

THE VULPRO FLYER

&

RESTAURANT NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2020

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



VulPro NPC - Vulture programme for the conservation of vulture species in southern Africa
Registration no.2011/127419/08 (The Companies Act 2008, Sec.14)



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Executive Summary

COVID-19 has brought the world to its knees with reminders, I believe, as to just how precious our planet is and how interconnected we all are together with all species that inhabit Earth. It is a stark reality of how quickly things can change. I also believe it is a lesson for us all, for humanity to perhaps slow down a little and smell the roses, breathe the fresh air and appreciate all that has been given to us to preserve and protect. Life is truly precious and extremely short and the time to make changes to our lives is now. We are all directly responsible for what is happening to our planet and we all need to take responsibility for our actions, behaviours and lifestyles which do directly impact heavily on our environment and its species holistically. We all need to be part of the change and a part of the generation that values life over materialistic wealth and possessions. I am not talking about not being able to survive, I am simply talking about living with an appreciation for all living things together with our fellow neighbours. COVID-19 is surely a reminder that everything is interlinked and what we do to our neighbours, we do to ourselves. Let us all hold each other's hands, be truly kind and generous to one another and learn to value, enjoy and appreciate the beauty that surrounds us. Be a part of the change and let us learn to live sustainably.

This newsletter continues to highlight the work we undertake on a daily basis to better the lives of Africa's vultures. Your support has been invaluable to our operations and in saving lives of many individual vultures as well as vulture populations in southern Africa.

Please keep safe during these trying times and we will continue to keep you all updated on our ongoing activities.

Kerri Wolter
CEO



The VulPro Flyer



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Vulture Rescue and Rehabilitation Statistics

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<u>Species</u>	<u>Number resident at VulPro 10 December 2019</u>	<u>Rescued and brought in since December 2019</u>	<u>Released</u>	<u>Died</u>	<u>Euthanized</u>	<u>Transferred/donated</u>	<u>Number resident at VulPro 31 May 2020</u>
<u>Cape Vulture</u>	163	35	13	8	3		174
<u>African White-backed Vulture</u>	56	5		1	1		59
<u>Lappet-Faced Vulture</u>	8		1				7
<u>White-headed Vulture</u>	2						2
<u>Palm-nut Vulture</u>	3						3
<u>Black Vulture</u>	1						1
<u>King Vulture</u>	1						1
<u>Andean Condor</u>	3						3
<u>African Fish Eagle</u>	1						1
<u>Hooded Vulture</u>	0						0
<u>Black-chested Snake Eagle</u>	2	2	3				1
<u>Lanner Falcon</u>	0	1			1		0
<u>Marabou Stork</u>	0	1		1			0
<u>Wahlberg's Eagle</u>	0	1			1		0
<u>Verreux's Eagle</u>	0	1		1			0
<u>Barn Owllet</u>	0	2					2
<u>Spotted Eagle Owl</u>	0	1		1			0
<u>Total</u>	240	49	17	12	6	0	254

Vulture Rescue and Rehabilitation

General

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We have had a fairly busy and interesting first half of this year.

In total we have rescued 40 vultures during this time which have consisted of 35 Cape Vultures and 5 African White-backed Vultures. Of these 40 birds we have already released 13 of them and we hope to be able to release more in the near future. In addition to rescues of vultures, we have also admitted two Black Chested Snake Eagles, a Lanner Falcon, a Marabou Stork, a Wahlberg's Eagle, a Verreaux's Eagle, two Barn Owlets and a Spotted Eagle Owl.

We have also provided a place of safety for some birds being kept in unacceptable conditions at a zoo, and for an injured vulture that was being offered for money

The majority of our vulture rescues continue to be powerline related, followed by poisoning, drowning and poor health due to starvation and dehydration.

A highlight for us was the release of a Snake Eagle that we had received with a leg fracture. We made the decision, along with Dr Etienne our vet at The Broederstroom Veterinary Clinic, not to euthanise her as recommended by colleagues, but to pin her fractured leg, and see whether we could save her. Yes, it took almost a year, but with the veterinary care, physiotherapy and daily rehabilitation she received, she slowly regained full use of her leg including being able to give a vice-like grip with both talons and perch on objects in her enclosure. After another couple of months of rewilding, she was pronounced fit to go! Such a proud day for us to be able to release this beautiful Snake Eagle along with another.



Vulture Rescue and Rehabilitation Animal Welfare Case

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Rescues Bloemfontein Zoo

We were approached by The Johannesburg Wildlife Veterinary Hospital to provide a safe haven for 3 Cape Vultures and a Verreaux's Eagle that were removed from the Bloemfontein Zoo by the NSPCA, due to the dreadful conditions that they and other animals had been kept in. All the birds arrived with damaged wings from long term injuries that had not been attended to properly. The damaged wings on the Cape Vultures were hindering their movements and required amputation which was performed by The Broederstroom Veterinary Clinic. Sadly the Verreaux's Eagle didn't survive the stress of the move and the underlying conditions that she arrived with.

