

APRIL - JUNE 2023



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THE CHANGE

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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# A WORD FROM OUR CEO

## What makes an organisation great?

I believe it is a team effort, including those individuals who are building the walls and cementing the structures in place, creating a safe environment for people and animals alike where we can focus on other aspects of building up an organisation, and continue to lead and strive to do more, do better and be better. Those individuals who are doing the hard physical work are the ones often forgotten, and yet, if it were not for them, where would most of us be, where would we work, and how would the animals be cared for, fed, enclosures cleaned and maintained, for example?

VulPro is a truly unique organisation where every staff member is a valued member of the team, and each person becomes family. With only 10 full time and 2 part time staff members, we care for each other, we nurture each other, and we respect and appreciate one another. If one of the bricks falls, the organisation becomes unsteady and thus, VulPro truly operates as a close-knit family group bringing in different cultures, races, age, sex, expertise and more, where each person is seen as an equal, no matter their position within the organisation.

In addition to our paid staff, we have been blessed with some amazing volunteers both locally and abroad. With such a small staff compliment, these volunteers are indeed an asset to our work, our success, and our ability to do more than what we could possibly achieve without them.

After 20 years in vulture conservation, I have learnt some valuable and hard lessons, with the most valuable one being in how to treat others and how to nurture them. After making many mistakes in my past, I now believe we can only earn respect when we treat others with the respect and dignity that each person deserves to be treated with. How can we expect to be treated in a certain way if we do not treat others as we would like to be treated? Twenty years ago, when I started in vulture conservation and established VulPro, I truly believed the birds came first and staff second, but as I have matured and as VulPro's successes have and continue to flourish, I have realised more and more that VulPro and the birds would never be where they are now if it was not for each person within the organisation doing their part. I guess with getting older one becomes wiser, and thus my beliefs have matured. Without a doubt, the staff and the entire team need to come first as happy staff and helpers mean we have the ability to be even greater which will and does benefit the birds directly.

I want to take this opportunity to say thank you to VulPro's hard working staff and volunteers. This newsletter is truly a tribute to them which showcases how hard each person works and how much good comes from all pulling together in the same direction to save Africa's vultures and make the world a better place for them.

Kerri Wolter, CEO



# VULTURE RESCUE AND REHABILITATION

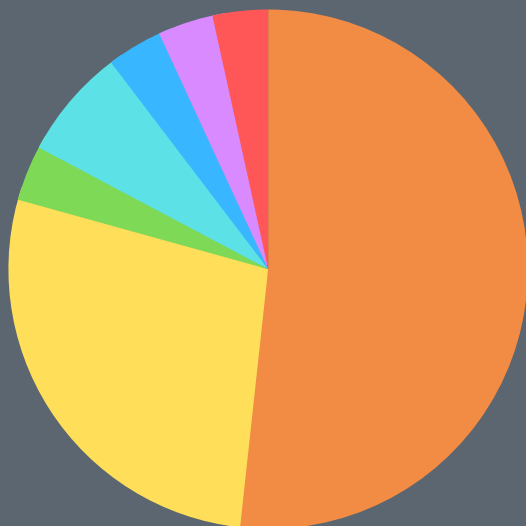
As we have reached the middle of 2023, our rescue and rehabilitation program continues to keep us on our toes. From April to June, we have treated a total of 29 patients.



A young White-backed Vulture in ICU on arrival at VulPro

More than half of the patients were admitted due to negative power line interactions, which sadly continues to contribute significantly to the decline of vulture populations. Nine of the patients came in from unknown reasons, two were treated for vehicle collisions, one was grounded and another fell from its nest. It is unfortunate that a total of seven birds were euthanised after careful consideration was taken as to their general overall well-being and the available limited options for further treatment. Furthermore, three of our non-vulture related patients were transferred to other facilities when they were stable enough to be safely moved after receiving emergency treatment

Species admitted to VulPro  
1 April - 31 June 2023



Cape Vulture, White Backed Vulture, Hooded Vulture, Barn Owl, Spotted Eagle Owl, Lesser Flamingo, Black-chested Cormorant

Reasons for admission  
1 April - 31 June 2023



Powerline collision, Electrocution, Vehicle collision, Grounded, Fell from nest, Unknown





The young White-Backed Vulture, Amahle, with her new beak transplant.

## SPECIAL PATIENT UPDATE

We are delighted to give you an update on the African White-backed Vulture with the beak injury which we showcased in our previous newsletter. But firstly, we would like to start with finally being able to officially introduce this precious girl to you all as Amahle, which in Zulu means Beautiful.

Through a collaborative effort with Dr. Katja Koepel from the Faculty of Veterinary Sciences at the University of Pretoria, a beak from a deceased African White-backed Vulture, was transplanted onto the remaining crushed beak of Amahle. As far as we are aware, this is the first transplant of its kind on a vulture with special emphasis on using a real beak instead of a prosthetic. Since the operation, Amahle has done so well that she has been moved to a larger enclosure with a cluster of other African White-backed Vultures where they all feed together on whole carcasses and are able to interact and behave as normal vultures would in a natural environment. We are extremely grateful to the Onderstepoort Veterinary Wildlife Unit for their dedication and out of the box thinking to give this girl a second chance at life.

Amahle after the first surgery where a prosthetic was attached; soon after it was found to be unsuccessful and the transplant performed instead .



Dr Koepel holding Amahle after the successful surgery

# THREAT RADAR

Although VulPro receives many injured vultures into our facility, some of which we are able to save, there are many more that fall victim to the myriad of threats, never make it to rescue centres and instead die in the field. We believe it is important for us to monitor these events to understand the relative impact each threat is having on the vulture populations.

Over the last three months, in addition to the vultures that were admitted to VulPro, we have been informed of four White-backed Vulture fatalities as a result of turbine collisions at a wind-farm in the Northern Cape. At the end of June we were notified of more than 40 vultures that were killed within Kruger National Park after feeding on a poisoned carcass. These numbers only include events that we were informed of and are thus just a small sample of the total vultures that have been killed across our country over the last three months.

