

BE A PART OF THE CHANGE

# THE VULPRO FLYER

APRIL TO JUNE 2022



# CONTENTS PAGE

Word from our CEO	Pg 3
Vulture Rescue & Rehabilitation	Pg 4–5
Captive Breeding	Pg 6
Tree Nesting	Pg 7–8
Cape Vulture Monitoring Surveys	Pg 9
Vulpro Eastern Cape Report	Pg 10–11
Education Statistics	Pg 12
Research	Pg 13–14
Volunteer Profile	Pg 15
Music Event	Pg 16
Poster	Pg 17
Sponsors	Pg 18

# WORD FROM OUR CEO



This quarterly newsletter covers three seasons: the closure of summer into autumn, and this year, winter hit us harder and earlier than usual. The change in weather patterns has brought about some changes to the vultures' breeding season. In the past, it was normal to get some eggs as early as May, this year, however, we had eggs as early as April, with most eggs being laid between April and May. What made the change even more pronounced was the ongoing rainfall right into June, with a large thundershower on 23 June. Not only has the change of weather confused us, but it has no doubt confused many species, including the vultures. But, if we are to survive in these ever-changing times, species must adapt to their changing environment as more pressure is placed on natural habitats and foraging ranges.

Change seems to be what the past three months have all been about, and with the help from HKML, Vulpro embarked on a branding campaign as we continue to grow as leaders in the field of vulture conservation. Our brand-new logo shows strength, direction and identification as to who and what we are. The new colour scheme we have adopted is fresh, bold, modern and vibrant, reflecting the marking schemes of vulture leg bands. With new branding comes further changes in who we bank with, and Vulpro has now partnered with First National Bank for all our banking needs.

Although change has been the norm, not the exception for us this year, there must still be some consistency, and that is most certainly the case with our tree and cliff-nesting breeding monitoring out in the wild, where we follow strict protocols. The surveys give us an insight into the health of vulture populations and are an extremely important tool to assess, monitor and analyse conservation work being done. They are also an opportunity to understand ongoing or new threats affecting specific sites and where education and mitigation measures can be undertaken and focused on to prevent population declines. All in all, breeding surveys are the grassroots of vulture conservation work, and they cannot be underestimated or side-lined as to their role and their conservation value.

Finally, after two years of living with Covid-19 restrictions, we are now free to enjoy each other's company, so Vulpro is inviting every one of you to our music event. This event will be held on 3 September, under the African Skies alongside one of the oldest mountain ranges in the world, the Magaliesberg. We, of course, will also be joined by the resident Cape Vultures of Leopard Lodge in Skeerpoort, where we will celebrate the magnificence of vultures during International Vulture Awareness Day. Please join us and be A PART OF THE CHANGE FOR AFRICA'S VULTURES!

I do hope you will enjoy reading this latest newsletter and gain valuable insight into our daily lives as we continue to conserve, protect and nurture our majestic vultures

Kerri, CEO



# VULTURE RESCUE & REHABILITATION

Species admitted to VulPro's rehabilitation programme between 1 April and 30 June 2022

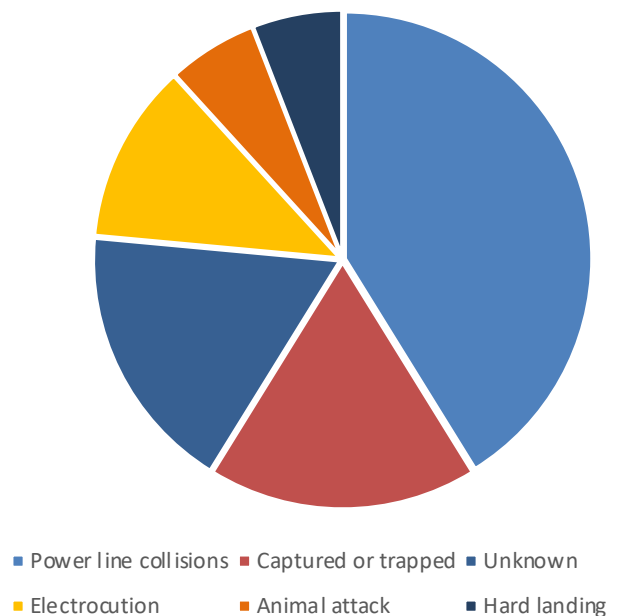


During the winter months of the year, we focus on the youngsters produced in our captive breeding programme as the programme takes off. However, while rehabilitation cases slow down during these months, they never stop, and we continue to admit vultures in need of our care to our rehabilitation programme. Between 1 April and 30 June 2022, we admitted 17 vultures to our programmes. A quarter of all our incoming cases were vulture species, with the total comprising 11 Cape Vultures and 6 African White-backed Vultures.

