



Volunteer Preparation Document

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Welcome to VulPro, the Vulture Programme. We are delighted that you are considering volunteering with us. This document is designed to help answer any questions and or expectations you may have during your planned time with us. It contains instructions and phone numbers that you will need for your journey, so you should print a copy and keep it with you during your travels. If you book with us, you will also receive **the volunteer contract with house rules**. We request that you read both these documents carefully as they contain essential information that you need to be aware of in order to make the best of your time with us. Let us know if you have any questions or if there is anything you do not understand.



Meeting us

The shortest way, internationally, is to fly into OR Tambo International airport in Johannesburg. VulPro will be able to arrange a reliable shuttle transfer from the airport to our facility, as well as a return transfer for your departure, which will be included in your volunteer fees. Please note that for safety and security, the center is locked up by 7pm daily, and thus, should you have a late flight in, we kindly request that you overnight at one of the airport hotels, at your own expense, and join us the following day.

VulPro is settled at the foot of the beautiful Magaliesberg Mountains, just 10 driving minutes from the Hartbeespoort town and about 40 driving minutes from the centre of Pretoria and 50 minutes from Fourways, Johannesburg. It takes approximately an hour to get to us from the airport.

Volunteer Contribution

The monthly accommodation fee is R 7200.00 per month per person. A 50% deposit is required to secure your volunteer placement, and we ask that you pay us the outstanding balance when you arrive in cash. The minimum required time at VulPro is 2 weeks and the fee for that would then be adjusted accordingly as you would not be expected to pay the full month's fee.

Please note: we do not offer refunds if you change your mind about the length of time you wish to stay with the project. We also, unfortunately, cannot accept promises of contributions being paid "later" or after the volunteer period has ended and must receive them upon your arrival. If your travel plans change due to unforeseeable circumstances (such as illness or immigration problems), contact us as soon as possible to see if we can reschedule without you losing your deposit. However, this will be subject to availability.

Included in the volunteer fee:

- Accommodation in single and shared rooms with shared kitchen and bathroom facilities. This includes water and electricity expenses and the cleaning of bathrooms.
- Training and supervision by VulPro and project staff.
- Research and conservation activities.
- One evening meal, often a traditional southern African meal prepared by the staff.
- Optional workout session by a staff member 3 times a week to keep active and fit.
- Letter of reference on satisfactory completion of the placement.
- Airport transfers.

Not included in the volunteer fee:

- Travel from your home country to South Africa and back.
- Passport and visa costs – please ensure to confirm all visa requirements as stipulated for your country of origin, as well as South Africa.
- If you wish to spend more than 90 days in total in South Africa, you will need to obtain a temporary residency visa, which will be either a 'volunteer' or a 'student' visa (if enrolled with a South African university) before leaving home. Rules regarding visas vary by country of origin, so be sure to ask your nearest South African consulate.
- Insurance – you **MUST** have travel/medical and cancellation insurance, which covers you for the activities you will be carrying out with the project.
- Medical expenses - you **MUST** be vaccinated against tetanus.
- Personal expenses such as phone/airtime, internet/WiFi, souvenirs, shopping & excursions.
- Additional meals and snacks besides dinner.
- Alcohol and cool drinks.
- Washing machine detergent.

Living, kitchen and laundry facilities

Typically volunteers will have a room to themselves, but when this is always possible, for example, during busy periods, same-sex roommates may be assigned to share a room. Smoking is not permitted in the house and on the whole property. There is a small communal kitchen, 2 communal full bathrooms, one bedroom with bathroom on suite and an additional separate toilet/basin. There is a lovely outside sitting area with facilities to braai (barbecue). There is a washing machine and clothes washing line for laundry once a week, maximum per person.





All volunteers will need to share household chores like washing up in the communal kitchen and are expected to respect their housemates and keep shared areas clean and clear of personal belongings. Everybody is responsible for purchasing and cooking his/her own food, except for evening meals. There is a fridge and freezer and space on shelves. The kitchen is well equipped and you are welcome to use all cutlery, pots, pans, etc. If there is something that is missing and is needed, please do not hesitate to speak to us and let us know what extras are needed for your comforts, within reason.

Please remember that this is a conservation NGO that takes environmental responsibilities seriously. As such, you are expected to use water and electricity responsibly. Please do not leave lights, fans, or taps on unnecessarily. Heaters are not permitted and we suggest using hot water bottles for winter evenings. We separate compost and plastic, cans, glass and cardboard for recycling, and you are expected to follow the rules on the designated bins and discard your waste responsibly.

There are, at the moment, 4 dogs (all sizes) sharing the main house who all love to have some attention, so be aware of enjoyable face-to-face encounters. Close to the volunteer rooms are 4 horse stables, so if you have any horse-hair allergies, please inform us before your arrival.

We are close to the town of Hartbeespoort and have plenty of grocery and pharmacy options for getting your own food and personal items. Visits to the shops will take place once a week, and recycling is taken to the depots at the same time. We are flexible with our trips and will invite you along whenever we go to the shops, but we ask you to also remain flexible and plan accordingly for one week's worth of groceries and necessary items.