The Cape Vultures are much happier and have settled in beautifully now. We are very happy to report that the one Cape Vulture has paired up with one of our resident vultures and they are busy copulating and building a nest which is wonderful after what she has been through. The other two Cape Vultures have integrated well with the other impaired vultures in the open enclosure.



Vulture Rescue and Rehabilitation Illegal Activity Case

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Sting Operation!

On the 17 March, VulPro, Law Enforcement and the Department of Nature Conservation went under cover and met with an individual trying to sell an endangered Cape Vulture. What took place next was something we are so proud of and can only praise our Law Enforcement and our local Nature Conservation Department highly. As VulPro secured the bird, Law Enforcement and the Department jumped in and arrested the perpetrator on the spot before he knew what had happened. Charges have been laid and we, together with the department, have opened a case for illegal activities involving an endangered species; the highest charge as in the case of rhino poaching so this is getting high level attention.

The young Cape Vulture was weak, confused and sore with bruised and broken wings, poor nutrition and dehydrated. She is currently doing very well and has integrated with our other residents.



Vulture Rescue and Rehabilitation

Muthi Market Case

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Our challenges saving vultures never stop! Gratefully the quick response and bravery of a local resident saved the life of this young Cape Vulture fledgling. A lady saw a man walking down the road holding a vulture by the head. She pulled up next to him and managed to persuade him to hand the bird over to her. Thanks to her intervention and quick thinking, this young bird ended up at VulPro and not at the Muthi Market (traditional medicine) that it was destined for.

After some physical and nutritional care at our rehabilitation centre, this bird was released to live wild again.



Vulture Rescue and Rehabilitation

What am I?

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Earlier this year, We received a Vulture from Kate Webster, our Eastern Cape Project Partner, that had survived a powerline electrocution.

On receiving this individual, we were suspicious as to her true identity and suspected she might be a hybrid. We had blood taken and sent off to the laboratories to confirm whether she might be a hybrid as she shows characteristics of both a Cape Vulture and a Rüppell's Vulture.

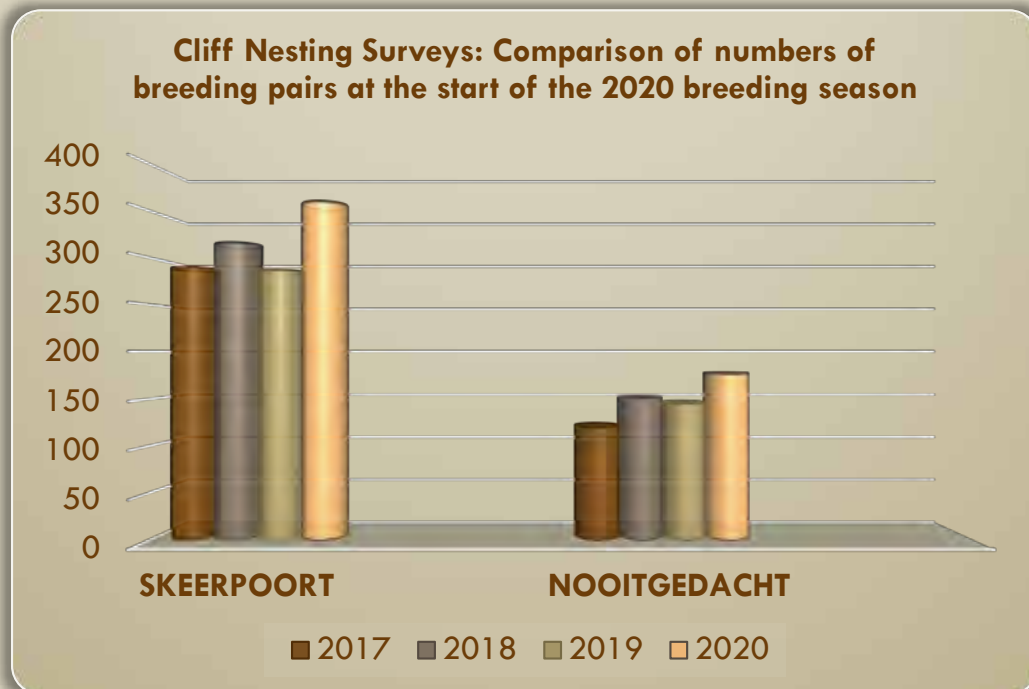
Unfortunately with the COVID-19 virus our test results are still pending so we wait and see.