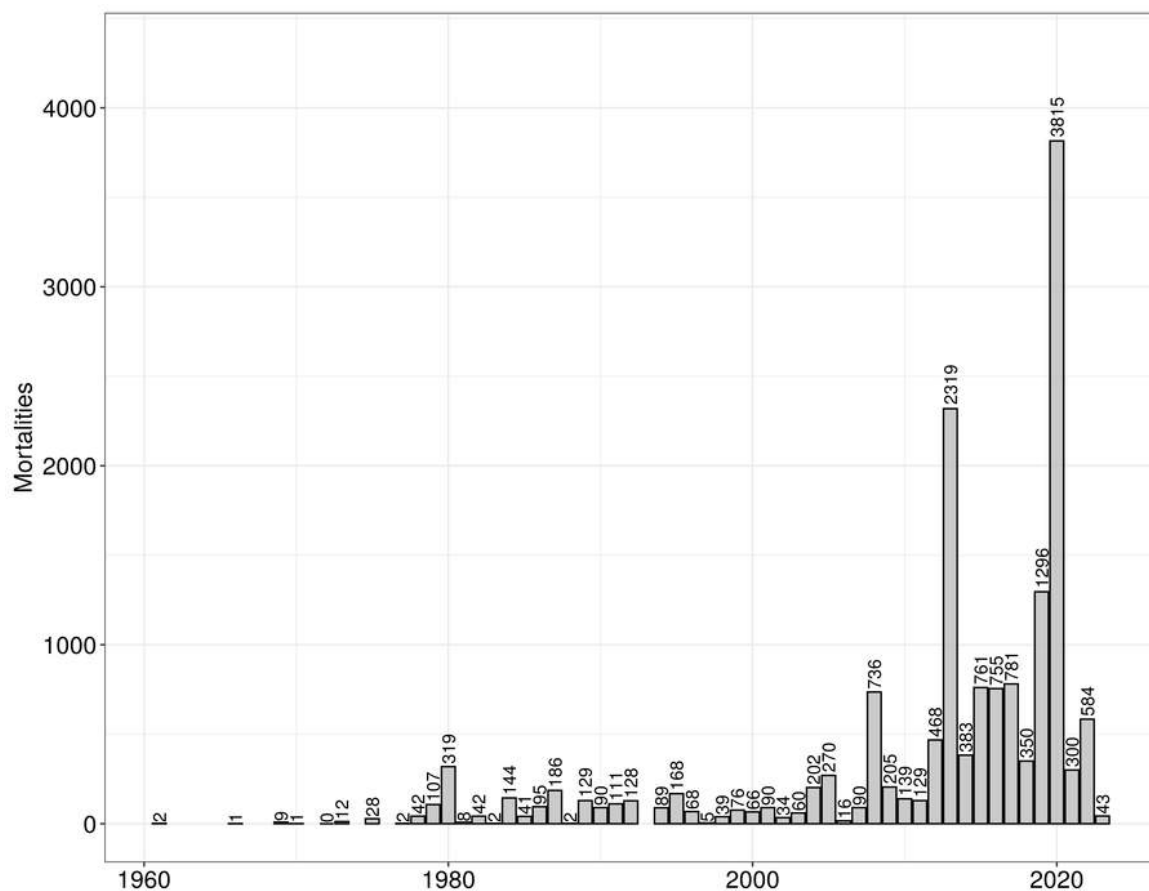


Figure 1. The number of vulture mortalities by poisoning across Africa for each year since 1960

## VULTURE POISONING DATABASE

Another very helpful resource for monitoring the threat of poison to vultures is the African Wildlife Poisoning Database\*. According to this database over 15 838 vultures have been killed by poison across Africa since the 1960's (Figure 1). South Africa has the second highest number of recorded mortalities, accounting for 18% of these (Figure 2). The majority of the mortalities have been White-backed Vultures (41%), followed by hooded vultures (14%; figure 3).

In 2023 43 vulture mortalities have been recorded, 33 of which occurred in South Africa, including 26 White-backed Vultures, four Hooded Vultures and three Cape Vultures. African White-backed Vultures

You can access the above mentioned data and more for other species at <https://awpd.cloud/>.

\*The Endangered Wildlife Trust and the Peregrine Fund. 2023. The African Wildlife Poisoning Database. Downloaded from [www.awpd.cloud](http://www.awpd.cloud) on 2023-07-13

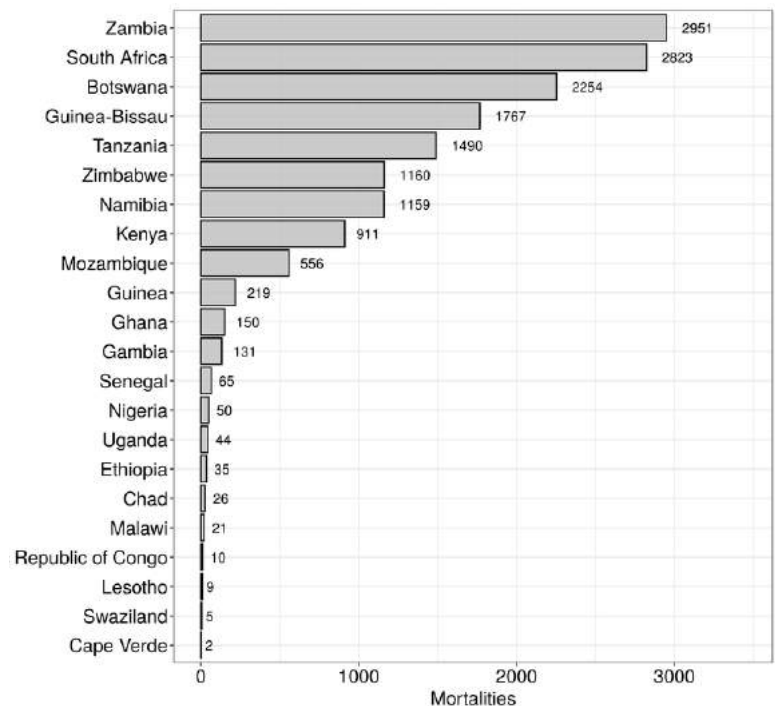


Figure 2. The number of vulture mortalities by poisoning in each African country since 1960

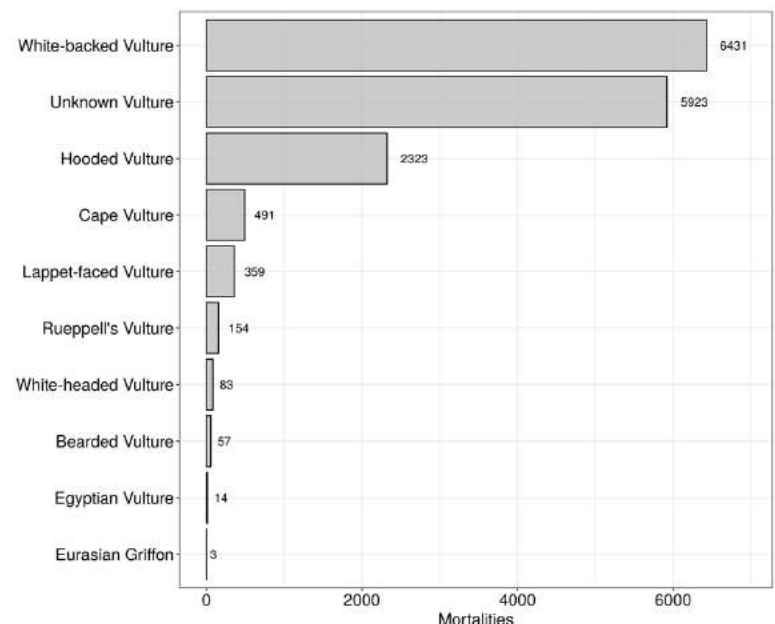


Figure 3. The number of mortalities by poisoning for each vulture species across Africa since 1960





Releasing two Cape Vultures at the  
Nooitgedacht colony in May 2023

## Release Highlights

Despite the continued challenges we face in trying to save every individual that comes into our care, we are only able to release 63% back into the wild due to the nature of their injuries. It therefore gives us great pleasure to showcase the release of 10 vultures over the past three months, i.e. Nine Cape Vultures and one African White-backed Vulture.

