JULY - SEPTEMBER 2023

Vulpro

BE PART OF 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

Over the past 3 months, we have seen first-hand how the illegal trade in wildlife has and continues to increase at an alarming rate. The effect this has on all wildlife and in our case, the vulture populations is catastrophic and it is our belief that this threat will cause mass extinctions, including some vulture species, within our lifetime.

Much emphasis is placed on poisoning and the destruction this risk has on the vulture species. However, are we not being blindsided and treating the symptom rather than the actual cause of this powerhouse threat? Should we not be focusing on treating the illegal wildlife trade, vulture harvesting and the use of vultures for belief-based purposes rather than addressing the symptom? I do not have the answers! However, I am concerned that we are not dealing with the actual root cause and if this is the case, we will never win this war.

As such, VulPro has, together with the Tusk Trust's PACE educational programme spearheaded VulPro's community and school educational and awareness mission. Due to limited capacity, we are prioritizing hot spot areas/communities, their leaders and schools where we know vultures are being harvested and sold to the muti markets and being used for belief-based purposes.



Our aim is to create a level of trust and understanding as well as a give and take relationship where children, parents and communities can become vulture champions and custodians. Their peers, friends and family members will also be educated to become part of the necessary change and a part of the answer to nurturing and protecting vultures within their environment. This is obviously not a quick fix solution and could take years to get right, but we need to start NOW if we are to influence any change.

VulPro continues to strive to do more, to be better and to lead by example. Our work and conservation efforts speak for themselves, as is the passion and total dedication by our small team in everything that we do. Some of this work is seen in this newsletter and we do hope you have a glimmer into the daily lives of our unwavering, tireless commitment to saving and protecting Africa's vultures.

Kerri Wolter, CEO

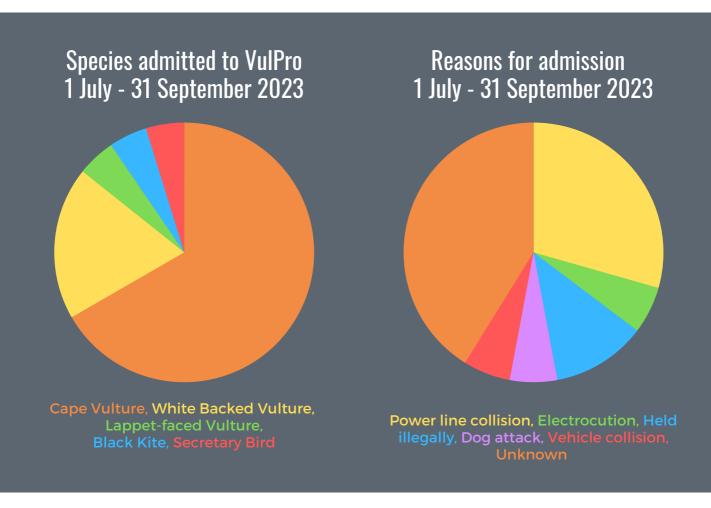




VULTURE RESCUE AND REHABILITATION

In the past we have been able to clearly differentiate between our 'breeding season' and our 'rehab season' as the chaos of one gives way to the other. This has not been the case this year. The last three months have kept us busy with rescues and rehab cases on top of our busiest breeding season yet.

From July to September 2023, we treated a total of 21 patients at our centre. These consisted of 14 Cape Vultures, four White-Backed Vultures, one Lappet-Faced Vulture and two non-vulture species, a Black Kite and a Secretary Bird. Five patients were admitted due to power line collisions and one due to a power line electrocution. Seven vultures were admitted for unknown reasons. Two vultures were being illegally held and one was found tangled in a string. The Black Kite was treated following a vehicle collision and the Secretary Bird had been attacked by a dog.







The results of colliding with a powerline, terrible burn wounds to the head.

The bulk of injuries incurred by power line collisions were to the wings, mostly fractures requiring surgery. We also saw birds with severe burn wounds. A bird rescued by Kate Webster from Reddersburg, Free State, sustained terrible burn wounds to its head. The wound has been surgically treated and the bird is well on its way to recovery. It should be ready for release in the coming weeks.

Sadly, of the birds admitted over the last three months, two died and two had to be euthanised due to the extent of their injuries. One vulture has become a permanent resident at VulPro joining our ex-situ colony, One vulture has been successfully released and the rest are still undergoing rehabilitation.



The head wound was sewn together and the vulture is recovering well



A RESCUE STORY

In August 2023, we were alerted to the sale of an African White-Backed Vulture chick Facebook on Marketplace. Our team responded quickly and enlisted the help of the North-West Environment & Nature Conservation Unit to intercept the sale. After we safely secured the nestling, the offender was arrested on the spot and is potentially facing a prison sentence of 10 years. The chick, which is now safely at VulPro, is being raised alongside another chick by our experienced captive pair of breeding vultures (with some assistance from staff). When ready it will be released.

The rescued chick was swiftly accepted by its new parents and sibling

The post on Facebook Marketplace advertising the chick for sale



Dumelang bagolo ke rekisa lenong Lele nnyane gaise lenne le diphoka tsago fofa ke dula mafikeng Disaneng pls 🍋 if WA lebatla buwa lenna ke 600

Hello guys I am selling a small egg that has never had flying wings I stay at Mafikeng Disaneng please 🐑 if you want it talk to me it is 600

Translated from Tswana





THREAT RADAR

Here at VulPro, we witness first-hand the threats vultures face. Sadly, many vultures who succumb to threats are not found in time or have suffered injuries preventing them from surviving back in the wild. Threats faced by vultures include direct and indirect poisoning, habitat loss and fragmentation, habitat degradation, electrocution and collisions with power lines and other infrastructure (wind turbines), as well as reduced natural food availability.

Over the past three months, we have seen several incidents involving various threats faced, of which the highest proportion come from power line collisions. When flying or landing on dangerous pylons, vultures often touch wires and die from electrocution or succumb to serious injuries. If they are not rescued these injuries sadly become fatal.

For the most part these birds, if rescued, can be rehabilitated back to health, and hopefully be released. If that is not possible, they will be added to our breeding programme if the injuries sustained impede their ability to survive in the wild again.

Power line collisions are the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the threats vultures face. Poisoning events are another issue we face here at VulPro. Vultures sadly do not often survive a poisoning event due to not being rescued in time, before the poison takes effect.