Once again, we continue to battle with power-line collisions, with the largest number of birds admitted as a result of power-line collisions. In the last three months, over 50% of our admissions were caused by energy infrastructure alone; we also admitted three birds for injuries caused by electrocutions.

This quarter, we once again saw the effects of human interference on these birds. Vulpro was contacted by a member of the public to find out if we would be interested in buying a Cape Vulture from them. This was immediately flagged with the local authorities, and between Vulpro and the Limpopo Environmental Department, a sting operation was put in place to gain custody of the distressed bird. Two Vulpro staff members made contact with the poacher and were able to set up a meeting with them for them to hand over the bird.

Reasons for admission between 1 April and 30 June 2022



Reasons for admission	Number of admissions
Power line collisions	7
Captured or trapped	3
Electrocutation	2
Animal attack	1
Hard landing	1
Unknown	3
Total	17





# VULTURE RESCUE & REHABILITATION

With careful timing in place, as soon as the vulture was brought out for the handover, the authorities entered the scene and confiscated the bird. Unfortunately, not much more can be done other than issuing the offenders with a fine, and it is always worrying to us that these individuals may go out and conduct this kind of activity again. But, Vulpro will continue to ensure that as many vultures as possible are removed from these kinds of situations and are returned to the wild as soon as possible.

Thankfully, we were able to release this individual despite the hardships he had gone through. This bird was one of 11 vultures we were able to release this quarter, including 1 African White-backed Vulture and 10 Cape Vultures, and it is always a positive reminder for us to keep doing what we can for every individual who comes into our care. We were able to fit him with a GPS tracking device. We are monitoring his movements daily. He is doing extremely well, and we are very pleased with his progress.

RIGHT: Poachers who attempted to sell an adult Cape Vulture to Vulpro are apprehended through a sting operation between Vulpro and the local environmental authorities, LEDET.



ABOVE: Safely confiscated, staff members transported the vulture back to Vulpro

RIGHT: The confiscated vulture had originally been restrained with wire over its wings. Vulpro carefully checked on the bird and treated it appropriately. This bird has been successfully rehabilitated and has since been released.

