



The VulPro Flyer

A Biannual Update

★ SEASON'S GREETINGS! ★



MISSION STATEMENT

*To protect African vultures through collaboration
and innovation*



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

Kerri Wolter, VulPro CEO



Wow, 2020 has sure been a year to remember and one which will go down in history books. Although it has been an extremely tough year for most of us, I have witnessed the kindness and generosity of South Africans and the widespread unity during a global pandemic. I am extremely grateful to those that have supported VulPro during these unprecedented times, not to mention our incredibly valuable volunteers who have helped us around the Centre with daily chores, maintenance and vulture collections across the country, I salute you!

To the VulPro staff, who have shown perseverance, determination and strength through a unified approach - you equally inspire me to continue reaching for the stars and to focus on our mission; "Protecting African vultures through collaboration and innovation" when times seem almost impossible to keep the faith. VulPro has grown stronger and closer during these hard times and I am so incredibly proud of how we have pulled together.

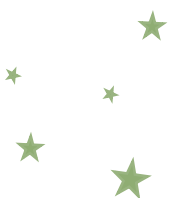
Just like many conservation organisations, VulPro's budget has been stretched to capacity, however, we still somehow managed to officially open an independent satellite site in which we are now able to secure the largest captive population of African Vultures globally, by spreading the risk into 2 facilities.

In addition, we have spearheaded the coalition of reputable rehabilitation centres in South Africa, forming a strong cohesive approach and bringing together resources and like-mindedness - all for the benefit of saving species across the country. Although still in the early stages, this coalition is already proving to be extremely worthwhile and useful.

The last 6 months have been extremely busy for VulPro and as you read through this newsletter, you will get a brief glimpse into the daily lives of VulPro staff and volunteers. This is all made possible because of the support and kindness we have received from ALL OF YOU, thank you! Thank you for allowing us to continue with our work, to make the world a better place for vultures and for allowing us to showcase 'their magnificence'.

We wish you a blessed and peaceful Christmas. Stay safe on the roads if you are travelling this festive season and come back refreshed, rejuvenated and ready to tackle an uncertain 2021.

With warmest wishes,
Kerri



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Rescue & Rehabilitation



Ms Stompie D. Pegleg, able to sun herself after getting her prosthetic leg

Rescue & Rehabilitation Statistics

Table 1. Rescue and rehabilitation statistics

	RESIDENT BIRDS AT 31 MAY '20	NEW BIRDS BROUGHT IN SINCE 31 MAY '20	RELEASED BIRDS SINCE 31 MAY '20	BIRDS THAT HAVE DIED SINCE 31 MAY '20	EUTHENAZED BIRDS SINCE 31 MAY '20	TRANSFERRED BIRDS SINCE 31 MAY '20	RESIDENT BIRDS AT 30 NOV. '20
Cape Vulture	174	32	12	8		2	184
African White- backed Vulture	59	7	1	2			63
Lappet-Faced Vulture	7						7
White-headed Vulture	2						2
Palm-nut Vulture	3						3
Black Vulture	1						1
King Vulture	1						1
Andean Condor	3						3
African Fish Eagle	1	1	1				1
Brown Snake Eagle	1	1	1				1
Barn Owl	2	1	2		1		0
Spotted Eagle Owl	0	6	3				3
Jackal Buzzard	0	1					1
Black-winged Kite	0	1			1		0
Kori Bustard	0	1		1			0
Marsh Owl	0	1	1				0
Total	254	52	21	11	2	2	270

Rescue & Rehabilitation Update

The second half of the year has once again been a busy one for VulPro. From 1 June 2020 to 30 November 2020, we admitted 52 birds, of which 39 were vultures. The majority of these vultures were Cape Vultures (32) with the remaining 7 vultures being African White-backed Vultures. The largest proportion of Cape Vultures were grounded due to unknown causes (10) followed by power line incidents (7). African White-backed Vulture rescues were also dominated by vultures being grounded for unknown reasons (3). Beyond vultures, we also helped with the rescue and rehabilitation of a number of other species including a young female Fish-Eagle, two Brown Snake-Eagles, two Barn Owl fledglings, a Black Kite, a Jackal Buzzard, a Kori Bustard, a Marsh Owl and a number of Spotted Eagle-Owls.

Our rescue and rehabilitation programme has had a number of exceptional stories in the last 6 months. One of our highlights was the story of Ms Stompie D. Pegleg (adopted by Katie Ballinger). VulPro was alerted to an injured and grounded vulture in a farmer's field near Kroonstad on 16 June 2020. VulPro volunteers went to fetch the vulture the next day. Once she arrived back at VulPro, it was discovered the reason the vulture was grounded was because she only had one leg. It appeared to be an old wound, and the injured bird seemed to have been using her wings as crutches to get around. Due to her missing leg, she was affectionately referred to as Stompie by the staff at VulPro. VulPro then took Stompie to the Broederstroom Veterinary Clinic where she was treated. After the consultation, the Clinic contacted Animotion about Stompie's missing leg. The staff at Animotion offered to assess Stompie and fit her with a prosthetic leg.



Ms Stompie D. Pegleg when she arrived at VulPro



Ms Stompie D. Pegleg standing on her prosthetic leg

On 27 June 2020, Animotion came to size the leg for a prosthesis and within 2 weeks, arrived back to fit her with her newly made prosthetic leg. As soon as the leg was fitted, Stompie, who had until then been lying flat on the ground at all times, immediately took to the leg, standing up and sunning herself.

It was truly something special to see how Stompie improved from day to day simply by having her leg again. Unfortunately, there were other underlying factors affecting Stompie and Stompie's health started to decline again. The decision to euthanise Stompie was eventually made when it was decided that her quality of life was not what it should be. This was a very sad ending to Stompie's story but we are so glad that, in partnership with Animotion, we were able to give Stompie the best quality of life and the dignity she deserved in her final days.

We had a fascinating and unusual rescue this year during our annual tree nesting surveys in Roedtan, Limpopo. We were originally called to the area after a lead poisoning event affected a number of birds in the area. Once there, it was realised that there were lots of African White-backed Vultures nesting in the area, and thus we decided to conduct a survey of these vultures.





During these surveys chicks are removed from the nest, ringed with a metal SAFRING band and a coloured identifying leg band. The chicks are then put back in the nest for the parents to continue caring for them. However, during the processing of one of the chicks, it was discovered that something seemed to be wrong with the young bird. Upon closer inspection it appeared that beetle larvae had started eating at the young birds chest. These beetles, known as skin beetles (Dermestidae family) are commonly found on carcasses and amongst other decaying materials, but they are also commonly found in animal nests, including birds nests where they do sometimes eat live animals and cause deep wounds. It was decided that because African White-backed Vultures are a critically endangered species and because there had been a recent poisoning in the area, the young bird was brought back to VulPro for treatment. After the larvae were removed from his wounds and he had been treated for any infection he may have had, he was placed with an older African White-backed Vulture in rehabilitation. He has since grown into a beautiful young bird and we hope we will be able to release him in the near future.

After receiving the three Cape Vultures and a Verreaux's Eagle from Bloemfontein Zoo with great success, four more birds were brought to VulPro in August 2020. A Jackal Buzzard with one eye and three Spotted Eagle-Owls were added to the residents of VulPro. The three owls settled in well at VulPro and within the first month of their move, the female had laid three eggs! All three eggs hatched and it was exciting to watch the owlets grow. All three owlets have been released and we have spotted them around VulPro, all of them doing well. It is very exciting for us that birds that are non-releasable are still able to produce offspring that can contribute to the wild.