VulPro team member, Notice, rescuing a vulture that sustained a wing fracture from a power line collision



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.



During August 2023, we received terrible news of seven dead vultures (Cape Vultures and African White-Backed Vultures), between Klerksdorp and Potchefstroom, all of which had been poisoned. Some of the vultures found at the scene came from the Skeerpoort colony, where in 2019 they had been caught and fitted with GPS trackers by a team from VulPro. Had these birds not been fitted with tracking devices, the likelihood of this discovery being made would have been very slim. This therefore highlights the value in fitting birds with tracking devices. Investigation into this poisoning event is still ongoing. Events such as this can be intentional or unintentional and it is vital to understand why, so that the community can be educated about the impact it has on vulture species.

Poisoned vultures found between Klerksdorp and Potchefstroom.



Towards the end of September 2023, another poisoning incident was reported in Vryburg, which resulted in the death of 60 cows and one Cape Vulture. The incident is being investigated.



A herd of cows found poisoned and The Cape Vulture found dead amongst the cows





The African White-Backed Vulture, previously rescued, rehabilitated and released, only to be found dead and used for belief-based practices (left), and its journey from its time of release to the time of death (right).

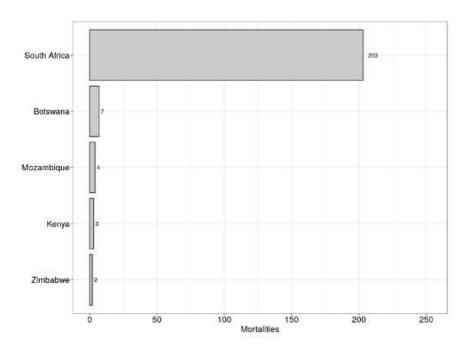
The illegal trade in wildlife is another major issue we face. A second incident came to our attention via a GPS tracking device which was not updating, with the last known location being in an unsafe area. A team from Jabulani Safaris was dispatched to the location in Zimbabwe to investigate. Here, an individual was found to be in possession of the bird, which was sadly dead, having been decapitated and then buried. The tracking device was retrieved and an investigation into the incident is underway. These incidents are generally guided by cultural beliefs, where the parts of many species are harvested for use in traditional medicine and belief systems.



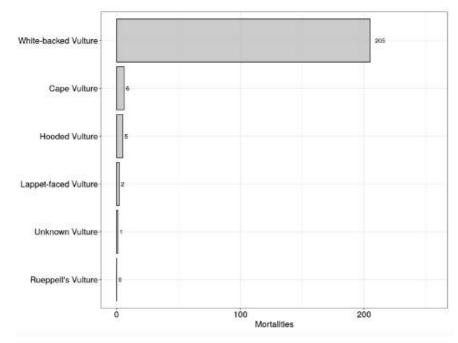
The vulture's body being dug up from where it was buried and the retrieved tracking device



THE AFRICAN WILDLIFE POISONING DATABASE



The number of recorded vulture mortalities by poisoning across Africa in 2023.



The number of mortalities by poisoning for each vulture species across Africa in 2023.

A very helpful resource for monitoring the threat of poison to vultures is the African Wildlife Poisoning Database.*

Since the start of July 2023, the number of vulture deaths recorded on this database has increased by 176, making a total of 219 vultures killed by poisoning in 2023. This includes 205 African White-Backed Vultures, six Cape Vultures, five Hooded Vultures and two Lappet-Faced Vultures. South Africa is responsible for 203 of these.

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

*The Endangered Wildlife Trust and the Peregrine Fund. 2023. The African Wildlife Poisoning Database. Downloaded from www.awpd.cloud on 2023-07-13





A rehabilitated vulture after release at the Potberg colony in De Hoop Nature Reserve, Western Cape.

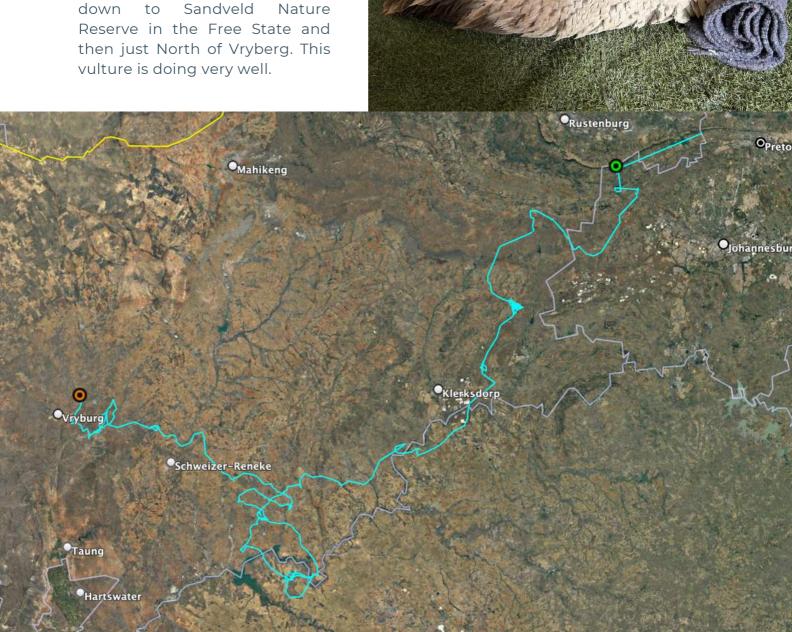
Release Highlights

Although some of the vultures that are admitted to our centre are unable to be released back into the wild due to the nature of their injuries, we take great joy in those that do get to soar again. Over the last three months, we have released three rehabilitated vultures, including two Cape Vultures and one White-Backed Vulture.

One such successful rehabilitation is the case of a juvenile Cape Vulture that came to us in April 2023. It was found near the Skeerpoort colony and had sustained a broken leg from a power line collision. On 2 September 2023, coinciding with International Vulture Awareness Day (IVAD), we released this young vulture back into the wild with a GPS tracking device.



Tracking the movements of released birds 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. As seen on the map below, over the last month this vulture has made its way from the Nooitgedacht colony in the Magaliesberg down Sandveld Nature to Reserve in the Free State and The released Cape Vulture on its admission.



Map of the movements of the released Cape Vulture over September 2023. It started its journey at Nooitgedacht Colony (green dot) in the Magaliesberg and is now north east of Vryberg (Orange dot).