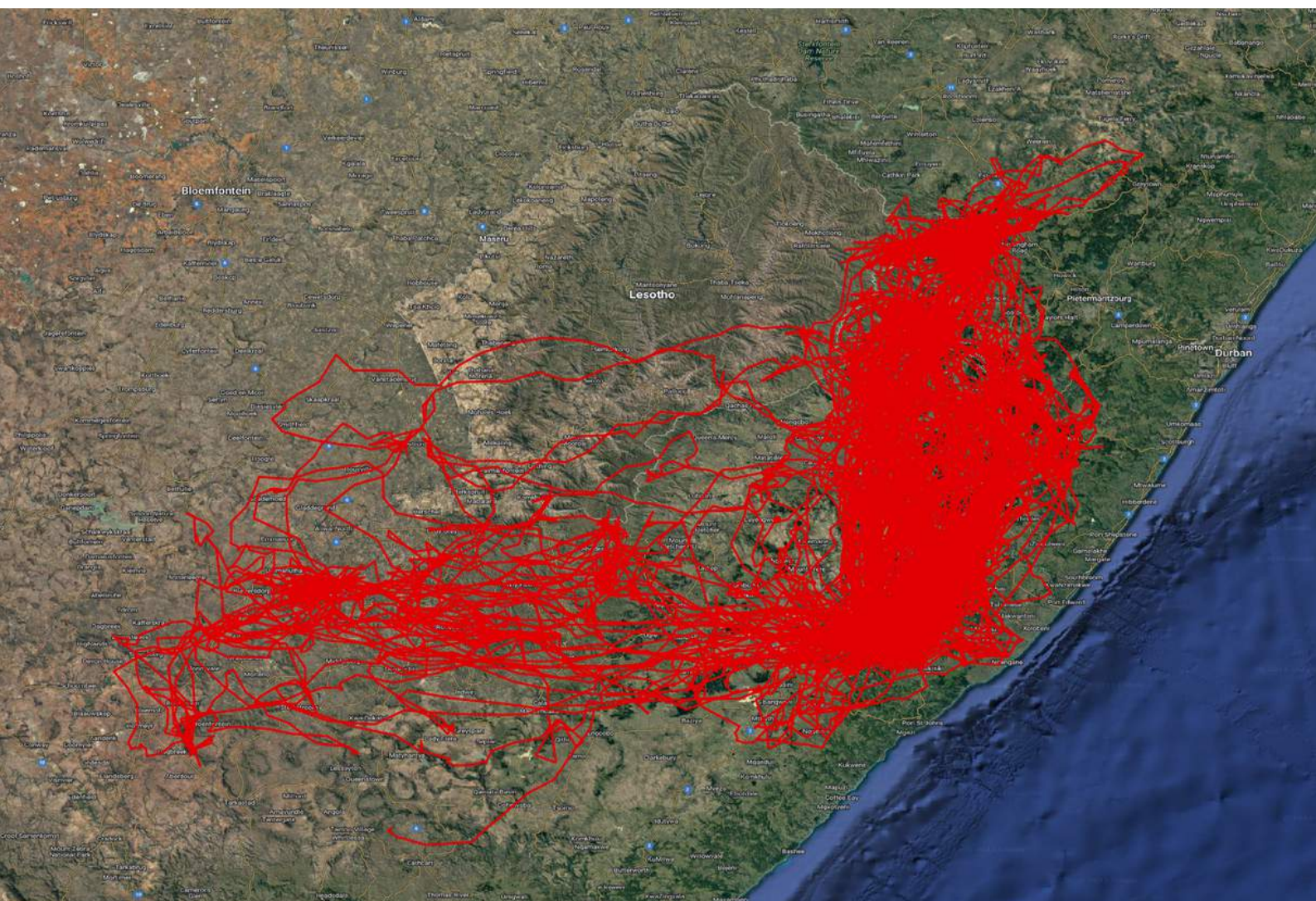


**Please contact us on  
+27 82 808 5113  
for emergencies only.**

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.



Tracking the movements of released birds, like the one below, is always fascinating and adds further insight into our work and how best to protect the species and/or mitigate threats that each bird encounters. The map below showcases the movements of an adult Cape Vulture that underwent rehabilitation with Kate Webster in Queenstown after being grounded by starvation. After receiving great care, she was successfully released with a tracking device, more than five years ago now. For most of her tracked life, she remained in the Eastern Cape where, we believe, she had successfully bred, however this year, she has left the Eastern Cape and moved into Kwa-Zulu Natal. This movement is significant in that it gives some insight into her life, and shows that she is not breeding this year. Unfortunately, we will never know the reasons for this, but we continue to monitor her closely, given she is one of our longest tracked birds to date.



Map showing the movements of the released Cape Vulture in the last 5 years



# DID YOU KNOW THAT THERE ARE VULTURES IN GERMANY?

## AND WHY BREEDING PROGRAMS ARE SO IMPORTANT

BY BETTINA BOEMANS

Many people know there are plenty of vultures in Africa or in Southern Europe. But did you know there are vultures in Germany, too? Yes, there are!

Bearded Vultures were once spread across the Alps, even living and breeding in Germany. But unfortunately people accused the Bearded Vulture falsely of killing sheep or even stealing human babies to kill and eat them. By the beginning of the 20th century, the Bearded Vulture was extinct in the Alps (and in Germany), when the last remaining bird was shot in Italy.

Luckily some vulture lovers from all Alpine countries got together in the late 70s and started planning to bring the Bearded Vultures back to the Alps. In 1986, the first captive bred chicks from zoos were finally released to the Alps in the Austrian Hohen Tauern National Park. By 2022 a total of 243 young Bearded Vultures were released in the Alps in different areas of Austria, Switzerland, France, Italy and... Germany!

A few years ago my friend, Toni Wegscheider, did a feasibility study to prove that Bearded Vultures can have a safe home in Germany's most southern province Bavaria, especially in the National Park of Berchtesgaden. In June 2021 the Bearded Vulture release program in cooperation with the Vulture Conservation Foundation (VCF), the National Park Berchtesgaden and the Landesbund für Vogel- und Naturschutz (LBV) finally started with two beautiful female chicks named Bavaria and Wally, that were released in the wild at the age of 3 months.



Bettina, passionate vulture lover from Germany and regular volunteer at VulPro since 2012





© Hansruedi Weyrich

### Toni releasing Bearded Vulture chick Sisi in Bavaria, Germany

When you release Bearded Vultures, it's always best to put two or three chicks in a protected cave and supply them with food for another 3-4 weeks. It gives the birds a chance to get used to their new home, learn from each other and strengthen their muscles before they finally fledge.

I was privileged to join the Bearded Vulture release in 2021 and the next one in June 2022, when the girls Dagmar and Recka were released. This year, while I was volunteering at VulPro, the third release of Bearded Vultures in Germany took place at the end of May with female Sisi and first male Nepomuk. More annual releases are planned for 10 years in total. The most important aim of this special project is to connect the Alpine population of Bearded Vultures with the soon to also be re-established, Balkan population to support genetic diversity. Maybe we are lucky and a breeding pair or two will realize that Bavaria is not the worst place to live and settle down here!?

But what happened to the released birds? Did they stay in the Alps? Did they start breeding? The releases of Bearded Vulture in the Alps turned out to be a perfect come back story of an extinct species! In 1997, only 10 years after the first release and 80 years after the Bearded Vulture got extinct in the Alps, the first wild born chick was celebrated! By 2022 vulture conservationists counted more than 400 wild chicks in total, making the wild population more and more self-sustainable.

The Bearded Vulture Captive Breeding Network, coordinated by the VCF on behalf of EAZA's EEP (Bearded Vulture EEP), was breaking many records in the Bearded Vulture captive breeding season 2022/23: In total 80 eggs were laid, 45 in specialized breeding centers and 35 in zoos, rescue centers and other establishments.

The 47 breeding pairs did a great job, 36 eggs have hatched, and only one chick has died, with 35 still alive. You can see that conservation programs would not be able to stabilize the wild population without professional breeding facilities and like-minded partners.