Population Monitoring Update

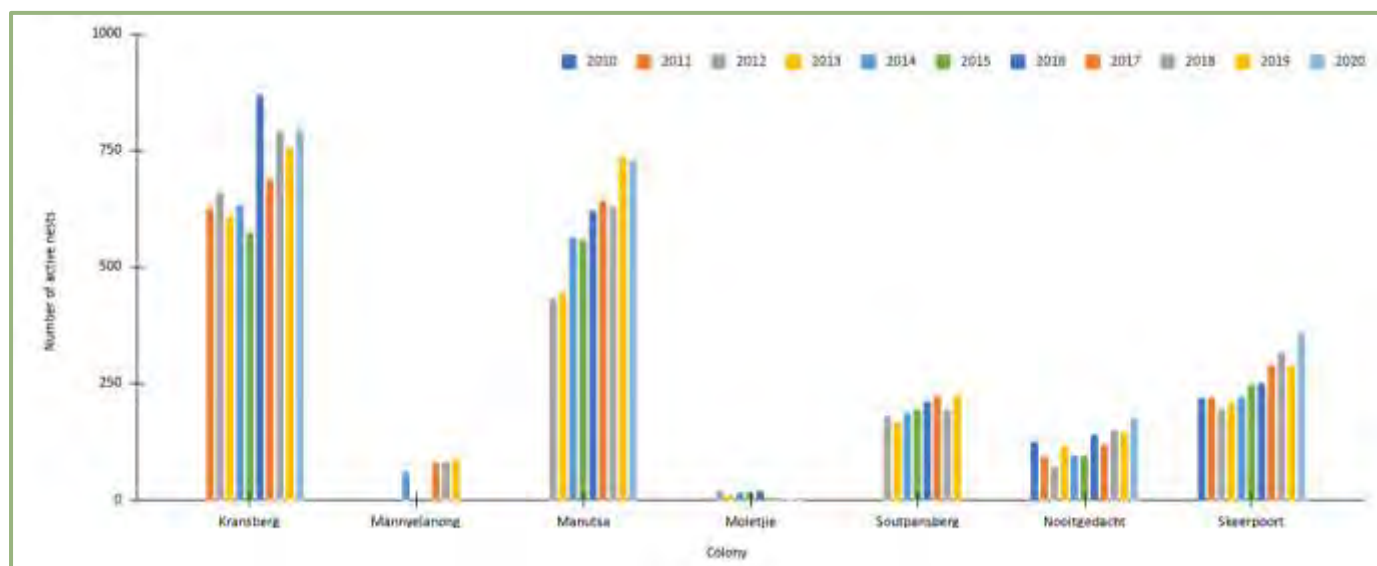
During 2020, we monitored six Cape Vulture colonies across the northern parts of South Africa. A total of 2071 active nests were observed during the initial survey. Furthermore, our African White-backed Vulture tree nesting survey efforts this year covered a total of four areas, comprising of 12 properties covering ~300km² and 128 active nests.

VulPro's cliff monitoring, which focused on the northern parts of the Cape Vulture population, was severely influenced by COVID-19, only allowing us to start with our Magaliesburg monitoring at the end of May 2020. The Manyelanong colony in Botswana was not accessible due to the ban on international travel. Furthermore, we experienced disruptions by local community members demanding compensation to monitor the Soutpansberg colony. Therefore, we observed fewer active nests this year than in 2019 but we observed more active nests at Kransberg, Moletjie, Skeerpoort, and Nooitgedacht, with Manutsa being stable. The breeding success for 2020 varied from 60 to 85%.

African White-backed Vulture tree nesting surveys were conducted at only four sites, three of which have previously been surveyed and one new area. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, which made it difficult to access sites due to provincial boundary restrictions; compounded with a lack of available accommodation and a reduction in funding, between one and two visits per site was conducted. The areas where surveys were conducted this year were Mareestane, Dwaalboom, Roedtan and Khaya Ndlovu. The Olifants River Private Nature Reserve was unfortunately not visited this year due to COVID-19 restrictions.



Monitoring at Skeerpoort Cape Vulture Colony



Annual estimates of the number of breeding pairs at each Cape Vulture colony monitored by VulPro throughout South Africa & Botswana

Table 2. Survey results of breeding success of African White-backed Vultures monitored at five study sites throughout northern South Africa in 2020

LOCATION	ACTIVE NESTS (JUNE/JULY 2020)	ACTIVE NESTS (SEPT 2020)	ACTIVE NESTS (OCT 2020)	ESTIMATED BREEDING SUCCESS
Mareetsane				
Omega Game Ranch	-	56	48	86%
Bakoven	-	2	0	0%
La Rancho	-	-	26	-
Khaya Ndlovu	21	-	10	47%
Dwaalboom				
Ultimo	-	-	1	-
Nando	-	-	1	-
Leeuwdoorn	-	-	1	-
Loggerinde Hoek	-	-	3	-
Soetdoring	-	-	15	-
Numzaan Safaris	-	-	16	-
Laastepoort	-	-	1	-
Unknown roadside	-	-	1	-
Roedtan				
TKB Farms	-	-	1	-
Bosveld	-	-	4	-
Total	21	58	128	

As part of our tree nesting surveys, we continue to ring as many chicks as possible with SAFRING metal rings and coloured plastic identifying leg bands. We were able to ring chicks at three of our four tree nesting survey sites, specifically at Mareetsane, Dwaalboom and Roedtan. In total we were able to process 27 birds, four in Mareetsane, 19 in Dwaalboom and four in Roedtan. The processing of these chicks is critical as it allows us to conduct resighting studies, which allow us to understand the movements of African White-backed Vultures after they fledge. The fledglings were accessed by using professional tree climbing equipment, allowing one person to access the nest, place the chick in a cotton bag, and lower it to the floor for processing by another person below. Once the rings and leg bands are fitted on the bird it is raised back up to the nest where it is carefully placed back in the nest. The whole process takes approximately 30 minutes, with as little time as possible spent at the nest tree to make sure that as little as possible disturbance to the chick and parents is caused.

Vulture counts are only possible with the support of all landowners involved: Leopard Lodge, Nooitgedacht Farm, Manutsa Game Farm, Marakele Game Reserve, Moletje, Soutpansberg, Omega Game Ranch, Bakoven Farm, La Rancho Farm, Khaya Ndlovu Game Reserve, Ultimo Farm, Nando Farm, Leeuwdoorn Farm, Loggerinde Hoek, Soetdoring Farm, Numzaan Safaris,

Laastepoort, TKB Farms and Bosveld Farm.

In addition, this work would not be possible without the financial assistance from Colchester Zoo, Columbus Zoo, Gauntlet Conservation Fund, Greenville Zoo, Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust, Zoo Atlanta Reeder Grant, Fondation Ensemble, Fresno Chaffee Zoo, Cleveland Zoo and the Tusk Trust.

Thank you to Jilly Ovens, Bhekinkosi Sibanda, Obert Gayesi and Francesca Fitzpatrick who assisted with monitoring fieldwork.



Processing African White-backed Vulture chicks at Numzaan Safaris, Dwaalboom Area

Ex-Situ Conservation Breeding



Egg produced in captive breeding programme & captive bred nestling in nest

Our captive breeding programme for 2020 produced 43 eggs. Of the 43 eggs laid this year, 37 were laid by our Cape Vulture pairs. We had a good fertility rate of 59% (22 eggs) and only 19% (7 eggs) were confirmed infertile. However, by allowing these birds to naturally incubate their eggs, we observed 8 broken eggs (22%). However, another 6 fertile eggs broke a couple of days before hatching. In addition, we lost another 8 chicks either during the hatching process, or when they were killed by other Cape Vultures. Our hypothesis is that the high numbers of broken eggs and killed chicks are possibly due to allowing these birds to do most of the breeding and raising the chicks with less human interference this year. Usually, eggs are taken from the nests and hatched in our incubators and hatching machines. This allows us to keep the temperature and humidity controlled in addition to reducing the disturbance of neighbouring and non-breeding birds. This year, due to COVID-19 budget constraints, the decision was made to allow the vultures, as far as possible, to lay, incubate, and raise their own chicks, without human interference. However, this left more variables to chance which may be the reason behind a lower breeding success rate amongst our vultures.

