

JANUARY - MARCH 2023

Vulpro



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





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# CONTENTS

## Page

A Word from our CEO	1
Vulture rescue and rehabilitation	3
Why VulPro is my happy place: Dr Sarah	9
Captive breeding for population restoration	11
Eastern Cape Update: Kate Webster	13
Education and Media	16
Research	20
Publications	22
Sponsor Shoutout	23
Volunteer story: So like a chicken?	25
Meet the team	28
Our sponsors	29
Our adoptive parents	30



## A word from our CEO

Recently, I spent some time with Ted Hart, President and CEO of CAF America, and after showing him the centre and chatting with him about the importance of vultures, Ted so rightly and simply stated, *'Everyone deserves a friend no matter what'*. No truer words have been said to us in such simplicity. It does not matter how important or how liked a species is; everyone, and I include vultures here, deserves a friend, and friendship is exactly what VulPro gives to vultures, together with all of YOU who support us and make our work possible. Survival is about partnerships, friendships, collaborations, family and teamwork. Collectively, we have the greatest chance of survival and success if we all work together. Everything and everyone is connected.

***Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.***

Chief Seattle (Leader of the Suquamish and Duwamish Native American Tribes)

Already, 2023 has shown the collective powers of working and supporting each other: from saving vultures from their untimely death at the hands of witchcraft practitioners and poachers and releasing them back into the wild to the funders who give us the wheels and the ability to undertake the numerous tasks we have prioritised and promised the birds. We thank you – our phenomenal friendship base.



On 1 January 2023, VulPro turned 16 years young, and I am astonished at just how far VulPro has come. From our early days of rehabilitation work inside my house, using a shower as the ICU enclosure, our captive breeding programme where eggs were incubated in the kitchen, and the handful of birds I started caring for, to our world-class, fully equipped on-site hospital and ICU enclosures, full breeding facilities and the largest facility in the world for African vultures. We also have over 50 peer-reviewed publications and world-first protocols: VulPro continues to grow, build and dedicate our lives to vultures.

As we move into the year and continue to save as many vultures as possible through our multifaceted conservation approach, let us take this opportunity to reflect on the first quarter of the year and the successes of our work and our new educational programme. Watch this space as we change the mindsets and attitudes of all walks of life. The sky is the limit; let's reach for the stars.

Kerri Wolter, CEO





# Vulture Rescue and Rehabilitation

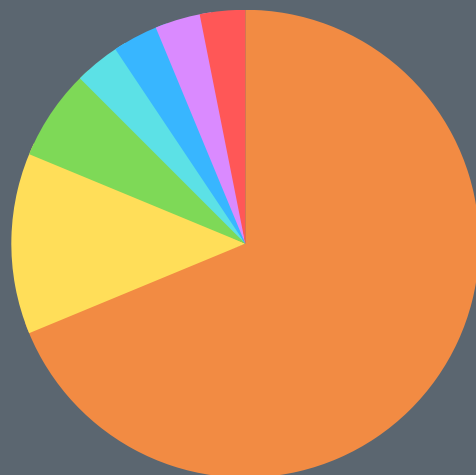
The beginning of 2023 has kept VulPro's rescue and rehabilitation programme very busy, as usual. Our dedicated volunteers and staff responded to numerous callouts to collect injured or stranded vultures. From 1 December to 31 March 2023, we admitted 32 patients to our hospital and rehab facility. Of these, there were 22 Cape Vultures, four White-backed Vultures and two Lappet-faced Vultures. Other than vultures, we also admitted a Secretary Bird, a Marabou Stork, a Black Sparrowhawk, and a Steppe Buzzard into our rehab centre. We also responded to two Cape Vultures that were electrocuted on powerlines.

The majority of the hospital admissions, eight birds, came in due to unknown reasons, but the second biggest cause of admissions, with five birds, was dog attacks. This was followed by four recently fledged youngsters finding themselves grounded and unable to take off again. Powerline collisions, poisonings and getting trapped each caused the admission of three birds. Patients were also admitted due to a vehicle collision, a hard landing, an electric fence collision, starvation, bad weather and one vulture was found being held, likely for use in the illegal trade.

The Secretary Bird when first admitted to our hospital.

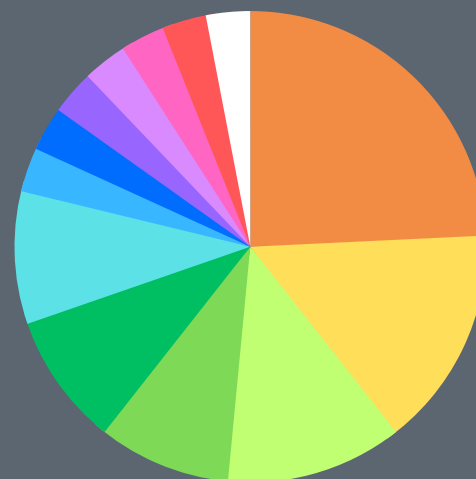


## Species admitted to VulPro 1 January - 31 March 2023



Cape Vulture, White Backed Vulture, Lappet-faced Vulture, Marabou Stork, Steppe Buzzard, Black Sparrow Hawk, Secretary Bird

## Reasons for admission 1 January - 31 March 2023



Unknown, Animal attack, Grounded, Powerline collision, Poisoned, Trapped, Vehicle collision, Hard landing, Electric fence, Electrocution, Illegally held, Starvation, Weather





The young White-backed Vulture admitted with head injuries after a car collision

One case that has stood out is that of a young White-back Vulture that was admitted in late March. This youngster came in with a crushed beak and a fractured lower mandible. After some time he is recovering well but is still unable to tear off meat pieces from whole carcasses. We are continuing to feed him with cut up pieces of meat but are optimistic that he will eventually make a full recovery.