In Africa, VulPro is the leading vulture conservation program with a huge breeding program of Cape Vultures, White-backed Vultures and other species. Due to bad injuries, e.g. caused by powerline collisions, often ending up in wing amputations, more than 250 non-releasable vultures found a safe place at VulPro. Once a bird reaches sexual maturity and finds a mate, they can use VulPro's artificial breeding cliffs or breeding platforms to build a nest and raise a chick. Like in Europe, VulPro is often taking eggs to an incubator to raise the breeding success and number of eggs. In the wild most vulture species can only raise one chick. But in captivity there's always the chance to double clutch. In case there are more eggs than breeding pairs, chicks can be given to foster parents that did not lay an egg themselves. After 1,5 decades of experience and world wide connections to other breeding facilities, VulPro is also breaking breeding records from season to season.

Any chick from VulPro, that successfully fledges and grows strong, will be released to the wild, either in the Magaliesberg Mountains or in the Eastern Cape, to strengthen the wild population. So should you see a badly injured vulture in the wild that seems more dead than alive: Please contact VulPro! Please give this bird a chance to be rescued and stay alive! Maybe one day its fledglings will soar high up in the African sky and continue the circle of life!

And I can tell you, no matter if it's in Germany, in South Africa or anywhere else in the world: There is nothing better than to release vultures and give something back to nature! Together we can make a difference!



Cape Vulture breeding pair at VulPro



Artificial Cape Vulture breeding cliff at VulPro





An adult Cape Vulture with it's week old chick

## CAPTIVE BREEDING

VulPro is excited to be instrumental in establishing the national vulture breeding steering committee for the country. Some of the objectives of this committee include, but are not limited to:

- To contribute to international efforts, 'to reverse recent negative population trends and bring the conservation status of each species back to a favourable level' in accordance with the Vulture MsAP and in support of sustainable futures for vulture species.
- To develop quantitative, measurable, and defensible targets necessary for vulture population supplementation in southern Africa, and to monitor and report on progress.
- To develop best practice guidelines for the captive breeding of Cape, African White-backed, White-headed, Hooded, Lappet-faced, Egyptian, Palm-nut and Ruppell's Vultures, and for their subsequent release within their natural distributions in southern Africa.
- To develop and/or propose criteria for release site selection.
- To identify information gaps, develop research priorities, and coordinate a scientifically robust research process, supported by stakeholders, to undertake necessary research into captive breeding, reintroduction, and restocking.

As such, VulPro is perfectly positioned to spearhead many of these objectives and lead, given our already successful breeding programme and pilot study releases.



# Update on the 2023 breeding season

The breeding season for the captive bred birds started early this year. Although this year has had its fair share of challenges with unusual weather, rainfall and hail during May and June which have resulted in some egg losses and early embryo deaths, we are still optimistic for a successful season. So far, we have 10 precious Cape Vulture nestlings with eight of them already with their parents and the last one, as it is only a day old, still in our care. In addition, we have another 19 confirmed fertile eggs, and six which are still unknown at this time, either due to them being naturally incubated by the birds, or they are still too young to determine fertility.

In addition, for the first time ever and, we believe this is a first for the species on a global scale, VulPro, in partnership with the Faculty of Veterinary Sciences of the University of Pretoria, have successfully taken semen from two of our male Lappet-faced Vultures. The samples are showing very good semen collection with viable sperm and we have also since the collection, artificially inseminated both females, in the hope of one of them producing a fertile egg compared to the previous two seasons of having infertile eggs.

The team attempting to extract semen from a male Lappet-faced Vulture



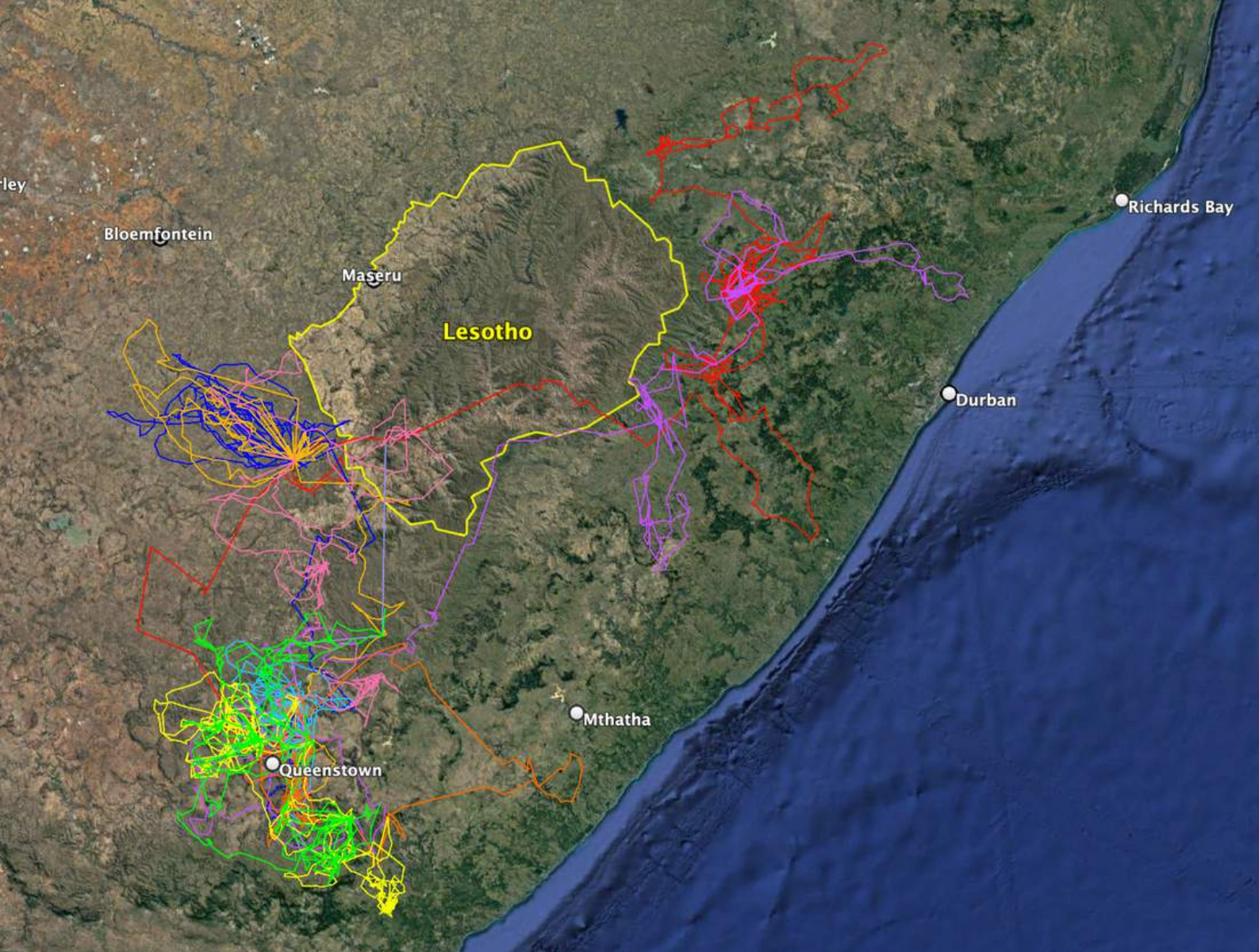


One week old  
nestling with parent,  
getting ready to be  
fed



Cape Vultures on their nests at VulPro,  
incubating and maintaining their nests





Movements of 12 captive bred Cape Vultures from the 2022 program released in the Eastern Cape earlier this year.