Despite this, we have 7 healthy Cape Vulture chicks within our colony which have now fledged and will be moved into our release enclosure shortly, in prep for their journey to the Eastern Cape for their future release in 2021. They are growing every day and we look forward to releasing them into the wild. The last egg that hatched was hand raised and will not be released. This was as a result of not being accepted by any of our existing breeding pairs and thus was

transferred to an educational facility with the fledgling from 2019. The Cape Vulture (Skylar), has now been sent, on loan, to the Cango Wildlife Ranch in the Western Cape, to represent her species for educational purposes where we hope she will contribute to the conservation of the species through education and changing the mindsets of the public who meet her.

Our African White-backed Vulture colony laid five eggs. Two of these eggs were fertile but unfortunately, only one hatched. This chick is doing exceptionally well and has fledged. We look forward to releasing him as a fledgling in the coming months.

We were very excited to have an egg from our White-headed Vulture pair this year! Unfortunately, the egg was infertile, but we hope that in the future they will lay more eggs allowing us to release White-headed Vultures back into the wild.



Egg produced in captive breeding programme

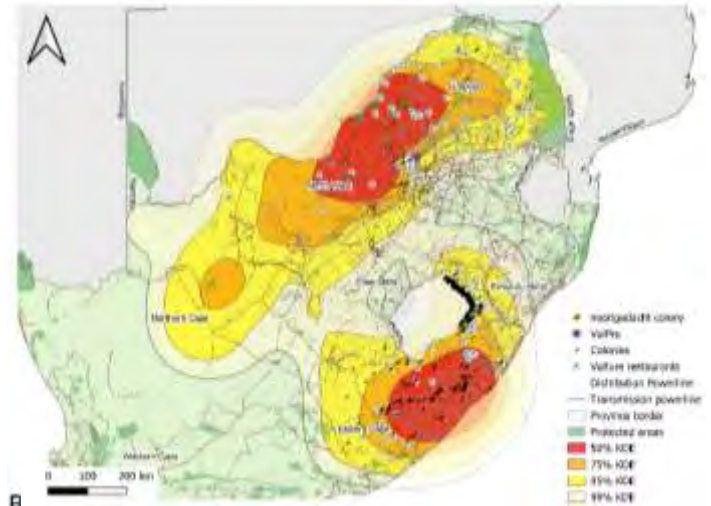
research

This year VulPro has published 7 publications and our work has been cited the second most since 2006, with 138 citations, showing the importance of the work VulPro is doing. In addition, we have another 3 publications that are almost ready for submission.

At VulPro, we try to conduct research that will benefit the conservation of all Vulture species in Africa. VulPro is currently preparing to start various exciting and novel projects that will benefit the conservation of vultures looking at multiple aspects.

Lead poisoning from ammunition is one of the hottest current topics in vulture conservation, we have therefore designed a study under controlled conditions looking at the impacts of Lead exposure in Gyps vultures with a start date in January 2021. Another exciting project is expanding on our recent publication (Howard et al. 2020) to better understand factors driving nest breeding success in the Cape Vultures' northern population.

Two projects that we are very excited about are assessing the threat of climate change on African Vultures, as limited information or knowledge is available regarding the implications of this threat on vultures. Climate change and global warming is felt everywhere and by every species including humans. As



Movement hotspots of Cape Vultures across South Africa - Preliminary results from Aspenstrom, S, Briers, R, Howard, A, Kemp, R, Hannweg, CG, Chetty, K & Wolter, K Vulture on the wire - Assessing high-risk areas of power line mortalities for the Cape Vulture (Gyps coprotheres) and the African White-backed Vulture (Gyps africanus) in South Africa

such, expanding our knowledge on this previously understudied threat to African Vultures is a pertinent addition to the conservation and protection of vultures globally. Watch the space for any updates on our ground-breaking research.

Publications

Publications for 2020:

Havenga, L, Naidoo, V., Wolter, K, Duncan, N. and Groenewald, H.B., 2020. Does the renal portal valve exist in a raptor species? A study aimed at further evaluating the mechanism of toxicity of diclofenac in vultures. *Anatomia, Histologia, Embryologia*, 49(6), pp.836-841.

Brink, C.W., Santangeli, A, Amar, A, Wolter, K, Tate, G, Krüger, S., Tucker, A.S. and Thomson, R.L., 2020. Perceptions of vulture supplementary feeding site managers and potential hidden risks to avian scavengers. *Conservation Science and Practice*, 2(8), p.e237.

Thompson, L.J., Barber, D.R., Bechard, M.J., Botha, A.J., Wolter, K, Neser, W., Buechley, E.R., Reading, R., Garbett, R.A., Hancock, P. and Maude, G., 2020. Variation in monthly sizes of home-ranges of Hooded Vultures *Necrosyrtes monachus* in western, eastern and southern Africa. *Ibis*.

Brink, C.W., Santangeli, A, Amar, A, Wolter, K, Tate, G, Krüger, S., Tucker, A.S. and Thomson, R.L., 2020. Quantifying the spatial distribution and trends of supplementary feeding sites in South Africa and their potential contribution to vulture energetic requirements. *Animal Conservation*.

Jobson, B., Wolter, K, Jordan, L, Monadjem, A. and Rowcliffe, J.M., 2020. Home range and habitat selection of captive-bred and rehabilitated cape vultures *Gyps coprotheres* in southern Africa. *Oryx*, pp.1-6.

Howard, A, Hirschauer, M, Monadjem, A, Forbes, N. & Wolter, K. 2020. Injuries, mortality rates, and release rates of endangered vultures admitted to a rehabilitation center in South Africa. *Journal of Wildlife Rehabilitation*.

Hirschauer, MT., Wolter, K, Howard, A, Rolek, BW. & McClure, CJW. 2020. Population growth rates in northern Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres* colonies between 2010 and 2019. *Bird Conservation International*.

Publications submitted:

Hirschauer, MT., Sibanda, B., Hannweg, CG., Kemp, R. & Wolter K. Observations of vulture nest predation from Leopards (*Panthera pardus*), contributing to low breeding success. Ostrich.

Bromfield, M., Webster, K., Hannweg, CG., Kemp, R. & Wolter, K. A GIS investigate of terrain and topographic characteristics at Cape Vulture (*Gyps coprotheres*) power line hotspots within the Eastern Cape, South Africa. South African Geographical Journal.