Unfortunately, seven of our patients either died or had to be euthanised. A particularly sad case was the Secretary Bird who came to us with wounds from a dog attack. Although most healed well, a wound on its foot was just too infected to remedy. Sadly, after one and a half months at VulPro, the decision was made to euthanise the Secretary Bird.



One of VulPro's resident Cape Vultures with a wing amputation enjoying the sunshine.





The Steppe Buzzard came in with what appeared to be a head injury. It has fully recovered and been released.

Despite the challenges we faced, we are proud to report that we successfully released five of the birds we rescued back into the wild, including three Cape Vultures, one White-backed Vulture and the Steppe Buzzard. Twenty of the other admissions are still in our rehabilitation programme. In addition, we released nine other vultures that have been at VulPro for rehabilitation since last year.

### Species released from VulPro's rehabilitation programme 1 January - 31 March 2023

Species	Number
Cape Vulture	11
African White-backed Vulture	2
Steppe Buzzard	1



Again, we would like to remind the public to keep an eye out for vultures and other raptors in distress. Should you have any other wildlife rehabilitation cases and are unsure whom to contact, call us to put you in contact with the right organisation or make an emergency plan.

**Please contact us on  
+27 82 808 5113 for emergencies only.**

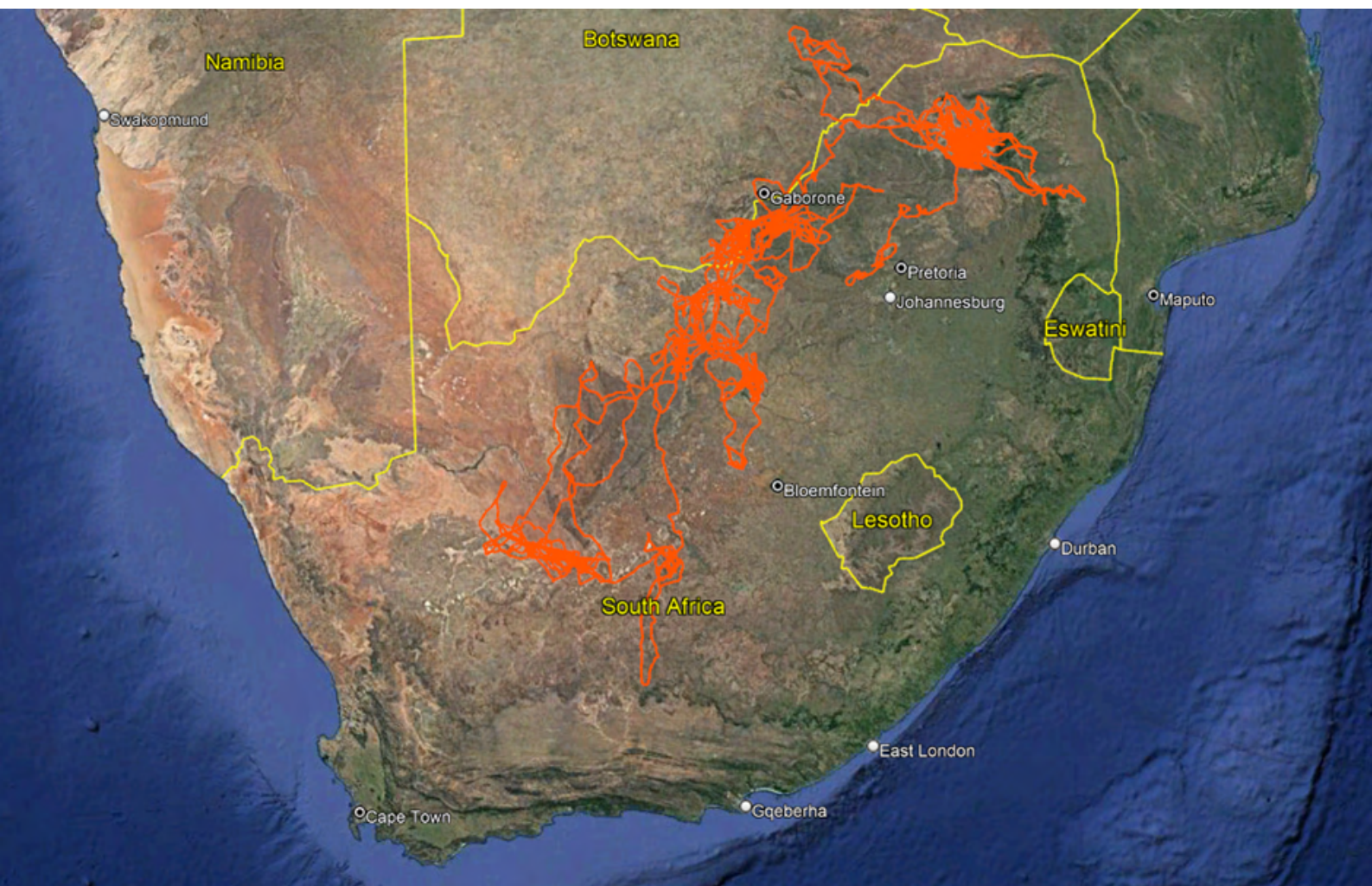
Clarence rescuing a stuck Cape Vulture fledgling from a canal.



## Previous Rehabilitation Highlights

In total, we have placed 24 tracking devices on vultures released from our rehabilitation programme, including 17 Cape Vultures and seven White-backed Vultures. Unfortunately, three Cape Vultures have been confirmed dead, and one tracking device was found in the field, having fallen off. After many years in our rehabilitation programme, a Cape Vulture that was released in December last year was readmitted to VulPro at the end of January after being grounded.

We are always amazed to see the vast distances these vultures travel and the places they go, and it is so rewarding to know VulPro has given them the opportunity to continue their voyages. One Cape Vulture, in particular, has really travelled. It came to VulPro in December 2021 with a broken leg after a hard landing and, after a full recovery, was released in March last year. Since its release, it has covered vast distances across southern Africa from Serowe in Botswana to Richmond in the Western Cape.



