

THE VULPRO FLYER



&

RESTAURANT NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2019

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



Compiled by Julie Lundt



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

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



Executive Summary

Over the past few months and more recently, I have noticed an increase in media showcasing the doom and gloom our planet is currently facing due to climate change. There are now also articles and published papers highlighting the human population explosion and the results this is having on our environment and species. Articles are publishing dooms day as soon as 2050 which does not give us much time. Greta Thunberg has done so much at her young age, lobbying for politicians to stop talking and to start acting in making changes right now in which to address the crisis our world is facing. It is without a doubt, time to act right now, this very second if we hope to save not only our environment, the species that inhabit this planet with us but also, the human population. Every single person that shares this planet can make a difference and every single person has a responsibility to live environmentally consciously and responsibly.

It is more evident now than ever before that the work VulPro undertakes is critically important. Just last week, 14 June 2019, another 2 poisoning incidents of vultures took place in KZN - South Africa where over 22 critically endangered vultures were targeted and poisoned for cultural practices. Three more poisoning events occurred in Botswana, Kenya and Zambia during the same week and over 537 vultures alone were poisoned in Botswana. The magnitude of this cannot be over emphasised given many adult vultures are incubating eggs and future generations of vultures have now also been negatively affected. For VulPro, with some of our current birds being tracked as far up north into Zambia, the thought of them reaching their untimely death at the hands of man is incomprehensible - simply unacceptable.

Man can no longer stand still and wait for someone else to make changes. We can no longer keep talking about educating the future generation as there is no time anymore to wait for the future generations to make decisions in 20 years from now. It is time we all stand together to protect and preserve all that has been given to us to cherish and look after.

This newsletter highlights team work, dedication and absolute commitment VulPro has in making a positive difference to every single vulture, to saving and conserving a species that is so incredibly important to the health of our ecosystems. We are incredibly grateful to our supporters, followers, donors, friends, volunteers and family for joining us on this road. Our dream is to prevent the extinction of vultures and we simply cannot do this on our own.

Kerri Wolter

The VulPro Flyer

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Rehabilitation Update

Statistics

<u>Species</u>	<u>Number resident at VulPro 31.12.18</u>	<u>Rescued and brought in since January 2019</u>	<u>Released</u>	<u>Died</u>	<u>Euthan-ized</u>	<u>Transferred donated</u>	<u>Number resident at VulPro 15 June 2019</u>
<u>Cape Vultures</u>	158	40	44	6	3	0	145
<u>African White-backed Vultures</u>	50	9	5	2	1	0	51
<u>Lappet-Faced Vultures</u>	8	0	0	0	0	0	8
<u>White-headed vultures</u>	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
<u>Palm-nut vultures</u>	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
<u>Black Vulture</u>	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
<u>King Vulture</u>	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
<u>Andean Condor s</u>	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
<u>African Fish Eagle</u>	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
<u>Yellow billed Kite</u>	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
<u>Hooded Vulture</u>	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
<u>Black Chested Snake Eagle</u>	0	2	0	0	1	0	1
<u>Marabou Stork</u>	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
<u>Cormorant</u>	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
<u>African Harrier Hawk</u>	0	3	0	0	0	3	0
<u>Pale Chanting Goshawk</u>	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
<u>Other Raptors</u>	7						0
<u>Lesser Flamingos</u>	0	43		6		37	0
<u>Total</u>	235	101	49	15	8	41	216

Rehabilitation Update - Rescues

Rescues

The first few months of 2019 were very busy with all kinds of rescues. The weather was incredibly hot and dry, followed by some very heavy thunderstorms. These extreme environmental conditions resulted in our team collecting many birds that were on the brink of starvation, severely malnourished and dehydrated. This was followed by a couple of waterlogged birds after the storms.

We continue to admit, far too many, victims of powerline collisions and electrocutions as well as altercations with barbed-wire fences. These birds kept us busy at the Vets with wing amputations and leg pinning surgeries.

A few birds came in having been exposed to poisoning including lead and organo-phosphate poisoning.

We also rescued 7 other birds of prey and 1 aquatic bird.

