



2023

ANNUAL REPORT



PROTECTING AFRICAN VULTURES THROUGH COLLABORATION & INNOVATION

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WORD FROM THE CEO

It is hard to believe 2023 has come and gone, almost as quickly as a lightning bolt, leaving my head spinning. Each year seems to whiz past quicker and quicker and yet, the magnitude of our work and conservation efforts continues to grow, leaving me to question: "how is it possible to conquer everything we have or had set out to do?" BUT, in true VulPro style, the birds drove our passion in allowing us to move one step at a time, as a team in unity and strength, conquering what often feels like the impossible.

To say I am proud of the VulPro team is an understatement as 2023 pushed every one of us to our limits. Not only did we plan the biggest vulture translocation move to ever occur globally, we did this whilst experiencing the busiest rehabilitation season to date, undertaking health checks on every single individual bird in our care, not to mention keeping on top of reports, grant proposals, field surveys, welcoming new staff members and saying goodbye to those who have left us, all within the timeline of completing our move to the Eastern Cape and setting up *VulPro@Shamwari* before the dawn of 2024. Not only did we conquer and succeed, but we did this with laughter, passion, and continuing commitment to putting our best foot forward, even when the going got tough.

Seventeen years ago, I remember someone saying to me, "You have a choice to make, you can keep

VulPro as small as you want or make it a formidable vulture conservation organisation'. I shrugged his message away and thought very little about it until recently. Who would have ever imagined it would grow this much and have such an impact? And yet, YOU all believed in VulPro and our mission, commitment, dedication, and passion, and for that, I will be eternally grateful. Our work, our efforts, our positive results, and our continued commitment and drive are motivated by the commitment and support we get from each one of YOU, our sponsors, friends, volunteers, loved ones, and those who follow and support our work from near and far.

I am proud to present our 2023 Annual Report to you. Although this report does not show the weary and tired eyes, the out-of-breath flushed faces, and the sheer exhaustion - mixed with laughter, smiles and the ever-present passion - I can assure you, hidden in each of these words are the tireless hours we have spent protecting, preserving, saving, and conserving Africa's vultures for us and future generations.

Together, we stand strong, stronger than ever before.

Kerri

Vulpro CEO





WORD FROM THE CHAIR

It's hard to believe that we've started a new year, let alone it already being February. However, it is easy to lose track of time when we are busy, and VulPro had a very busy 2023 - undergoing changes and now operating at two major sites (Hartbeespoort and Shamwari). In addition to bringing new staff onboard, we welcomed a new manager at the Hartbeespoort facility, as Kerri had made the move to the Eastern Cape to take responsibility for the daily operations of *VulPro@Shamwari*. The latter now allows VulPro the real opportunity of introducing vultures back into their historic ranges, all thanks to the many years of experience gained with the Magaliesberg colony and the artificial breeding enclosure set up at Hartbeespoort. While it will take a few more years to get the birds breeding naturally in the wild on the Eastern Cape cliffs, this certainly looks like a strong possibility. Added to this, we have also had success with sperm collection from Lappet-faced vultures, bringing forward the possibility of artificial insemination in vultures!

While we have achieved much success, we still have work to do. The key to achieving this is to ensure that vultures are kept safe, which, based on another extremely busy rehab year, indicates that more will need to be done in years to come as we tackle the impacts of climate change.

Thankfully our advocacy and community work are bearing fruit, with educational campaigns resulting in more engaged communities that have started reporting injured vultures and using what they learn to teach others as well. VulPro's advocacy programmes persist, and we are engaging with government departments and other stakeholders to better protect vultures.

Most recently, our activities have focused on tackling the increasing levels of lead poisoning as a result of the ingestion of lead shot. This year will also see my term as Chair of the Board come to an end on what I consider to be a remarkable journey that started with one enclosure and an idea, but has now changed how the country and world see vulture management and conservation. As we move forward into 2024, I'm sure that VulPro will have another busy and (re)productive year.

Prof. Vinny Naidoo

Vulpro Chair

ACCOMPLISHING VULPRO'S MISSION



OUR MISSION:

To protect African vultures through collaboration and innovation.

To succeed in our mission, we focus on four key focal areas: (1) Rescue and rehabilitation, (2) Captive breeding for population supplementation, (3) Research for optimising vulture conservation in South Africa, and (4) Community engagement.

RESCUE & REHABILITATION

By staying on the frontline of helping injured vultures and using rehabilitation methods developed over many years of work, we rehabilitate and release as many injured vultures as possible. We use an on-site hospital that specialises in the immediate care of vultures in need and have collaborated with specialised vets to pin broken wings that have seen vultures fly again.

CAPTIVE BREEDING FOR POPULATION SUPPLEMENTATION

In instances where birds cannot be released due to their injuries, we incorporate them into our captive breeding programme. They can then pair up, lay eggs, and raise their chicks. We release the youngsters so they can continue to contribute to their species' survival.

RESEARCH FOR OPTIMISING VULTURE CONSERVATION IN AFRICA

High-impact research is conducted at VulPro that contributes to our understanding of vultures in Africa. We strive to improve our research by collaborating with other institutes in mutually beneficial arrangements that enhances knowledge and expertise transfer around the world. Instances of collaborative research include population monitoring, tracking, and using coloured monitoring leg bands as part of the rehabilitation process and the release programmes. We use GPS transmitters to monitor our released birds' survival and foraging movements. It helps us understand movement patterns and behaviours, such as breeding and roosting. The wild populations are monitored annually at breeding sites. We maintain a re-sighting database using camera traps, photographs, and public sightings. In this way, we track wild, rehabilitated and captive-bred individuals past the point of transmitter failure.