This map shows the movements of a rehabilitated Cape Vulture after its release from VulPro in March 2022.





A four-person team holds down one of the Andean Condors for its annual health check.

## ANNUAL HEALTH CHECKS

February saw the end of our annual health checks with the help of a regular volunteer, Dr Sarah Woodhouse, a US-based veterinarian. Health checks entail catching each bird at VulPro to give them a physical exam and take blood for testing. With our new X-ray equipment, we could check up on old injuries in some of the birds. We are happy to report no major health concerns across the 200-plus birds at VulPro. All cases of chronic bumble foot are under control, and the general condition of the birds is very satisfactory.

The large amount of blood work data from the health checks has allowed us to establish 'normal' ranges for certain indicators in healthy vultures. VulPro staff have been trained in blood analysis techniques, enabling us to diagnose conditions such as anaemia, dehydration, starvation and infection in real time, ensuring rapid, accurate and effective treatment for our patients.

Dr Sarah conducting blood sample analyses.







A Hooded Vulture  
having its eyes  
examined and talons  
trimmed.



A Lappet-faced  
Vulture having its  
talons trimmed and  
feet checked.



# WHY VULPRO IS MY HAPPY PLACE

BY DR SARAH WOODHOUSE

I am a specialist Zoo Veterinarian from the USA and currently volunteering in South Africa at VulPro. While it is amazing to work with gorillas, stingrays and chameleons every day, I find my true fulfilment working with vultures at VulPro. Using the veterinary skills I've developed with birds of all shapes and sizes, I can help the VulPro staff bring endangered vultures back from the brink of death... literally.



Dr Sarah Woodhouse and Clarence

We received a young White-backed Vulture who had been poisoned during my first week here. He was severely dehydrated and unable to stand or keep food down. When he lifted his head, he had severe tremors that sometimes progressed to partial seizures, a common clinical sign of pesticide poisoning. We placed an IV line in a vein in his leg to rehydrate him and give him medications. I checked on him every 10–15 minutes for the next six hours, listening to his heart and lungs, watching his breathing, and assessing his response to me. He was so weak that he lay flat on the ground with his neck outstretched. His breathing was so slow that I thought he had died at least ten times that night. But each time I checked him, I gently touched his head, his eyes would slowly open to look at me, and I would breathe a sigh of relief. This little guy has gradually improved. He no longer has tremors; he eats like a champion, and the first time we saw him stand, even though it was only for a few seconds, we all cheered. He still likes to sleep flat on the ground, which I'll admit makes my heart skip a few beats, but he can now stand and move around on his own, and he has even graduated to eating like a real vulture.



When my vulture patients heal, they are either released back into wild populations or stay at VulPro, find a mate, and raise chicks that are then released into the wild. This means I am using what I have learned and practised over the past 17 years to make a direct difference – both for the individual vulture I've cared for and an endangered species. 'Happy' is a difficult concept to describe, but when we really think about it, I think most of us include 'making a difference' in our definitions of what it means to be truly happy... and that is why VulPro is my happy place.



The White-backed Vulture admitted to VulPro with severe poisoning.



Dr Sarah inserting a catheter to administer IV fluids to a rescued Cape Vulture.





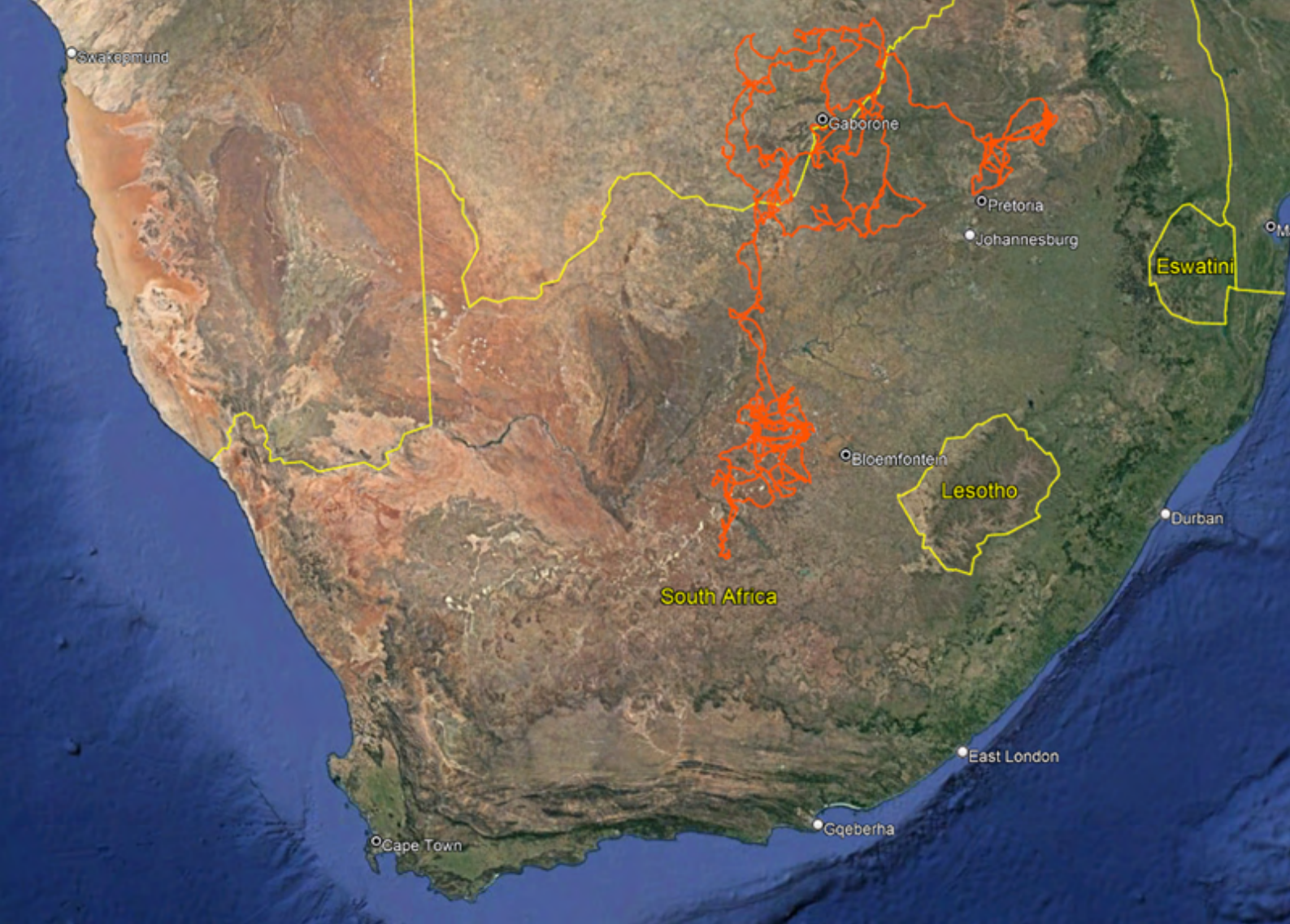
# CAPTIVE BREEDING FOR POPULATION RESTORATION