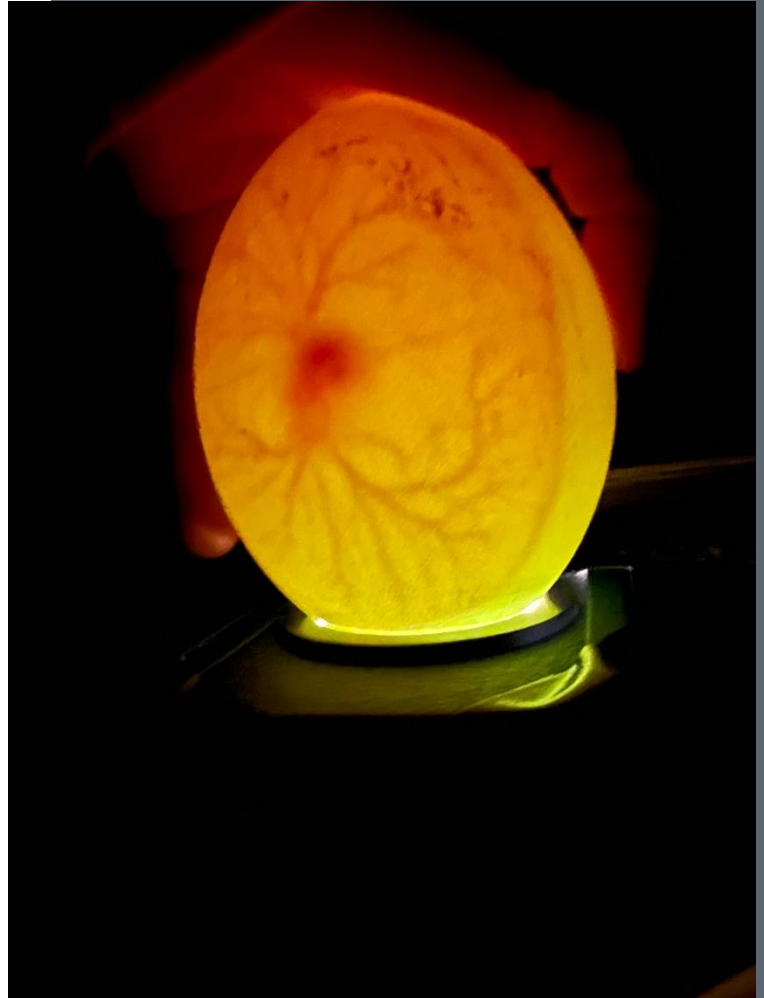


# CAPTIVE BREEDING FOR POPULATION RESTORATION

2022 has most certainly been our busiest captive breeding season with 49 eggs already laid. It has become a mammoth task keeping up to date with all breeding pairs, eggs and who is at which nest as there have been so many changes this season. Although this has already proven to be quite the season, unfortunately, we lost two of our precious elderly males that had been with us for many years and whose time had come. Fortunately, one of the males left a legacy: a fertile egg. Unfortunately, his mate was not able to incubate the egg alone so we have it safely in our incubator and will give the hatched chick to a surrogate pair as a single female cannot raise a chick on her own.

Where possible, we leave eggs with their parents for natural incubation. However, in a captive environment, there are many disturbances as well as disabled vultures hopping up and down from their own ledges. This causes fights to break out among the birds protecting their eggs and because of this, eggs that are in an unsecured area of the breeding cliff or enclosure, are removed and artificially incubated and replaced with dummy eggs for the parents to continue to incubate. We still need the parents to carry out their incubation duties if we plan to replace the dummy eggs with their real chicks. This parental duty is vital for chicks to be parent raised with the end goal of being released and contributing to species restoration projects.

In summary, we have had a total of 50 eggs from 4 species, namely 1 Lappet, 1 White-headed, 6 African White-backed vulture eggs and a whopping 42 Cape Vulture eggs. Unfortunately, not all were fertile with only 24 known fertile eggs. Sadly, nine eggs broke while being naturally incubated and the outcome of a handful is still unknown.





# TREE NESTING VULTURE MONITORING

As breeding seasons started for vultures in southern Africa, we once again partook in the first surveys of our annual tree-nesting breeding monitoring in May and June 2022. We are currently monitoring three sites: Mareetsane, Dwaalboom and Roedtan. We are pleased to say that our work is expanding and this year, once again, we engaged with more farmers on more properties and covered more ground. Unfortunately, due to the unseasonably wet weather this winter, our access to some farms was prohibited due to extremely wet and inaccessible roads. This has delayed our monitoring of the Roedtan African White-backed Vultures, but we are monitoring the situation closely to access this site as soon as possible and get an accurate first count of the nests on site. These first counts give us a good baseline of how many fledglings we can expect at the end of the season, and it helps us determine breeding success at the end of the season. This data is part of our ongoing work with these populations and will feed into a larger project forming a chapter of Caroline Hannweg's PhD thesis looking at how factors may be affecting nest-site selection and breeding success rate.

LEFT: Melanie Cheney, Dallas Zoo volunteer, logs a new nest in the Mareetsane area. Our thanks to the Dallas Zoo for their continued support throughout our work, and for going above and beyond, dedicating their time and efforts to volunteer as well.



RIGHT: An adult African White-backed Vulture incubates her egg in her nest in the Mareetsane area of South Africa.



# TREE NESTING VULTURE MONITORING

Results of first surveys for African White-backed Vultures monitored at two study sites in northern South Africa in May and June 2022

Location	Active nests (May/June 2022)
<b><i>Mareetsane</i></b>	<b>90</b>
Omega Game Ranch	57
La Rancho	18
Woodside Lodge	5
Bakoven	3
Woodside Cattle (New)	7
<b><i>Dwaalboom</i></b>	<b>83</b>
Swartbos	14
Rooiderbokvale	15
Numzaan Safaris	13
Unknown roadside	6
Groenedal	4
Boelani	2
Laastepoort	2
Nando	1
Leeuwdoorn	0
Loggerinde Hoek	1
Dotreg	0
Kallie Lee Farm	1
Haakdoorn	19
Elandskloof (New)	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>173</b>



Tree nesting surveys are conducted in the Dwaalboom area.