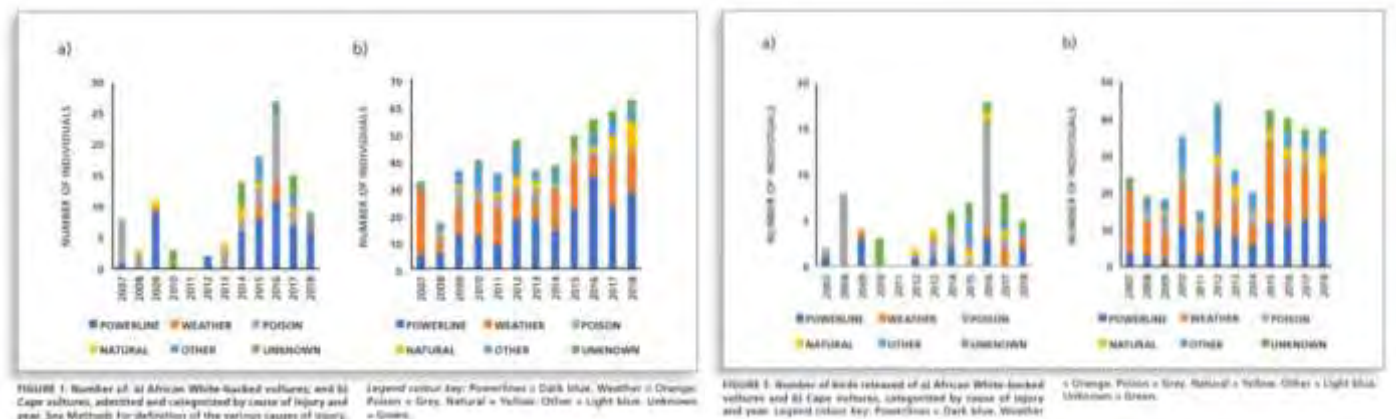
Curk, T., Scacco, M., Safi, K., Wikelski, M., Fiedler, W., Kemp, R. & Wolter, K. Under review. Wing tags severely impair movement in African Cape Vulture. Animal Biotelemetry.

Publications In Prep:

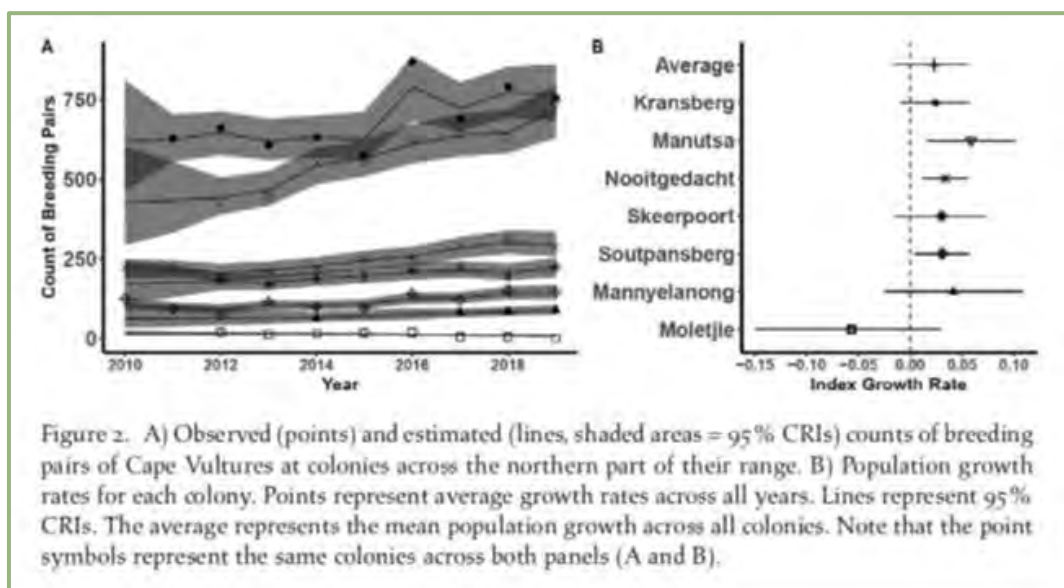
Sibanda, B., Kemp, R., Hannweg, CG. & Wolter, K. Movement behaviour and habitat requirements of a breeding White-headed Vulture

Aspenstrom, S., Briers, R., Howard, A., Kemp, R., Hannweg, CG., Chetty, K. & Wolter, K. Vulture on the wire – Assessing high-risk areas of power line mortalities for the Cape Vulture (*Gyps coprotheres*) and the African White-backed Vulture (*Gyps africanus*) in South Africa.

Casey, J., XXX, Kemp, R., Hannweg, CG., Naidoo, V. & Wolter, K. Lead levels aren't driving power line collision in Gyps vultures



Results from Howard, A., Hirschauer, M., Monadjem, A., Forbes, N. & Wolter, K. 2020. Injuries, mortality rates, and release rates of endangered vultures admitted to a rehabilitation center in South Africa. *Journal of Wildlife Rehabilitation*



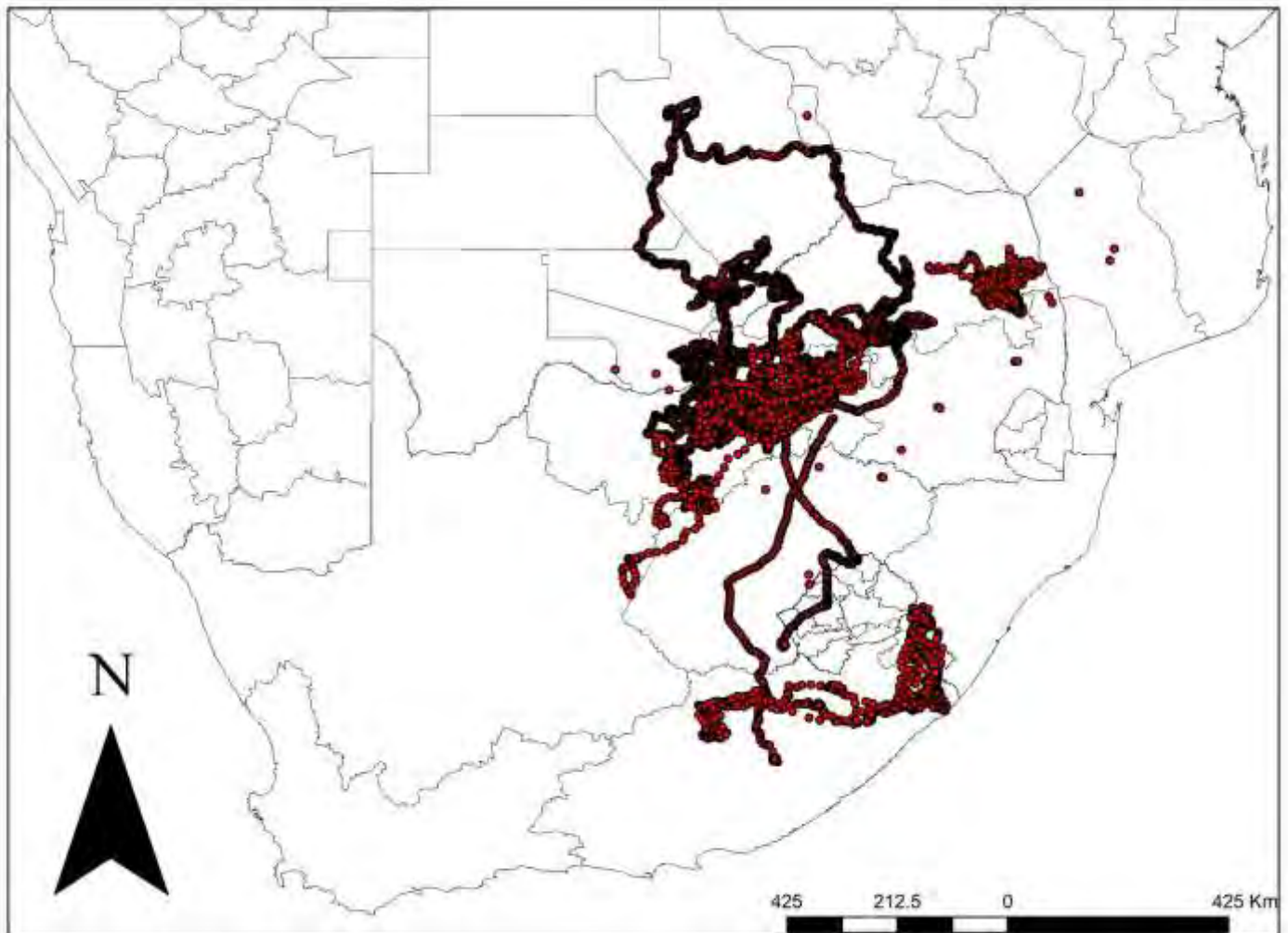
Results from Hirschauer, MT., Wolter, K., Howard, A., Rolek, BW. & McClure, CJW. 2020. Population growth rates in northern Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres* colonies between 2010 and 2019. *Bird Conservation International*

Tracking

The movement ecology of birds is one of the most critical fields in ecology as it provides vital information that will directly benefit the conservation of vulture species. The information we get through tracking devices is indispensable for our research and understanding of vultures' survival, dispersal, foraging ranges, roosting spots and habits especially in the light of increased renewable energy that poses a significant threat to African vultures.