As the weather cools, our Cape and White-backed Vultures at VulPro have started collecting nesting material and building their nests. We have also noticed several new pairs being formed with vultures who have not bred before. These are all signs indicating the start of this year's breeding season. Watch our Cape Vultures collecting their first bundles of nesting material here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=izPtLCBmcBA>.

The thirteen Cape Vulture fledglings from last year's breeding season have spent the previous three months acclimatising at Kate Webster's facility at Rookwood. They have each been fitted with a GPS tracking device and will be released any day now.

Of the 36 captive-bred vultures we have released, we are still actively tracking 24 of them. Sadly, five have been confirmed dead, victims of poaching, powerlines, and wind turbines. The devices on a couple of birds have also stopped sending signals, a risk with GPS tracking devices. However, it is so motivating to follow the movements of our released vultures and incredible to see the distances they travel. We have been releasing captive-bred vultures for eight years, which means the first releases are reaching reproductive age. This is exciting as the true conservation impact of our breeding programme will be realised when our released birds begin to contribute offspring to the wild population. We are currently analysing data further to see how these birds are integrated into the population and hope to confirm their breeding success.





This map shows the movements of a released captive-bred White-backed Vulture between 1 January and 31 March 2021.

One such captive-bred White-backed Vulture, born in 2022, has travelled from Mosolotshane, Botswana down to De Aar in the Northern Cape in just the last three months.

Unfortunately, in mid-March, we recovered one tracking device no longer attached to a vulture. This juvenile Cape Vulture was bred at VulPro in 2019 and released in 2020. The device was found near a cow carcass on a farm near Lichtenburg. The harness on the device had been cut and removed, which leads us to believe the vulture was likely caught and taken by a poacher. This is a very sad outcome that shows the dangers these birds face daily.





# EASTERN CAPE UPDATE

BY KATE WEBSTER



The Barkly Pass looking towards one of the vulture breeding colonies.

January saw a slight decrease in the continued rains we were blessed with throughout 2022, with more than 1 000 mm measured for 2022. However, our water table is so saturated that any downpour now results in run-off being very instant, and lots of surface water is still present. This has resulted in some devastating damage to most of our farm and the now un-maintained (by the Dept of Roads) gravel roads. So, whenever I get a call for an injured or sick vulture, I am always extremely concerned about the sections of roads that are gravel in this province, not only for myself getting stuck/bogged down but for the rough ride the bird has to endure.

In February, I received a photograph from one of my fellow Agri EC Council members, Wallis Hardie, from the Barkly East areas, of a very sick, sore and dehydrated young fledgling Cape Vulture. Barkly East falls within the Southern Drakensberg area in this province and is home to many Cape Vultures. However, it also has more extreme roads to travel. Wallis and his staff managed to catch the young bird, and I set off on a long road trip up to the mountains to collect this bird.



This trip includes a couple of mountain passes, one being the magnificent Barkly Pass, where one of the Cape Vulture breeding colonies can be located. Cellphone communication in the rural space in the Eastern Cape is becoming a huge challenge. Fortunately, Wallis had sent me directions to his farm, which assisted hugely in getting to the location quite easily. This young bird was extremely dehydrated, and I immediately started treatment before leaving for another 4-hour trip back to Rookwood. I made one more stop in Queenstown using the volunteers of BKB (who are always so willing to assist) to top up the rehydration process. The last 35 km of gravel road was possibly the worst of the journey, certainly for the much-weakened body of a Cape Vulture. However, once home and after a plate of food was offered, it was evident this bird had the will to live. Another power line collision bird, another lucky bird to be rescued by the landowner. Thank you, Wallis.

About a month later, a message was sent to me from Carl Miles, a farmer in the Dordrecht area, asking for assistance with a vulture that seemed unable to take off. As I was en route to Cape Town, my son, Kevin, stepped up to the mark and assisted in catching the bird.



A young wild bird photographed at Rookwood.

This bird showed signs of neurological imbalances. Sadly, an adult bird, but clearly, it will not be able to be re-released. However, my first patient is showing full signs of recovery and should be ready to go soon.

The young captive-bred fledglings who arrived at Rookwood early in December have now been fitted with devices which VulPro again has secured for their safety. Thank you, Kerri. Certainly not an easy task given there are always huge costs involved with this. I commend VulPro's effort in obtaining a device for each bird, as it helps monitor their movements after release. I would also like to thank my staff, my daughter Joy, Annalie, Marli, Katja (who got to hold a vulture and practised releasing one, too, for the first time in her life); Pat and Rosemary for assisting with the fitting of these devices. We still have two to fit as these youngsters decided to sit in the rafters where we could not catch them. The first of these captive-bred youngsters will get the taste of freedom early next week. This will be the fourth group of young Cape Vultures that have been part of this programme. They came from the North West and were released into the skies of the Eastern Cape. Yes, we have lost some, but I would like to say that this programme has grown and that it has proven quite successful despite not having exact measurables.