As we are so often in the field, we have been able to engage more with local landowners and extend our outreach programme to communicate the plight of African vultures.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The communities surrounding the vulture colonies and other areas that vultures use play an essential role in the species' survival. For this reason, we engage with the communities as part of our outreach and education campaign and embark on intensive bi-directional communication where we can understand the communities' concerns. Our education includes presentations, demonstrations, printed educational material, and social media.

We strive to ensure that vultures do not become extinct. We all know that it is much harder to re-introduce a species than to move individuals to supplement an existing population.

OUR **YEAR** AT A GLANCE

154



BIRDS RESCUED

3

SCIENTIFIC PAPERS
PUBLISHED



196

CITINGS OF OUR
PUBLICATIONS

16



CAPTIVE-BRED
VULTURES BORN

2,439



ACTIVE VULTURE NESTS
MONITORED

55



BIRDS RELEASED



55,513

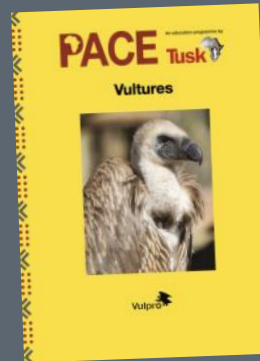


PEOPLE REACHED THROUGH
EDUCATION &
OUTREACH



8,034

VISITS TO OUR WEBSITE



VULCHA (VULTURE CHAMPIONS)
EDUCATION PROGRAMME & **PACE**
BOOKLETS LAUNCHED.

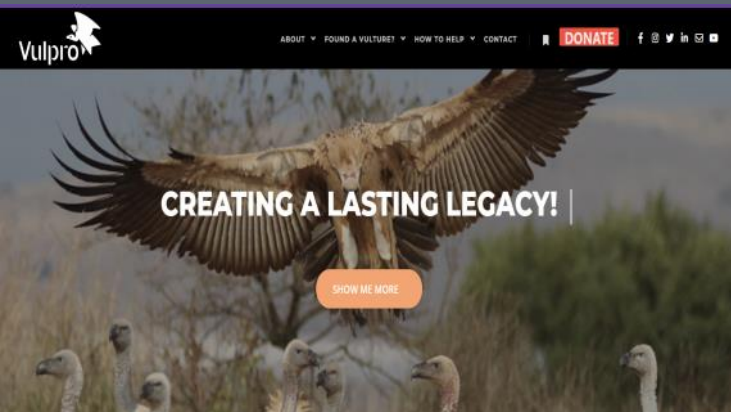
18,554

FOLLOWERS
ON
FACEBOOK



VULPRO@SHAMWARI

NEW VULPRO
FACILITY AT
SHAMWARI
PRIVATE
RESERVE



RESCUE & REHABILITATION

The most crucial work that we do is rescue and rehabilitation. By helping the individual, we can support the survival of the broader species.

Throughout 2023, we rescued and rehabilitated birds from across the country. As is typically the case, the beginning and the end of the year were our busiest periods. Table 1 summarises the rescue and releases conducted by VulPro between 2010 and 2023.

REASONS FOR ADMISSION

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 availability of natural food.

Many birds were admitted for unknown reasons (29), but the most common primary cause for admission was collisions with power lines (26), followed by recently fledged youngsters finding themselves grounded and unable to take off again (19), and electrocutions (10). Most of our non-releasable cases are from power line-related injuries. But what concerns us the most, ending off the 2023 year, was the number of individuals we rescued during sting operations performed to save vultures from the

trade in their parts for belief-based purposes. This threat appears to be increasing, and we are now being exposed to this almost daily, which invariably also places staff at risk.

Figure 1 (right) shows the reasons birds were admitted to VulPro, and what percentage of the birds were admitted per reason.

TABLE 1: Summary of birds rescued and released by VulPro between 2006 and 2023

Year	Vultures			Other bird species		
	Rescued	Released	Success rate	Rescued	Released	Success rate
2006	4	2	50%	0	0	0%
2007	30	26	87%	1	1	100%
2008	14	6	43%	0	0	0%
2009	24	13	54%	0	0	0%
2010	30	17	43%	14	4	29%
2011	39	15	38%	17	7	41%
2012	58	31	53%	15	6	40%
2013	46	24	52%	13	7	54%
2014	72	15	21%	8	9	113%
2015	75	21	28%	22	12	55%
2016	73	16	22%	9	3	33%
2017	108	72	67%	24	2	8%
2018	120	48	40%	14	4	29%
2019	93	40	43%	59	37	63%
2020	81	17	21%	20	6	30%
2021	84	50	60%	12	4	33%
2022	89	49	55%	12	5	41%
2023	138	52	38%	16	3	19%



Figure 1: Reasons birds were admitted to VulPro and their percentages

ANNUAL HEALTH CHECKS

More than 250 birds are permanent residents at Vulpro and we conducted our annual health checks on these birds in February 2023. Health checks entail catching each bird at VulPro to give them a physical exam and take blood for testing. With our new X-ray equipment, we could check up on old injuries in some of the birds. No major health concerns were found across the birds in residence at VulPro. All cases of chronic bumble foot were under control, and the general condition of the birds was satisfactory. The large amount of blood work data from the health checks allowed us to establish 'normal' ranges for certain indicators in healthy vultures. VulPro staff have been trained in blood analysis techniques, enabling us to diagnose conditions such as anaemia, dehydration, starvation, and infection in real-time, ensuring rapid, accurate and effective treatment for our patients.