Vulture Breeding and Population Monitoring 2020

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The COVID-19 pandemic has unfortunately made it very difficult for us to monitor some of the colonies that we annually monitor. However, we were still able to access and monitor the Magaliesberg Cape Vulture colony sites, namely Skeerpoort and Nooitgedacht. From 25-29 May 2020, Ryno Kemp, Caroline Hannweg and Charne Wilhelmi monitored these colonies and found Skeerpoort to have 360 pairs, a 24% increase from last year's 287 pairs, and Nooitgedacht to have 177 pairs, an increase of 20% from last year's 145 pairs. This is great news for these colonies and we hope that in our follow up monitoring sessions later in the year we will continue to see that there has been growth from last year.



Ex-situ Conservation Breeding

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VulPro's 2020 breeding season is showing very positive results so far. We had been discussing a different approach to our Captive-Breeding Programme this year, and with challenges presented by the COVID-19 lockdown and having to operate with our very small staff contingent, we decided to implement it. This year, 2020, our Captive Breeding pairs are laying, incubating and hatching their own eggs. In the past we have taken the eggs and artificially incubated them whilst the parents sat on a dummy egg, getting back their chick once hatched. We are keeping careful records of all the confirmed pairs, checking if the egg is fertile and continuing to observe their progress.

	Total	Fertile	Infertile	Broken	Unknown
AWB	2	1		1	
CV	25	13	4	3	5
Total	27	14	4	4	5

We are still expecting more eggs to be laid.



Threat Mitigation Power Line Updates

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Year	Date	Area	Province	Kilometers Surveyed	Structures	Fatalities	Injured birds
2019	24 December	Nooitgedacht	Gauteng	0.4	4	1	0
2020	31 January	Holfontein	North West	1.0	4	1	0
2020	13 February	Vooruitzicht Broedery Farm	North West	1.20	14	0	0
2020	26 February	Tylden area / Peninsula Farm	Eastern Cape	2.08	19	2	0
2020	02 March	Burgersdorp	Eastern Cape	1.50	14	3	0
2020	03 March	Hofmeyer	Eastern Cape	4.50	20	3	0
2020	09-11 March	Vryburg	North West	14.64	103	0	0
			Totals	25.32	178	10	0

VulPro continues to collaborate with Eskom, our state utility provider. Together we are working to minimise the number of vulture - power line incidents through informed mitigation efforts as the release rate of the victims is extremely low. Our power line surveys have had to be put on hold for a while during the COVID-19 lockdown period.

Cause	# of admissions	Released	Dead	Recovering
Collision	15	0	2	13
Electrocution	4	0	3	1



Eastern Cape Report

Kate Webster

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Rehabilitation:

During the month of December, two young raptors that had prematurely left the nest were rehabilitated, a young Rock kestrel and Gabar Goshawk.

Both were soft released successfully. No injured Cape vultures were reported during this month.

On the 1st of January the first call came in of an electrocuted vulture from Kei Road (with another bird a power line mortality) but sadly this bird had extensive burns and succumbed to these injuries. Two days later, my daughter Meagan, who had been travelling back to Johannesburg after a visit to the farm, spotted a rather 'unhappy' looking vulture at the bottom of Penhoek pass which she felt needed help. She alerted me to this and after confirming with the local farmer there, we set off to capture this juvenile. With a heart stopping flight it decided to take over the then very busy N6 highway we managed to capture this juvenile which clearly was very thin and disorientated. She was very vocal once caught but settled down in the crate. Although there was nothing wrong with her wings, it was ultimately decided that she should be transported up to VulPro to join the captive bred chicks up in the release enclosure on the Magaliesberg to be reintegrated properly as a vulture. She has subsequently been brought back down to VulPro with the others and obviously once the opportunity arises, will no doubt go back up to the enclosure for release later with the other youngsters. (DHL kindly once again transporting her up to VulPro for me)

At the end of January Kerri informed me of a tracked vulture (no 321 wing tag) that had been 'caught' by a gentleman in Mt Ayliff area of the Transkei. After much negotiation and deliberations, we decided to call in the help of the Department of Environmental Affairs to assist with the collection of the bird, as threats of mutilation, killing (as it had reputedly killed a goat kid), and the bird even apparently dying at one stage, as this bird's life was hanging in the balance. I would like to thank Thabo (DEDEAT) for driving the marathon journey from Matatiele down to Mt Ayliff for collecting the bird and meeting me half way outside Maclear. This is true dedication for assisting in rescuing this bird. Fortunately in one way the wing tags assisted with connecting with VulPro of the whereabouts as the tracking device is faulty, however also prove that this makes them far more visible for 'trade' purposes. After a week of rehab and building up strength (as bird was super hungry), he was released from Rookwood. We removed the yellow wing tag (for obvious reasons), cut the other one in half as device is a wing device and gave him a turquoise leg band instead for safety reasons. The last reading came through from the colony on the Kei river and considering this bird was a rehabbed bird fitted with a device in 2017 at VulPro, let us hope he continues to live a good 'stay safe' life.