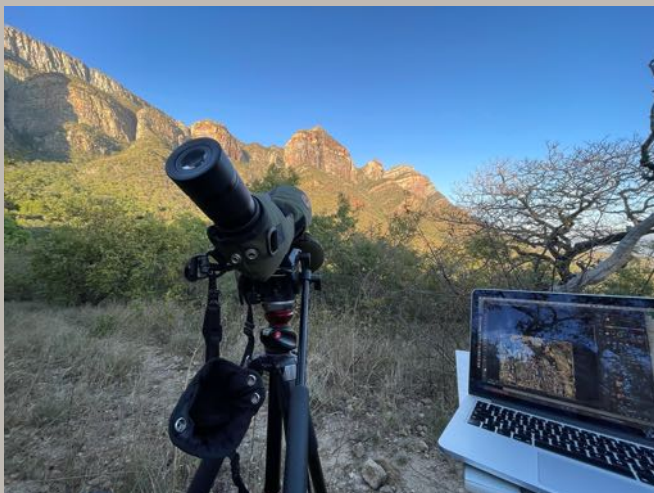
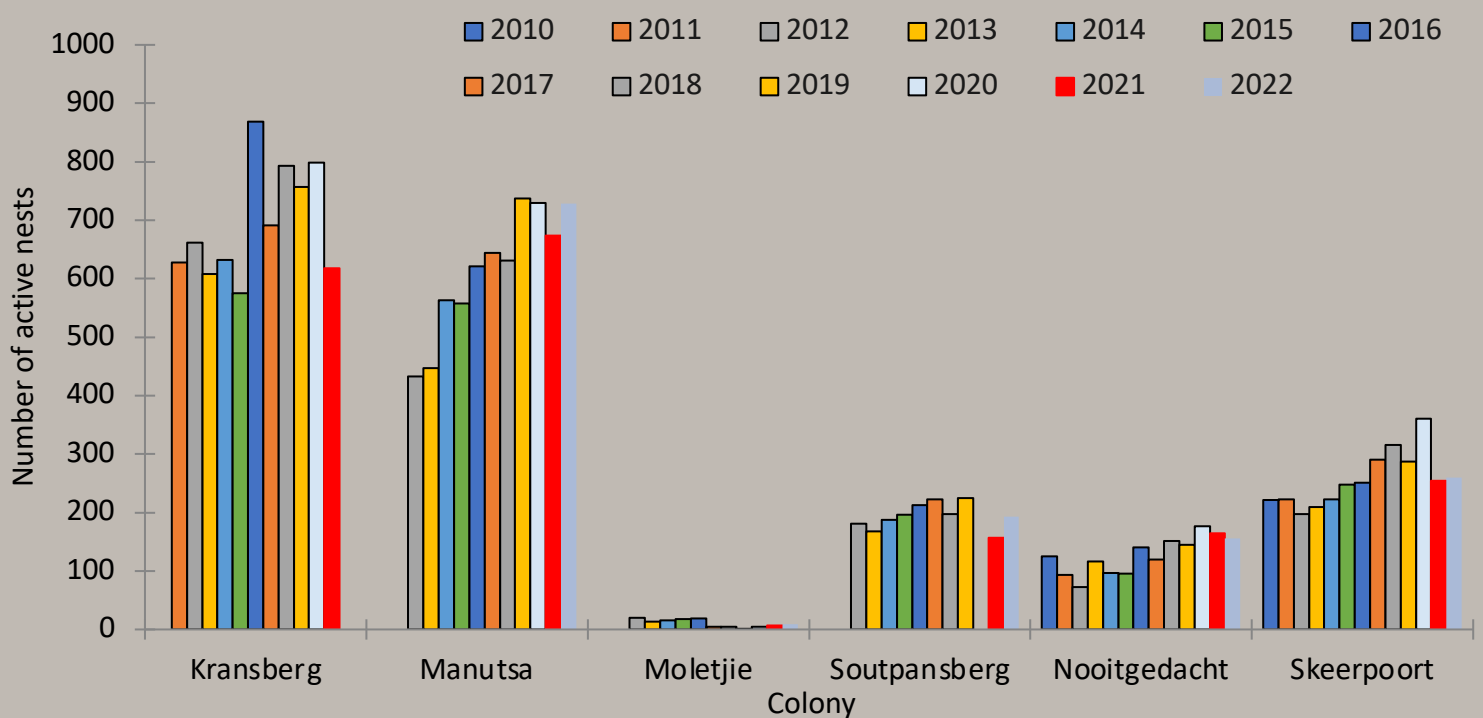




# CAPE VULTURE BREEDING SURVEYS

During the first part of 2022, we monitored five of the six Cape Vulture colonies so far across the northern parts of South Africa. We counted a total of 1346 active nests during the initial surveys for these five colonies compared to last year's 1257 active pairs. So far, all the colonies monitored showed to be stable or increased since last year, which is excellent news as we have seen a decline in almost every colony over the last couple of years. The Kransberg colony will be monitored in the upcoming weeks finalising our cliff nest monitoring initial survey. However, we will monitor the colonies close with the respective landowners and should we observe any drastic changes, we can act immediately. We are very excited to see how many eggs will successfully fledge.