CAPTIVE BREEDING PROGRAMME

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 started early and was characterised by constantly shifting weather patterns that created confusion and disruption in incubating and nurturing each chick amongst our breeding birds, causing some egg losses and early embryo deaths. Nevertheless, there was a slight increase in the number of chicks that successfully hatched this year - 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.

In addition, for the first time 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, has

successfully taken semen from two of our male Lappet-faced Vultures. The samples are showing very good semen collection with viable sperm, and since the collection, we have 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.

We will continue with this in the next year's breeding season unless the pairs start copulating themselves.

The cohort of fledglings in 2023 comprises 14 Cape Vultures and one African White-backed Vulture. Our single captive-bred White-backed vulture, together with three other rehabilitated individuals, all of whom are the same age, were released in the Dwaalboom region within Limpopo province on 22 December 2023. The 14 Cape Vulture fledglings will all be moved to the Eastern Cape on 21 January 2024, in preparation for their release using a soft release method.

We are also proud to announce that, as part of the breeding programme expansion, we have partnered with Shamwari Private Game Reserve, which will soon be home to VulPro's breeding birds and the largest captive breeding programme for African vultures.



MONITORING RELEASED CAPTIVE-BRED VULTURES

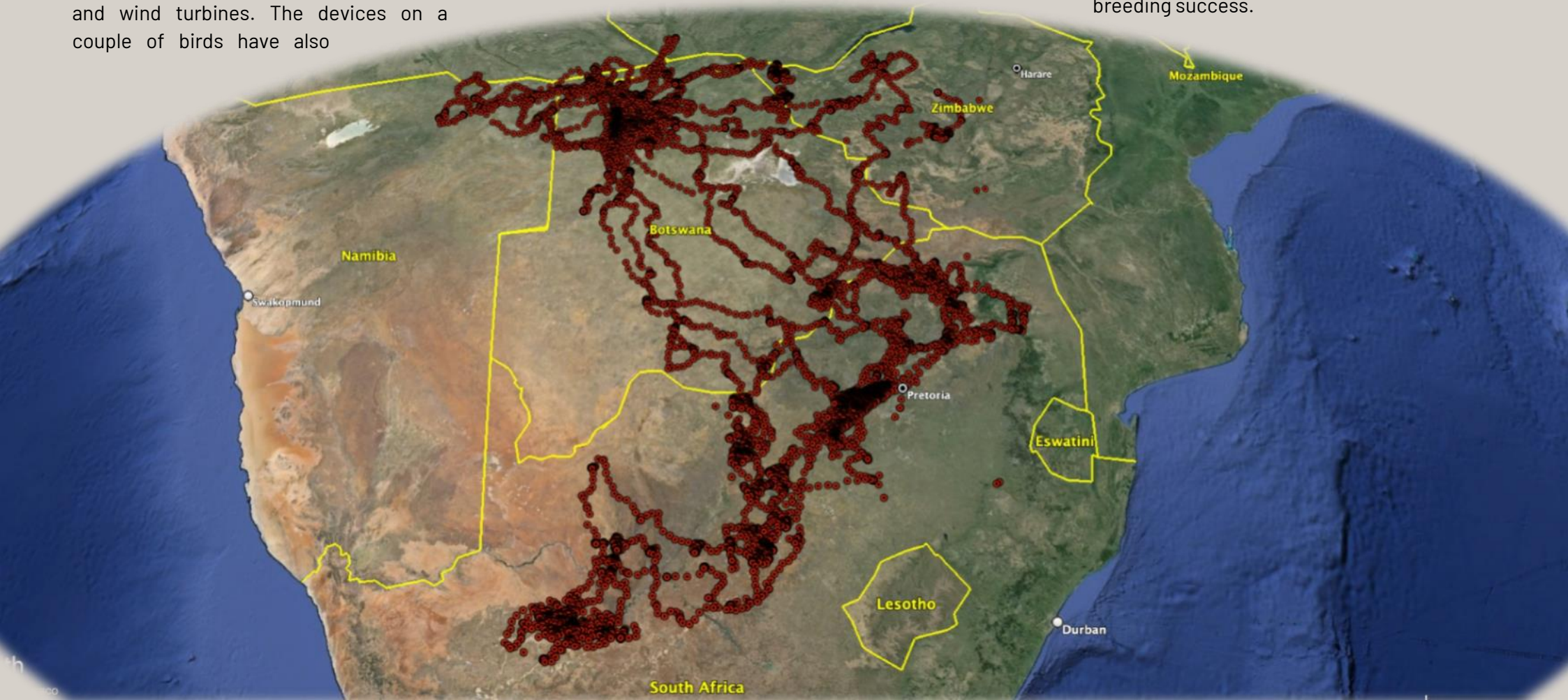
It is motivating to follow the movements of our released vultures and incredible to see the distances they travel. In 2022 13 Cape Vultures and two African White-backed Vultures were released in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo Province respectively and many are doing well. Of the 36 captive-bred vultures we have released, we are still actively tracking 24 of them. Sadly, five have been confirmed dead, victims of poaching, powerlines, and wind turbines. The devices on a couple of birds have also

stopped sending signals, a risk with GPS tracking devices.