I do not think, anywhere else within the boundaries of this country or in the world, such large numbers of captive-bred birds have ever gone through a process like this. With the pending changes to TOPS permits and requirements, I am not sure how much longer we will be able to do this. However, as these next groups of youngsters take to the skies, let us keep them in our thoughts and on their wings in prayer.

Even though this summer season has been extremely quiet regarding injured birds, I regularly get sent photographs or have conversations with many landowners regarding good sightings of birds or roosts that were dormant but have now become more active. This is positive news and makes me feel that there is possibly a light of hope for the survival of the Cape Vulture in the Eastern Cape. There is also a greater awareness of the dangers and problems these birds face, and I am immediately informed of any development, be it power lines or possible new wind farms. I recently gave a 'Friends of Vultures' board supplied by VulPro to one of my older farmers, whom I regularly used to visit due to power line problems. His immense gratitude made my heart happy, too... at least he was acknowledged for looking out for these birds. Then you also feel very proud when you notice that BKB have this board on their wall as you enter their shop. Our vultures have friends in good places.

Lastly, to Kerri and her staff at VulPro, your support and faith in me mean a tremendous amount. And a big thank you to my family (in particular Joy, who always stands in when I am not around to help feed the birds and clean their water and enclosure) and my staff are absolute stars. Also, thank you to the staff from No 2 piggeries (in particular, Vivian and Lindy) who keep me in food supply for the captive-bred fledglings and the injured resident birds.

The state of our gravel roads leading to Rookwood.





Deidre from Wild and Free, a project partner who is based in Marloth Park and our eyes and ears for vultures needing our help.



# EDUCATION AND MEDIA

## Rehab training

During our health checks, Dr Woodhouse gave a two-day training course to colleagues from four other wildlife rehab centres nationwide. They were trained to handle vultures, take blood, create blood smears for analysis, and provide emergency treatment. They also received first-hand experience in treating new rehab cases. This training will allow these rehab facilities to provide lifesaving care to vultures beyond our reach and will be applicable to all raptors that come into their care. Have a look at some events from the training here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w504Oydaaes>

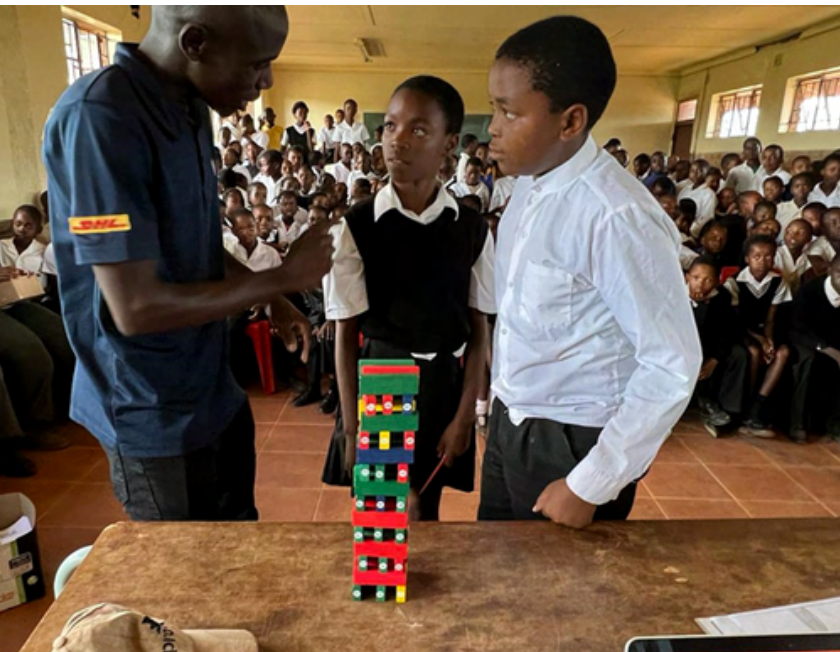
Dr Sarah and the trainees conducting a physical exam on a White-backed Vulture.





# School programme

In mid-March, we launched our new school-based education programme. Two of our team members, Clarence and Obert, travelled to Blouberg Limpopo and gave interactive presentations to students from Marumafase Secondary School and Biokotso Primary School. Blouberg is an area at the foot of a Cape Vulture colony with a regular market for vulture parts.



Clarence demonstrating the balance of ecosystems using a fun game of Jenga.



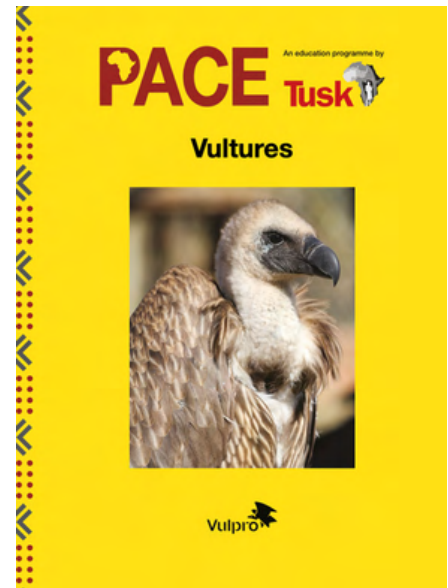
VulPro presenting our new school programme to students at Biokotso Primary School.