In addition, vultures are not confined to protected areas and are in a constant battle with anthropogenic disturbances. Therefore, we try to track as many vultures as possible to better understand the movement ecology of these critically endangered species that play such an important in cleaning up our ecosystem.

We currently have 38 birds active with trackers (18 Movebank and 20 CellTrack devices) that we monitor across Southern Africa.



Tracking data movement data from 2020

Press Release



Captive bred chick

VulPro Expands through Partnerships

With vulture numbers continuously declining across their range, collaborations and multifaceted approaches are becoming more important in order to safeguard existing populations. This requires adaptive management approaches which includes both in-situ and ex-situ conservation strategies and which incorporates rehabilitation and breeding programmes for ethical conservation purposes.

VulPro has, since 2007, spearheaded vulture conservation across the continent and has worked throughout the globe on critical vulture research projects. Already known as one of the leaders and drivers in vulture conservation in Africa, VulPro, through the support of the Tusk Trust and the Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust, continues to expand its reach and has such, expanded its operations into the Gauteng and Eastern Cape Provinces of South Africa.

"Tusk has proudly supported VulPro for over a decade. In that period we have seen the organisation go from strength to strength in their unparalleled conservation operations. We're excited to support our long-term partner throughout this new period of expansion & beyond. Our thanks go to whole VulPro team for their commitment & dedication to Africa's vultures."

VulPro currently houses the largest collection of non-releasable African vultures globally, all for conservation purposes to benefit their free-living wild counterparts. As such, with partnerships from GH Braak Farms and CS Vets, a captive core population of non-releasable vultures has successfully been moved to a fully sponsored and permitted satellite site at Bronkhorspruit; VulPro's first official satellite site. With new diseases emerging, security risks ever present in South Africa and for insurance purposes for the species, sharing the load of such large numbers of non-releasable vultures across provinces within South Africa is sound and ethical conservation practices. This also allows VulPro to further increase its rehabilitation and captive breeding efforts which are directly aimed at benefiting wild populations.

"We, at GHB Farms(Pty)Ltd, are extremely excited about the arrival of the vultures at our enclosure near Bronkhorstspuit. As a large Agro-Business, one of our core focus areas is bio-security and the management of risk factors associated with the spread of diseases. It is our feeling that by helping VulPro to manage some of their birds in a remote location, we will contribute to the health and safety of the captive population under VulPro's care. The long wait is over and we look forward to the exciting times ahead and who knows, maybe there will be another project on the horizon!"
Says Dries du Plessis

"CS Vet is thrilled to be part of this project. We have for years being encouraging and educating farmers and landowners to conserve and farm sustainably. We have been involved in setting up and helping to manage various vulture feeding sites but this project truly takes vulture conservation to a new and very exciting level. We know that this project will be a huge success and thank VulPro for their ever present dedication as well as GHB Farms for their commitment and enthusiasm in taking on such a mammoth task."

Furthermore, VulPro has also expanded its release sites into the Eastern Cape in partnership with Kate Webster who is VulPro's Eastern Cape associate, together with the Eastern Cape Nature Conservation Department and DHL Supply Chain. It is here where Phase 2 of VulPro's captive breeding programme will commence where parent raised offspring from our 2019 and 2020 breeding seasons, will be housed for a few months, followed by their release.

Each individual will be released with a SAFRING metal leg band, a coloured leg band for easy identification and resighting purposes as well as a GSM/GPS mounted backpack tracking device. With the ever declining Cape Vulture populations in the Eastern Cape due to power line related incidents as well as both intentional and unintentional poisoning, breeding sites are contracting with only a few pockets remaining as strong holds for the species in this province; as such, the Eastern Cape is well suited for a well co-ordinated and managed vulture supplementation programme. In addition, some of the offspring produced at VulPro, are from Eastern Cape birds that have been permanently maimed due to power line related incidents and thus, these birds are able to give back to 'their' province. Hand in hand with this, VulPro continues to address the ever-present dangers of anthropogenic threats across the vultures foraging and breeding ranges. This includes but is not limited to (a) the mitigation of unsafe power line structures and lines; (b) lobbying for wind farm developments outside of vulture priority areas as well as further research and understanding of vulture movements in relation to proposed wind farm developments (c) constant farmer and landowner engagements with regards to safe farming practices to avoid poison use and lastly (d) the correct management of vulture feeding sites in particular to the safety of carcasses fed to vultures and making sure these sites provide correct nutritional requirements to the species. This new approach in the Eastern Cape Province, offers VulPro, together with Eastern Cape officials and the public to play an important role in preserving the species through a collective approach whereby there is inclusion by farmers, communal landowners and the public, both directly and indirectly.



Nestlings at VulPro



Cape Vulture

ABOUT VULPRO

VulPro is a multifaceted vulture conservation organization, based on the outskirts of Hartbeespoort, North West Province, South Africa. VulPro focuses in adaptive management approaches incorporating in-site and ex-situ vulture conservation strategies across the globe with focal points being; rehabilitation, captive breeding for conservation purposes, research in all spheres on African vultures as well as extensive educational and landowner liaison and awareness programmes. VulPro is one of the lead vulture conservation organisations in southern Africa.

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ABOUT THE HANS HOHEISEN CHARITABLE TRUST

The Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust managed by Nedbank Private Wealth facilitates the protection, restoration, improved resilience and sustainable use of South Africa's species and eco-systems by providing grants to conservation bodies engaged in physical biodiversity conservation and working in the cross-cutting environmental governance and advocacy, climate change, research and education arenas.

Eastern cape report:

Kate Webster



Arrival of 6 fledglings at Rookwood Farm, Eastern Cape, from VulPro headquarters in the Magaliesburg, North West Province

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation tends to slow down in the winter months, however during May I was contacted by a state vet from Smithfield informing me of a vulture that an Eskom technician had found alive under powerlines in the Zastron district. Sadly there were 4 other vultures dead under the same powerlines. Unfortunately, after assessing the bird, it was clear that there would be no chance of survival as the leg was badly broken, with maggots throughout the leg and wing areas. Dr Wentzel from Queenstown kindly euthanized the bird for me.

My next two cases were not vultures, but were rather a Black Sparrow-hawk and a Verreaux Eagle.

The Black Sparrow-hawk had been caught in the local supermarket warehouse. Sadly due to being locked up all weekend, the bird died shortly after collection as a result of stress and the cold conditions. The bird was taken to the East London Museum for possible use as a mounted specimen.

The Verreaux's eagle had fortunately been caught in a lynx trap, and was unharmed. The bird was subsequently soft released at Rookwood, and will hopefully find it's own territory.