In addition to the above, in February, VulPro opened its doors to 43 newly hatched Flamingo chicks needing to be rescued as part of the greater Kimberly Flamingo Rescue Operation.



Rehabilitation Update - Releases

Releases

There is very little that can beat the feeling of standing on the top of a mountain and releasing a rehabilitated or captive bred vulture back into the wild. Over the past 6 months, we have had the extremely emotional and incredible privilege of releasing 49 vultures (44 Cape Vultures and 5 African White-backed Vultures) to live a wild and free life.

Of the above, 13 were our captive-bred babies , consisting of 10 Cape Vultures and 3 African White-backed Vultures.



Ex-situ Conservation Bred Releases

On 8 March 2019, 4 vehicles left VulPro with precious cargo. 13 juvenile vultures, the captive reared chicks hatched in 2018, were graduating to the soft-release enclosure for a few months of acclimatisation prior to their release into the wild.

During the months that these vultures are in the soft release enclosure they have interactions with many wild and previously released vultures that come and visit them from surrounding colonies. In addition to delivering a fresh carcass to the enclosure twice a week VulPro organises for the birds to be checked on daily. These special birds were born to captive non-releasable parents in efforts to supplement the dwindling wild populations



Ex-situ Conservation Breeding

	Egg Bound (lost)	Died	Fertile	Infertile	Unknown	Cracked	Lost
AWBV	0	0	2	1	2	0	0
CV	0	6	16	5	2	4	0
Total	0	6	18	6	4	4	0

VulPro's 2019 breeding season has come early for our captive vultures and to-date, we have 33 Cape Vulture eggs and 5 African White-backed Vulture eggs laid. Whilst we are still waiting for a few more eggs to arrive, our first two precious chicks have already hatched.

In addition to this, for the first time ever, our 2 adult breeding pairs of Lappet-faced Vultures have attempted to copulate. Although it is still early days, we are thrilled with their progress of nest building and their want to begin breeding.

Outlined in the table above are our breeding statistics for Cape and African White-backed vultures so far for the 2019 breeding season eggs laid.