This new school programme aims to raise awareness about the importance of vultures and their conservation, particularly among the next generation of environmental stewards. Through engaging classroom presentations and interactive activities, we teach students about vulture biology, behaviour and ecological importance. We also emphasise the threats facing vultures and how individuals can take action to protect them. By educating students about vultures, we hope to inspire them to become advocates for conservation and encourage them to take action to protect vultures. Additionally, we believe that by instilling a love and appreciation for vultures in children, we can create a generation of individuals who value and protect our natural world.



# PACE Booklet

The launch of our school programme also saw the first distribution of our fantastic new education booklets, which we developed in partnership with PACE. These colourful booklets are intended to share information about vultures, their threats and their conservation and are designed for school and community use. These booklets are free to download, and you can find a copy at <https://www.paceproject.net/pace-news/a-new-pace-resource-vultures/>



We have also just started a webinar series with PACE, with our first live session on the 31 March given to students from the Makuleke community during an environmental education programme hosted by SANParks. This series consists of four live episodes with educational presentations, a tour of our sanctuary, viewing our vulture restaurant from our hide, and interactive activities to allow people to see vultures close-up and learn about their value. We will continue this series and aim to present it to many schools and communities across Africa.

The students at Biokotso Primary School with their vulture booklets.







A group of Honorary Junior Rangers and their parents visited VulPro for a tour.

In addition to these exciting new educational programmes, the last three months saw an impressive reach via presentations, tours and media as follows:

- VulPro's team has presented to 1449 people since the start of the year. Of these, 345 were adults, and 1104 were children.
- We provided educational tours of our facility to 109 visitors, including 83 adults and 26 children.
- VulPro's website has been visited 6,604 times in the last three months..
- We currently have 17 648 followers on Facebook, 1 996 followers on Twitter, 1071 followers on Instagram, 439 followers on YouTube and 390 followers on LinkedIn.
- VulPro was featured in two magazine articles in The Lark: BirdLife Polokwane and Porcus PrimeCuts.
- We were interviewed for a French radio segment and featured in an Africa from Within episode aired on SABC2.
- We were also featured in a Facebook post by The Independent Co about the grand opening of Ford Brits, our Ford Wildlife Fund vehicle handover, and Ford's press release.



Obert giving a presentation to the visiting Junior Honorary Rangers and their parents.

# RESEARCH



## Project update: Assessing the effects of thermal factors on the spatial ecology of a Critically Endangered African vulture

The first three months of 2023 have been exciting and frustrating for this project. We are finishing off part of this project which involves the capture and fitment of devices. Unfortunately, despite our efforts to capture more birds this year, our fieldwork has been unsuccessful. We started with a two-week trip in the Northern Cape Kalahari, and despite our best efforts, our carcasses caught more attention from the local insect populations than the birds! I am sure it is a universal vulture-researcher existential crisis. Still, I always wonder what life choices have brought them to the point of watching a carcass decompose over a couple of days and seeing the worms and beetles churn it into the soil. However, the absolutely gorgeous Kalahari sunrises and sunsets and getting to experience the unique wildlife of the area kept our spirits up and helped remind us that half the magic of field biology lies in all that we still have to learn about these ecosystems, including how best to catch and tag their vultures. We have a couple more sites set up where we will attempt more captures in the coming months, and we look forward to hopefully having more success and building relationships with conservation groups in the area. We are also looking forward to starting with the 2023 breeding surveys in May, and these data will add another year of invaluable data to the many years of data gathered by VulPro.



We are also excited to share that we have been able to begin with the data analysis of this project, looking at the breeding records we have obtained thus far. While still preliminary, we also have started looking at the tracking data of some of the birds tagged in 2022. We have already identified some exciting patterns, such as where these individuals may be nesting. We look forward to further analysing these data and having some preliminary results in the next newsletter. Our thanks to our collaborators, partners and funders on this project, without whom this would not be possible, including the University of Pretoria, Max Planck Institute of Animal Behaviour, North Carolina Zoo, National University of Science and Technology, Zimbabwe, Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust, Jabulani Safaris, BirdLife Zimbabwe, Dronfield Nature Reserve, Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research, Wildlife ACT, Dallas Zoo, Greenville Zoo International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators, the Society for Conservation Biology and Zoo Zlin.



An African White-backed Vulture waits at a carcass to assess if it is safe to eat.

# PUBLICATIONS

- Cervantes F, Murgatroyd M, Allan DG, Farwig N, Kemp R, Krüger S, Maude G, Mendelsohn J, Rösner S, Schabo DG, Tate G, Wolter K and Amar A. 2023. A utilisation distribution for the global population of Cape Vultures (*Gyps coprotheres*) to guide wind energy development. *Ecological Applications*. IF: 6.105
- Wild TA, van Schalkwyk L, Viljoen P, Heine G, Richter N, Vorneweg B, Koblitz JC, Dechmann DKN, Rogers W, Partecke J, Linek N, Volkmer T, Gregersen T, Havmøller RW, Morelle K, Daim A, Wiesner M, Wolter K, Fiedler W, Kays R, Ezenwa VO, Meboldt M and Wikelski M. A multi-species evaluation of digital wildlife monitoring using the Sigfox IoT network. 2023. *Anim Biotelemetry* 11:13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40317-023-00326-1>

## Publications In Prep:

- MacLeod N, Kemp R, Hannweg CG, Wolter K, Warren B and Keith M. (2023) Examining the foraging ranges and behaviours of two African Vultures in Gauteng and North-West Provinces of South Africa [Manuscript submitted for Publication].







# SPONSOR SHOUTOUT

To show our appreciation for our sponsors, we are introducing a new segment to our newsletter where in each edition, we highlight a few of our sponsors and how their contribution has supported VulPro's vulture conservation efforts.



## HANS HOHEISEN charitable trust

— MANAGED BY NEDBANK PRIVATE WEALTH —

Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust has generously provided funding for VulPro for multiple conservation actions. Firstly, their funding supports our identification, investigation and mitigation of powerline structures that pose a threat to vultures. Secondly, they support our monitoring and research of multiple wild breeding colonies of Cape Vultures and African White-backed Vultures. This allows us to determine current population trends and assess the impact of our conservation efforts. Thirdly, they support VulPro in monitoring the movements and success of our captive-bred vultures that have been released. And finally, they support our rescue, rehabilitation, and release programme.