My second vulture of the year was a very unfortunate bird that was found wandering around on a farm of Mr

Charlie Wilson. The bird had been injured from powerlines. Unfortunately, although we tried very hard to save the vulture, it was not successful.

Recently another powerline victim was collected - an extremely fortunate bird. Mr John Colman of Adelaide district picked the bird up and cared for it as best possible (I must just add that he is 83 years of age, which is remarkable). The bird, 'Feathers', had a badly swollen head and neck from the collision. He is currently being rehabilitated and will be released in due course.

I have just received another vulture from - yes you guessed it - a powerline interaction again. This bird is currently being monitored for improvement and possible release.

And lastly, some good news!

When one receives news of a re-sighting of a bird that you personally rehabilitated and released two years ago, it does make one extremely happy. A young bird affected by a vicious electrical storm was re-sighted in the Katberg with 90 birds feeding off a dead horse. This makes rehab all the more worthwhile!!!!

Eskom Reporting

The 2020 season for vulture deaths as a result of powerlines continues unabated and, although the reactive period has definitely improved from reporting incidents to mitigation, the number of birds affected has not decreased.

Below is a list of the incidents since January 2020 (I have deliberately supplied the information for the whole year to provide an overall view of the extent of the problem).

Sadly, as in most cases, all of the work done is reactive in nature, occurring only after the incidents have been reported. While the most recent incident did result in

the line being mitigated, it is clear that current level of maintenance is not sufficient. This has a significant potential impact, highlighted by the fact that the most recently mitigated line was identified back in 2010, due to more than 100 dead Cape Vultures found under the line. The mitigation of lines, without sufficient maintenance in place is an issue across South Africa.

I continue to report all incidents related to powerlines, and we continue to hugely depend on the public to report sightings in order to assist all birds in need, as well as to identify where work needs to be done.

Table 3. Incidents since January 2020

DATE	INFRASTRUCTURE TYPE	COMMENTS
01.01.020	Distribution line	2 x Cape vulture collision (dead) 1 bird survived, however extensive burn on wings & subsequently died
24.01.020	Distribution line	10 x Cape vulture electrocuted (dead) With historical evidence as well
27.01.020	Distribution line	2 x Cape vulture (dead) A pole had fallen over & sheep that had walked into the line. Subsequently died attracted these birds who suffered the same fate.
03.02.020	Distribution line	1 x Cape vulture collision (dead)
11.02.020	Distribution line	1 x Cape vulture electrocution (dead)
26.02.020	Distribution line	2 x CV electrocutions (dead)
02.03.020	Distribution line	3 x Cape vulture (dead) Historical evidence as well
03.03.020	Distribution line	3 x Cape vulture electrocution (dead)
17.03.020	Distribution line	2 x Cape vulture electrocution (dead)
08.04.020	Distribution line	1 x Cape vulture electrocution (dead)
29.04.020	Distribution line	1 x Cape vulture electrocution (survived)
21.05.020	Distribution line	5 x Cape vulture electrocutions (died) 1 bird had survived but had to be euthanized due to extensive injuries
04.08.020	Distribution line	2 x Cape vulture electrocutions (dead) Historically evidence as well
14.09.020	Distribution line	1 x Cape vulture collision (died)
19.11.020	Distribution line	1 x Cape vulture collision (survived)
28.11.020	Distribution line (mitigated!)	1 x Cape vulture electrocution (survived)

SUMMARY:

Cape Vultures affected in total:

Other birds affected:

Cape Vultures permanently damaged:

Cape Vultures released

Cape Vultures killed/dead:

38 (32 in Eastern Cape)

Blue cranes (numerous in Somerset East area)

1 (possibly 2)

2 potential releases

35 (average just over 3 vultures per month)



Captive bred individuals

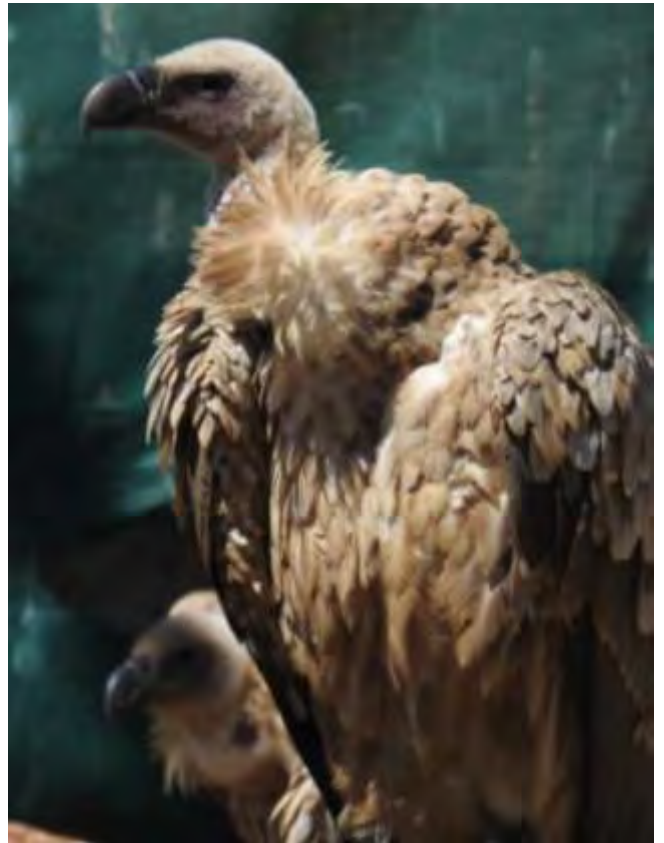
Our Collywobbles Champion: Mfuneko

Mfuneko lives close to Collywobbles, the largest breeding colony of Cape Vultures in the Eastern Cape. Over the years he has shown tremendous enthusiasm and willingness to become a guardian for the Cape Vultures of the area. In order to support his willingness and persistence to help, we sent him to VulPro for more training (VulPro sponsored this).

VulPro has now managed to secure funding for a monthly stipend for him, for which he will supply monthly reports on breeding, visits, power lines as well as visitors to the area.

It has become apparent that we need to spread our footprint into the rural Transkei area, as this is still a stronghold of Cape Vultures, and with champions like Mfuneko, we believe it is possible.

We certainly need more people like him in this world - despite living in very poor conditions, he has shown that passion can keep one focussed.



Captive bred individual

Captive Bred Chicks

At the end of September a new era arrived in this province with five captive bred chicks and one releasable youngster arriving from VulPro. After an approximately 28 hour journey in their crates from VulPro to Rookwood, they were released into a holding enclosure and transferred into the Rookwood aviary the following day. One of these fledglings is from a pair of birds that originated from Rookwood many many years ago, Mr G and Ms V (known as Kate's pair at VulPro).

They have settled down well in the aviary with all the other 'broken', unable to fly vultures (6) and will be released from the middle of December in the Eastern Cape. All are fitted with devices so we will be able to watch what they do.

This is new territory for us all and we are excited to see how they adapt to their new environment. This will hopefully boost the existing populations in this province.

media

In September 2020, I had an interview with Mariska Spoormaker which was broadcast for Vulture week awareness on RSG 360 programme. Cara-Lee Dorfling, Media 24, published an article on the captive bred chicks that came from VulPro. This article can be found at the link below:

<https://www.netwerk24.com/Nuus/Omgewing/6-jong-aasvoels-kry-nuwe-tuiste-in-o-kaap-20200928>

A note of Thanks

The support that I get from my family, staff, local vets Dr Werner Wentzel and Dr Elreza Kloppers, Tim de Jongh and Dean Ricketts from DEAET, No 2 Piggeries for the constant supply of food, and all of the landowners in this province, really is invaluable. A special mention must be made to my son Kevin, who assisted with 'upgrading' the aviary at Rookwood under extreme pressure. I would also like to thank Joy for continued backup and support with regards to feeding and collection of food supply during the periods that I have been unable to. Kerri, Ryno and Caroline of Vulpro thank you for your continuous support and backup. I thank my sponsors Lomas Wildlife Protection Trust and DHL Supply Chain, as I would not be able to do the work without their funding and support.