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

poacher. This is a very sad outcome that shows the dangers these birds face daily.

We have been releasing captive-bred vultures for eight years, which means the first releases are reaching reproductive age. This is exciting as the true conservation impact of our breeding programme will be realised when our released birds begin to contribute offspring to the wild population. We are currently analysing data further to see how these birds are integrated into the population and hope to confirm their breeding success.



RESEARCH: BREEDING SURVEYS

OVERVIEW

VulPro monitors breeding populations twice a year to understand the number of breeding pairs and the breeding success of these pairs, ultimately recording and evaluating the success of the population within each survey site.

TREE-NESTING VULTURE MONITORING

In 2023, we surveyed three areas for the African White-backed Vultures comprising 21 properties with 144 active nests observed during the initial survey period. Our final surveys in October yielded an average breeding success rate of 83% - this is an increase on last year's figures, likely due to additional nests being observed at the Dwaalboom sites during our final surveys. Although an increase in nests was observed, active nests across the three sites showed a reduction in numbers during the year.

All three sites showed a decrease in active nests in our initial surveys, and the Dwaalboom site was the only one to show an increase at the end of our survey period.

During our final 2023 surveys, we were able to make use of a drone. The drone was invaluable to us and helped locate nests we had not had access to in previous years due to bush encroachment or alterations in landowners and property access. By using a drone, we were also able to identify several nests in the Mareetsane area with dead chicks. This discovery highlighted the need for further engagement with landowners and the community in the region.

The drone also assisted us in locating an orphaned chick at a nest in Dwaalboom. The chick was found sitting in its nest with a dead adult bird below. It was recovered from the nest and taken to VulPro to be raised by foster parents until it can be released back into the wild.

Apart from finding the orphaned chick and the unfortunate discovery of dead chicks, we had one exciting find.

In Dwaalboom, a Lappet-faced Vulture chick was found sitting on a nest, parents thankfully still around and taking care of it.

As we know little about the movement ecology of these vultures outside of protected areas within South Africa, we took the opportunity to return to the area, safely removed the chick from the nest and fitted a GPS tracking device, SAFRING and a coloured leg band to it before carefully returning it to the nest. We are now closely monitoring the nestling via the GPS tracking device, eagerly awaiting to see it fledge the nest and venture out into the world. It currently flying a few kilometres away from the nest, testing out its wings and flight techniques before returning to the nest site.

Figure 2: Tree nesting survey results for 2023 indicating breeding success recorded for African White-backed vultures across the three sites surveyed.



CAPE VULTURE BREEDING SURVEYS

In 2023 we successfully monitored six Cape Vulture colonies across northern parts of South Africa. A total of 2,268 breeding pairs were observed in our initial surveys and a total of 2,295 active nests for the year were recorded. The six Cape Vulture colonies surveyed comprise approximately 50-60% of the entire breeding population, with Kransberg and Manutsa being two of the largest colonies.

Breeding success across the colonies varied between 25% and over 100%. The colony at Moletjie showed the largest decline in numbers, whilst Kransberg and Skeerpoort were the only colonies to show an increase in breeding success this year. The overall breeding success for the year across all six of the colonies was 83%.

In addition to the six monitored colonies, a site survey was carried out on a property near the Zastron Colony in Free State Province. This area, once a breeding ground for Cape

Vultures suffered declines in numbers and reports of the birds not returning to the colony to breed. The last records of breeding at the colony were over 20 years ago. Reports of vultures returning to the colony in 2020 led Dawie de Swardt from the National Museum to carry out a survey. He surveyed approximately 60 birds leaving the colony and counted 200 birds in the area. Since 2020, no new records have been published.

Our team visited the site near breeding season this year, as local farmers reported seeing vultures returning to the colony to roost. Although no evidence of breeding was observed during the site survey, we will return to the area to monitor the birds' behaviour in the hope that they begin to breed there again.

Monitoring these areas and colonies over many years has provided us with valuable data and enabled us to see how variations in active nests, breeding pairs and fledgling numbers change. Changes can easily be compared year on year and when numbers at colonies drastically alter between years, we can investigate why these changes may have occurred.

This year we noticed steep declines in one colony, the Moletjie colony. Upon further investigation and engagement with rangers in the area, we discovered the declines could be linked to the local community not knowing enough about vultures or why they are so valuable to our

ecosystem. Our education team has since jumped into action and invested time in providing education to the community, which we hope will improve the breeding success of the colony during our 2024 surveys.

Continued engagement with the communities living alongside vultures and in particular near their colonies can go a long way to ensure these magnificent birds are protected at ground level.