Figure 1. Annual estimates of the number of breeding pairs at each Cape Vulture colony monitored by Vulpro throughout South Africa



# VULPRO EASTERN CAPE REHABILITATION

As is normally the case, my rehabilitation cases slow down a lot during this time of the year. The last bird I collected from above Penhoek pass is unable to be released and is now part of the 'injured group' in my enclosure. So I have not had any other vultures that have come in for rehab since April.

## ***Captive-Bred Fledgling Partnership programme 2022***

As in my previous report, you will recall I had received a group of 20 young Cape Vulture fledglings from Vulpro with DHL (Theo and his team) delivering them to my enclosure at the end of February. The release was not possible with the extreme rains we had experienced in March.

However, early in April we got the first break and released the first three birds from the enclosure. It also gave us an opportunity to clean two of the faulty devices to see if they would be then functional. It was a good clear blue day and all three birds flew off very well.

Regarding the previous group, one of the last vultures, number 39, took to the skies finally (after roof sitting for more than a year) on 15 February 2022 and is presently foraging in the Free State launching from the Zastron roost. Number turquoise 04 that flew back to Vulpro, returned to the Eastern Cape and is presently foraging between Burgersdorp and the Orange River area. Sadly, number 14, another of the final roof sitters, died after colliding with the power line here at Rookwood. My feeling was that number 14 was not a good flyer (somehow compromised in flight), and once number 39 had left, it also attempted to fly off even though the next group of captive-bred fledglings had just arrived.

All in all, this has been a mind-boggling experience and something I will treasure for the rest of my life. For me, being able to watch them fly off with the wild birds and being able to observe/monitor their movements (often with my heart in my throat, particularly when they fly around those wind turbines!!!) as they attempt to ultimately be able to reach maturity and to supplement the Cape vulture populations, is a truly awe-inspiring experience.



# VULPRO EASTERN CAPE MEDIA & TALKS

Once again, I was interviewed by Mariska Spoormaker on RSG 360 about a new group of captive-bred fledglings that arrived at Rookwood towards the end of February. Marion Edmunds from CNN Africa covered this story. I continue to represent Vulpro at the Predator management Forum meetings of the NWGA of the Eastern Cape and have recently been appointed to run the environmental section of the Stormberg Branch of the SA Hunters Association with support from the members going to assist with the vultures in this province.

## General

2022 certainly has been the year of the 'raining vultures' for me. As I have said before, I will continue to assist and support the plight of the Cape Vulture, not only in this province but generally. As part of the General Council of Agriculture EC, I get further opportunities to interact with the landowners who are really the guardians of these birds. The support of my children, Kevin, Miche and Joy, and the staff cannot be underestimated. My vets, Werner and Elriza of the Queenstown Vets, have come a long way in assisting with these birds and even being prepared to do amputations...I am extremely proud of you. To Brendan and Ria Farrel, a big thank you, too and for showing interest in assisting with the injured birds down Cookhouse way (that is if they are not in pieces lying under those turbines already). The food supply from Number 2 Piggeries through Vivian (Lindie) and Abraham (Willem) plays such an important

Role, and I would not be able to keep/hold/treat any birds without this supply. Lastly, a big thanks to Tim de Jongh (especially), Dean Ricketts and Div de Villiers from DEDEAT for your backup and support regarding permits, power line issues and compliance. Kerri, Ryno and Caroline of Vulpro thank you for your continuous support and backup. I thank my sponsors **Lomas Wildlife Protection Trust** and **DHL Express**, as I would not be able to do the work without their funding and support, too.

In conclusion, as I receive another call of a downed vulture in the Penhoek area, I wonder when these birds will ever overcome all these challenges they face on a daily basis. May these birds continue to show the chutzpah that the last Hofmeyr bird did, despite her injuries and burns, and the will to try and outlive all the odds thrown at them. They will continue to amaze me always.





# EDUCATION STATISTICS

Vulpro continues to engage with the public and interact with individuals to educate them on the importance of vultures and the work we do to protect them. The following is a summary of our education and media work over the last three months:

- ❖ 127 individuals visited Vulpro between 1 April and 30 June 2022 through private tours and events, and school tours.
- ❖ Vulpro presented to groups on two occasions over the last quarter:
  - Lory Bird Park, South Africa: Ryno Kemp presented to approximately 25 people on vultures and their importance and what Vulpro is doing to protect them.
  - Royal Veterinarian College, Zoological Society, United Kingdom: Caroline Hannweg presented to approximately 15 veterinary students on vultures and their importance and what Vulpro is doing to protect them.
- ❖ Vulpro was featured in two articles over the last quarter:
  - Kate Webster wrote an article entitled 'Captive bred Cape Vultures (*Gyps coprotheres*) from VulPro (NW Province) released at Rookwood (Eastern Cape)' in the Bee-Eater Newsletter.