The last vulture rehab is presently still with me. I received a call from a young farm manager, Leon Petzer from the Free State near Smithfield. He had found a very wet Cape Vulture sitting on an anthep (after drenching rains the day before) and requested I collect the bird. Armed with the necessary essential services permits (thank you VulPro), I could now travel across the border at Aliwal North to outside Smithfield to collect the young vulture. The bird has clear injuries from power line interaction and is presently still in rehabilitation with me at the moment. The manager has also patrolled their power lines to ascertain if there are any other birds but luckily has come up empty handed.

My partnership with Dr Werner Wentzel is working well and although he has not had to deal with any vultures so far this year, is always on hand to support me.

Eastern Cape Report

Kate Webster

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Eskom reporting:

The 2020 season for vulture killing under power lines this year has been the WORST I have ever experienced since I have been working with the birds. I have put it down to two main issues

- Better reporting (people are reporting incidents more due exposure of this problem on social media)
- Weather conditions like the extreme dry conditions up until January, have forced the birds to forage quite widely and obviously in areas that they are not normally seen.

Date	Infrastructure type	Comments
01.01.020	Distribution line	2 x Cape Vulture collision 1 survived, burns on wings were very extensive and subsequently died.
24.01.020	Distribution line	10 x Cape Vulture electrocuted With historical evidence DEDEAT did a follow up visit on this site to emphasize the urgency on this issue
27.01.020	Distribution line	2 x Cape Vulture Sadly a pole had fallen over and a sheep had walked into the line and subsequently died which attracted these birds who not only suffered the same fate but were mutilated with heads and feet harvested for the muthi trade
03.02.020	Distribution line	1 x Cape Vulture
11.02.020	Distribution line	1 x Cape Vulture
26.02.020	Distribution line	2 x Cape Vulture electrocutions
02.03.020	Distribution line	3 x Cape Vulture Historical evidence
03.03.020	Distribution line	3 x Cape Vulture electrocutions
17.03.020	Distribution line	2 x Cape Vulture electrocutions
08.04.020	Distribution line	1 x Cape Vulture electrocution
29.04.020	Distribution line	1 x Cape Vulture electrocution

Eastern Cape Report

Kate Webster

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Summary

Cape Vultures affected in total	28 (27 in Eastern Cape)
Other birds affected	3
Cape Vultures permanently damaged	1
Cape Vultures released	0
Cape Vultures killed/dead	27 (averages 6.75 birds for the first 4 months)

All these incidents have had reports sent through to Eskom for attention. I am actually horrified at these statistics and sometimes feel that one is wonders how one could ever win this battle. As usual most of the birds are normally immature, however, there are adult birds too that are killed. It is for this reason, I voiced my concerns to the higher authorities in the Eskom environmental division, and a meeting was called and held just prior to lockdown in East London. Sadly I still feel that unless enough drive and initiative is taken within the offices responsible, the number of vultures that we will lose will remain high. Paper work is necessary but the implementation of plans are equally vitally important to stem this kind of carnage. Aphelele Tomsana from the Environmental division of the Southern Region of Eskom and I continue to work together. He continues to push Eskom with regard to mitigation and aiming for the 'zero tolerance' that was promulgated many years ago with in the EWT/Eskom partnership but somehow think he also feels he is losing the battle.

The working group within the Department of Environmental Affairs under the leadership of Dean Ricketts, has been of huge support and I am grateful to be able to interact and ask for assistance when I need them. They are also willing to go out and do power line reports when necessary.



Eastern Cape Report

Kate Webster

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DHL supply chain and transport

DHL transported our young Penhoek fledgling up to Vulpro this year. The staff, Nadia, Graham and drivers still remain so helpful and willing. I cannot sing their praises more often. Thanks guys, you will always rock for me.

General:

During February I travelled down to East London to do a presentation to a group of more than 50 people called the University of the 3rd Age. What a responsive wonderful group of people with such a positive approach to life. One of my better presentations, I will remember. My enclosure at Rookwood seems to remain at the number of 5 birds, all permanently injured (with the potential of the Smithfield bird joining them soon). I supplied them with breeding material and a possible nesting tyre, however, it does seem that the breeding age birds are mostly males, so no action, although best would be to be able to get these mature birds up to VulPro for the next breeding season. The resident pair of leguaan (water monitors) have now increased to at least 2 more and are still sneaking in to assist disposing of the carcasses that are fed to the vultures. They are very quick when one approaches and disappear so fast that a decent picture has still not been taken.

No 2 Piggeries continue to supply food for me (under strict supervision of the State vets) which is a huge weight of my shoulders as constant supply of food for my birds was always been a huge concern. My thanks go to Fred Boucher, who quietly lets me know that my deepfreezer their side needs emptying as it is full of food.