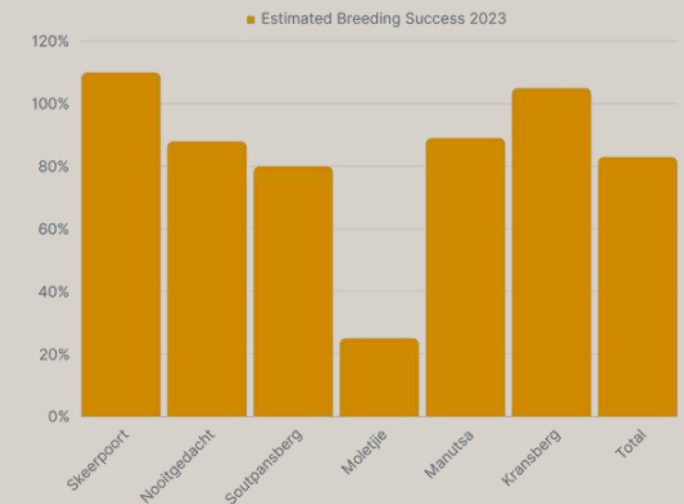


Figure 3: Estimated breeding success rates for 2023 for the six Cape Vulture colonies monitored by VulPro.



RESEARCH: PROJECTS

ACTIVE RESEARCH PROJECTS

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

Fieldwork Challenges and Progress

Despite initial challenges in capturing birds during fieldwork in the Northern Cape Kalahari, the team remained resilient and was rewarded when five individuals were captured and tagged in the Lowveld of Mpumalanga in April. The conclusion of fieldwork included surveys conducted in Mareetsane, Dwaalboom, and Roedtan. Challenges such as reduced nesting success rates and potential poisoning incidents were addressed through community engagement initiatives.

Data Analysis and Insights

Data analysis comprised of examining breeding records and tracking data collected in previous years. Initial analyses focused on correlating maximum temperature with nesting success rates, leveraging collaborative efforts and climatic data access. Preliminary findings revealed intriguing patterns in breeding site selection and colony dynamics, providing valuable insights into vulture behaviour and climate change impacts. The project team anticipates significant advancements in understanding vulture ecology, with plans for publications and continued research in 2024.

The project's success is attributed to the dedication of the research team, supervisors, advisors, and numerous collaborators and partners, including the Endangered Wildlife Trust, Dronfield Nature Reserve, Leibniz Institute, National University of Science and Technology, Zimbabwe, Max Planck Institute, North Carolina Zoo, University of Eswatini, University of Pretoria, Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust, and Wildlife ACT. Special thanks to the funders of this project, AZA Conservation Grants Fund, Colchester Zoo, Dallas Zoo, Greenville Zoo, IAATE, Society for Conservation Biology and Zoo Zlin.

Assessing the effects of regional food predictability on the foraging behaviour of African White-backed Vultures (*Gyps Africanus*) throughout sub-Saharan Africa.

This research compares the movement and feeding patterns of African White-backed Vulture individuals in Tanzania, South Africa, and Ethiopia, each of which has different prominent food types for foraging vultures. Tanzania primarily has large wild ungulate herds and elephants, which are generally unpredictable in both where and when their carcasses may occur. South Africa, in contrast, has more human activity and many vulture restaurants, which are more predictable in



where they occur and tend to be more frequent sources of food for vultures. The final site, Ethiopia, has a much higher human presence than the other two and vultures residing in this country have access to many abattoirs and other incidental, human-mediated food types that are regular spatially and temporally.

Researcher Mattie Purinton used GPS telemetry data from the North Carolina Zoo, the Peregrine Fund, Hawk Watch, and VulPro, to calculate several metrics for large and small-scale foraging behaviours of 74 African White-backed Vultures. Mattie is finalising the analysis of these behaviours and the differences between sites and plans to publish the findings in 2024.

PROJECTS COMMENCING

Project title: Does lead poisoning impair avian thermoregulation in the heat of Pied Crows?

Project title: Examining the foraging ranges and behaviours of African White-backed and Cape Vultures in the Gauteng and North West Provinces of South Africa

Project title: The movement ecology and survival rate of captive-bred Cape Vultures

Project title: Changes in raptor ranging behaviour in response to altered levels of human activity during Covid-19 lockdowns: a community-driven, global-scale analysis

Project title: Using resighting and camera trap data for vulture conservation

Project title: Investigating how their movement interacts with water availability and thus can be indicative of desertification processes

Project title: Population status of African White-backed Vultures on Olifants Private Game Reserve

Project title: The effects of food predictability on the foraging ecology of African White-backed Vultures (*Gyps africanus*)

Project title: Exploring flight heights of different raptor species and how this relates to collision risk across Africa.

PUBLICATIONS PUBLISHED

Cervantes F, Murgatroyd M, Allan DG, Farwig N, Kemp R, Krüger S, Maude G, Mendelsohn J, Rösner S, Schabo DG, Tate G, Wolter K and Amar A. 2023. A utilisation distribution for the global population of Cape Vultures (*Gyps coprotheres*) to guide wind energy development. Ecological Applications. IF: 6.105

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>

Wild TA, van Schalkwyk L, Viljoen P, Heine G, Richter N, Vorneweg B, Koblit JC, Dechmann DKN, Rogers W, Partecke J, Linek N, Volkmer T, Gregersen T, Havmøller RW, Morelle K, Daim A, Wiesner M, Wolter K, Fiedler W, Kays R, Ezenwa VO, Meboldt M and Wikelski M. A multi-species evaluation of digital wildlife monitoring using the Sigfox IoT network. 2023. Anim Biotelemetry 11:13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40317-023-00326-1>

PUBLICATIONS IN PREP

Three publications are still being prepared for publication and eight projects in the data collation or analysis phases.