The other Cape Vulture that was released is a heart-warming story of good collaboration. We were alerted to a vulture caught on a telephone pole in July 2023 near De Hoop Nature Reserve, Western Cape. A team from De Hoop Nature Reserve, CapeNature and Cango Wildlife Ranch came to its rescue. Under our supervision, Cango Wildlife Ranch took care of the bird until it was ready for release. At the beginning of September 2023, in another joint effort, we fitted a GPS tracking device on this vulture and released it back into De Hoop, where it has found its way back to the Potberg Colony.

The bird rescued outside De Hoop Nature Reserve was found caught on a telephone pole cable



Team members from VulPro, CapeNature and Cango Wildlife Ranch fitted a GPS tracking device to the vulture before releasing it.



CAMBODIA AND ITS VULTURES

BY SUE FOX

For those of you that don't know, the Kingdom of Cambodia is a country in Southeast Asia, which is bordered by Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. It is classed by the United Nations as a least developed country. The economy is growing fast, but about 17% of the population still live below the poverty line and corruption is endemic.

During the mid-late 1970s, Cambodia suffered a terrible genocide, when it is estimated that between 2-3 million people died. After that horrific period, civil war continued and peace was finally restored in the late 1990s. It is classed as a democracy, yet it is in fact a one-party state.



A Red-headed Vulture

Three-quarters of the country has low-lying plains with low-lying mountains primarily in the northwest, northeast and southwest. Cambodia has the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia – the Tonle Sap or Great Lake and it is an integral part of the Mekong River system and floodplains. There is also coastline in the south and southwest by the Gulf of Thailand and South China Sea.

Approximately 70% of Cambodia used to be forested, but it is estimated that only 15-20% remains due to deforestation, timber concessions and illegal logging.

I have been living full-time in Cambodia since 1995, but I have NEVER seen a vulture in 28 years and I have travelled to all of the 25 provinces. There is a local and traditional saying in the countryside, "**see dote t'mart**", which translates as "to eat like a vulture" – when you overeat through greed and your stomach is absolutely bulging.





A White-Rumped Vulture

A Red-Headed Vulture

Cambodia is home to three vulture species – the Red-Headed, the White-Rumped and the Slender-Billed Vulture – all of which are listed by the IUCN as "critically endangered". The Ministry of Environment carried out a census in early June 2023 and a total of only 131 vultures were recorded in the whole country. Out of that total, 12 were Red-Headed, 77 were White-Rumped and 42 Slender-Billed. In comparison, the total number recorded in the June 2022 census was just 134 vultures and in 2021 there were 121.

The Cambodian Vulture Conservation Project (CVCP) was established in 2004 to work on vulture conservation. It is a partnership of Cambodian government ministries (the Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Agriculture) and NGOs (e.g. the WWF and the WCS – Wildlife Conservation Society) and a dozen or so smaller partners (e.g. Sam Veasna Conservation Tours).



Slender-billed Vultures



The main threats to the vulture population in Cambodia are – lack of food availability and poisoning especially from the residues of the NSAID Diclofenac (banned since 2010) which is used to treat domestic livestock – mostly cattle plus to a lesser degree goats. Certain pesticides (e.g. Carbamate) have also been a danger to vultures before the Covid-19 pandemic. There was a reported instance of vulture smuggling in March 2023 involving five vultures, who sadly perished in the northeast of the country.

Together, all the partners of the CVCP designed an action plan for 2016-2025. The main points of this current plan are to:

- Provide supplementary feeding through vulture restaurants;
- Plan and develop ecotourism for vulture site(s);
- Provide better management of protected vulture sites;
- Conduct education and awareness-raising activities; and
- Research and improve knowledge of conservation.

On International Vulture Awareness Day 2023, a workshop was organised and held at the Royal University of Phnom Penh and approximately 100 people attended. The main themes were the current status of vultures in Cambodia, the important role of vultures in the ecosystem and enhancing the interest of university students about vultures and encourage research. There were vulture displays, a competition, an open discussion and a selfie booth.

: Awareness materials from the International Vulture Awareness Day 2023 in Cambodia.







Two adult Cape Vultures and their chick

White-backed Vultures with their chicks (above) and a Cape Vulture with its chick (below)

CAPTIVE BREEDING

Captive breeding serves as a reminder of the delicate balance of life and the profound impact humans can exert on a species' survival. Vulture breeding is no different. This year, our breeding season has been marked by an extended and demanding period, characterised by constantly shifting weather patterns that have created confusion and disruption in the processes of incubating and nurturing each chick amongst our breeding birds. This year, there was a slight increase in the number of chicks that successfully hatched - 17 Cape Vultures and two African White-Backed Vultures.

The fledglings will be released as soon as they are ready. Research has shown that Cape Vultures gain their independence at five months on average. This is a critical time for the development of fledglings because during this time they must acquire flight skills, learn how to find food sources and become self-sufficient.





At VulPro at about 5-6 months of age, we separate the fledglings from their parents to a large flight enclosure. This enables the development of independence from the parents. Therefore, we look forward to releasing the fledglings in the first quarter of 2024. Last year, a total of 13 Cape Vultures and two African White-Backed Vultures were released in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo Provinces respectively and following the thorough monitoring of each one, many are doing well



Three chocks that were artificially incubated getting their daily 30 mins of sun

Additionally, this year we attempted artificial insemination on our Lappet-Faced Vultures. This is a first for the species globally. Although no fertile eggs were produced, we were successful in collecting excellent semen samples which show our males are suitable breeding males with good quality semen. We will continue with this in the next year's breeding season unless the pairs start copulating themselves.