The article focused on the release of some of Vulpro's captive-bred vultures in the Eastern Cape earlier this year.

- Robin Rankine wrote an article entitled 'Vulpro outing' in the Radford School publication. The article highlighted her visit with her school group to Vulpro to learn more about vultures.
- ❖ Vulpro's website continues to attract visitors daily and was visited 5 017 times in the last quarter.
- ❖ Our social media pages remain our most accessible way to engage with the public. Currently, our Facebook page has 16 820 followers, our Twitter page has 1 845 followers, and our Instagram page has 649 followers. Our YouTube channel currently has 411 subscribers.

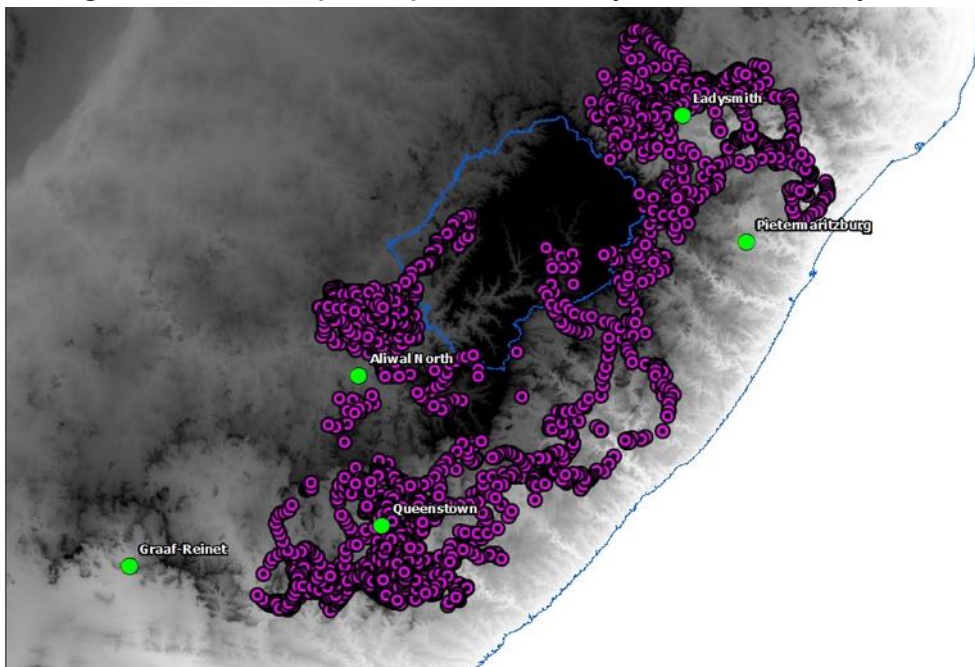


# RESEARCH

Vulpro is collaborating on 21 ongoing research projects to better understand these threatened species' ecology so that we can implement more robust conservation strategies through our impactful research. This year we have already published two scientific articles and had another two accepted with lead authors addressing the comments from the reviewers, which will be sent back to the journals by the end of July. Further, we have another three scientific publications in preparation and ready for submission in the next couple of months. Our work has also already been cited 175 times this year, compared to last year, which was cited 190 times.

Throughout the first year of 2022, Vulpro has been collaborating on various exciting projects. The study that we are the most excited about aims to identify high-probability roosting areas on powerlines that will allow for pro-active mitigations. This study will use Vulpro's entire tracking database and the tracking database from collaborators from Philipps Universitat Marburg to model heat maps across South Africa to identify critical areas that require pro-active mitigations to minimise the impact of anthropogenic threats. The project is analysing this massive dataset of more than four million tracking data points and aims to have preliminary results by the end of July 2022.

Another important project is looking at the successful integration back into the wild of rehabilitated and captive-bred fledglings. The initial phase of the study was completed during the second quarter of 2022 as we released 15 captive-bred Cape Vulture fledglings and 6 rehabilitated Cape Vulture fledglings in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. We are monitoring their movement remotely and can see their movement since their release in the first part of 2022. One project almost ready for publication was a collaboration with the University of Pretoria and Anglia Ruskin University. The study aims to address the concerns of whether lead exposure drives power line collisions and electrocutions in South Africa. The lead authors have re-analysed the results and are finalising the manuscript for publication by the end of July 2022.