Papers submitted and rejected: Researchers addressing feedback for re-submission:

Project title: The threat of powerlines to two African Vulture species

Project Title: Understanding the use of satellite tracking data to assess bird mortality in the African-Eurasian flyway.



POWER LINE SURVEYS & MITIGATION

Once again, most of our rehabilitation cases that came into VulPro were a result of power line incidents. As mentioned, power line incidents are often fatal for birds, and when a bird does survive one of these incidents, the damage is often irreparable and results in the bird becoming a permanent resident at VulPro. VulPro continues to work with Eskom and the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) to have dangerous lines mitigated, and we continue to follow up on work done to protect these birds.

In 2023, 42 power line incidents were reported to VulPro. Nine of these cases have been closed, and 33 are still open. All power line reports are followed up with Eskom and VulPro reviews all incident statuses to ensure that accurate recommendations are made.

These 42 power line incidents involved a total of 66 birds, including 56 Cape Vultures, seven African White-backed Vultures, one Lappet-faced Vulture, and two other bird species. Unfortunately, these only represent a small portion of the incidents that have occurred as these are only the incidents reported to VulPro, and with power lines stretching the length and breadth of the country, there are most likely many other incidents that go unreported.



Table 2: Number of Species affected by power line incidents between 2012-2023

Species	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Cape Vultures	3	17	49	62	57	99	60	50	68	59	34	56
African White-backed Vultures	0	0	15	7	4	5	1	12	16	6	8	7
Lappet-faced Vultures	0	0	1	1	0	3	0	2	1	0	0	1
Unknown vulture carcasses	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0
Other species	4	7	14	15	34	14	1	13	28	18	49	2
Total	7	25	79	85	96	122	62	77	113	83	93	66



LANDOWNER & FARMER ENGAGEMENT

A large portion of the land that vultures use in South Africa is not protected, and much of that land covers private farmland. As humans move more and more into the spaces that vultures use, it becomes more important to communicate with the people and communities that are living near these birds, specifically farmers, and landowners.

Our biggest opportunity to talk to and engage with these individuals is through our annual breeding surveys and during rescues in remote areas. It is during this time that we can discuss the importance of these birds with landowners, and hand out educational material to them and farm workers and staff living and working amongst them. Often, despite living amongst these birds, these individuals do not know the importance of vultures and how they are keeping their land clean. It is always exciting to see new enthusiasm for these birds in these spaces.

These groups also often have strong community values, and as such, word travels fast about our work in the area. This allows us to branch out to more properties in the area and expand our reach. It is through this that we are also able to explain the importance of reporting dead birds under powerlines and getting in touch for vulture and other raptor emergencies. Furthermore, we can

assist interested parties set up vulture restaurants to help supply vultures with additional safe food and educate these groups on the importance of not using poison and moving away from lead-based ammunition during hunting activities. Finally, this year we have worked hard to ensure that all landowners that we engage with are given physical signs for their properties, showing their support for vultures. This once again creates awareness of our cause, and people learn that they can call us at any time for vulture support. Many of our rescues are thanks to landowners or staff who find injured or ill birds and know to call us immediately, demonstrating how crucial it is to engage with everyone on the ground and inspire them to want to save vultures.



COMMUNITY OUTREACH & EDUCATION

VulPro strives to engage with all stakeholders and members of the public to educate them and raise awareness about the importance of vultures and the work we do to protect them.

REHABILITATION TRAINING

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

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.

VULCHA

In mid-March, we launched our new school-based education programme, VulCha (Vulture Champions). This new school programme aims to raise awareness about the importance of vultures and their conservation, particularly among the next generation of environmental stewards. Through engaging classroom presentations and interactive activities, we teach students about vulture biology, behaviour, and ecological importance. We also emphasise the threats facing vultures and how individuals can take action to protect them. By educating students about vultures, we hope to inspire them to become advocates for conservation and encourage them to take action to protect vultures.

Additionally, we believe that by instilling a love and appreciation for vultures in children, we can create a generation of individuals who value and protect our natural world.

Our team travelled to Blouberg Limpopo in March and again in September to give interactive presentations to students from Marumafase Secondary School and Biokotso Primary School near the Blouberg Nature Reserve, Limpopo. Blouberg is an area at the foot of a Cape Vulture colony with a regular market for vulture parts. To



VulPro team member, Clarence, demonstrating the Cape Vulture's wingspan to learners taking part in VulPro's Vulcha Programme.

show our commitment to the schools and their communities, members of the VulPro team, with the help of Blouberg Reserve staff and parents of the students, also gave some of their classrooms a new coat of paint. We also added another two schools to our programme, Maphuta High School, and Kgobokang Primary School, which we visited and gave presentations.

The next step in this programme will be forming VulCha student committees at the participating schools. These committees will 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.

In total, we visited six schools, three primary and three high schools this year. Our staff also took 16 kids with teachers to the Blouberg Nature Reserve to experience nature in a whole different way. The most positive results came from Moletsi. This community have donated their own stock animals to the Blouberg Nature Reserve vulture restaurant and this collaboration resulted in more than six reports of injured vultures, which was not observed in 2022.