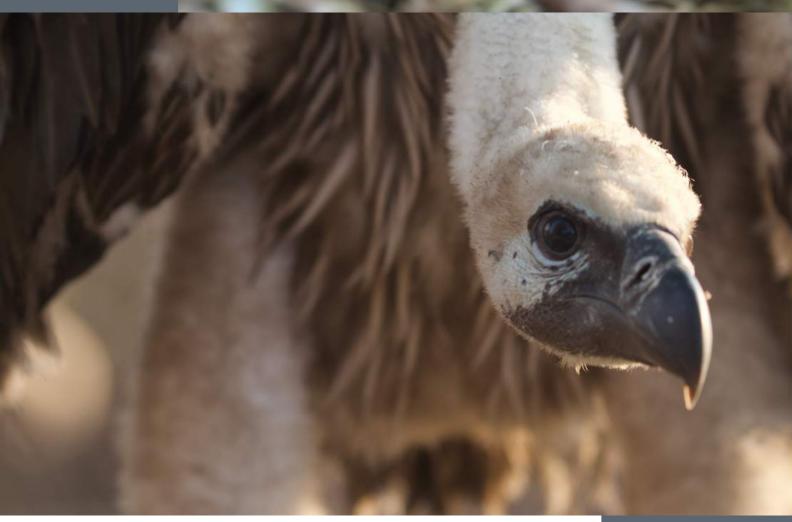


A chick hatching after artificial incubation





A Cape Vulture chick only a couple days old in its nest



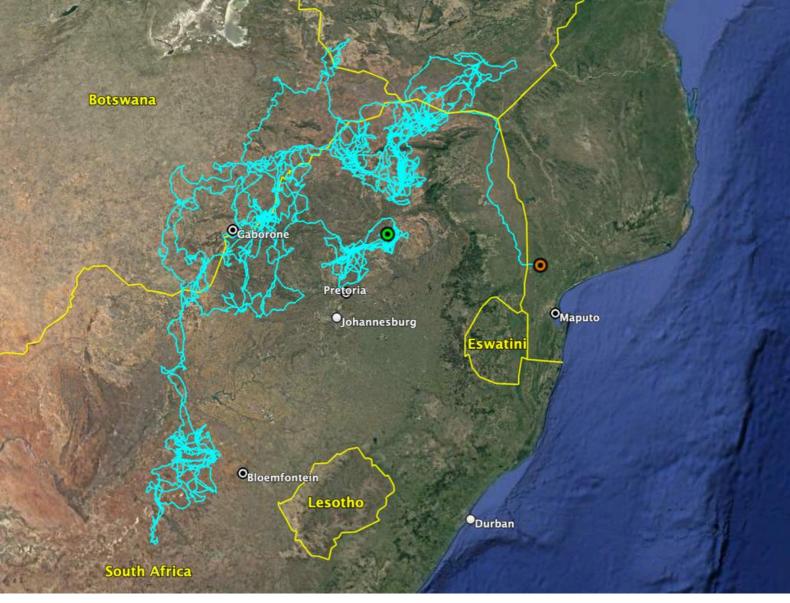
A White-backd Vulture now a couple months old





Vulture parents feircly gaurding their new chicks





Map showing the movements of the captive bred White-Backed Vulture since its release in December 2022. It started its journey near Roedtan (green dot) and has now moved through Kurger National Park into Mozambique (Orange dot).

Release Highlights

In September 2023, we saw one of our captive-bred vultures move into Kruger National Park. This is very exciting, as it is the first time one of our captive bred vultures has entered the park. This White-Backed fledgling is from our 2022 breeding season and was released in December 2022 near Roedtan.

Prior to making its way into the park, this vulture explored far and wide, moving down through parts of the Free State province, up again into the Northern Cape and North West province. It also spent time exploring southern parts of Zimbabwe and Southeast Botswana before heading into Limpopo province and entering the Kruger National Park.

Fitting GPS tracking devices onto our released birds is an integral part of our work to protect them and learn more about their behaviour.



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EASTERN CAPE UPDATE

BY KATE WEBSTER

Even though the winter months tend to be quieter with regards to vultures in the Eastern Cape / Southern Free State, my only rehab case stands out in my mind and will do for a long time to come. Kerri contacted me early in August regarding a bird that had been seen 'hanging around' in a camp on a farm just this side of Reddersburg in the Southern Free State. I contacted the landowner, Chris Russouw, and arranged to collect the bird. He had sent a video of the vulture standing in a camp close to the homestead. I set off on a journey that was going to be a good six hour round trip (this is excluding the time negotiating my badly washed and eroded part of gravel road close to Rookwood). Chris informed me that he was elsewhere on the farm as he was working cattle, but his mom-in-law would be at the house and he would join us as soon as he was finished to help catch the bird. Well mom-in-law was there, however, the vulture was not!!!! Now the camp unfortunately was not a 'normal' type camp with good fences all around. We duly spent an hour looking for the vulture, who had disappeared. Fortunately Chris arrived with extra staff and it did not take long to find the poor vulture which had pushed through the fence and almost fallen into the river. This immature vulture was not in a good way and I rehydrated the bird on site before heading back home.

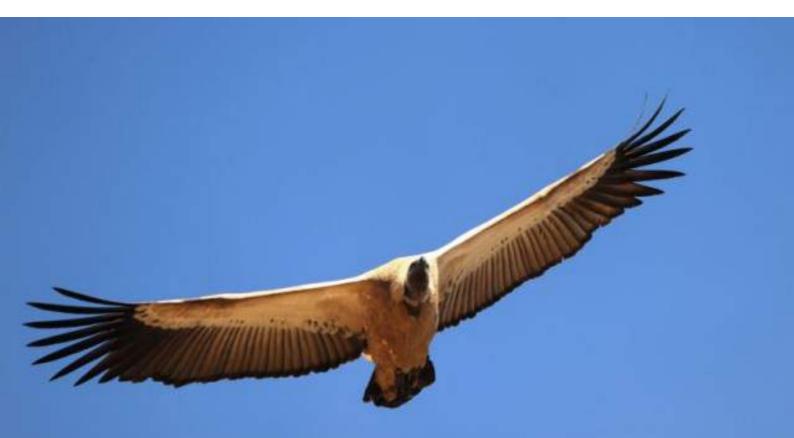
It was now well after four in the afternoon, and I knew the last part of this journey (my lovely gravel road!) would be the make or break for the bird. Much to my relief, when I got home, the bird was still alive and we could rehydrate again. The injury is a burn wound to the head. This is the first for me. Joy and I proceeded to treat the wound with honey with support medication for the pain and infection, however, knew that expert medical attention and care was needed. So, thanks to Theo, Wesley, and Mongezi from DHL Express, our miracle boy was transported to VulPro. Kerri can elaborate on this miracle vulture which will soon fly free again.