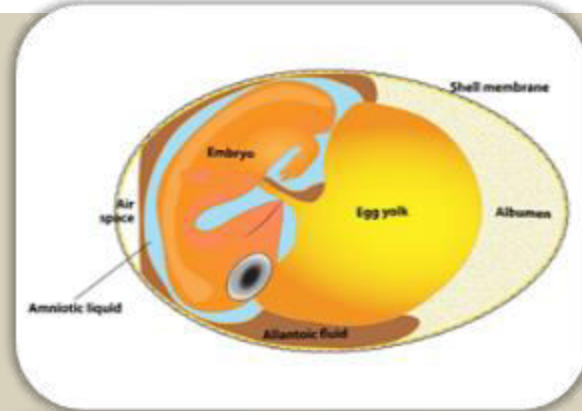


Ex-situ Conservation

Breeding - Hatching

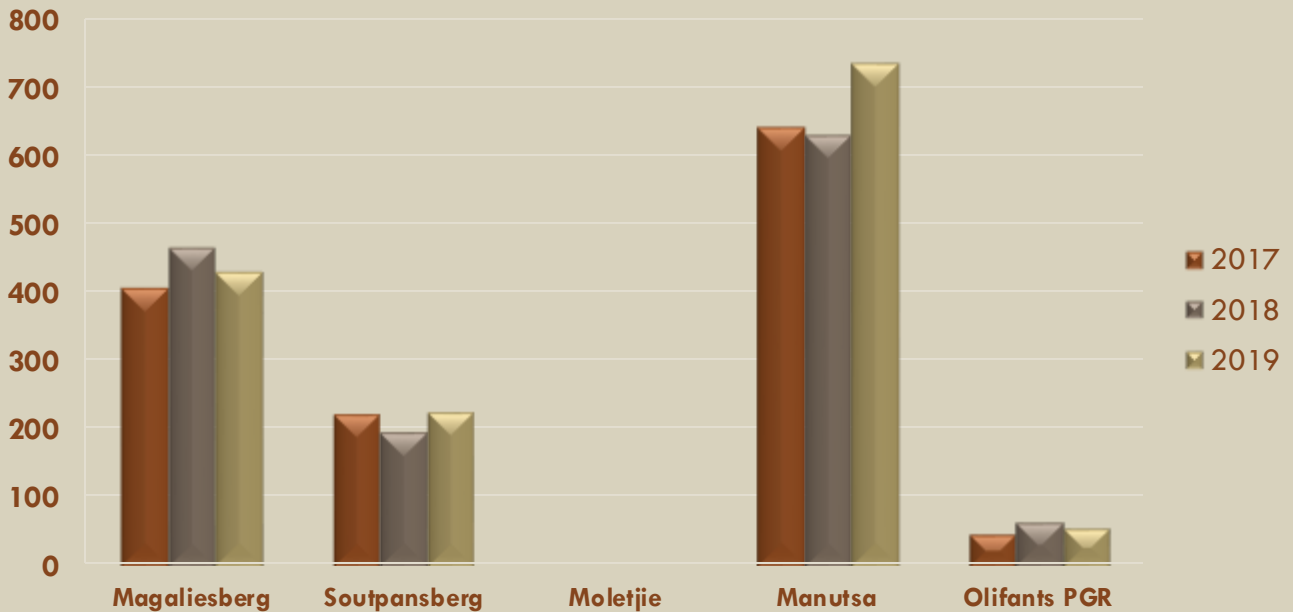
The Miracle of Life

- The egg is laid and taken from the parent birds and placed in an incubator (The parents get given a dummy egg)
- Incubation is around 54 days
- The eggs are candled to determine fertility and to monitor proper egg development
- Towards the end of incubation the chick starts to retract residual yolk into its body cavity and Oxygen demand is growing which will trigger respiration.
- The amnion sac contains and protects the embryo until hatching
- The allantois provides an exchange of calcium and oxygen and gets rid of waste
- As the embryo grows and fills the egg cavity the albumin (egg white) decreases whilst the air cell grows to provide enough air to keep the hatchling alive.
- As the embryo starts to manoeuvre itself into position for hatching the absorption of the yolk into its stomach speeds up, this enables the chick to survive a couple of days without food once born. The chick moves into position with the egg tooth correctly positioned to start breaking through the membrane and shell.
- Internal pipping – the shortage of oxygen triggers the embryo to start lung respiration. The embryo instinctively puts its head under its wing and with its beak pierces the inner membrane and starts lung ventilation into the air cell. The embryo may start cheeping at this stage
- External pipping – after piercing the inner membrane, the embryo starts tapping the eggshell repeatedly with its egg tooth causing the shell to weaken and eventually break.
- Hatching – to break free from the egg shell, the hatchling uses its egg tooth to cut away and its wings and legs to force through the egg shell
- The hatching process can take up to 72 hours in total.
- After 10 – 22 days the chick is returned to its parents to rear.



Vulture Breeding Monitoring 2019

Number of Breeding Pairs June 2019



VulPro undertook the first breeding surveys for 2019.

Magaliesberg - a total of 432 breeding pairs were identified on the Magaliesberg range which is made up of the Skeerpoort colony (287 pairs) and Nooitgedacht colony (145 pairs).

Soutpansberg - the first count of the Soutpansberg Colony recorded 225 breeding pairs, an increase of 28 breeding pairs.

Moletjie this colony showed only 1 breeding pair down from 5 breeding pairs seen the previous 2 years

Olifants PGR - We recorded 56 tree breeding pairs made up of African White-backed Vultures and Hooded Vultures

Manutsa - A very encouraging 737 breeding pairs were observed and recorded for this area, an increase of 106 pairs.