## Release Highlights

Amongst the many birds we continue to monitor via tracking devices, VulPro is currently monitoring 12 of its 2022 captive bred Cape Vultures who were successfully released earlier this year. 10 were released in March and two in May. All releases took place in the Eastern Cape.

Young birds are known to fly longer distances since they only start breeding at a later age. Interestingly, a few of these released vultures have shown remarkable courage by venturing beyond their province and flying as far as Smithfield in the Free State, and New Castle in KwaZulu Natal. Among them, a specific bird identified as OB 76 has flown the greatest distance compared to the others. As they become more accustomed to their natural surroundings, we anticipate that they will continue to explore even greater distances. It is known that vulture movements are closely tied to the availability of food resources.





# EASTERN CAPE UPDATE

BY KATE WEBSTER

April was an exciting month at Rookwood as all the captive bred fledglings were by now fitted with tracking devices (once again thank you, VulPro, for making this possible), and ready to take to the skies. We arranged for a professional photographer to be present (on request from DHL Express), so that this magical moment could be caught on camera as well. Our first group of five birds were set free on the 4th of April together with one re-release of a previous group of captive bred fledglings (2021) that had decided to rejoin the group inside the enclosure. The day was perfect and as expected the birds took to the skies and then back to the top of the enclosure (to orientate themselves/or maybe this was just home to them for a little bit longer). On the 6th the next group of three captive bred fledglings were released with a second re-release of a 2021 wild rehab bird that had also decided to join the inside group again. We also fitted the last two captive bred fledglings with devices. The birds literally followed the same pattern as the previous group and joined the roof sitters for a day or so. The last group of four fledglings and one wild rehab (Barkly East bird I collected earlier this year) took to the skies on the 6th of May. The baby of this group I had to recapture as he was not ready to leave and I felt it was best and safest to bring him back into my enclosure.

Most of the birds spent a short while on the roof of the holding enclosure before taking off into the Eastern Cape countryside. I monitor them with their tracking devices and it has been very interesting to see where they have travelled. Some have left and returned to Rookwood, while others have explored further and further afield. For the first time we had one bird (O/B 91) visit the Collywobbles breeding colony, however, it did not stay there for long. A second interesting movement is that some have headed up along the Southern Drakensberg Escarpment into KZN. I have two of this group of captive bred fledglings still in the enclosure but in discussion with Kerri, have decided they best be returned to VulPro as they were very late hatchlings and are too vulnerable if released in this province.



A volunteer helping to release one of the captive-bred fledglings

I want to say, I am indeed privileged to be able to be part of this program and feel we have made a big difference in this process. It has been a learning curve all along and possibly the most captive bred fledglings that have been released out of the province they were born in (maybe in SA, but worldwide too?).

At the end of March, I received a call from one of my favourite farm managers in the Southern Free State, Leon Petzer. He had found a vulture sitting in a camp not looking good and had caught the bird and could I please collect it. This is the 3rd bird I have now collected from him, however, this time it was a juvenile African White-backed vulture. They are such cute little birds really. I realized that this bird was not the victim of power lines, but possibly poisoning and was in constant communication with Kerri regarding treatment. The bird slowly got better, but as I cannot release it in this province, DHL Express (Theo and Wesley) came down to collect this bird and one adult Cape Vulture that needed to go to VulPro for possible captive breeding next year.

On the 14th April, I received a call from one of my 'vulture farmers', John Fletcher, informing me he had found a bird that had collided with a powerline and had snapped its wing. This was a stunning adult female Cape vulture and in consultation with the vets, Elreza performed the amputation. She pulled through but as the break was literally on her body, and after careful consideration, we decided the best was to let her go, as the toxins from her break had already started affecting her body. I was extremely heartsore, as she possibly was one of a breeding pair and we could not give her that second chance to contribute to her own species. I consider John Fletcher as one of my 'vulture farmers' as not only does he own the property where the Stonehenge/Thomas River roosting colony is, he is always on the lookout for injured birds whilst he goes about his business of farming.



My third rehab came from Tarkastad direction where a farmer had seen the bird unable to take off in his camp. I was 'vehicle down' at the time, so again called upon my son Kevin to assist. He and his staff set off to the farm and had almost given up finding the bird (like looking for a needle in a haystack situation) when one of the staff members spotted the bird. They caught the injured bird quite easily which turned out to be yet another powerline casualty. Although being quite underweight, the bird has recovered quite well and is now in with the other permanents in the enclosure.



Some of the released captive-bred vultures roosting on the enclosure



Cape Vultures at the Karnmelkspruit colony

As power lines will continue to have a negative role with our vultures, a more looming threat is that of the wind farm developers and poor avifaunal specialists' reports is becoming more evident. We have recently been very actively part of the I&APs of two proposed developments in this province. One in Molteno area and one in the Transkei area where both sites will have huge negative impacts on the vultures. What is evident is that developers clearly have different agendas to that of protecting or preserving the environment and accepted norms of 4/5 vultures per year killed on turbines are predicted (and often not using the tracking data that VulPro has available). This will not only affect the overall population but literally wipe out all the effort put into this captive bred program (economically and in overall decline of the species). This is a hard-fought battle and requires hours of reading as often the pages run into well over 150, which I think is a ploy to try and hoodwink the average person or frustrate the average person who does not understand the processes and gives up on reading the report.



I often ask the question as to what the ultimate agenda of these developers are. Is it money or is it genuinely to try and assist with the power generation crises, (with all the turbines already operating, no significant change has been observed yet!!) as seemingly the environment and its' inhabitants (including vultures) play the least role.

Last month I was invited to join the Department of Environmental Affairs from Aliwal North, East Cape Parks Board and a group of invited learners and educators from Lady Grey to spend a day at Karnmelkspruit colony, where we spoke about vultures and their value. There were four schools present (about 10 learners in each group) and they all had to do a presentation on a topic on vultures. I had to speak about the anatomy of the vultures focusing on the Cape Vulture of course, and the threats. The learners (and educators) were then given time to observe the birds at the site through binoculars and spotting scopes. We concluded with question-and-answer time. I want to congratulate the Department in driving this process.

Lastly I would like to say, it is indeed a privilege for me to be able to watch the young fledglings take off from the enclosure and 'practice' their flying skills with the wild birds that visit the restaurant at Rookwood. Then watch the numbers decline as they move off into the skies to start their journey to adulthood. Kerri and VulPro, DHL (in particular Theo) and my vets, Elreza and Werner, my vulture farmers, Vivian and no 2 Piggeries, Joy, Kevin and my staff, you all play a very pivotal role in sustaining the future of the Cape vulture not only in the Eastern Cape but in Southern Africa. I thank you.

#### Learners and educators from Lady Grey visiting the Karnmelkspruit colony



# EDUCATION AND MEDIA

Over the last three months VulPro has spread vulture conservation awareness through any platforms including presentations, tours and media as follows:

- VulPro's team has presented talks to 336 people since April. Of these, 122 were adults, and 214 were children.
- We provided educational tours of our facility to 137 visitors, including 105 adults and 32 children.
- Onyx, our Palm-nut Vulture on loan at Monte Casino bird park, was visited by 26 930 people over the last three months.
- VulPro's website has been visited 1244 times in the last three months.
- We currently have 16 797 followers on Facebook, 2000 followers on Twitter, 1191 followers on Instagram, 452 followers on YouTube and 441 followers on LinkedIn.
- VulPro was featured in articles from four newspapers including The Citizen, Die Beeld, The Star, and Pretoria North Rekord. Four online articles about our work were also published on Getaway, Netwerk24, Goodthingsguy, and Bild. VulPro was featured on a news segment on eNCA, focused on the beak transplant, which was also the topic of interviews on Cape Talk and Mix FM.
- We were also featured in a Facebook post by the Faculty of Veterinary Science, Onderstepoort, about the beak transplant.