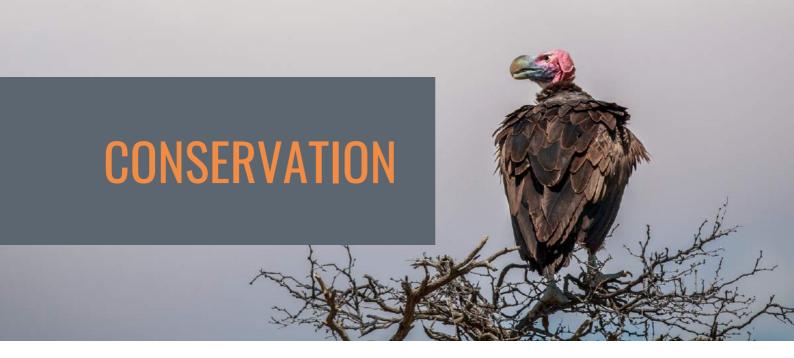
We continue to monitor the captive bred fledglings that have been released. Sadly, we recently have lost two of our released fledglings. The first was a young fledgling from 2022 which we found dead and presume the bird had been ill or had not managed to find sufficient food. The second was one of this year's captive bred fledglings that succumbed to power lines in the Southern Free State but sadly was also subjected to the muthi market trade with feet and head removed as well as a tracking device lost. Every now and then one of the released birds does pop in at the Rookwood vulture restaurant which always makes my heart happy.

On the administrative side, I carry the role of the conservation portfolio for the SA Game Hunters and Conservation Association and had to give a report on the vulture work done over the past year. I have also participated, together with VulPro, in the comments and objections submitted to prevent wind farm development in critical areas in the Eastern Cape. This is an ongoing battle and sadly so often extremely poor avifaunal reports allow development to proceed which put our birds in danger.

Recently we have done some repair work on our aviary. As usual my gratitude to my staff on the farm and Joy with those willing helping hands when needed (and a small group of volunteers). I must also thank Vivian who so diligently keeps my birds supplied with food from No2 Piggeries. Lastly, to Kerri and her staff, the support and understanding plays a huge role. Thank you.







Birds & Renewable Energy Forum

The climate and energy crises have led to a surge in countries moving towards using 'greener' resources and developing sustainable methods of generating power for ever-growing populations. One overall aim of going green is also to conserve wildlife. However, every method sadly comes with elements which, without proper mitigation and research can lead instead to an increased risk to wildlife and the environment.

In August 2023, VulPro was represented at the Birds & Renewable Energy Forum held by Birdlife South Africa at the Kirstenbosch Gardens, Conservation Centre, Cape Town. The forum brought together green energy developers, government departments, avian experts, NGOs, consultancies and researchers. The aim of the forum was to openly discuss the challenges, achievements and key research projects being done to ensure all parties can work together to protect wildlife whilst also achieving carbon zero goals.

A piece of interesting research was highlighted and Trisha Pillay from the DFFE (Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment), provided insight into how the department is attempting to ensure a more straightforward process for all those involved in the application process for green energy developments.

Trisha briefly touched on a Draft Vulture Protocol and how they aim to have it gazetted by the end of 2023. This protocol will set out guidelines for the assessment and minimum report content for the environmental impacts on Cape Vultures by onshore wind energy facilities. We are waiting in the hope that this is published soon and will provide the necessary protection to conserve all vultures.





Amongst some other interesting research shared, we heard from Rory Haschick from the Eastern Cape Department of Conservation, who reported on the status of vulture populations in the region in relation to wind turbine facilities and known collisions with wind turbines. His feedback highlighted the need for developers and government departments, along with avian specialists to work together to reduce these incidents through sound research and mitigation methods.

Sam Ralston-Paton, the organiser of the forum, presented on the Cape Vulture risk model. This model helps identify risks to vultures if wind turbines are placed in those areas with high vulture activity, based upon recorded fatalities at facilities. Sam is also putting together a report about fatalities to indicate the importance of specific mitigation measures at wind turbine facilities, for example the removal of carcasses in and around wind turbines. By removing carcasses, we reduce how attractive the area is to vultures. It is imperative that measures like this are done thoroughly at facilities along with additional monitoring. It is also necessary that any assessment of the presence of birds in the vicinity of a windfarm are conducted by highly skilled and trained staff, to ensure everything is done to protect vultures and also other avian species.

Dr Pachi Cervantes gave an insightful talk into his recently published research. This research has seen collaboration and data sharing with organisations including VulPro. His research paper is called, 'A utilisation distribution for the global population of Cape Vultures to guide wind energy developments'. The study has mapped the utilisation distribution of the species across its known range to develop a spatially explicit habitat model to estimate how birds use their range, determining their exposure to wind farm developments.



Additional research included, pertained to other raptor species under threat from these developments and how research is hoping to guide mitigation measures and conserve as many threatened species as possible.

Although many believe mitigation measures are not always strong enough or implemented correctly, a success story came from the company BTE Renewables and the measures they undertake at windfarm facilities in Kenya and more recently here at the Excelsior Wind Farm near Swellendam, Western Cape.

BTE Renewables have implemented a shut off on demand programme to mitigate birds flying in the vicinity of the wind turbines. They have highly trained dedicated teams who work all day every day in various shift patterns. They have specific points set out across the windfarm which give them a good vantage point to see when birds are entering various zones within close proximity to wind turbines. The job of the observers is to identify the species they see flying within certain height and distance bands to wind turbines. When a raptor or vulture enters these bands, they trigger an alert system. The alert instructs wind turbines remain off until the bird has left the vicinity. The observers are essentially conducting similar surveys to those which are done for pre-construction of these developments, with a key difference in that they advise when turbines must be switched off to protect the birds.

Since the inception of this method, they have drastically reduced collisions with turbines at these facilities. Since its inception 32 months ago, they have shut down the turbines 388 times for Cape Vultures and 775 times for priority species, with no reports of vulture fatalities.

The forum highlighted gaps in our knowledge and the overwhelming need for data sharing and accessibility to streamlined data and more transparency. Environmental impact assessors and developers must be guided, ensuring we are all working towards a common goal to tackle climate change and the energy crisis whilst also protecting wildlife.





INTERESTING FACTS

Globally, there are 23 vulture species: 16 species in the Old World (Africa, Europe and Asia) and seven in the New World (North and South America). New World vultures were previously considered closer to storks and are occasionally called buzzards. Of the Old World vultures, nine species are found in Africa, whilst three species – White-Headed Vulture, Hooded Vulture and Cape Vulture – are found solely in Africa.