Power Line Updates

Charne Wilhelmi

Year	Date	Area	Province	Kilometers Surveyed (KM)	Structures	Fatalities	Injured birds
2019	21 - 22 Jan	Thabazimbi	Limpopo	24.7	115	0	0
2019	20 Feb	Christiana	Free State	1.6	12	0	0
2019	28 Feb - 01 Mar	Bloemhof	Free State	6.72	66	0	0
2019	07 - 08 Mar	Witpoort	North West	8.9	50	4	0
2019	12 Mar	Kathu	Northern Cape	13.52	47	3	0
2019	17 Apr	Ventersdorp	North West	11.2	28	0	0
2019	15 May	Holfontein	Gauteng/North West border	3.87	24	1	0
2019	16 May	Randfontein	Gauteng/North West border	6.93	47	0	0
2019	16 May	Rhino and Lion GR, Teak Place Guesthouse, Krugersdorp	Gauteng	3.5	12	0	0
			Totals	80.94	401	8	0

During the period of 01 January to 31 May 2019, VulPro surveyed a total of 80.94kms of power lines, including 401 power line structures. During these surveys, a minimum of 8 vulture fatalities were identified, and reported to Eskom.

Some good power line news - Our continued efforts in minimising the threat of power line incidents resulted in some positive action by the collaborative efforts of Tshwane Municipality who placed bird protectors on some powerline structures located behind our facility. Every single preventative measure contributes to making these lines safer for vultures and other birds of prey.

We continue to engage with our providers of electricity in our efforts to minimise the threat of power line incidents, as this still remains the biggest threat to South African vultures.



Eastern Cape Report

Kate Webster

Report December 2018 – May 2019

Rehabilitation

The middle of summer presented extreme dry conditions over the Eastern Cape which, similar to those experienced up in the northern provinces of the country, did not bode well for vultures; particularly the young birds.

Just before Christmas I received a call from Mark Marshall (reptile specialist) in PE about a Cape Vulture being seen in the urban part of the city. He asked if I would be willing to collect the bird should he locate and capture it. Arnold Slabbert eventually managed to capture the vulture which was very dehydrated and disorientated. We arranged to collect him from Arnold at Colchester on the Sundays River just outside PE. This young bird was put into the enclosure with the company of a vulture I had collected from Stutterheim area last year, to become used to being a vulture again. He was later fitted with a device and released in early February together with his companion (wing tag 241).

Early in January, I got a call from Kathy Stretton informing me of a vulture found in her garden after they had returned from holiday. We travelled out to just below Penhoek pass area and spent at least an hour capturing this weak individual, which kept on flying 'just out of reach' from one camp to the koppie and back to the camp until her energy had run out. The typical symptoms of dehydration, disorientation and extremely thin matched all the other birds that VulPro were collecting during this very dry summer. With VulPro staff being stretched in collecting many downed birds, I volunteered to collect an injured African White-backed Vulture from Petrusburg in the Free State.

This youngster had permanent wing damage and is now a permanent resident at VulPro.

My next vulture came from Steynsburg area, she had been found grounded and weak but clearly not too weak to give me a good bite on the ear. She was nicknamed 'ear chomper' and with a bit of TLC she was released at Rookwood a month later sporting the new leg band no 34.

Steynsburg seemed to be on the map for downed vultures and not long after collecting ear chomper, I got a call from the area of an electrocuted bird. Sadly by the time I collected her, she was in a very bad way and died in transit back to Rookwood.

Early in March I travelled through Colesberg to collect an injured (yes power lines yet again!) bird from Mr Rassie Smith who kindly brought the girl through from Phillipstown in the Northern Cape. She has now joined my permanent immature group of birds until she grows up to become part of the captive breeding programme at VulPro.

Then along came Mr Ugie! I collected this vulture from Ugie where the bird was being treated and cared for by Mr Botha who had confiscated the bird from PG Bison. This bird, clearly very imprinted, was quite comfortable in his garden and walked up to me after lying on the grass (like a dog in his yard). I realized that this bird had been in the company of people for too long as every time I put another bird in with Mr Ugie he would squeal out of protest. He had no fear of people and was never happy with company of his own kind. Mr Ugie was sent to VulPro for further integration lessons with vultures and hopefully soon will

be able to take to the skies, when he realizes he is actually a vulture!!

Eastern Cape Report

Kate Webster

Eskom reporting:

Eskom power lines continue to reap havoc amongst the vultures in this province with virtually not a single month going by where electrocutions and collisions are not reported to me.