The Rookwood vulture restaurant still supplies food however the raptors like the Jackal Buzzards and Verreaux's Eagles will make use of this during the quieter winter months. A very enthusiastic farmer, Gareth Smith down Kei Road is operating a successful restaurant and getting big numbers of close to 200 to 300 birds at a time (most coming across from the Transkei region) and he constantly gives me updates on numbers or sends me video footage of the birds feeding there. Thank you Gareth, these birds are at least getting safe food supplied for them.



Eastern Cape Report

Kate Webster

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GENERAL – continued

Wind farms continue to be a threat for our Cape Vultures in this province with news of more fatalities. I am on the constant lookout for more potential developments that would be to the detriment of the vultures and register whenever necessary as I&AP. As much as it is seen as renewable energy, it is also a very destructive development especially with regard to our vultures and raptors with some endangered birds being killed by the turbines. Information of fatalities still remains a HUGE secret with parties involved all signing non-disclosure documents!! I regularly get asked about information of vultures in various regions and yes often in the very same foraging zones of the Cape vultures of this province. I reiterate that this industry remains skewed with post monitoring very dependent on the integrity of the specialists involved as well as monies paid/supplied to 'allow' such developments to be sanctioned. The official numbers vs the actual numbers still remain a mystery with very few people being prepared to put their necks out and state what is happening. The latest is a taller turbine and longer blades proposed for one of the wind farms in the Bedford/Cookhouse area has also stated that according to their information that Cape vultures only transverse 6% of the area so the effect will be nominal. How bizarre and how can this make any sense when you will never be able to tell a vulture where they can fly and how they must avoid this 6% zone!!!! It is as bizarre as this 'Fly Safe Zone' that has been promoted with talks of 'reintroducing' birds into the Karoo with thousands of unsafe Eskom lines.....just creating more and more hotspots and obstacles for the species to overcome!!!!!!.

THANK YOU

I thank Kerri and Charne of Vulpro for their continuous support and backup.

I would also 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.

I would also like to thank the support I get from specific specialists with regard to the wind energy development side.

Thank you too to the local Department of Environmental Affairs for their continued support.

My family and staff, are still always willing to handle, hold, catch and assist with treatment whenever necessary.

To the landowners who always make the effort to contact me for assistance with Cape vultures, and play a very important role in keeping this species going. You guys are our ears and eyes on the ground. Thank you.

Research and Tracking

The tracking of vultures provides us with information that is vital to our research and understanding of vultures' foraging ranges and habits, it also allows us to pick up when a vulture is no longer moving and potentially injured or dead. We are able to track our released vultures by recorded sightings of birds that have been released with coloured leg bands, SAFRING metal rings or patagial (wing) tags.

Tracking Devices help us gain the most valuable information from the birds we release fitted with one. Information relating to how they disperse from the release site, how some stay close to where they are released and how some travel incredible distances.

We are currently following:

38 Cape Vultures, 3 African White-backed Vultures and 1 White-headed Vulture

Here is the story of one of our captive bred Cape Vultures

In June 2018, our 11 month old captive bred Cape Vulture 368, a young vulture from our 2017 captive breeding programme, was released at our release enclosure, situated on the highest point of the Magaliesberg Mountains, as part of our captive breeding supplementation pilot study programme. Less than a week after his release however, he found his way back to VulPro and remained on site for almost 14 months, feeding with the wild birds at our vulture feeding site but continuing to roost on top of the enclosure where he was in fact bred. We were worried this bird would never move away from VulPro and would never find a mate and contribute to his species, the main goal of our captive breeding programme. Every day we carefully checked his movements from the GPS device, and every day he was once again, still at VulPro. In February 2020, CV368 realised he was indeed a wild bird and started to travel further and further but he always came back to VulPro. Then on 30 March 2020 his tracker stopped downloading his updated locations and we were worried something might have happened to this young bird, anxiously awaiting the next tracker update, once again carefully looking for movement from his tracker every day.

Finally, as we began to give up hope, CV368's tracker finally beeped and his location was sent through to us, 43 days later. We were astounded to see he was now located in Ga-mashashane, Limpopo, approximately 40km west of Polokwane and almost 300km away from VulPro. He had in fact flown the coop and finally spread his wings, exploring the great outdoors away from VulPro, as any young vulture is meant to do. We assumed that he would then return to VulPro, as he usually did, but this time it was different.