Two newspaper articles, in the Star and Pretoria North Rekord, featuring Amahle's beak transplant





# VulPro and PACE sessions

In April we continued with the last three of our live four-part webinar series in collaboration with PACE. During the sessions we presented on VulPro, vultures, and their conservation, a virtual tour around VulPro's facility, and a live viewing of our restaurant from our hide. The audience included students, mostly from the South African Wildlife College, rangers and environmental educators based in the Makuleke community. The sessions went really well and the participants were fantastically engaged and enthusiastic!



Since then, Aubrey Maluleke from Northern Kruger and his team, who attended the webinar sessions, have taken these webinar recordings, along with the PACE booklets, and conducted their own VulPro learning sessions. This is such exciting news for us! Our reach in spreading awareness about the value of vultures and their conservation is expanding further and further. The students are from several schools in the area, a hotspot for vulture poisoning. During their sessions they took students to the education Centre at the Punda Maria Gate, went on to watch vultures and even saw a nesting site. They then went on through the park to Crooks Corner and had a picnic at a visitor centre in Pafuri. The students thoroughly enjoyed themselves!



We want to thank Aubrey and his team for investing in this outreach and vulture conservation!



The students from Northern Kruger with their new PACE vulture booklets during their "VulPro Sessions"





## VulCha (Vulture Champions)

After launching our new school-based educational programme, VulCha (Vulture Champions), in mid-March our team returned in April to Marumafase Secondary School and Biokotso Primary School near the Blouberg Nature Reserve, Limpopo, to greet the students and discuss our partnerships with the respective schools going forward. We believe a successful environmental education programme requires commitment and ongoing engagement. Through the programme we plan to assist the schools in forming student-lead VulCha committees, a sort of voluntary club, that will assist us in implementing our vulture education and lead other environmental initiatives at the school. We intend to expand this programme in the coming months and slowly build new partnerships with additional schools. We are really looking forward to what these partnerships grow into.



VulPro team member, Clarence, chatting with students from Biokotso Primary School during our second visit to the school as part of our VulCha programme.



## Eskom conference

Powerline collisions and electrocution have been extensively documented as one of the primary threats contributing to the decline of vulture populations. For many years we have been Collaborating with Eskom and municipalities to address this threat. When an incident occurs we file a report with Eskom, who will then investigate the site and determine and implement the best mitigation strategy for the powerline. We value the longstanding relationship we have established as it allows us to directly address this threat. At the end of May we had the opportunity to participate in the exhibition at Eskom's Environmental and Climate Change & Sustainable Development Conference 2023, where we showcased our dedicated efforts to help protect our vultures, and managed to raise some funds through merchandise sales.



VulPro team member, Shelton, with volunteers Bettina and Jade, hosting a stand at Eskom's Environmental and Climate Change & Sustainable Development Conference 2023.



# Local School Talks



VulPro team member, Obert, presenting an educational talk to the students at Kameeldrift West Primary

In the last several months we visited Kameeldrift West Primary School and Mountain Cambridge Pre-school to teach the students about vultures. Both schools are located very near to VulPro and we are working to engage more and more with our local community. At Mountain Cambridge we were joined by Brian Vorster, a local raptor educator, who did a great job engaging with the students. Both visits were thoroughly enjoyed!



Brian Vorster, on behalf of VulPro, giving a show and tell to the students at Mountain Cambridge Primary School.



# DISCOVER THE BEAUTY OF *African Vultures* WHILE SUPPORTING THEIR CONSERVATION



Each purchase sponsors VulPro's efforts to protect and rehabilitate these incredible birds





# RESEARCH

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

The months of April to June have been busy for this project and we are pleased to say our efforts have borne fruit. We attempted wild captures at two more sites, specifically in the Hectorspruit area of the Lowveld, and at Dronfield Nature Reserve near Kimberley. We are pleased to report that we were able to catch a further five individuals for this study in Hectorspruit bringing the total number of birds fitted with GPS devices to 21. These birds have since moved actively through the south of the Kruger National Park, Eswatini, parts of Mozambique and even down into Kwa-Zulu Natal. With the addition of these birds to the study, and through collaborations set up with other research institutions with GPS tracking data on these individuals, we now have information from nearly 100 individuals across southern Africa. We will thus now be able to begin in earnest with the analysis of this data to see how temperature may be affecting the movement of African White-backed Vultures in southern Africa.

The winter months of 2023 also brought about the breeding season for African White-backed Vultures, and we were thus able to begin the monitoring of these nest sites. We are currently monitoring three areas where these individuals are nesting, and we pleased to be able to expand our monitoring to further farms in these areas as we determine how these sites differ from each other.



An African White-backed Vulture is fitted with a GPS tracking device near Hectorspruit, South Africa.



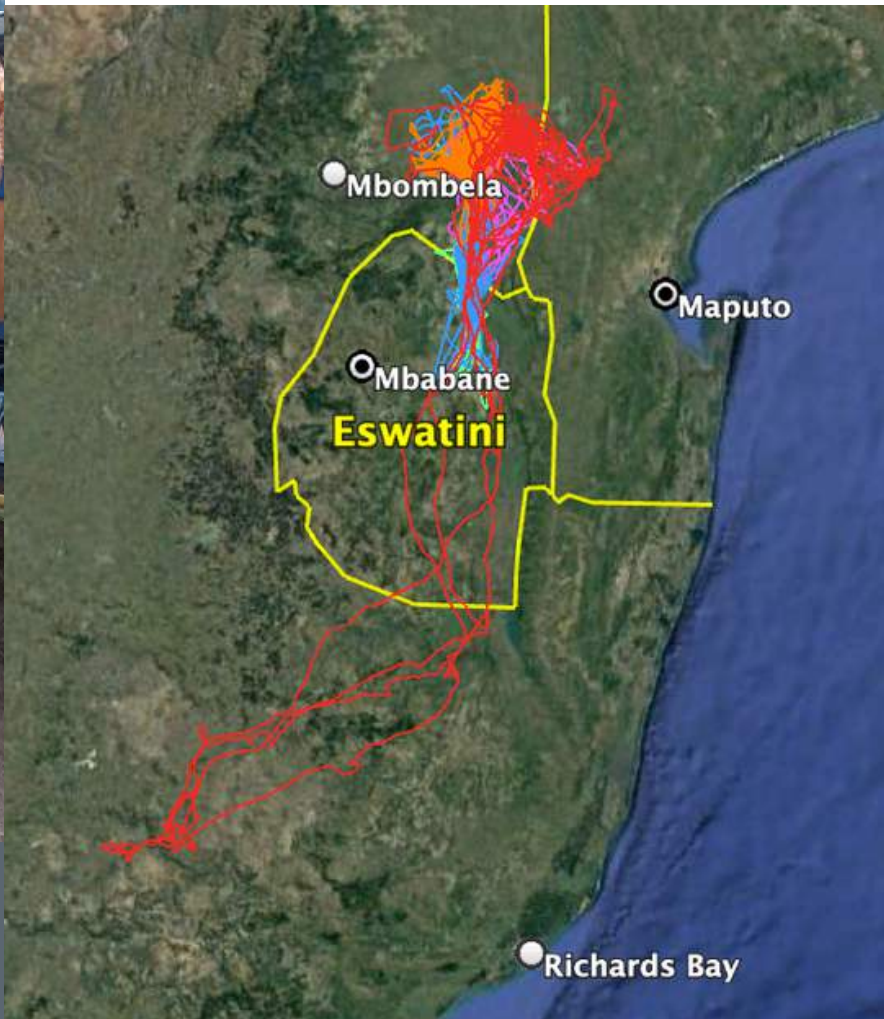
We look forward to visiting these sites again in September and October to see what the breeding success of each site looks like and if there are any new threats that need to be addressed this year.