Below is a list of the incidents since January 2019

Date	Infrastructure type	Comments
05.01.019	Distribution line	1 Cape Vulture collision and killed and set the veldt alight but fortunately the fire was contained very quickly to prevent large scale damage – Thomas River
20.02.019	Transformer	1 Cape Vulture electrocuted at a transformer in the Thomas River area
25.02.019	Transmission line Transformer	1 Cape Vulture found alive but died in transit electrocuted (PM confirmed this) Found under the transformer at the same time were: 1 Black-chested Snake Eagle 1 Helmeted GuineaFowl
07.03.019	Distribution line	1 Cape Vulture in Steynsburg area Report done by Aliwal North DEDEAT
17.03.019	Distribution line	1 Cape Vulture collision in the Northern Cape near Phillipstown – Mr Rassie Smith
01.04.019	Distribution line	1 Cape Vulture electrocuted (on poorly maintained already mitigated line!) near Penhoek Pass
16.04.019	Distribution line	5 Cape Vultures (Wriggleswade) Upon visiting the site in early May, together with Eskom, we found an additional 2 Cape Vultures and a Blue Crane collision
24.05.019	Distribution line	2 Cape Vultures in the Upper Cathcart area. Site visit to take place with Eskom personnel within the next week.

Eastern Cape Report

Kate Webster

Summary (calculations done on the birds reported 5 months)

Cape Vultures affected in total	15	(average 3 vultures per month)*
Other birds affected	3	
Cape Vultures permanently damaged	0	No survivors (excluding N Cape bird)
Cape Vultures killed/dead	15	
*this excludes the bird from the N Cape and sadly the average is up from last years 5 months of 2.2 vultures per month		

As usual all these incidents have had reports sent through to Eskom for attention. The numbers remain high and of major concern for this species in this province. Recently I have visited reported incidents with Aphelele Tomsana, who is the newly appointed Eskom Environmental Management Officer based in East London and the respective CNC managers to discuss mitigation measures required. This is possibly the first step in the right direction but sadly remains reactive as opposed to pro active!

THANK YOU - I would also like to thank Div de Villiers of DEDEAT (Green Scorpions) for establishing a working group under the leadership of Dean Ricketts, who are tasked to monitor this situation with regard to vultures and power lines in this province. It is certainly wonderful to have the support and understanding from the Department of Environment and I am extremely happy that they too see the importance of this concerning a very vulnerable species in this province!



THANK YOU - I must also thank Dr Werner Wentzel who is willing to assist with post mortems on birds that die. He conducted a post mortem on the bird that died in transit (Steynsburg) and confirmed electrocution and permanent wing damage. He has furthermore indicated he will continue to assist whenever I need help.

Eastern Cape Report

Kate Webster

General

My enclosure at Rookwood has presently got 5 birds, all permanently injured and I continue to monitor them for translocation to VulPro for when they are closer to breeding age. They often are visited by the usual Pied Crows and White-necked Ravens, however, have also had an odd visit or two from the Fish Eagle or even Hamerkop. A resident pair of leguaan (water monitors) sneak in to assist disposing of their carcasses fed to the vultures.

Thank you - I am extremely grateful to Dave Osborne (no 2 Piggeries) for allowing me to access a constant supply of food for these birds.

Thank you - Thanks must go to Brendon Westerberg (manager) who makes sure the carcasses are placed in the deep freezer and is always ready to assist loading when I collect. This has been a huge weight of my and shoulders as constant supply of food for my birds has always been a big concern.

I continue to feed birds at the vulture restaurant at Rookwood, with food available (supplied either by our farm or from Peace Abattoirs). Regular visitors other than vultures remain the Fish Eagle, Jackal buzzard and Verreaux's eagles. The restaurant will now quieten down however with a more constant supply of food available, I will be able to start supplementing and the end of winter (September) for all the wild birds looking for food once they start coming off their nests.

Releases

Three—fifty (tag 350) was released early in February 2018 continues to fly between the Eastern Cape and the Drakensberg of KZN. She loves the mountainous area just North and East of the big Mzimvubu river and has once made a trip down to the Mkambati colony on the Transkei coast. She must be getting closer to breeding age now.

