the standards

Those who see VulPro's monthly reports will know that every month sees a host of meetings taking place on a wide range of topics – sponsorship and fundraising, captures and monitoring studies, volunteers and their activities, student and other academic/research projects, vulture restaurants, actions to overcome threats to vultures, media interviews, equipment and enclosure needs, Board meetings and more.

The one we choose to highlight this issue was a meeting with representatives of the NSPCA in May. The outcome of this was a huge plus for VulPro. The Vulture Centre was deemed to have set the minimum standards for vulture rehabilitation in southern Africa and our handling, capturing and fitting of tracking devices has been accepted and incorporated into the NSPCA's management and ethical standards for work with, and research on vulture species throughout South Africa. Having the approval of the NSPCA is a massively positive sign that VulPro is a true leader in vulture conservation.

Community Outreach & Educational Activities

As always our outreach calendar has been well filled:

January

Three families and a group of 5 paragliders were hosted this month and 11 international veterinarian students contributed a day of volunteering

March

One group of 8 overseas guests, a group of 16 young learners from the Lutheran Church of Pretoria and 2 other small

groups of local guests were hosted. Two students from St Stithian's school did 8 hours of community service at the Centre.

April

One large group of 20 young adults and 2 small groups of local and overseas guests were hosted at the Centre

May

Some 80 members of the South African Hunters Association in Centurion were

given a presentation. Also a group of 29 adults with 28 children from the Honeydew Cubs were given an education day at VulPro. Three other smaller groups were also hosted at the Centre.

June

45 members of the Polokwane Bird Club were given a presentation at the Koral Retirement Village. A group of 60 adults and children and 3 other small groups were hosted at VulPro during the month.

Media & Publicity

January

- Working with Triosphere on a documentary "Faces of Africa" for a Chinese DSTV station

March

- Pre-recorded radio interview for "The Nature Journal" (Radio 702)
- "Visarend wat gif inkry, veg terug". Article on a poisoned Fish Eagle for Die Beeld
- Pre-recorded radio interview for Radio RSG afternoon show on the poisoned Fish Eagle
- Photography and text on the poisoned Fish Eagle for the Sunday Times

May

- Pre-recorded radio interview for "The Nature Journal" (Radio 702)
- Two minute insert on "Limpopo vulture tracking project"

aired after E-TV news on prime time DSTV

- Half-page feature on the "Tusk Award" for the Kormorant and the Fourways Review
- Interview with Radio 702 on the "nomination for the Tusk Award"

June

- Interview for vulture feature for the July issue of Africa Geographic magazine
- Pre-recorded radio interview for "The Nature Journal" (Radio 702)
- Article for a French magazine on the captive breeding programme
- Interview for the DagBreek by Wynette Theart early morning DSTV show, also to be posted on YouTube.
- Filming for a Tusk Trust documentary featuring Kerri Wolter as a Tusk Award nominee.

This issue's profiles

Bettina, a true vulture enthusiast

Hi there. I am Bettina Boemans, a 30-year old engineer from Germany. I have always had a passion for vultures. I started writing a German vulture blog three years ago (www.geierwelt.blogspot.com) and, more recently, on Facebook with an English vulture page entitled 'Fascinated by vultures'. Over and above my blogs, I have recently published my first German children's book about four European vulture species ("Der kleiner Geier mit der großen Angst und den vielen wilden Freunden") and together with my colleague and co-writer, we plan to translate it into different languages.

During 2010 and 2011, I spent most of my leave volunteering in Croatia for an Eurasian Griffon Vulture rescue centre and in February 2012 I was a volunteer at VulPro for three weeks. During these three weeks at VulPro, I knew I wanted to take a year off work and help in any way I can in protecting and conserving vultures and so, in October 2012 I started my vulture year - travelling "On vultures' wings around the world".

The first six weeks I was a volunteer at an Andean Condor project in a small village in the highlands of Ecuador followed by two weeks on the Galapagos and in Nepal and then on to the USA in San Diego working with the California Condor project. Five weeks later, after a ten days stop-over on Hawaii, I left the New World Vultures of North and South America to work with the Old World Vultures in Asia and Africa.