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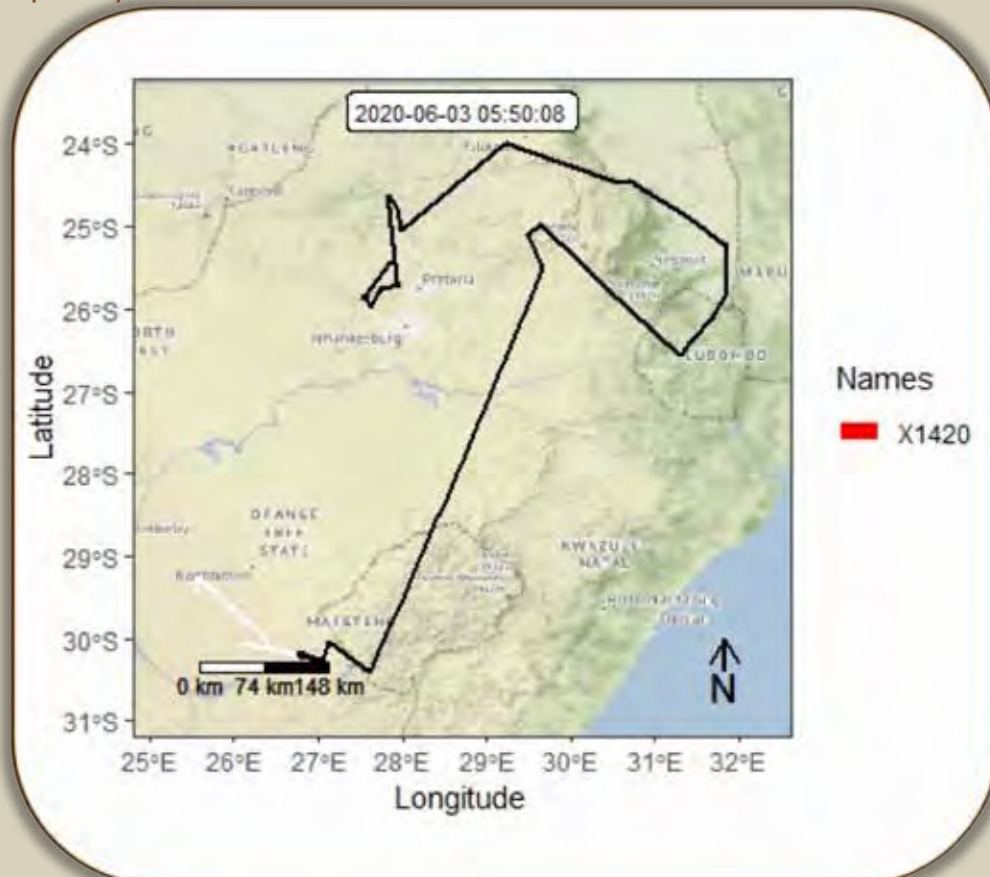
Research and Tracking

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We then excitedly watched CV 368's movements as he travelled approximately 490km from Limpopo to the middle of Eswatini, travelling through the south of the Kruger National Park, in an incredible 3 days. He continued to travel even further, and travelled more than 650km in 12 days and ended up on the southern border of Lesotho. In total this incredible, young, inexperienced bird travelled through 3 countries, over 1000km, in just over two weeks, at the still very young age of 2 years and 10 months! This is an awesome achievement for one of our captive bred birds, who began his life under one of our non-releasable vultures at VulPro, was nervous to leave the nest, even after he was given freedom, and is now soaring through the skies above southern Africa. This is just one of our many examples of how the GPS tracking devices that are fitted to our vultures are helping us to understand their movements once they leave VulPro, and provides evidence that our captive breeding programme continues to breed successful individuals. We cannot wait to see where he goes next on his incredible journeys!

Below is a map of his journey!



The VulPro Vulture Restaurant and Hide

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The VulPro Vulture Restaurant and the Sean Williams Living Creatures Trust Hide.

The main objectives for our restaurant is to supplement the ever-decreasing food supply for vultures; to provide bone fragments which are an important source of essential calcium and to provide safe food i.e. free of poisons and harmful drugs. We also get to monitor the vultures coming in to feed and are able to record numbers of visiting birds and those with patagial (wing) tags and leg bands. From the Sean Williams Living Creatures Trust Hide we have seen some wonderful activity at our Vulture Restaurant lately. There have been good numbers of visiting Cape Vultures, African White-backed Vultures and a few Lappet-faced Vultures that are starting to pop in more regularly. In addition to the vultures we have had a couple of weeks with many Marabou Storks, a couple of White Storks, and daily visits from Yellow-billed Kites, Sacred Ibis and Pied Crows.

We have recently set up cameras at the restaurant and are now streaming live for our followers to view on our YouTube channel during the day.



<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGHVAQO-dHhMxInt1UWv2EA>



The Vikela Game Breeders Vulture Restaurant

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Mr Dick Jacobs, owner of Vikela Game Breeders had a very rare visitor at his feeding station earlier this year.

He has been a hunter for many years and has been breeding different kinds of game on his farm in Witbank, Mpumalanga on the Highveld for the past 3 years now.

Wild animals and the bush are his passion, and whilst not a bird watcher per se he has always been fascinated by them. He frequently spots raptors, such as hawks, eagles and owls on the farm. So on 10 April, whilst out on a game cull for meat during the lockdown period, he and a colleague spotted an unusual bird that he hadn't seen before at the "feeding station" where they put the waste meat for the scavengers.