This year has been a very tough one, with COVID-19 grinding everything to a halt. Over and above this, I have had to deal with illness in the family, which has added additional time constraints and emotional pressure on my daily life. However, it has always been wonderful to have the opportunity to work with these very intelligent birds. They so often show more determination than many humans and one can learn from them.

Thank you,
Kate Webster



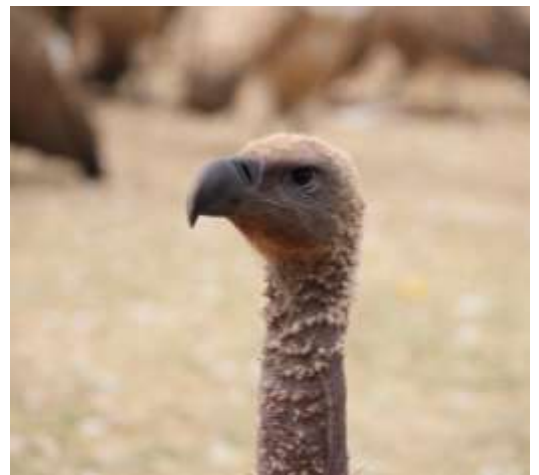
Captive bred & rescued vultures



Captive bred & rescued vultures

Restaurant News

Artificial vulture restaurants not only provide safe reliable food for vultures, potentially contributing to their breeding success and survival, they also provide conservationists and researchers with the opportunity to observe, monitor, photograph and research vultures. In this edition of our newsletter, VulPro wanted to showcase some of the personalities and observations we get to enjoy whilst observing these majestic vultures (not so majestic on the ground)...



Savannah Grobler:
Cango Wildlife Ranch Representative

I am an animal caregiver at Congo Wildlife Ranch, situated in the beautiful klein-karoo in Oudtshoorn. I have been chosen by my company to receive training in hand-raising vulture chicks and to learn more about how to work with these amazing birds. The reason for this is because two of Vulpro's Cape Vulture's will be travelling back with me to be ambassadors for their species at Congo Wildlife Ranch.

These two vultures are a chick of 7 weeks old and a juvenile that is over a year old. Their purpose will be to educate the public of their plight in the wild, what we, as humans, can do to prevent their extinction, and why these animals are crucial for the environment.

During my stay at Vulpro, I have learned a lot about vultures and birds that I would have never learned if I did not have this opportunity. I am thankful to receive first-hand experience working under passionate conservationist, Kerri Wolter. Without her and her team's hard work in protecting these amazing animals, we will suffer under the consequences of the extinction of these animals.

I thoroughly enjoyed my stay and hope to return soon.



Lisa Michael a Scheer

I am always looking for something new and different, something that will challenge me, take me out of my comfort zone and teach me new things. Be it something I had never seen before or something that I did not know about the world. I, Lisa from Germany, found myself volunteering at a vulture conservation centre, VulPro. This place has taught me so much about vultures, how to protect them, and about myself.

The team here is amazing. They are friendly and welcoming and will make you feel right at home. A very good thing, considering how far out of my comfort zones it has taken me!

For example: Have you ever heard of a vulture restaurant? No, I hadn't either. Well this is a place where carcasses are put out to feed the wild vultures. Sounds lovely? It is. So nice to see all of these incredible creatures feeding and making a come-back into this world. Well, at the end of each week the restaurant needs a clean - now that is where things get, well, smelly! But we do it to help a species survive.



Fran Fitzpatrick



I have always loved animals and since childhood I have felt frustrated at the damage and irresponsible way our species treats the planet that we are privileged to inhabit. My passion and my career both focus on a holistic approach to the conservation of endangered species, hoping to find ways in which humans and wildlife can co-exist in stable, productive ecosystems. I was in South Africa when the COVID-19 pandemic struck, and chose to remain at Lionsrock Big Cat Sanctuary throughout the national lockdown. During this time, I had heard from VulPro that the team was short-staffed due to the departure of the international volunteers at the start of lockdown, so once travel was permitted I came to help.

My passion for vulture conservation developed as I studied the conflicts which arise when humans share landscapes with carnivores, and how approach that integrate social and ecological sciences have revolutionised large carnivore conservation. Vultures really are the un-sung stars of the savanna in their crucial roles as apex scavengers, yet I noticed that they are often ignored or even spoken of disparagingly by visitors, locals and those working in the nature tourism sector in southern Africa. From the first time I dove into the scientific literature on vultures, I was hooked. However, there is only so much one can learn from the comfort of one's desk! I was lucky to spend three informative weeks at VulPro in 2018, after attending the Raptor Research Foundation's annual conference in the Kruger. However, three weeks barely scratches the surface of a place like VulPro, which is involved in so many different aspects of research and conservation of these fantastic birds. Therefore, I was very excited to have the opportunity to spend the past two months volunteering at the sanctuary.

Vultures up-cycle the waste products of carnivorous and herbivorous diets, feeding almost exclusively on the carcasses and waste materials from wild and domestic animals and humans. VulPro is a pioneer in the field of vulture conservation and the sanctuary itself revolves around a theme of minimising waste,

which resonates deeply with me. The rehabilitation and release of wild birds is a key focus, but when release is impossible, maintaining sites for captive breeding allows those permanently captive birds to continue to contribute to the wild population and to the genetic diversity of their species. These birds may not fly free, but they are by no means wasted by remaining in captivity.

Indeed, their survival and capacity to breed, in spite of the injuries or debilitations which prevent their release, has allowed the organic development of genetically diverse, captive populations of several critically endangered vulture species. These act as an insurance policy in case of a sudden, rapid loss of a wild population or species, as occurred during the Asian vulture crisis. Alternatively, developing a safety net for African vulture species through captive breeding would require removing functional breeding vultures from the already-declining wild populations and placing them into captivity. They also perform critical roles as ambassadors for their species, teaching us about them and inspiring us to care about their plight in the wild.

VulPro simulates wild breeding habitats to allow permanent avian residents to raise and fledge chicks in an environment resembling the wild breeding sites (e.g. cliffs for Cape Vultures, raised platforms to resemble the flat tops of trees where White-backed Vultures nest), so that when these new generations are released, they recognise suitable breeding habitats and understand how to breed successfully in the wild. Tracking of released captive-bred birds provides data on movement patterns and the threats and mortality rates of wild vultures, allowing more accurate monitoring of vulture populations, assessment of the level and urgency of the different threats currently causing Old World Vulture declines, and filling in some of the gaps in the scientific knowledge and understanding of these species. Even without the additional research, monitoring, education, outreach and advocacy, the logical combination of rescue and rehabilitation with conservation and monitoring of released individuals and of the fate of the wild populations they join makes so much sense.

Vulture conservation is difficult, but learning about VulPro's goals, long-term and daily activities, and how the different strands fit into the overall aim of saving African vultures from extinction, has been an inspiring and unique experience. I already wished to dedicate my own life and career to Old World Vulture conservation, but VulPro acts as an example of how such a goal may be achieved and succeed.