In Pokhara, Nepal, there is a paragliding school called "Parahawking", where guests can fly with Egyptian Vultures. This paragliding school supports vulture conservation and vulture restaurants in Nepal and through their parahawking flights, educates guests about the importance of conserving vulture species. After six amazing weeks in Asia I finally arrived back at VulPro, where I will volunteer until September until I have to return back to Germany and start working again.

Being at VulPro for 6 months and during the breeding season is a dream come true. Working with all these beautiful vultures at the centre, watching the wild ones flying in the sky or coming down to the vulture restaurant and supporting a wonderful project like this always puts a smile on my face, every single day!



Ara Monadjem

Ara is a professor in the Department of Biological Sciences, University of Swaziland with an impressive record of qualifications (BSc, and MSc at the University of the Witwatersrand and PhD at the University of Natal) and academic activities and publications. He serves on VulPro's scientific committee helping with VuPro's records. He writes that "I am a zoologist specializing in the ecology and conservation of the birds and mammals of Africa. My focus is currently on African small mammals (specifically bats and rodents), and large birds (vultures, eagles and storks). I specialize in field surveys where the objectives are primarily to obtain distributional information on rare and threatened species, and to provide accurate identifications of these species. I am also involved in predictive modeling of distributions, and studies of population dynamics. I have worked in very remote locations across the African continent including the rain forests of



Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Uganda, and the savannas of Mozambique, Swaziland, Kenya, Tanzania, Namibia, South Africa and Angola. I have published widely, including 4 books and > 70 scientific papers. My ultimate goals are: 1) to provide up-to-date and reliable scientific information on African mammals and birds that could be used in their long-term conservation; and 2) to share my enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, Africa's wildlife with students, colleagues and the general African public".

Funny

Hello! I'm Funny. They call me that since I often start what I am going to say with "Funny," But, as you see, I am keeping a low profile this issue, mainly in deference to Cody and Bonnie. I am missing them greatly. Also I am a little depressed by the slightly disparaging uses of my species in the Arts and in Business terminology (see page 8). I am very depressed at the awful story, also on page 8, about the massacre of my fellow vultures in Zimbabwe last year. Where is the 'sapiens' in Homo sapiens? Anyhow, regardless of all that, don't forget to show your love for us by signing up for the Gala dinner 26 August (see page 2). See you there!



Research areas

Research has largely centred around the programme to study vulture movement and other behaviour through re-sightings of tagged birds, particularly at restaurants, and following those fitted with tracking devices. Altogether 778 Cape Vultures have now been tagged and, since 2007 56 fitted with these devices through VulPro. Six of these devices are still emitting their signals. Initially these were not re-usable; these last 6 are re-usable and 1 has been successfully recovered for re-use (the others are still in first time use). Another 15 devices have been fitted to Cape Vultures for tertiary studies aided by VulPro and these are all still emitting their signals. Capture enclosures have been constructed at 4 sites in 4 Provinces. The devices cost in the order of SAR R30 000 and have been donated by Boehringer-Ingelheim, Virtryx, and general donations to VulPro.

Re-sighting is greatly dependent on the positive contribution of members of the public; camera traps are also proving their worth.

The resulting database is developing well and a paper entitled “Effects of rehabilitation on survival rates of endangered Cape Vultures” has been accepted for publication in *Animal Conservation* Print ISSN 1367-9430.

The following broadsheets supplying protocols found appropriate and successful for handling and the fitting of tracking devices to vulture species in South Africa have been prepared for submission to *Vulture News* and are also available from Kerri Wolter at kerri.wolter@gmail.com.

Broadsheet on Vulture Handling available. A broadsheet entitled “Handling of Vultures” by Kerri Wolter, Walter Nester and Mllue Nsikani. This has been drawn up for the benefit of bird ringers, veterinarians, biologists and others who need to handle vultures in the course of their duties. This has been prepared for submission to *Vulture News*.