The Holtzman Wildlife Foundation has supported the recent construction and outfitting of our on-site veterinary hospital. This hospital enables VulPro to provide immediate, high-quality care to our injured and sick vultures. The hospital has reduced the time taken to assess and treat birds, reduced our reliance on external service providers, and helped save limited resources. The new facilities will also contribute to our research outputs and rehabilitation best-practise. Using state-of-the-art medical equipment, we will continue to conduct studies on the health of vultures, including establishing reference levels, exploring prognostic indicators for successful rehabilitation and release, and creating protocols for diagnostic testing. The continued support of the Holtzman Wildlife Foundation enables us to provide the highest quality veterinary care and lead the standard for rescue and rehabilitation globally.



The Tusk Trust has been one of our biggest and most consistent funders over the years. Their generous grants support all aspects of our conservation efforts. Tusk has supported our rehabilitation and release programme, our captive breeding programme, our research and our community awareness and education. The support from The Tusk Trust is fundamental to our work here at VulPro.



In March, the Ford Wildlife Foundation presented VulPro with a new Ford Ranger 4x4. This vehicle will be used to rescue and release vultures across the country. Many vultures that need rescuing are in distant and hard-to-access locations. This vehicle will enable us to travel further and reach previously inaccessible areas. This improved access to these birds will allow us to provide the necessary care much faster, increasing their chances of survival and successful rehabilitation. We will also use this vehicle to conduct our annual breeding colony monitoring. This will allow us to improve the quality of our breeding monitoring, contributing to our understanding of these species and, thus, our research outputs, and will enable us to expand our monitoring footprint by including areas that are currently not accessible.



The brand new Ford Ranger 4x4

We would like to express our sincerest gratitude to our generous funders. Your support has enabled us to continue our vital mission of protecting these critically important and often misunderstood animals. Without your financial contributions, VulPro would not be able to conduct crucial research, operate our rehabilitation and captive breeding programmes or implement much-needed public awareness campaigns. Your commitment to our cause is a testament to the importance of preserving biodiversity and protecting the natural world, and we are deeply grateful for your partnership in this critical effort. Thank you for your support, and we look forward to continuing to work together to safeguard the future of these birds.



## VOLUNTEER STORY: SO LIKE A CHICKEN?

This was the response of the Botswana Customs and Excise official when presented with an export permit to convey a Lappet-faced vulture across the border to South Africa.

In early March 2023, VulPro made history by successfully importing a non-releasable Lappet-faced

vulture from Botswana to his new home at VulPro. For the past few years, Kerri followed the story of Sirri (Tsheriletso meaning conserve in Setswana), a Lappet-faced vulture held at the Mokolodi Nature Reserve on the outskirts of the capital of Botswana, Gaborone. Sirri came to Mokolodi with a broken right wing but, due to his injuries, was non-releasable.

Although well intended, Sirri was unfortunately carted across Botswana for educational purposes. Despite their large size, Lappet-faced Vultures are shy creatures and Sirri no doubt suffered from stress, and the confined space left his beautiful tail feathers in tatters.



Lorentha and Sirri.



Finally, in a joint effort, Sirri was given the green light to travel to South Africa and join VulPro's captive population. On 11 March 2023, triplet sisters, Helene, Janet and Magda, travelled to Mokolodi, where Lorentha, Sirri's caretaker, met them. Lorentha generously arranged for the triplets to spend a night in one of the chalets while she continued with the arduous task of getting the state veterinarian to complete the required health certificate.

Magda and Lorentha explaining the situation to the border official.



Never passing up the offer to go on a late afternoon game drive, the triplets set out exploring. Well, it seems the local baboon troop also never passes up the opportunity to explore and, upon finding the chalet windows and doors securely locked, took one of Janet's flip-flops as a souvenir and left the patio covered with the foul stench of baboon urine. The bag of charcoal left next to the braai also did not survive!

Early the next morning, with Sirri loaded in his transport crate, the triplets set off to the border post just to be met with the perplexed reaction of a border official who has never seen a vulture, let alone a creature named *Torgos tracheliotus*. After much explaining that vultures are critically endangered wild birds and are in no way related to domesticated chickens, the waving around of CITES permits, vet certificates and some translation from English to Setswana by Lorenta, Sirri was cleared to immigrate. Yes, it only took two hours at the border post to explain this.



Kerri and the team taking a blood sample for DNA sexing. Sirri is male.



Sirri in his new home.

Confession time – we briefly considered just letting Sirri walk across the border and collecting him on the other side. After all, vultures are not bound by human fences and have been roaming the African skies for centuries.

Sirri will now live out the rest of his life in a beautiful enclosure with his new bird brothers, enjoying a daily meat buffet. Who knows, perhaps one day, Sirri will successfully produce offspring to be released into the African skies.



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(AND A KEYRING TO MATCH)



# MEET THE TEAM

## GENERAL ASSISTANT: KATHRYN GARDNER

Kathryn is the newest member of the VulPro team, having started in January as our general assistant. Kathryn relocated from Cape Town, where she has lived for the last six years. Kathryn holds an MSc in Conservation Biology from the Fitzpatrick Institute at the University of Cape Town and a BSc honours in Biodiversity and Ecology from Stellenbosch University. She has experience in cheetah conservation, fynbos corridor restoration, ecosystem service accounting and landscape ecology.

Kathryn grew up in KZN surrounded by vivid tropical vegetation and troops of mischievous vervet monkeys. These wonders ignited her love for the natural world and its conservation. This passion, and determination not to be office bound, fueled her decision to pursue conservation biology.