Contact Information

Please ensure you supply us with additional contact information for your family or next of kin, in case of emergencies. Please also provide us with your medical and insurance contact details and numbers.

Requirements

We remind you that in order to make the most of your time at VulPro you need to be flexible as plans may change in response to the weather, local conditions, or other factors. We encourage enthusiasm, common sense, self-starters, independence, perseverance and patience. Bear in mind that South Africa is a developing country and things may well be different from what you are used to at home. Please remember that wants are not the same as needs, so ensure you keep an open mind and consider the situation carefully before complaining. A positive attitude and a sense of humour are vital to ensure you gain the most out of your stay at VulPro. Volunteering is about what you can do for the project, what you can learn and gain from the experience and we are looking for cheerful, willing individuals. If you have any medical conditions, disabilities or other special needs, you **MUST** inform us before your booking so that we can assess whether or not our facilities will be suited to your needs as well as ours. The work is physically demanding and thus one should expect to do lifting, pushing, other manual activities, etc.

You are expected to take care of any project equipment you use – loss or damage may have to be charged to the volunteer(s) account.

Data and Photographs

Please note, ALL data, photographs, etc. belong to VulPro and can only be published and used after receiving authorization by either the CEO or the research manager.

Weather

It certainly depends on the time of the year, but generally, it is hot and sunny in summer (maximum 35° C/95°F) as well as during the days in winter (average around 15°C/60°F). The mornings and evenings in winter can be chilly (down to 5°C/40°F at times), and you may want to wear long trousers and a fleece jacket. It is also vital that you pay attention to the sun and heat as you will spend many hours outdoors. Please ensure you are dressed appropriately to protect yourself from the sun and that you stay hydrated at all times. Please also ensure you have clothing suitable for rainy weather as we do experience large rainstorms in the summer.

What to bring

The following items are necessary:

- A valid passport and visa
- A photocopy of your passport to leave with us for our records
- International and valid driver's license
- **A note of your insurance policy number and emergency phone numbers**
- South African compatible (plug types M and C) electrical converter for any of your personal electrical appliances
- Warm clothing for cool days and cold nights – e.g., sweaters, fleece, gloves, hat, scarf, slippers
- Long trousers and long-sleeved shirts or tops in neutral colours. You need to be covered up to protect against insect bites, sun and cold. And t-shirts.
- Walking boots and/or closed-toed shoes for fieldwork and work inside the vulture enclosures (would strongly recommend bringing/purchasing in SA, wellingtons/rubber boots for cleaning in the enclosure)
- Insect repellent
- Good torch/flashlight (with spare batteries, preferably rechargeable)
- Sunscreen, sunglasses, and hat to protect you from the sun
- Work gloves, for use when cleaning cages, etc.
- Rubber gloves, for use, when cutting meat or removing carcasses (heavy duty & a couple pairs)
- Water bottle(s)

- Any medicines you need
- Notebook and pen or pencil
- Daypack (helpful when going on rescues, groceries, etc.)
- Comfortable clothes for evening/after work (mention that work clothes get DIRTY)
- Towel /washcloth? (linen for the beds are provided)

Clothing should be conservative; you are working with dangerous animals and in a very hot and arid climate. Therefore strappy tops and short shorts are examples of items that are not appropriate here during working hours. As with all biology fieldwork, you should choose clothes in natural shades (green, beige, brown, grey, black, etc.), not bright colours.

The following are recommended:

- Binoculars (high power is better)
- Camera
- Film/memory cards
- Laptop
- Pocket knife
- Alarm clock
- Duct tape (it's always useful!)
- Comfortable, lightweight shoes to wear around the house
- Personal first aid kit including plasters for blisters, painkillers, cold remedies

Volunteer Activities

Husbandry

We currently house over 275 captive vultures and other large birds of prey, and there are constant maintenance and husbandry tasks. However, daily tasks vary broadly based on the season and workload (fieldwork and/or vulture emergencies). Volunteers will work directly with VulPro staff. Duties include feeding and cleaning the enclosures, which is usually done every day, generally starting around 6:30 - 7:00 am. The vultures are typically fed every other day, and volunteers will help store and prepare the food according to the instructions. Other large birds of prey and injured animals are fed daily. Carcasses often need to be offloaded into our cold room and delivery vehicles will need to be cleaned.

Cleaning and supplement provision

Removing the unconsumed bones and skin from the vulture restaurant and taking them to a disposal site on the property is usually a daily task. Dried bones are collected and manually crushed with a hammer and redistributed to the vulture restaurant and captive birds. In the afternoon, it is necessary to check whether and how much the birds have eaten. Cleaning/scrubbing pools is also done every second to every third day.

Maintenance

Maintenance tasks with which volunteers may help include checking enclosure and perching structures (usually once a month) and carrying out whatever repairs or constructions are necessary.