Ellen Horlebein

As we all know, and especially feel, COVID 19 has had a serious impact on all of our lives this year. After being in lockdown in Eswatini (formerly Swaziland) for more than half a year, I needed a break from being locked-in, and as soon as South Africa's borders opened, I decided that it was time to pack up in the Kingdom and contribute towards wildlife conservation.

My wildlife conservation contribution for October & November 2020 went towards VulPro, where I volunteered for 3 weeks. I met lovely people and a big bunch of amazing and interesting birds.

Not being familiar with the area where VulPro is based, I was positively surprised how many colonies do have their home “close by”. The action at the vulture restaurant is mind-blowing, as well as the time before and after feeding, when the air-giants gently approach their breakfast – I loved just to sitting down and simply watching the sky.

The birds that eat from the vulture restaurant are still the lucky ones. Flying into the premises, most of them cruise across the open-air enclosures – the vultures staying in this section can't fly anymore, so there is no need to keep them in an enclosure with a roof. The birds in these enclosures either have one wing, a serious injured wing or other similar issues – making non-flyers out of them. It was so sad to watch them wobbling when they start running because they get excited. These birds will never again enjoy the ability to simply disappear into the sky and fly home to some of the beautiful cliffs in the Magaliesberg mountains near around VulPro.

It is also very interesting to see the precise timing of the birds that eat from the vulture restaurant – they start to inspect the vulture restaurant from early in the morning, waiting for a nice load of meat. They are definitely not picky – it's easy to please them taste wise – it's rather the issue of the amount of food they receive. I couldn't believe how quickly a whole cow gets eaten!

Spending time so close to all of the different birds is definitely something special and I am very grateful that VulPro is making it possible.

But there is one thing that is even better than spending time with the birds: not spending time, because they get released back into the wild!



A Fish Eagle was ready to be released after receiving medical treatment and going successfully through rehab at VulPro . It was agreed that the Fish Eagle would be released at Dinokeng Game Reserve - a place I had only heard about. Once in Dinokeng Game Reserve, an area was identified as being an ideal location for the Fish Eagle (lots of water and food, large trees and no other Fish Eagles within the area). I was able to join this adventure and share in this special moment - releasing the bird and watching it fly back into the wild. It didn't perch somewhere next to the dam, as everybody was hoping for - the Fish Eagle just flew, and flew and flew...



Fish Eagle release in Dinokeng Game Reserve

DUNISANI CLARENCE MABASA

I hope to complete my one year practical, and in doing so, gain some knowledge about the behaviour, distribution, habitat, breeding, feeding, conservation status and importance of vultures.



Magnificent Vultures of Africa

Extracts from the Book

"Vultures are the crown jewels of the avian world, & have roamed our skies for millions of years. They have seen species appearing & disappearing, yet their own kind has not changed much in the recent history of the Earth. Humankind has yearned throughout our own evolution to fly like the vulture & we have embedded vultures in our hieroglyphics & rock art as a remembrance of where we all come from. The negligence & ignorance of modern man, however, has taken an enormous toll on vultures. In the dawn of the third millennium we have a critical duty to conserve these creatures, as we are just another earth-bound species viewed from the heavens by the masters of flight."

~ Dr Gerhard Verdoon, director of the Griffon Poison Information Centre



"If we are to ensure the survival of all wild species in a world dominated by greed and rampant materialism, our only choice is to attempt to shift people's mindsets towards caring and understanding. And in the case of vultures, this means that we have to showcase these birds' magnificence, their spectacular beauty and their utter irreplaceability, because no-one will work to save a species or care about its future if they are not emotionally moved by it, no matter how vital its ecological role is."

~ Kerri Wolter



R650

+ R110 for delivery to your nearest Postnet

Book Review

This book showcases our majestic vultures with pictures that could not paint a thousand words, but could rather write entire volumes of books. Valuable, concise information (and a wake-up call) about each species, as well as marvellous photos and pictures that could not be seen anywhere else. I enjoy the book because of the detail in the writing and incredible photos.

These misunderstood and overlooked birds are very precious and deserve more attention, as well as the protection against extinction by every living soul on the planet. This book needs to be shared to get the message out into the world. It's the perfect gift!

By Mariza Hamman

Owner of Sound Ear Pty (Ltd) & VulPro adoptive parent

Adoptive Parents

We asked some of our adoptive parents why they decided to give their adopted vultures the name they gave them. Here are some of the answers!

Dawn Barclift: Ega

Adult male Lapped-faced Vulture



"When I was choosing a name for my vulture he was described to me as a bit of a curmudgeon who likes his space, and Ega means 'the only one, alone, solitary, by oneself, single'."

Garth Williams: ChickyB

Adult male Cape Vulture.



"A chickie with the initial B gifted me the adoption of a vulture. All vultures start off as chicks with the hope to 'B' magnificent aviators. The greatest hope of all is that each vulture will 'B' lucky enough to have their own chickie. So, the name I chose was obviously ChickyB."

Scott Oxtan: Malika

Juvenile female Lappet-faced Vulture



"I chose to name my adopted vulture Malkia which is the Swahili word for queen because I see vultures as beautiful, regal animals."

Tracey Robinson: TJAY

Adult female Cape Vulture.



"TJay is a play on my initials. When I got the list of candidates she was described as super vicious, super mum. It was love at first sight. It makes me smile even now."

Annemieke de wit:
Isabis

Adult female White-headed Vulture



"When I was looking for a name for my adopted female White-headed Vulture, I decided I wanted to give her an African name so I started searching for African girl's names and came across Isabis. When I read that it meant "something beautiful", I knew it would suit her perfectly. I have to admit that when I learned her partner's name is Arthur, I thought maybe I should have called her Guinevere. But I do really love the name Isabis!"

Jonathan Chaplin: Conan & Sherry

Adult female Cape Vulture.



“Conan and Sherry are two people I admire and wanted to honour. I loved the idea of these wonderful and resilient vultures being named after an equally strong pair.”

Jessica van der Berg: Optimus Prime & Bumble Bee

Adult male Cape Vulture & adult female Cape Vulture



"As we don't have kids, we use Mother's Day to 'adopt' animals or help out at shelters instead. The three of us adopted two girls - an old girl and a baby girl. We all like Transformers so we called the older one Optimus Prime and the younger one, Bumble Bee. It's fitting."

Nicole Schoppner:
Elani & Shujaa

Sub-adult female Cape Vulture & adult male African White-backed Vulture



"When I adopted my two vultures last year, I thought they should have African names. For the female Cape Vulture I have chosen the name Elani, which means "light". The little male White-Backed Vulture was new at VulPro and had a bad broken wing that had to be amputated. So I decided to call him Shujaa, which means "hero" or "brave". For me these are the perfect names for my vultures.

Clive Vardakis: Brizzle

Adult female Cape Vulture



"We named our adopted vulture Brizzle. This is how locals from my home town (Bristol, England) often say 'Bristol'. It's also the name of the mascot of the Bristol Bears rugby team!"

Foxfeather Zenkova:
Cozcacuauhtli

Sub-adult male King Vulture



"It means vulture, specifically King vulture in Nahuatl, the native Aztec language. I have heard a couple of different etymologies for the word, but it is commonly accepted that Cozcatl means jewelled necklace/collar (referring to the white ruff on their neck) and cuauhtli means eagle – so sort of 'jewelled collar eagle'. Vultures, especially king vultures, were held in high regard in this culture and even had a day named after them, and were seen as symbols of purification, turning death and decay into life. There are so many amazing legends and stories about them and many amazing glyphs and artwork that can be seen throughout Mesoamerica. Even though this bird is in Africa, I thought he could have a little nod to his South American roots."

Thank You to our Sponsors



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