Kathryn's tasks at VulPro include fund raising, managing the adoptions, monitoring of the Cape Vulture breeding colonies, education, and much much more. She is interested in the research conducted at VulPro and is passionate about the hands-on care and rehabilitation of each vulture.

When not at work Kathryn enjoys swimming and kayaking. She has dabbled in graphic design and loves painting and crafting. She is most at home in nature and most fulfilled when working with animals.





# WITH THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS

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National Aviary in Pittsburg  
Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo  
R&R Abattoir  
Wilhelma Zoologisch  
BotanischerGarten Stuttgart Zoo  
World Bird Sanctuary

# WITH THANKS TO OUR ADOPTIVE PARENTS

We want to thank our adoptive parents for their continued support of their adopted birds:

Alexander H - African White-backed Vulture, Kira-Mathilda; and Cape Vulture, Bacchus Carlo

Andrea Schreier - Lappet-faced Vulture, Johnny

Annemieke de Wit - White-headed Vulture, Isabis

Clive Vardakis - Cape Vulture, Brizzle

Dawn Griffard - Cape Vulture, Bubba

Frank Schöppner - Lappet-faced Vulture, Fenja

Virbac - Cape Vulture, Cura

Hans and Ute Schute - Cape Vulture, Lucky

Jonathan Chaplin - Cape Vultures, Conan and Sherry

Kim Caldwell - Cape Vulture, Percy

Mariza Hamman - Cape Vulture, Isolde; White-headed Vulture, Orpheus; Lappet-faced Vulture, Abigaille; and Hooded Vulture Athanael

Nicole Schöppner - Cape Vultures, Elani and Chuma; African White-backed Vultures, Bahati and Vuyo

Rod Rankine - Cape Vulture, Phoenix

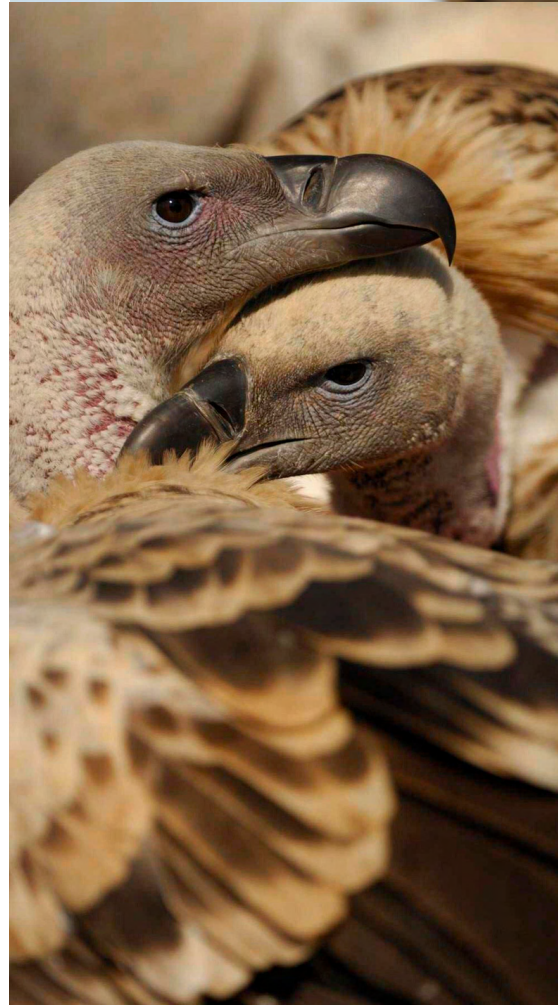
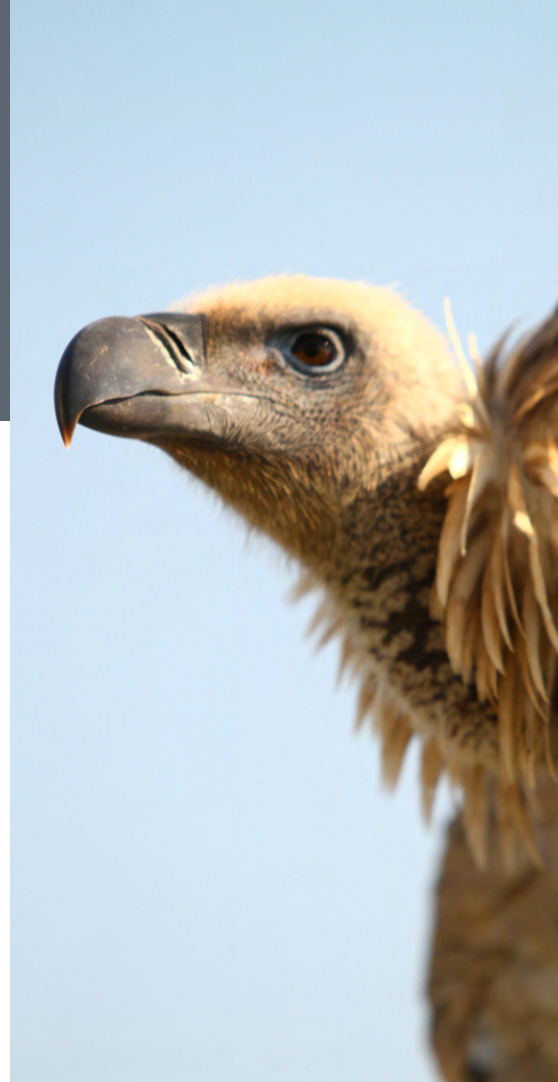
Sandy Murray - African White-backed Vulture, Alfred

Julie Edgley - Cape Vulture, Amala

Sjobbe Voet - Hooded Vulture, Mrs Nasty

Tracey Robinson - Cape Vulture, Delilah

If you would like to support the stay of one of VulPro's resident vultures please email [admin@vulpro.com](mailto:admin@vulpro.com) to find out who is open for adoption





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