Large Wingspan: The Lappet-Faced Vulture is Africa's largest vulture with the widest wingspan of three metres. This great wings helps them to soar high in the sky as they search for carrion. They are good at utilising thermals to glide gracefully through the sky. Thermals are columns of warm rising air that can lift birds to great heights without using much energy. Vultures have evolved to take full advantage of these natural updrafts.

Unique Appearance: Vultures have distinct features, such as long necks and bald heads which help prevent blood and meat from sticking to them. They also have a powerful hooked beak that helps them to tear at carcasses.





Clean-up Crew: Vultures play a crucial role in the ecosystems as scavengers. They are highly efficient at cleaning up carrion, which helps prevent the spread of diseases and keeps the environment clean.

Socialites: Vultures are social creatures and often gather in large groups when feeding known as "wakes." Some species, like Cape Vultures, also engage in communal roosting and nesting.



Long-Distance Travellers: Vultures are known for their expansive ranges. They can travel hundreds of kilometres in search of food and suitable nesting sites. African White-Backed Vultures can travel more than 220 km in a single day.

Strong Stomachs: Vultures have powerful stomach acids that can digest bacteria, toxins, and pathogens commonly found in carrion. This adaptation helps protect them from diseases associated with their diet.

Vultures are fascinating and often misunderstood birds, with unique adaptations that make them essential components of many ecosystems.



EDUCATION AND MEDIA

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

- VulPro's team has presented talks to 420 people since July 2023. Of these, 20 were adults and 400 were children.
- We provided educational tours of our facility to 94 visitors, including 58 adults and 36 children.
- Onyx, our Palm-Nut Vulture who is on loan at Montecasino Bird Park, Johannesburg was visited by 26,930 people over the past three months.
- VulPro's website has been visited 93 times in the past three months.
- We currently have 18,000 followers on Facebook, 2,023 followers on Twitter, 1,314 followers on Instagram, 463 subscribers on YouTube and 514 followers on LinkedIn.
- VulPro was featured in an article in the Die Pos newspaper and six online articles by The Daily Maverick, Komorant, Netwer24, Goodthingsguy, Times Live and Hartbeesfontein Newsletter.

A school group tour at VulPro







VulCha

After launching our new school-based educational programme, VulCha (Vulture Champions), in mid-March 2023, it has taken on new ground. Our team revisited Marumafase Secondary School and Biokotso Primary School near the Blouberg Nature Reserve, Limpopo. To show our commitment to the schools and their communities, in nurturing a mutually beneficial relationship, members of the VulPro team, with the help of Blouberg Reserve staff and parents of the students, gave some of their classrooms a new coat of paint. We have also added another two schools to our programme, Maphuta High School and Kgobokang Primary School, who we visited and gave presentations.

The next step in this programme will be forming VulCha student committees at the participating schools. These committees with act as ambassadors for vulture conservation in their communities. They will also help us with our activities at the schools, as well as starting their own environmental awareness initiatives.

We are extremely proud of this new project and are looking forward to the opportunity to help foster awareness and care for vultures.









VulPro has partnered with two new schools for our VulCha programme

VulPro team member, Clarence, displaying the size of real Cap<u>e Vulture wings</u>

We are reaching hundreds of students through this programme





Day Nameof

Training

In mid-September 2023, VulPro conducted training for four guides from Goo-Moremi Gorge in Botswana. During this training, they learned to: appropriately and safely handle vultures, provide emergency medical treatment, conduct vulture rehabilitation and monitor Cape Vulture breeding colonies. This training will allow these guides to provide life-saving care to vultures who are beyond our reach.



The trainees helping to provide medical treatment for a Cape Vulture



The trainees conducting Cape Vulture breeding colony surveys





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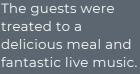
A delicous main and dessert selection included. Cash bar. R450 per person. BOOKINGS: Dave 082 787 0340 or dave@bcspro.co.za. DiE OU PASTORIE Kat.1865

Heritage Day Fundraiser

Heritage Day 2023, was celebrated by VulPro with a fundraising event at Die Ou Pastorie, a picturesque venue in Skeerpoort. There was delicious food, live musical entertainment and a raffle with exciting prizes. VulPro team members had fun manning our stand selling merchandise and educating supporters about vultures. It was altogether a great way to celebrate vultures as a part of our natural heritage.

A big thank you to Die Ou Pastorie and its lovely staff, Dave Stewart and First Consulting Alliance for putting together a great event and to everyone who supported us with your presence. VulPro team member, Obert, manning our merchandise stand (left), and the invitation to the event (right)







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

As the field work components of this project come to a close, we now enter the exciting stage of the project, where we are able to begin with the data analysis we have been able to gather thus far. Between July and September 2023, we began with the analysis of the first part of this project, focusing on our breeding data and looking at how breeding site selection and breeding successes may differ over years. We also focused on loose colonies as an effect of changing temperature, rainfall and other factors relating to climate change.

This has been an extremely exciting time for the project as we begin to see just how important the years of data collection conducted by VulPro and our collaborating organisations actually is. This is just another example of how data over many years allows us to see how spaces are changing and helps predict what we can expect from these sites in the future. The data that we have put together thus far has included over 1,200 African White-Backed Vulture nests in southern Africa and dates as far back as 2000. We are extremely excited to see the data unfold as we explore it further and dig deeper into the effects of climate change on the breeding of African White-Backed Vultures in Southern Africa.



A VulPro researcher observes a pair of African White-Backed Vultures at a nest.



Our work still will include one more set of field work dates that we will be conducted at the end of September and the beginning of October. These field trips will be conducted as the second breeding survey of 2023 and will add brand new breeding data to our dataset, keeping us at the forefront of these issues. We are looking forward to heading out soon to see how successful the colonies we monitor have been this year.

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

A pair of African White-Backed Vultures protect their nest, Dwaalboom, South Africa.





African White-backed Vulture Monitoring

It is that time of the year again, when we head out to the colonies and begin monitoring both colonies and nesting sites to ascertain which nests have been successful. Although we are still at the beginning of the monitoring season, it has begun with a few successes.

Our team from VulPro including volunteer Robyn from Dallas Zoo, went out to Dwaalboom during the final week of September 2023 to monitor known nesting sites, assess population numbers and hopefully find new nesting sites. In previous survey seasons, there have often been nesting sites which were inaccessible due to bush encroachment and this has left the team unable to record whether the nests were indeed active or not.