Tracking locations of 15 captive-bred and 6 rehabilitated Cape Vultures released in the Eastern Cape just south of Queenstown.

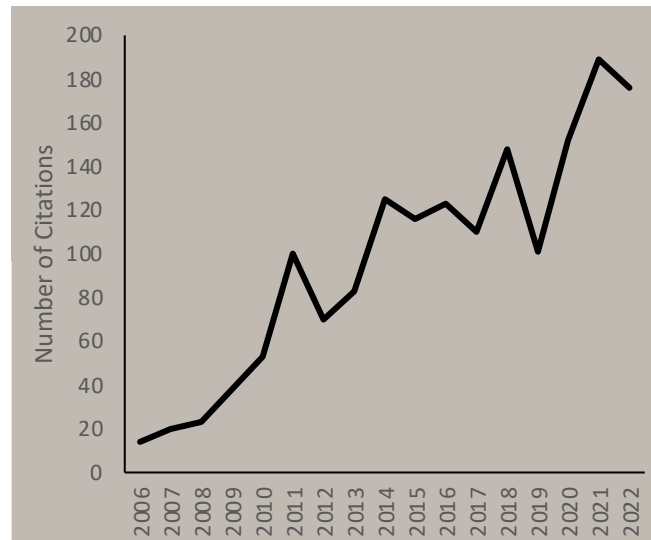
# PUBLICATIONS

## Publication for 2022:

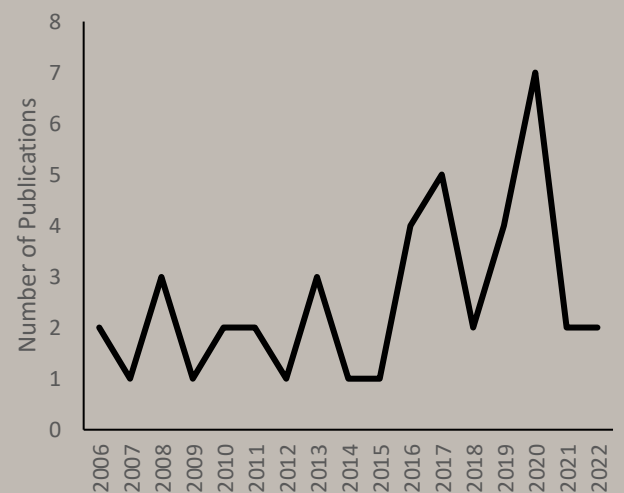
- Kane A, Monadjem A, Bildstein K, Botha A, Bracebridge C, Buechley ER, Buij R, Davies JP, Diekmann M, Downs C, Farwig N, Galligan T, Kaltenecker G, Kelly C, Kemp R, Kolberg H, MacKenzie M, Mendelsohn J, Mgumba M, Nathan R, Nicholas A, Ogada D, Pfeiffer MB, Phipps WL, Pretorius M, Rösner S, Schabo DG, Spiegel O, Thompson LJ, Venter JA, Virani M, Wolter K, Kendall C (2022) *Size doesn't matter, it's how you use it: Using continent-wide variation in ranging behaviour of vultures to assess the feasibility of Vulture Safe Zones in Africa*. Biology Conservation
- Hirschauer MT, Hannweg CG, Kemp R & Wolter K. (2022) *Vulpro: An overview of Africa's Vulture Conservation Centre*. Vulture News

## Publications Accepted/In Prep:

- Aspenström S, Kemp R, Howard A, Hannweg, CG, Chetty K, Briers RA & Wolter K. (Accepted) *The threat of power lines on two African Vulture species*.
- Cervantes F., Murgatroyd M., Allan D., Kemp R., Kruger S., Maude G., Mendelsohn J., Rosner S., Schabo DG., Tate G., Wolter K. and Amar A. (Accepted) *A partially explicit collision risk model for the Endangered Cape Vulture to guide wind energy development*.
- Casey, J., Kemp, R., Hannweg, CG., Hirschauer MT., Naidoo, V. & Wolter, K. (In Prep) *Lead poisoning may not contribute to power line collisions amongst African Vultures*.
- MacLeod N., Kemp R., Hannweg CG., Wolter K., Warren B. and Keith M. (In Prep) *Examining the foraging ranges and behaviours of two African vultures in Gauteng and North-West Provinces of South Africa*.
- McKechnie, AE., Kemp, R., Freeman, MT., Hannweg, CG., Wolter, K. & Naidoo, V. (In Prep) *The impact of lead exposure on the thermoregulatory capacity of Pied Crows*.