We fitted the bird from PE with a tracking device and released him during February. Initially he foraged not much further east of Rookwood just into the Transkei area before moving up to the Stormberg range near Molteno. Sadly we lost track of his movements as he moved across towards Hofmeyr (Bamboeshoek mountains) and despite sending out a search party to the last reading have not found any evidence of him.



Eastern Cape Report

Kate Webster

General

Thank you to DHL supply chain and transport

I have become so used to this support from DHL, but feel that I must make special mention of how wonderful they are with always being ready for transporting our birds up to VulPro from Rookwood. This season we have already done two batches with the first being the little AWB from Petrusburg, together with the bird I caught early in January (She has been safely released up at Nooitgedacht in the Magaliesberg). The second group was Mr Ugie and one of my permanently injured birds that has lived with me for almost 2 years now, and is getting closer to breeding age. Graham and Nadia are absolute stars in organizing this, and the drivers are also so helpful and friendly when meeting me at the Ultra City in Queenstown with my precious cargo. Thanks guys, you will always be special and my spirit is always lifted whenever I see these yellow long haul trucks in my province because I know what a wonderful job you do for us.



Thank you - I want to specifically thank Kerri and Charne of VulPro for their continuous support.

Thank you - I would like to thank my sponsors Lomas Wildlife Protection Trust and DHL Supply Chain as I would not be able to do the work without them.

Thank you – to My family and staff, who are always willing to handle, hold, catch and assist with treatment whenever necessary. T

Thank you - to the landowners who always make the effort to contact me for assistance with regards to our precious Cape vultures, this is very valuable.

The Shangani Sanctuary

Vulture Restaurant

The Shangani Sanctuary is situated near to the village of Shangani in Zimbabwe, which is located on the main road between Bulawayo and Gweru. Jabulani Safaris which operates within the Shangani Sanctuary has over the years left carcasses out for vultures whenever they had mortalities of the wildlife within the area.

This situation changed in 2018 when a commercial farm in the area, Pezulu Ranches, established a commercial abattoir on their property. The Pezulu Ranches abattoir has pledged its support and provides a weekly supply of offal and offcuts that are devoid of poisons and other chemicals and drugs as the animals being slaughtered are for human consumption.

After consultation and guidance from VulPro we have established a vulture restaurant, feeding at least once a week depending on the slaughter schedule of the Pezulu Ranches. The Jabulani Safaris Manager, Daniel Mead has commenced recording feeds using camera traps, establishing the numbers and different species of Vultures that come into feed.

To date Lappet Faced, White Backed, Cape and Hooded Vultures have all come into feed, with the White Backed Vultures dominating the restaurant. At night, we have Brown Hyena and Bushpigs as regular visitors to the restaurant.



With the regular feeding, we have at least 100 Vultures coming into the restaurant when food is put out and we are monitoring this to see if we are getting increasing numbers with each successive feed.

Buoyed by our initial successes, the next step for the Shangani Sanctuary Vulture Restaurant is to work with VulPro in fitting tracking devices to Lappet Faced Vultures in order to get an understanding of their range and nesting sites in relation to the restaurant. This is still in its infancy and we are starting the process of consulting with Zimparks in order to obtain the necessary permits to allow us to capture Vultures.

We would like to thank Kerri Wolter and the VulPro team for the advice, guidance and inspiration for us and our restaurant in Zimbabwe.



African Folklore

Credo Mutwa on Vultures



Credo Mutwa is a 97 year old Celebrated Traditional Healer / Sangoma

In the land of the black people, before western civilization made a mockery of and destroyed ancient traditions, vultures were respected and honoured. Vultures were known as Izingwony zenkosi, birds of the lord or king, and were protected with some of the strictest enforceable laws by the king of the land.