Broadsheet on a Protocol for Fitting of Tracking Devices. By Kerri Wolter and Walter Nester, this covers protocols for fitting the Backpack harnesses used with success on vulture species in southern Africa

Publications

Naidoo V, Wolter K, Espie I, Kotze A. (2012) Lead toxicity: consequences and interventions in an intensively managed (*Gyps coprotheres*) vulture colony. *J Zoo Wildlife Med* 43(3): 573-578.

Phipps WL, Willis SG, Wolter K, Naidoo V (2013) Foraging Ranges of Immature African White-Backed Vultures (*Gyps africanus*) and Their Use of Protected Areas in Southern Africa. *PLoS ONE* 8(1): e52813.

Monadjem A, Wolter K, Nester W, Kane A. (2013) Effect of rehabilitation on survival rates of endangered Cape vultures. (In press. Accepted for publication April 2013).

Submitted to PLOS one for submission: Do Power Lines and protected areas present a catch-22 situation for Cape Vultures (*Gyps coprotheres*)?

Wolter K. (2012) To stabilize the global Cape Vulture population. Cape Vulture Task Force report. Available from kerri.wolter@gmail.com.

Boemans B, Wolter K. Captive breeding behaviour of Cape Vultures (*Gyps coprotheres*) Submitted for publication to *Vulture News*

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Sign up for your **MyPlanet** card today and help us save our vulture species.



Present your MyVillageMyPlanet card when you make a purchase with participating companies, and a percentage of your payment can be made to VulPro. Contact **MySchoolMyVillageMy Planet** at www.myvillage.co.za or contact Kerri Wolter on 082-808-5113 or via email at kerri.wolter@gmail.com and arrange to support VulPro through this excellent scheme.

History corner

From “The Song of Hiawatha” (XIX: The Ghosts)

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1855

*Never stoops the soaring vulture
On his quarry in the desert,
On the sick or wounded bison,
But another vulture, watching
From his high aerial look-out,
Sees the downward plunge, and follows;
And a third pursues the second,
Coming from the invisible ether,
First a speck, and then a vulture,
Till the air is dark with pinions.
So disasters come not singly;
But as if they watched and waited,
Scanning one another's motions,
When the first descends, the others
Follow, follow, gathering flock-wise ...*

Issues

Report to Zimbabwe BirdLife* on Poisoned Elephant Carcass and Dead Vultures, 17th July 2012, Gonarezhou National Park. A poacher poisoning horror story. (Report by Dr Rosemary Groom). [*info@birdlifezimbabwe.org](mailto:info@birdlifezimbabwe.org)

Extracts and one of several photographs from the report:

Tuesday 17th July in the area around Pokwe camp ... a poisoned elephant carcass .. seen from the air. (First .. a zebra carcass cleaned of meat with about 15 dead vultures scattered around it, and then we came across the poachers camp. About 50m away from the poachers' camp we came across the elephant carcass, which appeared to be about 2 weeks old. The tusks had been removed, apparently while the carcass was still fresh. The skin appeared to have been cut open in at least three different places; the neck, back and rear; evidence of knife marks were clearly visible on the skin. This may have been to expose poisoned flesh to vultures or, if the elephant had been shot, to subsequently poison the flesh for the vultures. In total we counted 94 dead African white backed vultures and 15 dead lappet faced vultures at or in the immediate vicinity of the carcass. ... The majority of these carcasses were in four piles under different trees or bushes next to the elephant carcass. In all piles, the upper beaks of the older carcasses had been removed. The fresher carcasses were undisturbed,

perhaps suggesting the poachers had moved off before the vultures finished dying. In total the upper beaks had been removed from 57 white backed vultures and 8 lappet faced vultures... Nothing else was disturbed on the vulture carcasses; the heads/brains had not been removed. It looked like the beaks had been chopped off with a machete or a heavy blow with a sharp knife. It seemed like the piles of vultures under the trees had been made by people moving the carcasses into piles. In total therefore we counted 184 vulture carcasses (of which 15 were lappet faced vultures, and the rest African white backed as far as we could tell), but we suspect there were considerably more and I would not be surprised if the total exceeded 250 birds



Bioaccumulation and ecotoxicity of diclofenac [Not just a vulture problem.]