Our thanks again to all collaborators and partners who have made this project possible up until this point, including Dronfield Nature Reserve, Leibniz Institute, National University of Science and Technology, Zimbabwe, Max Planck Institute, North Carolina Zoo, Raptors Botswana, University of Eswatini, University of Pretoria, Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust, and Wildlife ACT

Five African White-backed Vultures move across the Lowveld of South Africa after being fitted with GPS tracking devices.



An African White-backed Vulture is held before fitment of a GPS tracking device near Hectorspruit, South Africa.





# African White-backed Vulture Monitoring

June has brought the vulture breeding season around once again, and we have been back out in the field to monitor the wild vulture populations. VulPro monitors breeding populations twice a year in order to understand the number of breeding pairs vs the success of these pairs, ultimately recording and evaluating the success of the population within each survey site.



June and July brought about our first surveys for the year, which is summarised in the table below, and is shown in comparison to the same survey in 2022. From these figures we can see that there has been a slight drop in the breeding pair numbers. We suspect that these declines are mostly due to human disturbances as many of the farms attempt to tackle their bush encroachment problem. While this can be disturbing to the birds during the breeding season, it is also beneficial for their populations that this is cleared as bush encroachment was found to be a major factor leading to the extinction of Cape Vultures in Namibia. Landowner engagement is therefore an important part of what we do in the field. In this case it helps us to ensure that bush encroachment measures are carried out, but in a manner that causes minimal disturbance for the birds.

We are also still fighting the ongoing battle of unsafe powerlines on a number of these properties, most urgently on properties where the birds are nesting on the lines. We continue to engage with Eskom, our national power utility about the importance of making these lines a priority, and it is something we will continue to do until these lines are mitigated and this site becomes safer for the birds. We continue to have open dialogue with landowners on these sites, and have stressed to them the importance of letting us know if any power line incidents occur on their properties.

Our thanks to all the individuals who make these surveys possible, including our hosts Hano and Shane Swanepoel from Numzaan Safaris, Paula and Richard Hobson from Woodside Lodge, and volunteers Mariza and Gert Hamman and Rosemarie Hannweg. Further, our thanks to all the landowners and managers from the farms listed below for their continued enthusiasm for these surveys and for assisting us with access to each property in order to conduct these surveys.

Results of the first surveys for African White-backed Vulture nests monitored at the three study sites in northern South Africa in 2022 and 2023.

Location	Active nests (May/Jul 2022)	Active nests (Jun/Jul 2023)
<b>Mareetsane</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>81</b>
Omega Game Ranch	57	60
La Rancho	18	10
Woodside Lodge	5	5
Bakoven	3	3
Woodside Cattle	7	3
<b>Dwaalboom</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>49</b>
Haakdoorn	22	20
Numzaan Safaris	13	13
Swartbos	14	5
Unknown roadside	6	5
Groenedal	5	3
Laastepoort	2	1
Leeuwdoorn	0	1
Loggerinde Hoek	1	1
Kallie Lee Farm	1	0
Nondo	1	0
Ultimo	-	1
Hogenbomen(New)	-	2
<b>Roedtan</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>10</b>
Renosterfontein	7	5
Bosveld	2	4
Harlou	1	1
Nooitgedacht	3	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>140</b>



A VulPro researcher observes a nearby nest, Mareetsane, South Africa.



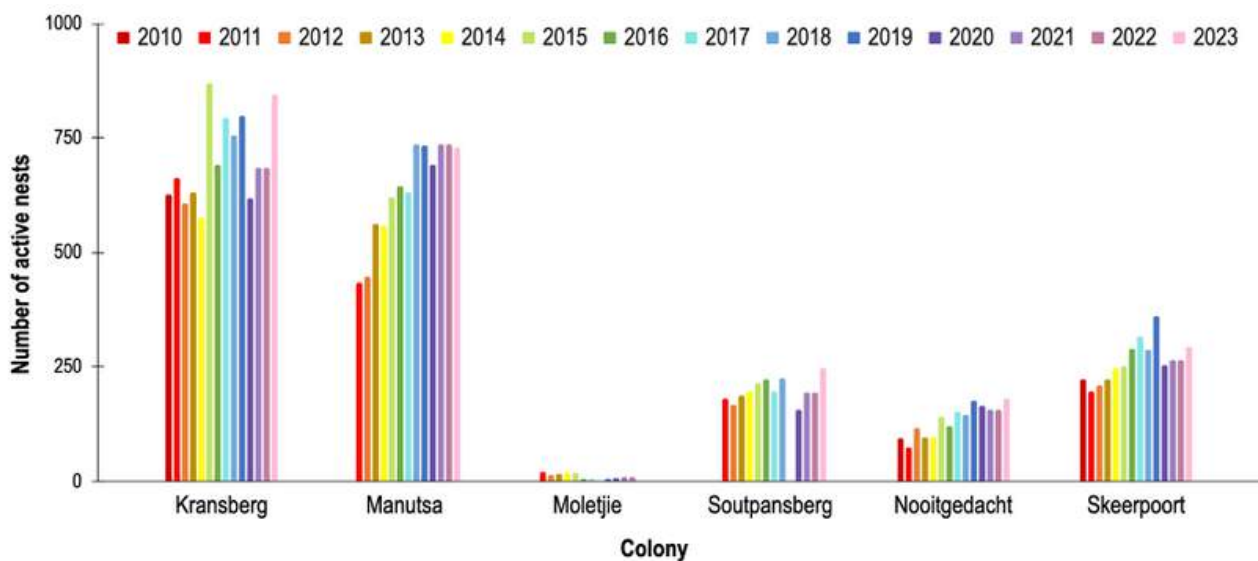
A pair of African White-backed Vultures sit near their nest, Dwaalboom, South Africa.