To African people the vulture was the symbol of fertility, and people believed that where there are vultures, there is safety, there is purity, and there is life. The vulture was regarded as a purifier, one who cleans up the land; as symbol of fertility, one who fertilizers the earth and makes it fat; and as a warrior. Stories are told that vultures were the reincarnated souls of brave warriors or hunters who had died bravely in battle or out hunting

One of the greatest acknowledgements of a great warrior or hunter was for the tribal king to permit the wearing of 3 vulture tail or wing feathers in his headdress which symbolised truth, faith and honesty. A vulture **was NOT allowed to be killed to obtain these feathers** which the warrior or hunter had to collect from a living vulture, or one that had died of natural causes. The king would then place them in the headdress.

The bones of a vulture that had **died of natural causes** were regarded to be of great value to African healers and Shamans who use vulture bones that have been ground to a powder to protect people from enemies.

Priest diviners regard the beak of a vulture that had **died of natural causes** a powerful instrument of divination and it is part of the equipment of priest diviners.

For someone starting a family it is good to dream of a vulture as this means strong, healthy children who will protect the home and family.

For someone to dream of a vulture eating them, it means the gods are angry and might inflict punishment by death unless one mends their way.



Editor : Today's sad reality - vultures' lives are taken due to the above beliefs, but without regard to the ancient laws of the kings that once ruled, that **vultures be protected at all costs** and only the use of **parts from natural death** be used. The punishment of death for killing a vulture is no longer forceable in modern society!

I personally wonder, would the world not be a better place if we listened to and took cognisance of the teachings of these wise Leaders who lived in harmony and respect for Mother Earth?



Comic Relief

Q. What is a vulture's favourite underwear?

A. Thermals!
They're always flying in them

A vulture boards a plane with three dead racoons.

The flight attendant says to him , "I'm sorry sir, it's only two carrion per passenger!"

Two vultures are in a field, eating a dead clown. One vulture says to the other, "Does this taste funny to you?"

BUT YOU HAVE
A VERY NICE
PERSONALITY

WHEN YOU'VE JUST BEEN DROPPED
INTO THE FRIEND ZONE.

Meet our Head of Research

Alexandra Howard

Alexandra Howard

After growing up on David Attenborough and 50/50 documentaries I always knew animals would be a part of my career some day. Born and bred on the East Rand of Johannesburg, I went to study a Bachelor of Science in Zoology at the University of Pretoria where I continued with an Entomology Honours on dung beetles and a Zoology Masters focusing on bats. I have been fortunate enough to conduct fieldwork throughout Southern Africa from testing birds in the Kalahari, to catching ants in the Drakensberg and sampling bats in Swaziland, KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape. I am hoping to combine my love of fieldwork and science to make a real difference to the plight of African vultures and I am excited to join such a respected and passionate team of staff at VulPro.



Meet our Volunteer

Shelley Alder



Shelley Alder
Gauntlet Conservation Trust

This is my second time volunteering at VulPro and I'm certain it will not be my last!

The place, the people, and the birds hold a very special place in my heart.

From arrival you are emerged into the world and workings of VulPro. That may mean getting your hands dirty and preparing food for the birds, cleaning aviaries and changing bath water, or sitting in the hide spotting tag numbers of returning Vultures at the restaurant. You find yourself never without a job, and every job you do makes a difference.

Coming from a bird of prey centre I got some further hands on experience with the wild vultures, and saw with my own eyes the issues vultures are facing across southern Africa. After following rescues on their Facebook page, to be asked to tag along on one was an honour and a great insight into the relentless hard work the staff do day to day (and night!) to help these amazing birds.



Meet our Volunteer

Amanda Baca



Amanda Baca
Bird Keeper
Abq BioPark Zoo

Vultures have been one of my favorite birds to work with, and when I learned about VulPro and all the work they do, I knew I had to go!

Thanks to the support and funding from the Abq BioPark, BioPark Society, and our conservation committee, I was able to make this trip happen!

I've had an amazing experience here! I've done everything and anything VulPro has needed, including feeding, cleaning collecting nesting material, monitored breeding, helped with injured/sick birds, and more!

My favorite thing to do is re-sightings at the vulture restaurant. It's amazing to watch 100 birds or more enjoying their feast, and I was lucky enough to see several marabou storks visit the restaurant as well!