Prior to this season's monitoring, VulPro was fortunate enough to be able to invest in a drone. The drone certainly produced some great results for the team and located nests which had not been observed on previous trips and it also allowed the team to see areas which had not been accessed before.

Robyn from Dallas Zoo searching for nests using binoculars.







VulPro team member, Clarence, getting the drone airborne.

The table below indicates the active nests from our first trip earlier this year to Dwaalboom and our recent trip. A few farms reported an increase in active nests because of using the drone to gain access to nests. Two of the farms in the survey reported zero active nests, both of which had active nests last season. Further investigation into what may have happened to these nests and reasons why the birds may have left is needed.

Location	Active nests (June/Jul 2023)	Active nests (Sept 2023)
Haakdoorn	20	5
Numzaan Safaris	13	14
Swartbos	4	4
Unknown farms	5	7
Groenedal	3	5
Laastepoort	1	0
Leeudoring	1	0
Loggerinde Hoek	0	1
Kallie Lee Farm	0]
Nondo	0	0
Ultimo	-	-
Hogenbomen	2	3
Rooiderbokvale	2	14
Dwaalboom Total	51	74

Results of the African White-backed Vulture nest surveys from Dwaalboom, for the first and second survey of the season.





Using a ladder to access a nest.

> We will continue with our tree nesting surveys at the beginning of October 2023 and hope the use of the drone at our other breeding sites will show an increase in nests like Dwaalboom. Although two sites had lost nesting sites, the overall result is an increase in occupied nesting sites which is great news for the vulture population.

> Our thanks to Robyn for assisting the team with the surveys and to Nick from Laastepoort for hosting the team and all the landowners and managers for providing us with access to the nesting sites on their land.





Cape Vulture Monitoring

September is here once again and time for the team at VulPro to head out to the Cape Vulture colonies to assess nests and ascertain how the populations are doing.

We began our surveys in the Magaliesberg, where Scheerpoort and Nooitgedacht colonies were monitored, followed by a visit to Moletjie and the Soutpansberg colony. Right at the beginning of October 2023, the team will continue the monitoring at Kransberg, where international volunteer Sue Fox will be assisting us and finally, we will finish up the season at the Manutsa colony.

These will be the final surveys for 2023 and the team are looking to see which nests have been successful at raising chicks. Most colonies receive two visits per year from the team, with Skeerpoort and Nooitgedacht receiving a third visit. These two colonies have the benefit of not being too far away from VulPro's main centre and therefore the team can spare time to squeeze in an extra survey.

The following table gives an indication of our survey results thus far. Scheerpoort (as of now) showed the most success with the September 2023 surveys identifying new nests most with fledglings or active pairs. We hope when next year's survey season begins that those nests are still active and that the numbers will continue to rise. Nooitgedacht has seen a drop in numbers throughout all surveys this year. There are many reasons why this might be and we take all of them into account when assessing the numbers. With all surveys we must account for observer error and know even with successes there can still be a margin of error.



Results of the Cape	Vulture	breeding	colony	surveys	for four sites
incourts of the cupe	varcare	breeding	colony	Sarveys	for rour sites

Location	Active nests (May/June 2023)	Active nests (Jul/Aug 2023)	Active nests (Sept 2023)	Breeding Success
Scheerpoort	293	283	330	113%
Nooitgedacht	180	166	147	82%
Soutpansberg	247		199	80%
Moletjie	4		2	50%

We hope reductions in active nests is a not sign of population decline, however, we will take every opportunity to find ways of tackling these declines. For example, we have seen declines continuing at our Moletjie colony and during the recent visit there, active nests had sadly declined by 50%. The team were lucky enough to catch up with a staff member based at the colony to discuss why these declines may be occurring. The reserve where the colony is has over the years seen an increase in human settlement encroachment on the reserve. Also, more people are coming into the reserve for leisure purposes, which may have led to a disturbance of the colony.



VulPro team member, Rhiannon, monitoring nests at the colony in Soutpansberg in-between bouts of misty low lying cloud.



Colony at Soutpansberg shrouded in mist (above). VulPro team member, Orbert, hiking up the mountain to get to the perfect monitoring spot (below).

After our September 2023 visit, VulPro is now in discussion with the reserve staff to set up some educational visits to local schools and the community, to educate them about the importance of vultures in our environment and how they can help us protect the species. We are also working towards minimising disturbance to the colony through engagement with reserve staff.

The Soutpansberg colony also saw a reduction in its active nests and reduced evidence of whitewash around previous nests. The team have located some new nests, but the number of active nests is still lower than our first survey earlier this year. This colony is often shrouded in low lying cloud and mist, therefore there is a strong possibility some nests were not seen during the survey or constant alterations in weather conditions caused some vultures to move or not be successful in breeding. This colony also has breeding Verreaux's eagles on the other side of the mountain and vulture chicks can be easy prey for these big raptors. The team hope 2024 will provide more fruitful results. In the meantime, we will invest as much time as possible in educating communities about the plight and importance of vultures.







MEET OUR VOLUNTEER **ROBIN RYAN**

Hello, my name is Robin Ryan, and I am the manager of Ambassador Animal Experiences at the Dallas Zoo. When I started my career in animal care and conservation, I was actually afraid of birds. But through working with them

I learned to love how they are amazing and unique. I worked with my first vulture in 2008 and quickly fell in love. A huge part of my job is connecting people with the natural world and inspiring them to create a better world for animals. Vultures are so often vilified in pop culture, and society in general, it is a really powerful moment to feel when a guest has made a positive connection.

The vulture in our program is a non-releasable imprinted black vulture, a US native species, that joined our team from a local rehab center. I find it vital to connect people to what they see in their own spaces and build on those connections to relate to global conservation efforts. I lovingly refer to him as a 'gateway vulture' so we can start the conversation about African vultures. My favorite part of his encounters is watching guests change their viewpoints right in front of us. He is very active, running around, following trainers, and participates in free-flight behaviors which provide a very dynamic experience for people. I often hear guests leaving encounters with a new positive perspective on vultures.