(extracted from "Microbiology", March 2013)

Diclofenac is used worldwide and has been frequently detected in sewage effluents, surface water and groundwater at concentrations of up to a few micrograms per litre. (It) has a low removal rate during the wastewater treatment process ... and may accumulate to toxic concentrations. ... Studies have revealed that diclofenac can cause adverse effects on the kidney functions of birds and fish. Sewage bacterial strains exposed to various concentrations of diclofenac exhibited reduced growth rate and changes in morphology

Vultures in contemporary art

In Ictu Oculi (in the blink of an eye)

[Viewable on *In Ictu Oculi*, 2009 on Vimeo]

Just finished playing at the Saatchi Gallery in London has been Spanish born artist Greta Alfaro's video *In Ictu Oculi* featuring a huge flock of vultures descending on a richly laden dining table in the Spanish mountains, picking it dry with much chaos and then flying off again. Write-ups tell us that it is an allegory alluding to the shortness of human existence and the viewer's experience of time, with hark-backs to well-known events and art of the past, particularly the Last Supper. It is well worth watching the vimeo (available via Google). Be patient; the first signs



of your favourite birds is about 2 minutes in.

Vultures in contemporary business

"Vulture raid on tycoon's hotel empire" runs the headline in a recent Sunday Times (UK) business section. Such allusions to vultures are quite common in

business sections of the press. Wikipedia tells us a little what uncomplimentary use our poor birds are put to this time: "**Vulture fund**" is a term commonly used to refer to a private equity or hedge fund that invests in debt considered to be very weak or in imminent default. Investors in the fund profit by buying this debt at a discounted price and then suing the debtor for a larger amount than the purchasing price. The term is used to criticize the fund for strategically profiting off of debtors that are in financial distress. The term is a metaphor used to compare the fund to the behavior of vultures "preying" on debtors in financial distress to make a large monetary gain; in many cases, leaving the debtor in a worse state.

VulPro SPONSORS

Lewis Phillips. A story of dedication to the cause of the conservation of vultures

Lewis Phillips is a full time Photography Lecturer and Conservationist who is based in the UK. As a youngster he was always interested in wildlife and the countryside. Lewis grew up in a busy part of London, as a young man he worked on the fruit stalls on the markets of London, this was far from what he wanted to do, so by the age of 17 he had saved enough money to go travelling, first visiting America then over the next few years, countries from Fiji to Australia, working his way. His love of photography developed as he recorded different habitats holding a wealth of wildlife. The barn owl was his main inspiration in bird photography and led to his love of birds of prey and his fascination with vultures.

"I became concerned about how misunderstood vultures were and working with them was a real privilege. They are great characters, funny and, like us, have mood swings but they are incredibly intelligent. I decided to write a book about them highlighting issues on which to raise their profile, and how their demise is affecting the ecosystem around the world.

I became greatly impressed by VulPro and their forward thinking. I contacted Kerri who proved very enthusiastic about my passion, always replying to me in a swift professional manner. Last year I managed to help raise over £1000 for International Vulture Day and last month I held a fundraiser in Greenwich, London, for Vulpro and the Balkans Trust, raising £500 which were split between the two organisations. This year I hope to help by sending some of my photography work to VulPro to be auctioned on the 6 September

at the Vulpro Gala"

Lewis is visiting Africa and VulPro for the first time in August and hopes that this will be the just the first of many visits. He hopes that, with the power of imagery, he can document issues the birds face and thereby help to conserve the future of the Vulture worldwide.

His website can be visited at www.lewisphillipsimages.com



Lewis and his vulture fundraising and awareness display

AngloGold Ashanti
Beluit Investments
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
Samancor - Western Chrome Mines
The Tusk Trust
Virtryx
Wild Exposure



ALSO —

The many donations from individuals, including Lewis Phillips (above) and

ADOPTIONS

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

Jika Africa, 2 adult Cape Vultures, Flaps and Ziggy.

Mike Behr's family, as a birthday present to Mike Behr, have adopted our first