Vulpro is committed to increasing the number of participating schools in 2024. It is the young generation that will contribute to the survival of all animal species. They are the future champions that can ensure vulture conservation continues.

PACE Booklet

The launch of our school programme also saw the first distribution of our fantastic new education booklets, which we developed in partnership with the Pan African Conservation Education Programme (PACE), created by Tusk and Siren Conservation Education.

These colourful booklets share information about vultures, their threats, and their conservation and are designed for school and community use. These booklets are free to download, and you can find a copy at <https://www.paceproject.net/pace-news/a-newpace-resource-vultures/>. We also started a webinar series with PACE, with our first live session on 31 March given to students from the Makuleke community during an environmental education programme hosted by SANParks.

This series consists of four live episodes with educational presentations, a tour of our sanctuary, viewing our vulture restaurant from our hide, and interactive activities to allow people to see vultures close-up and learn about their value.

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. We will continue this series and aim to present it to many schools and communities across Africa.

SPREADING OUR WINGS

In addition to these exciting new educational programmes, Vulpro obtained an impressive reach via presentations, tours, and media.

VulPro's team has presented to 3,487 people since the start of the year. Of these, 488 were adults, and 2999 were children. We provided educational tours of our facility to 486 visitors, including 315 adults and 171 children. External tours reached a further 113,408 individuals.

VulPro's website has been visited 8,034 times this year, and we currently have:

18,554 followers on Facebook
2,062 followers on Twitter
1,542 followers on Instagram
552 subscribers on YouTube
743 followers on LinkedIn.

VulPro was featured in six magazine articles, 21 Newspapers, and 32 online publications, and appeared on French radio, SABC 2, eNCA, Cape Talk, and Mix FM.



NOTEWORTHY EVENTS

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.



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 intention was to openly discuss the challenges, achievements and key research projects being done to ensure all parties can work together to protect wildlife, while also achieving the carbon zero goal.

THE NATIONAL VULTURE BREEDING STEERING COMMITTEE

The National Vulture Breeding Steering Committee, chaired by Kerri Wolter, has been endorsed and written up as part of the Vulture

Trisha Pillay presenting on Draft Vulture Protocol and its development application process at the Birds and Wind Energy Forum (left).

Biodiversity Management Plan for South Africa. This is recognition of our efforts to bolster the dwindling wild populations and prevent their extinction. VulPro is perfectly positioned to spearhead many of these objectives.

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' according to 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.

VULPRO@ HAMWARI

The [largest relocation of vultures ever undertaken](#) reached a critical milestone when approval was granted to move the first tranche of 158 birds to a new home in the Eastern Cape. Once the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment approved, work began on a bespoke facility at Shamwari Private Game Reserve, adjacent to its existing Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre. VulPro at Shamwari will be the new home for the Cape Vultures and African White-backed Vultures, which will be transported from their current home at VulPro's Hartbeespoort Dam facility in late January 2024, during the first phase of a two-year relocation programme. VulPro is the only vulture conservation facility of its kind on the continent, spearheading population restocking and supplementation to address the severe decline of our African vulture species.

The partnership with Shamwari Private Reserve was created to provide a safe area for in-situ and ex-situ conservation programmes and the ecosystem services provided by vultures are a significant addition to the ethos Shamwari has created in restoring a natural and well-balanced ecosystem. In addition, the stability and financial support that Shamwari brings will provide sustainability to VulPro's breeding programmes and the future of vultures in South Africa."

The vultures being moved to the VulPro facility at Shamwari are all non-releasable breeding birds. After the Cape Vultures and African White-backed

Vultures move in January 2024, a second phase will see non-releasable breeding pairs of Lappet-faced Vultures, White-headed Vultures, Hooded Vultures, and some additional White-backed Vultures being relocated.



ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

BOARD, STAFF, VOLUNTEERS, AND STUDENTS

Keri Wolter, VulPro founder and CEO has run the independent, not-for-profit, organisation since 2011. With the support of the Chairman, members of the board, and staff, Kerri ensures the organisation's ongoing viability and the ability to deliver its mandate to safeguard the survival of our vulture species.

VulPro would like to thank the board for its continued guidance and invaluable support. The members of the board and their roles are listed in Table 3.

TABLE 3: VulPro Board Members

NAME	ROLE	SINCE
Prof. Vinny Naidoo	Chair & Research	2013
Magda Kets	Legal Advisor	2019
Carl Kruger	Governance	2022
Craig Natttrass	Operations	2017
Kerri Wolter	CEO	2011

STAFF

Without a doubt, VulPro would not be where it is without the dedication of its staff members, listed in the Table 4.