They stopped to view an unusual bird, initially thinking it was an eagle or hawk, but realized it couldn't be due to the bald head. They took a picture and sent it to a birding friend, (Neels Snyman).

Neels thought it could be Kaalwangvalk (African Harrier Hawk), but that he was not sure and would send the photo to another friend who confirmed it was an extremely rare Egyptian Vulture that does not usually occur in the area.

Dick, quoting the famous writer Charles Dickens "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." felt that the Lord had spoken to him and sent this bird to encourage him. The COVID-19 was the worst of times but in this time, God had sent this scarce and amazing bird, making it the best of times..

He named the vulture Dickens and visited the vulture every day on the farm until it left on the 21st April.

Magda Kets from Vulpro called Dick to chat and make sure the vulture was in good health. She also shared very interesting and valuable information with him regarding the species.

Dick will continue with his Vulture Restaurant and make sure that everything put out for the birds must be lead free.



New Project

On-site Hospital and ICU

22

For so long we have dreamed of having a dedicated on-site hospital and intensive care unit at VulPro. We are so proud that this game-changing dream is in the final stretch to becoming a reality.

We have completed the building of a beautiful hospital wing, consisting of a diagnostic area, a procedure room, a radiography room, a consulting room and an intensive care unit as well as a new double garage and ablution block. Our grateful thanks to everyone who has helped us get this far.

Next step will be kitting it out with all the necessary equipment and then we will be able to provide immediate medical care to the vultures that come in and require emergency procedures where time is of the essence.



New Project Off-site Enclosure

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We are expanding! Thanks to some seriously awesome people, and in collaboration with GHB Farms, we have a fantastic new satellite site that has been built, inspected by the relevant authorities and approved. We are now awaiting our permits and for lockdown to end so we can move the birds. We hope to move 20 plus non releasable vultures to this site. This site will also be monitored 24/7 by surveillance cameras .

It has always been one of our goals to have safe, satellite sites to spread the risk of having all 250 resident birds in one place.



Introducing our Head of Research Ryno Kemp

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At a very young age, birds got my attention and I knew that I wanted to make a difference. I decided to pursue my dream and am currently in the process of finalising my Ph.D. in Zoology, focusing on bird behaviour and analysis of the mechanisms birds apply in response to warming environments.

During my postgraduate studies, I developed a particular interest in birds' responses to an ever-changing environment from human-induced to completely natural induced changes. Vultures are considered as one of the keystone species across the global landscape and play an essential role in reducing disease by cleaning up the environment.

I joined VulPro early this year as I knew that I would be able to make a difference and help our Vulture species to survive over the next decade so that our children have the privilege of seeing this magnificent species in the wild.



Introducing our General Assistant Caroline Hannweg

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I recently joined VulPro at the beginning of March this year as the General Assistant after completing my MSc in Wildlife Management the University of Pretoria under Dr Mark Keith. I have always had a keen interest in nature and animals, having spent much of my childhood outdoors. This led me to pursuing a career in nature, which led me to studying Wildlife Management. My interest in animals began extending to birds in particular when my parents introduced me to birding in 2004. My passion for birds means I am extremely excited to have joined the team at VulPro. My MSc degree gave me experience working with wild populations of animals having studied owls and rodents. I also have experience working with livestock and domestic animals having completed my undergraduate studies in agriculture.

I live in Pretoria with my family and our 3 dogs, 2 cats and 5 chickens. In my spare time I am pursuing a birding ringing license and spend as much time as possible in nature, birding, running, cycling or hiking. When I am not in nature, I spend my time painting and gardening and in the evenings I rehearse with the Horizons Project Choir and the Vox Collective Ensemble. I also play action soccer with my friends.





Cultural Folklore

Totem Animals

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The Vulture saves the World – the Wanderer

In the earliest of times, the sun lived very close to the earth - so close in fact that life upon the earth was becoming unbearable. The animal world got together and decided to do something about it. They wanted to move the sun further away.

The fox was the first to volunteer, and he grabbed the sun in his mouth and began to run to the heavens. After a short while, the sun became too hot, burning the fox's mouth, and he stopped. To this day, the inside of the fox's mouth is black. Then the opossum volunteered. He wrapped his tail around the sun and began running toward the heavens. Before long though, the sun became too hot, burning its tail, and he had to stop. To this day the opossum has no hair upon its tail.

It was then that vulture stepped forward. Vulture was the most beautiful and powerful of birds. Upon its head was a beautiful mantle of rich feathering that all other birds envied. Knowing that the earth would burn up unless someone moved the sun, the vulture placed its head against it and began to fly to the heavens. With powerful strokes of its wings, it pushed and pushed the sun further and further up into the heavens. Though it could feel its crown feathers burning, the vulture continued until the sun was set at a safe distance in the sky away from the earth. Unfortunately, vulture lost its magnificent head of feathers for eternity.