I also have some experience training several bird species, so I was able to help their staff with some of the training goals they had for the non-native birds living at their facility, including 3 condors. I've learned so much from the staff here and it's been nice to be able to share some of my knowledge with them!

Everyone at VulPro has been so kind, welcoming, and a joy to be around! I will miss all the new friends I've made here. The passion Kerri and her staff have for these birds is inspiring. I hope my experience here will inspire others to help join the fight to save this incredible species!



Meet our Volunteer

Bonnie Van Dam



Bonnie Van Dam
Associate Curator of Birds
Detroit Zoological Society



The Detroit Zoological Society continues to work closely with VulPro, a vulture conservation/rehabilitation organization located near Hartbeespoort dam in South Africa. In May 2019, I travelled to VulPro and spent two weeks assisting staff as they began the 2019 breeding season.

VulPro is home to more than 200 individual vultures, many are permanent residents that have survived severe injuries but those injuries have left them unable to be released back into the wild. Other individuals are being rehabilitated and will eventually be released back into the wild. VulPro provides homes and medical care to the endangered Cape Vulture and the critically endangered African White-backed Vulture as well as other vulture species.

Every year in April, the Cape Vulture, followed by the African White-backed Vulture, receive cues from the environment and begin their breeding season. VulPro staff provides piles and piles of nesting material daily for the birds to use during nest building. Pairs of vultures will meticulously pick a nest site or platform and build their nest with sticks and green leafy plants.



Meet our Volunteer

Bonnie Van Dam

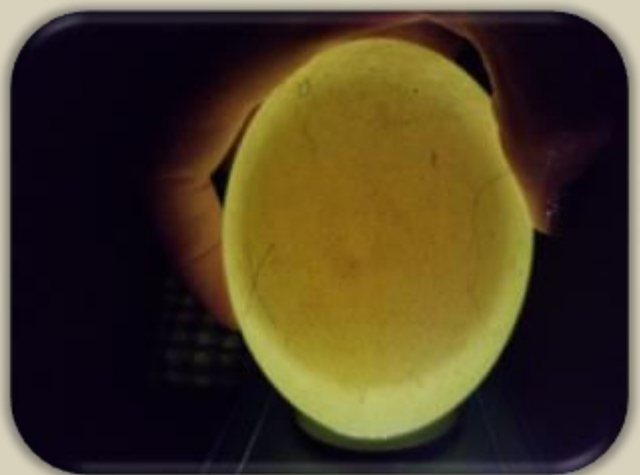
In May 2019 I travelled to South Africa and joined the VulPro team for two weeks as the 2019 nesting season began to provide assistance with nesting observations and artificial incubation. VulPro is enhancing wild populations of Cape and African White-backed Vultures through a captive breeding program. This breeding program includes the artificial incubation of eggs and parent-rearing of vulture chicks that are released back into the wild. Once an established pair has laid an egg, it is immediately pulled and placed in an incubator. An artificial egg replaces the real egg which will allow parents the opportunity to rear the chick when it hatches. All eggs that are placed in incubators are watched very closely for signs of fertility, embryo development and eventually hatching. Upon hatching, the vulture chick is placed back into the nest with the parents and they begin to care for it. In some cases, “foster” pairs of vultures can be used to rear chicks as well.



While I was at VulPro, I spent a significant amount of time daily observing vultures choosing mates, nest sites and gather nesting material to place it in their nests. A total of 31 vulture eggs were laid and placed into incubation



I was responsible for weighing and tracking weight loss, confirming fertility and ensuring proper development of the vulture embryos. VulPro has an on-site incubation center with high-tech equipment, all of which is essential to run such a successful captive breeding program. By the end of this year there could be as many as 20 chicks released back into the wild populations of vultures in South Africa.



Meet our Volunteer

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The day before I left VulPro I was able to visit the Magaliesberg Mountain area where all of the captive reared vultures from VulPro are taken for acclimation and release into the wild. I cannot truly explain the sound of the wind and the sight of the vultures gliding on thermals that are created by the upwelling winds of the mountains. I am honored and privileged to have participated in such an important field conservation program. A program that is essential to saving animals from extinction.



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