Dallas Zoo is a supporter of 12 major conservation projects around the globe and one of our focuses is African vultures. Every year Dallas Zoo sends team members to support some of those conservation organizations and efforts. Every year I have applied to come to VulPro. When I tell you that I burst into tears at the news that I was going this year, it is not an exaggeration. To visit VulPro and help the work on the front line has been a dream of mine. And it has not disappointed! It has really given me a new perspective on how much work this entire team puts in daily. From long drives to monitor nests, hot days in the bush, last minute change of plans due to a chick in need, scramble to tag a nestling before it has fledged, heavy lifting, manual labor, very smelly food items, managing a social media account, managing days off, monitoring the 20 chicks slated for reintroduction, and everything else in between, the team members and volunteers who are spending their days at VulPro are unbelievably dedicated and hard-working. Thank you for letting me be a part if it.





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.



MAX-PLANCK-GESELLSCHAFT

Max-Planck-Gesellschaft is pivotal а partner of VulPro, helping us take vulture research to new heights. With MaxPlanck Institute's support, we have been able to fit multiple vultures with GPS tracking devices, unlocking invaluable insights into their flight paths and ranges. Amongst many other research avenues, this data will feed into our study that is exploring the potential impacts of future climate change scenarios on the behaviours of African White-Backed Vultures. This is imperative information for understanding how best we can protect them and their suitable habitats into the future.

AE Solutions has played an invaluable role in our vulture conservation efforts by supporting our rehabilitation programme and the general operation of our centre. Their sponsorship enables us to rescue injured vultures from across South Africa and provide specialised care, medical treatment, and rehabilitation, ultimately increasing the chances of releasing these birds back again into their natural habitat.







Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust

Frnst Kleinwort Charitable Trust's generous sponsorship will help equip us with vital tools for our captive breeding programme, namely an incubator and GPS tracking devices. These invaluable additions not only enhance our capacity to care for our precious vulture chicks and bolster our breeding capabilities, but ensure our ability to monitor their wellbeing and integration success once they return to the wild. These resources are a huge contribution to our vulture population restoration efforts.

Zoo Zlin/Lesna is a major sponsor of VulPro's wild population research. They have helped to fund our tree nesting surveys which allows us to closely monitor the breeding success of White-Backed Vultures in the wild. This enables us to understand how the populations are changing and inform our conservation efforts. This data is also informing our project aimed at determining how climate change may impact African White-Backed vulture breeding. This research is imperative for adaptive conservation management and to allow us to support the survival of this species into the future



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 SUE FOX

Haai! Hello everyone! My name is Sue Fox. I'm 65, retired and I'm originally from Manchester, UK. I'm writing this short article from the VulPro Centre in Rietfontein. I arrived on the 24th September 2023 and I'll be a volunteer here for 3 weeks. I've done a lot of volunteer jobs over the years in different fields and in 2017, was able to work on a wildlife monitoring and conservation project in Kwa Zulu Natal for 2 weeks. It was amazing and such a life-changing experience for me. Wildlife certainly kept me from going insane during the Covid-19 pandemic!

I don't live in the UK, but have been living and working in Cambodia, Southeast Asia for 28 years. Cambodia by the way, is a poor and developing country. I've always worked in education there (teaching/ training and project management) and my last job – for over 9 years – was working as a military English teacher at the capital city's (Phnom Penh) National Defence University, where I taught Cambodian enlisted military personnel from the national army, navy, air force and military police.

I first visited Africa about 40 years ago, when I went on a cheap and cheerful safari holiday to the Masai Mara, Kenya. I think that's where my love of wildlife truly began.Also, my Dad loved bird-watching – especially birds of prey. I've been very fortunate since the 1990s to have been able to visit several other countries in Africa and places on other continents – seeing wildlife – and this is honestly my passion. I want to see so many more places though whilst I'm still fit enough to travel.





Last September, I was in the UK for a couple of months and I visited an organisation called the Gauntlet Conservation Trust, who by chance happen to be a donor for VulPro. That's where I learnt about the plight vultures worldwide are facing. Prior to that – despite my love of wildlife – I was ignorant about the many dangers that are threatening vultures.

I contacted Kerri and she kindly agreed that I could come and be a volunteer for this worthwhile vulture rehabilitation project. The rest is history, because now I am here and loving every minute of my time!

I have different duties e.g. preparing meat for vultures receiving essential treatment and some orphaned vulture chicks, taking photographs, checking the vultures in the enclosures are okay, hanging out in the hide at the vulture restaurant observing and tag monitoring, filling water ponds for the birds and proofreading documents for Kerri. We have to be flexible, work well on our own and with the team and be patient, as priorities can change in the wink of an eye.

Next week, I am going to the field for 5 days to the biggest vulture colony that VulPro is surveying and monitoring. So that's very exciting! I really admire all the work that VulPro is doing to safeguard vultures and the dedication and hard work of all the staff. They are amazing role models!

Keep up your support for VulPro and PLEASE spread the word far and wide – as often as you can! We can't live without vultures – if they're gone there would be serious consequences for our ecosystems and the human population.

Nice meeting you through this article and hope you enjoyed reading it!



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 CONSERVATION MANAGER

Following an extended period working in the retail sector, I decided to pursue a career in conservation. Something my heart had only dreamt about since childhood school-days, where I was inspired by amazing teachers who instilled a love for nature within me.

After completing my honours degree in Wildlife Biology obtained from the University of South Wales, UK, I began my journey towards working closely with birds. I spent three years gaining hands-on experience as a Seabird Rehabilitator for SANCCOB, Cape Town and it was here my passion for birds grew.

Since SANCCOB, I have continued to grow my skill set, assisting as a research assistant and avifaunal surveyor for several projects, as well as gaining experience with surveying mammals and managing extensive camera trapping data.

The experience gained, led me to apply and undertake a position as an Aviculturist for the Gough Island Restoration Programme with the RSPB, a challenging yet rewarding life-changing experience.

Prior to joining VulPro, I have been undertaking Avifaunal survey work for preconstruction of wind farms. Throughout this work, I have been exposed to how important it is to ensure we can work harmoniously to protect our birds and wildlife whilst tackling the energy crisis.

I am excited to take on the challenges in my role at VulPro to grow, develop existing and also learning new skills. I also aim to bring my experience as a rehabilitator and aviculturist to the position, where it may benefit the incredible work done by Kerri and the rest of the team.



WITH THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS



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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 Vultures, Abigaille and Ismaele; 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 to find out who is open for adoption







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