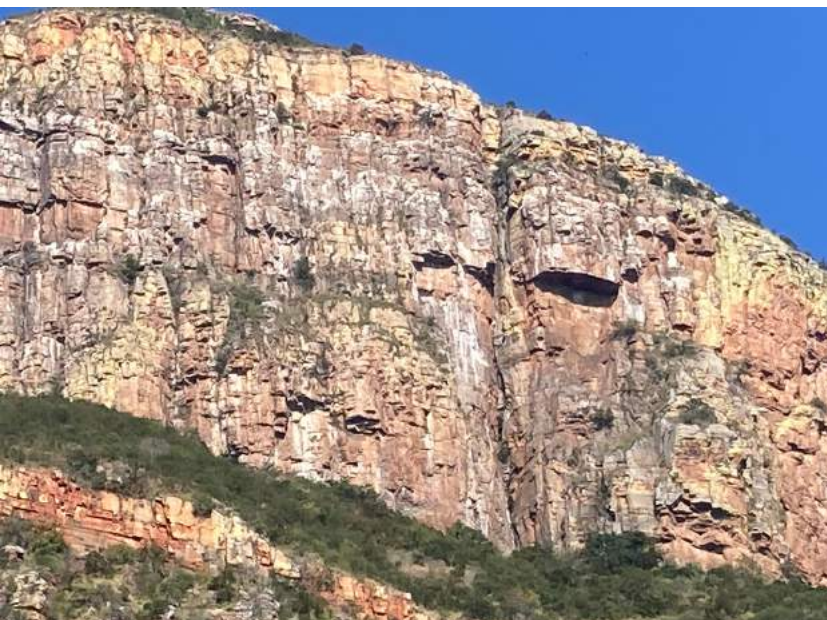
## Cape Vulture Monitoring

VulPro's wild breeding monitoring season has come around once again! We began our Cape Vulture colony monitoring towards the end of May at the Scheerpoort and Nooitgedacht colonies in the Magaliesberg, and then went on to monitor the colonies at Manutsa, Moletjie, Soutpansberg and Kransberg. Colonies are surveyed twice a year, once at the beginning of the season to see how many pairs are actively attempting to breed, and again at the end to see how many of these pairs have successfully raised chicks. Nooitgedacht and Scheerpoort are also monitored a third time in between.



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

We have counted a total of 2295 active nests during our initial surveys, which is an 12% increase from this time last year. Two of the colonies have only a handful fewer active nests since last year, and the rest have increased. We're always excited to see increases in the wild populations we monitor, and we look forward to seeing how many chicks the colonies are able to produce this year.



Whitewash indicating the presence of vultures on the cliff-face at Kransberg colony.



A VulPro researcher monitoring the Skeerpoort Cape Vulture colony

## PUBLICATIONS

- McClure CJW, Rolek BW, Kemp R, Wolter K. 2023. Combining trends from disparate monitoring programs to inform Red List assessments: The case of the Cape Vulture (*Gyps coprotheres*). *Biological Conservation*. 284: 110175. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2023.110175>.



# SPONSOR SHOUTOUT

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

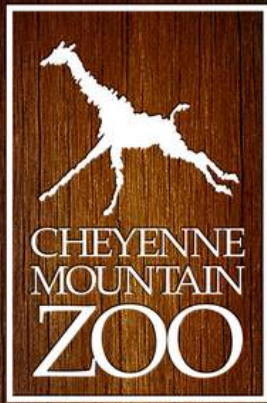


**San Diego Zoo  
Wildlife Alliance**

San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance generously provides funding for our captive breeding programme, demonstrating their commitment to conservation. This support enables VulPro to enhance our efforts in breeding vultures for release, a crucial step in safeguarding these endangered birds' future. Every year our programme grows from strength to strength with thanks to support from San Deigo Zoo.



With the support of Nashville Zoo's funding, we have been able to conduct imperative maintenance to our largest breeding enclosure which houses the largest captive breeding population of Cape Vultures globally. These upgrades have provided our breeding Cape vultures with a safe and comfortable environment which will contribute to their breeding success and thus contribution to the wild populations. Nashville Zoo has also supported our rescue, rehab and release programme. The rescue and release of each one of these vultures has contributed to reducing losses to the wild populations, preventing ongoing declines of these species.



Way Beyond  
Watching

Cheyenne Mountain Zoo sponsors of both our rehabilitation and captive breeding programmes. Many vultures have been released from both of these programmes thanks to their support. By releasing vultures that have been rescued or captive bred, VulPro is directly contributing to the wild populations of these endangered species and, due to their longevity and slow reproductive rate, every individual put back into the wild counts!

DHL has been a pivotal partner for VulPro, going above and beyond to provide transport for our captive-bred and rehabilitated vultures, ensuring they are safely delivered to their release sites, often all the way to the Eastern Cape. This service is invaluable to VulPro, as the safe and timely arrival of the birds to their new home is essential for their success in the wild. Furthermore, DHL has provided funding to support our captive breeding and rehabilitation programmes and build new enclosures helping to create an environment for the birds to thrive and recover. DHL team members, along with their friends and family, have also spent time enthusiastically volunteering at our facility. DHL has shown incredible generosity and dedication to supporting VulPro in our mission to conserve and protect African vultures



Cape Vulture fledgelings waiting to be loaded onto the DHL truck

We would like to express our sincerest gratitude to our generous funders. Your support enables us to continue our vital mission of protecting these important and often misunderstood animals. Thank you for your support, and we look forward to continuing to work together to safeguard the future of these birds.





MEET OUR VOLUNTEER

## JAIME ALEXANDER SOTO

June 2023 marks my fifth visit to VulPro in the past two years. And though the packing for each return is done with a calm familiarity, the excitement that burns from within never ceases to dampen.

From the first time I stepped foot onto VulPro soil, my life changed, finally able to chase my dreams of focusing my time and energy on Vulture Conservation. The immense passion that exudes from within me was met by a CEO and staff that had equal passions and desires to see Vulture Conservation soar to new heights. The work that is being done here at VulPro is second to none, paving the way for what we can hope to be an ever-growing interest in Vultures. I am honoured to be welcomed here time and time again, and grateful for all the opportunities and growth that VulPro has allotted.

I would be nothing in the Vulture Conservation world had Kerri not taken me on in 2021, and so I owe it all to her for giving me that exposure and continuing to trust me each step of the way. She is the real hero in this narrative. And lastly, to the staff that has always made me feel like family while I am away from home, I thank you greatly.

Here is to many more years with Vulture Conservation at VulPro.

Stand up for  
**VULTURE CONSERVATION**  
and show your support with our  
**EXCLUSIVE BRACELETS!**



Every purchase directly contributes to the protection and rehabilitation of African vultures, ensuring their survival for generations to come.





# MEET THE TEAM

## GENERAL ASSISTANT: MAHLE DUBE

Mahle is the newest member of the VulPro team, having started in May as our Assistant Curator. Mahle holds a BSc Hons in Biological Sciences from the University of Cape Town and a BSc Hons in Forestry and Wildlife Management from the National University of Science and Technology. On a daily basis, some of the tasks Mahle does at VulPro include assisting with the captive breeding and rehabilitation of the birds at our centre, GPS tracking of the released birds, management of the permits, and writing of funding proposals, amongst many other things

Mahle says:

“Since childhood, my profound fascination for birds has shaped my journey and continues to be a driving force in my life. The delight I experience while working with birds is indescribable. My childhood was spent in the city of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. While the city boasted abundant natural surroundings, it was predominantly populated by house sparrows and various small bird species. Throughout my journey, I have acquired expertise in bird training and show presenting. My educational background includes two honors degrees: one in Biological Sciences obtained from UCT and another in Forestry and Wildlife Management earned at NUST. These qualifications have equipped me with a solid foundation to understand and contribute to the realm of avian studies.

The remarkable efforts undertaken by VulPro to raise awareness about the significance of vultures and deepen our understanding of these magnificent birds have captured my interest. I am genuinely intrigued by the impactful work being done, and I eagerly anticipate the opportunity to acquire further experience and expand my knowledge about vultures.”



# WITH THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS

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BotanischerGarten Stuttgart Zoo  
World Bird Sanctuary  
Zoo Atlanta



# 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

Katey Parson - Cape Vulture, Resilience

Kim Caldwell - Cape Vulture, Percy

Mariza Hamman - Cape Vulture, Isolde; White-headed

Vulture, Orpheus; Lappet-faced Vulture, Abigaille; and

Hooded Vulture Athanael

Mike and Amy Latimer - Lappet-faced Vulture, John

Travulture

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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