Enrichment

Enrichment for the birds is also encouraged and we urge volunteers to assist with this on a daily basis.



Vulture rescues

Our busy season for rehabilitation is during November – April. However, we do still have injured and poisoned birds arriving throughout the year. There may be opportunities for volunteers to travel with VulPro staff to collect injured birds. Critical care and medical treatment of the birds is NOT the responsibility of volunteers, but feeding, husbandry, and assisting with handling MAY be part of the volunteers' tasks.

There may be other opportunities to join in fieldwork, such as searching for vulture mortalities via power line surveys. You will always be accompanied and instructed by VulPro staff when in the field.

Captive Breeding

VulPro is proud to be one of only two recognised vulture conservation breeding facilities on the African continent, which contributes solely to conservation reintroduction efforts. Vulture breeding season is during the South African winter months (April – October). On-site incubation facilities are off-limits to volunteers unless given express permission. However, there are ample opportunities to learn about egg development, artificial incubation, chick hatching, and care. Volunteers are critical in helping us observe the behaviours of the parents and chicks, there are also ample opportunities for contributing to the knowledge of our breeding programme through standardized observations if this interests you. There may be volunteer opportunities to join our team conducting wild breeding surveys at various field sites.

Data Recording and Entry

On a daily basis, volunteers will compile the data collected each day, enter it into a digital database and email the information to the project coordinator, who will analyse it. This allows volunteers to experience components of the research at VulPro too.

Care of the captive birds is the utmost priority, but recording data about wild vulture behaviours and daily counts of birds visiting the vulture restaurant is also critical to our efforts. We have a viewing hide from which these standardized counts are done, and we will train you on how and what to record. This is also an excellent time to get close to the wild birds, photograph, observe, and learn directly from them.



Additionally, after any task, such as cleaning, feeding, or maintenance, the volunteer must complete the **record sheet** with describes and notes activities conducted, quantities of food fed, etc., and note any relevant information, such as the vultures' reactions. However, if there is something pressing, please tell a staff member urgently and do not just write it down as this could be a matter of life and death to one of our resident birds. One of the most important tasks is collecting data as this data allows us to understand more about the resident species and their needs and most outstanding characteristics. You will receive training on how to observe the vultures and fill out the record sheets. Any unusual behaviour needs to be reported to the manager in charge **as soon as possible, without delay!**

Work Schedule

You will usually work for 7 or 8 hours a day, 5 days a week, with 2 days off, not necessarily over the weekends. Your schedule will be agreed upon with the project coordinator and we ask that you do follow it.

During your free time, there are many activities and tour operators which you can make use of should you want to see more of South Africa during your visit. Some of the popular activities include trips to the Pilansberg Game Reserve, The Cradle of Humankind, and the Aerial Cable Way. The costs of these excursions are solely the responsibility of the volunteers. However, VulPro will assist with contacts as far as possible.

We kindly request that should you partake in such activities that you still adhere to the center hours and either ensure that you are back on site by 7pm or alternatively, seek accommodation for the evening and return the following day. It is, however, important that this does not interfere with your schedule at VulPro, and thus, your travel plans must be arranged well to avoid interference with your responsibilities at VulPro.

GENERAL INFORMATION FOR SOUTH AFRICA

We recommend you get a South Africa guidebook and do some research before you arrive, so you have an idea of what to expect. A bit of cultural and historical background will help you appreciate your time here more.

Tips

Tipping is usually 12% of the service charge when you are eating in restaurants.

Health

Our tap water on the farm is safe to drink, and the same is true for ice cubes in cool drinks in town. Malaria is not a concern near VulPro. However, should you visit the Kruger National Park, you will need to take Malaria tablets. Proof of a tetanus vaccine is required to volunteer.

Local Currency

South African Rand (ZAR).

Language

South Africa has 11 official languages. Communication at VulPro is done in English, and good communication skills in English are more than sufficient. Any experience with Afrikaans or Zulu is also advantageous.

Safety

South Africa is not as bad as what you might have heard if you just follow some rules:

- Never walk alone at night outside the property;
- Make sure you do not have a lot of valuable jewellery, including watches - you won't need them here;
- If somebody is robbing you, immediately hand over the valuables they want - your life is worth more than any documents, money or whatever else the person wants;
- Don't leave any cameras or valuable items in the car;
- Make sure that nobody is following you when you are using an ATM and rather go with a friend if you want to collect money;
- Never hitchhike and NEVER pick up hitchhikers;
- Avoid public transport such as local taxis

Other Animals:

There are a number of highly venomous snakes and other dangerous animals in South Africa, so for your own safety:

- Always take a torch with you when walking outside your rooms at night - some snakes love to lie on warm pathway or stones;
- Never pick up a stone or wood, without touching it first with your shoe (closed shoe!);
- Don't try to catch or pick up any snake if you are not trained!

Thank you for your interest in our volunteering program. We hope to welcome you to VulPro and our beautiful country soon to experience our amazing vultures and the work that we do to save them.