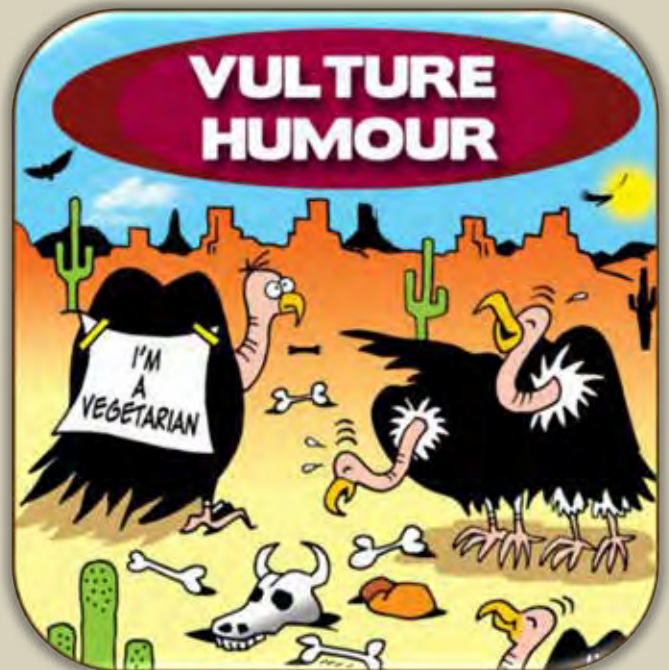




Comic Relief

27

Q. What do you call
a group of
superhero vultures?
A. The Scavengers



"Imagine that. It says here that during the plague, some lucky peasants were employed to push carts through their villages and call out, 'Bring out your dead!' and collect them for free. Man, talk about a dream job!"

Q. Why don't
vultures ever give
up?
A. They just keep
calm and carrion



Meet our Volunteer

Heather Shank-Givens

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Hello, my name is Heather and I was a volunteer at VulPro for 2 months in early 2020. I live in Haymarket Virginia in the United States. My academic background is biology and environmental science and my professional work for the past 18 years has been in the field of Organ and Tissue Donation for Transplantation. Over the last several years I have been a volunteer wildlife rehabilitator in my state. Additionally, I hold state and federal permits to keep and exhibit a non-releasable vulture.

My vulture adventures began with my first wildlife ambassador, Gryphon, who was an American Black Vulture. Unfortunately, she died very young due to development/genetic issues. Since then I have a new ambassador, Vega, a Turkey Vulture. My intimate experiences in caring for vultures and providing public education about them led me to follow VulPro on Facebook. There, I discovered that international volunteers were welcome and so I made my way to South Africa!

Working closely with old world vultures was an incredible experience. They are magnificent, intelligent, curious, and amazing birds. Also, the VulPro team (staff and volunteers) is a remarkable and diverse group of individuals with whom to work and learn from. I feel very privileged to have directly helped the endangered African vultures through my efforts at VulPro.

In addition to my vulture ambassador, I also share my home with my husband Brian, and our menagerie consisting of 7 ducks, 2 chickens, 2 cats, 3 beehives, 1 snake, 1 hermit crab, and 1 tarantula! Needless to say, I love all kinds of animals (but vultures hold a special place in my heart)!



Meet our Volunteer

Charlie Russell

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I am a wildlife conservation student at the University of Kent, England, with a passion for birds of prey and vultures. Throughout my degree I have focussed my studies on the conservation of vultures and migratory birds of prey, and closely followed the work of VulPro. For over 3 years I was planning and waiting for my opportunity to fly out to VulPro and get involved in the work they are doing on the ground. Towards the end of 2019 I was lucky enough to do just that, and spent just shy of 5 months volunteering with VulPro as part of my studies, although my stay was sadly cut short by the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Whilst at VulPro I found every member of the team to be extremely welcoming, warm-hearted and generally wonderful people, making the time go by far too fast. I was very privileged to be a part of this team for so long, and experience VulPro's work hands-on. During my time at VulPro I found myself working in close proximity with these wonderful birds, and every task was a joy to undertake. From cleaning and feeding to husbandry, rescues and health checks every aspect of the work taught me so much about the dedication of this vital organisation on the forefront of African vulture conservation.



Meet our Volunteer

Daisy Bessant

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Daisy Bessant
Falconer
Gauntlet Birds of Prey, Eagle and Vulture Park

I have been brought up around birds of prey my whole life, and have always been involved in the rearing and training of all the birds we have at Gauntlet. The vultures have always been a massive part of my life, and I have always been passionate to make a difference.

I am here at VulPro to try and understand the challenges and threats that affect vultures on a daily basis. I have enjoyed being around all of VulPro's resident birds, especially PJ, even though he enjoyed stealing my scrubbing brush for the duration of my trip. I really enjoyed the experience learning so much and meeting amazing people with a similar passion; to save vultures.



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