



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Vulpro warns that misinformation linking vultures to the spread of Foot-and-Mouth Disease risks irreversible biodiversity loss.

30/01/2026 - *Vulpro, one of Africa's leading vulture conservation organisations, is issuing an urgent message to correct the dangerous and scientifically inaccurate narrative that vultures are responsible for the spread of Foot-and-Mouth Disease. As an organisation dedicated to the survival of these essential birds, Vulpro warns that these false accusations may fuel a spike in illegal and retaliatory poisonings that threaten to wipe out already severely diminished local populations.*

As of January 2026, South Africa is managing widespread foot and mouth disease (FMD) outbreaks across KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, Free State, North West, and Mpumalanga, all areas that act as home and foraging ranges to some of southern Africa's vulnerable, endangered and critically endangered vulture species.

Recent reports of vultures being blamed for the spread of FMD are deeply troubling. The assertion that vultures act as vectors for FMD ignores the specialised biology that makes these birds nature's most effective sanitation experts.

Scientific research into vulture physiology reveals a digestive system uniquely evolved to metabolise and neutralise lethal pathogens, effectively acting as a biological 'dead-end' for diseases like Foot-and-Mouth. By rapidly consuming carcasses, vultures provide an indispensable service, removing diseased tissue from the environment before it can rot or attract less specialised scavengers. This process lowers the overall environmental viral load and creates a vital barrier.

Their presence will not totally eradicate the spread of disease, but it will aid in protecting the very livestock they are being falsely accused of endangering. To be clear: vultures slow the spread of harmful pathogens that would otherwise be totally unmitigated.

The current wave of misinformation is leading to a catastrophic 'blame the bird' mentality which could have deadly consequences. When vultures are eradicated through retaliatory poisoning, the resulting vacuum is filled by mammalian scavengers such as feral dogs, cats and jackals. Unlike vultures, these mammalian scavengers will carry and spread disease as they move between wild areas and commercial grazing lands.

The convergence of FMD and the presence of vultures creates a heartbreaking paradox for the South African farmer. While the vulture acts as a biological sanitiser consuming carcasses and reducing the viral load in the environment, their presence is a stinging reminder of the failure to contain the outbreak through proper vaccination and movement controls.



It is deeply unfair to the vulture to be loathed as a scavenger of misery when they are merely filling a void left by a broken biosecurity system; they are doing for free what authorities have failed to do with tax money.

Yet, for the farmer, the sight of a bird thriving on a preventable loss is the ultimate insult. The anger directed at the sky is, in truth, anger at a bureaucracy that has allowed FMD to turn prized cattle into carrion, forcing the agricultural community to watch their livelihoods be dismantled.

Vulpro is calling on agricultural unions, veterinary services, and provincial authorities to prioritise science over rumor. The real transmission of FMD is driven by the movement of infected live animals and the transport of contaminated animal products. Scapegoating vultures only serves to distract from the failures to implement effective biosecurity measures and risks the permanent loss of species that are already on the brink of extinction.

Vulpro remains committed to working alongside the farming community to ensure a safe, healthy environment for every animal, wild or domestic.

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Note to editors:

Since 2007, Vulpro has been at the forefront of southern Africa's vulture conservation through a multifaceted science driven approach, including a captive breeding programme for population supplementation, monitoring of over 20 breeding colonies and sites across southern Africa, research on movement patterns and threat mitigation, educational outreach to over 15,000 community members annually, power line surveys and advocacy for bird-friendly infrastructure and rehabilitation of injured and poisoned vultures.

The organisation maintains Africa's largest vulture rehabilitation and breeding facility, which has become increasingly vital as wild populations continue to face mounting threats.

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Further resources:

[REVIEWING THE ROLE OF VULTURES AT THE HUMAN-WILDLIFE- LIVESTOCK DISEASE
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