Number of citations of Vulpro's publications since 2006



Number of publications produced by Vulpro since 2006.





## VOLUNTEER PROFILE: SANDI BAKER

It was quite by accident that I stumbled across on post on Facebook about vultures. Being an admin for Dachshunds in Need South Africa (we focus on dachshunds and honorary dachshunds in shelters in South Africa that desperately need homes – yes, this is a punt to adopt a dog from a shelter), I'm on Facebook every day. I read further and was amazed at the work done by Vulpro (not a typo, it's longer VulPro but Vulpro) As soon as I could, I contacted Kerri and asked if I could become a volunteer. Sadly, though, I could never seem to be available for the rescues due to my workload. Then one day, there was a request on the group for an editor to work on the Vulpro annual report. Well, finally, there was something I could do as I'm an editor who writes and edits annual reports. There were three of us for the first round of drafts, but towards the end, I found myself working alone and finding out more about Vulpro. Since then, I have been editing the annual reports, and this year, I've started to edit Vulpro's quarterly reports, 'The Vulpro Flyer'.

This year, I've also brought my family to volunteer their time. One son helped out at a release of rehabilitated vultures, and the other painted some of the playground equipment. As I busied myself watching the vulture restaurant, I tried to understand the birds' dynamics and how each type of bird plays a particular role in the scavenging process before the vultures come to feed. Of course, on that day, I had lots of time to watch this as, despite the vultures gathering, they did not come down to feed. I also walked around the enclosures and found myself becoming more entranced with the birds than ever before.

Recently, Kerri held a training session for the volunteers, and I got to meet some of the volunteers who actually do the rescues. I brought my brother-in-law to the training session. He did do a rescue but, sadly, the bird did not survive.

Perhaps, the highlight of volunteering at Vulpro, for me, is knowing that no matter how small our contribution, it all helps to keep the species alive. And at heart, while I may be just a keyboard warrior, in my mind's eye, I'm out there with the rescuers and Kerri and her team on the front line. In support of that idea, I even learnt how to pick up a vulture just in case I actually get to do a rescue.



# IN CELEBRATION OF VULTURES



## *Mountain Matinee*

Celebrating International Vulture Awareness Day


### UNDER THE AFRICAN SKY

Join us for a production of hits from  
WEBBER & RICE AND ALL THINGS NICE  
(3 Voices & 2 Pianos)

3 September 2022 - 12h00

Theatre Style Attire  
R550 per person  
Table d'hôte Menu (4 courses)

Contact VULPRO to book:  
082 808 5113      [kerri@vulpro.com](mailto:kerri@vulpro.com)

  
LEOPARD LODGE



## Book your seats now!





# Every Bit Counts



## A Monthly Debit Order for as Little as R100 Goes a Long Way

By making a monthly contribution to VulPro, you can have a big impact on vulture conservation.

### VulPro Banking Details:

Acc. number: 63008172403  
First National Bank  
Branch code: 250 655  
SWIFT: FIRNZAJJ





# WITH THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS

## Gold:

- ❖ Tusk Trust
- ❖ Holtzman Wildlife Foundation

## Blue:

- ❖ Thea Erasmus
- ❖ Little Rock Zoo
- ❖ National Centre for Birds of Prey
- ❖ Idea Wild
- ❖ National Aviary
- ❖ Send-it

## Silver

- ❖ Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust
- ❖ Cheyenne Mountain Zoo
- ❖ Detroit Zoo
- ❖ Natural Encounters Conservation
- ❖ Lush Cosmetics
- ❖ Dallas Zoo
- ❖ San Diego Zoo
- ❖ Lomas Wildlife Protection Trust
- ❖ DHL
- ❖ St. Augustine Alligator Farm
- ❖ Fort Wayne Children's Zoo
- ❖ Nashville Zoo
- ❖ Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens
- ❖ Knoxville Zoo
- ❖ Scottish African Safari Park
- ❖ Martin Ramstrup Holdings Aps

## Bronze:

- ❖ The Abraham Foundation
- ❖ Scottish African Safari Park
- ❖ Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden
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- ❖ Sophie Danforth Award – Roger Williams Zoo
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- ❖ Wilhelma Zoologisch-Botanischer Garten Stuttgart Zoo
- ❖ Atlanta Zoo
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- ❖ Gauntlet Bird of Prey Centre
- ❖ Blair Drummond
- ❖ Sacramento Zoo
- ❖ Fondation Ensemble
- ❖ Brits Poles