VOLUNTEERS

Our volunteers are vital to VulPro's success. They are often a critical link in the chain – bringing rescued or injured birds to the centre and giving us a chance to save them. During 2023 we had 33 visiting international volunteers staying at VulPro for between two to four weeks and 42 dedicated local volunteers

TABLE 4: VulPro Staff 2022

Kerri Wolter	CEO	Permanent*
Obert Phiri	Operations Manager	Permanent*
Rhiannon Gill	Conservation Manager	Permanent*
Notice Phiri	Driver & Maintenance	Permanent*
Charles Banda	Maintenance Manager	Permanent*
Esther Mapope	Domestic Affairs	Permanent*
Anita Engelbrecht	General Assistant	Permanent*
Alistair Sinclair	General Manager	Permanent*
Tau Phiri	Assistant Operations Manager	Permanent*
Clarence Mabasa	Operations and field assistant	Permanent*
Shelton Mathe	Vehicle Manager and Maintenance Assistant	Permanent*
Kate Webster	Eastern Cape Representative & Fieldworker	Permanent
Anesu Chauke	General Bird Assistant	Permanent*

*Salaried

TRAVEL

Travel is a part of VulPro's daily activities as we work throughout several provinces in South Africa. In 2023, we not only worked within our country's confines, but we also made regular visits to neighbouring countries such as Botswana and Zimbabwe.

Reasons for travel include but are not limited to the below:

- Carcass collection for feeding purposes
- Rescue and rehabilitation efforts
- Release of rescued individuals
- Meetings and conferences
- Management, supervision, and visits to vulture restaurants
- Travel to undertake research projects and fieldwork activities
- Training and education
- Talks and presentations
- Transportation of critical birds for veterinary services
- Vehicle service and maintenance

FINANCIAL REPORT

FUNDRAISING AND SPONSORS

VulPro, as a not-for-profit organization, relies on the generosity and support of local and international donors and sponsors to sustain its operations. The contributions received from individuals and organizations are vital for achieving our mission of conserving and stabilizing vulture populations across southern Africa.

We express sincere gratitude for the unwavering support and dedication of our local and international sponsors and donors. Additionally, we extend appreciation to initiatives such as the MySchool/MyVillage/MyPlanet programme for selecting VulPro as a beneficiary, furthering our cause.

As VulPro expands its reach globally, we aim to raise awareness among local and international communities about the significance and conservation of vultures. This expansion not only enhances educational efforts but also fosters growth in both material and financial support for our organisation.

RISK STRATEGY

VulPro continues to manage its investment asset to support its cash flow. Throughout 2023, we continued with our strict expense controls and

managed our financial forecasting according to best financial practices. The funds continue to be monitored and invested at a conservative rate and have provided a modest return on investment during the turbulent markets (The audited financials are available on request).

SUSTAINABILITY

VulPro remains committed in upholding its core values and safeguarding its valuable assets, cultivated over the past thirteen years. These efforts encompass the recruitment of dedicated personnel and a proficient board of directors to oversee the organization, ensuring adherence to robust corporate governance practices.

Recognizing the worldwide significance of vultures, VulPro is committed to extending its reach beyond borders, advocating for their importance to global citizens both today and in the future. Through extensive outreach initiatives, we aim to educate an increasing number of countries about the critical role vultures play in the ecosystem. This concerted effort has been instrumental in cultivating a loyal and robust global sponsorship base, pivotal for VulPro's continued growth and the preservation of vulture species.

We remain resolute in our mission to promote awareness and secure support for the sustainability of vultures worldwide.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THANKS TO OUR ADOPTIVE PARENTS

Platinum

Tusk Trust

Gold

DHL

Ford Wildlife Foundation

Holtzman Wildlife Foundation

Silver

AE Solutions

AZA SAFE Project partners

AZA Conservation Grants Fund

Cheyenne Mountain Zoo

Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden

Detroit Zoo

Different.org

Ernst Kleinwort Charitable Trust

Fort Wayne Children's Zoo

Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust

Jacksonville Zoo

Lomas Wildlife Protection Trust

MaxPlanck Institute

Nashville Zoo

Natural Encounters Conservation

San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance

Wilhelma Zoologisch Botanischer Garten
Stuttgart Zoo

Zoo Zlin/Lesna

Hair of the Dog Conservation Fund

WeWild Africa

Bronze

Abraham Foundation

Blair Drummond Safari and Adventure Park

Colchester Zoo

Cybercom

Dallas Zoo

Designline Graphics

Duxbury Networking

First Consulting Alliance

Fondation Ensemble

Fresno Chaffee Zoo

Gauntlet Conservation Trust

GHB Farms Pty Ltd

Greenville Zoo

Hamman Donation GPS

IAATE

Idea Wild

National Aviary in Pittsburgh

National Center for Birds of Prey

Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo

R&R Abattoir

Regal Security

Rheinmetall Denel Munition

Riverleigh Equestrian Centre

Tandy Foundation

The Tax Shop

Tulsa Zoo

World Bird Sanctuary

Zoo Atlanta

Zoo Miami Wildlife Conservation Fund

Blue

Chessington World of Adventures Operations
Ltd

Little Rock Zoo

Roger Williams Park Zoo

Thea Erasmus

Wan4U

Zoological Society of Hertfordshire Paradise
Wildlife Park

Thea Erasmus

THANKS TO OUR ADOPTIVE PARENTS

Virbac

Robyn

Alexander H (Silke) (two birds)

Andrea Schreier

Sascha Winninger (for Julie Edgley)

Tracey Robinson

Mariza Hamman (four birds)

Frank Schöppner

Mike and Amy Latimer

Kim Caldwell

Katey Parson

Hans and Ute Schute

Nicole Schöppner (five birds)

Clive Vardakis

Rheinmetall Denel Munition - Rick Harness

Rheinmetall Denel Munition

Christina Elena Hanga



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