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Top news story from VulPro

VULTURE OR PHOENIX? The story of our first Cape Vulture chick reared in captivity ended sadly – but valuable lessons were learnt and we have big hopes for the future with another chick already hatched

The story of our 'world first' success in hatching and rearing a Cape Vulture chick in captivity was featured in our December 2011 VulPro Newsletter. This, alas, ended rather sadly. The bird was released near the Nootgedacht colony as planned on 17 February but initially returned to the release site after each of two flights. Then,



ABOVE: Fledgling proudly displays his tags and transmitter and to tell us he's ready to go, and **BELOW,** away he soars



ents for natural rearing to the point of release to the wild. And we are very hopeful that the learning curve from our 2011 experience, which began with 9 eggs laid by 7 breeding pairs nesting on artificial cliffs (pictured far left) within VulPro enclosures, will have given us the know-how to achieve true success with the 9 pairs currently breeding on our improved artificial cliffs. The good news is that the first of this year's eggs has now hatched (right and below).

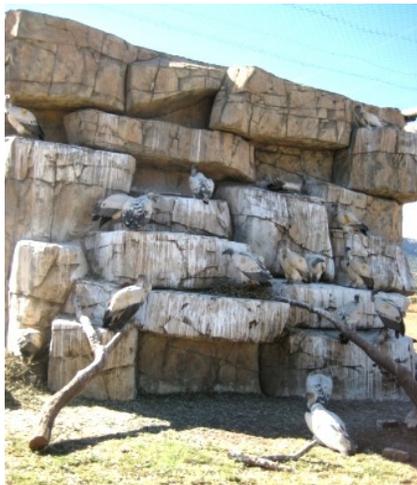
It will be recalled that the primary objective of the



after apparently 'getting the message' that it was really free, it was left to its freedom, only to be found two days later having been predated by a leopard. As judged by the leopard spoor by the carcass. It is not known why it did not join the colony but we believe it had failed to understand how it had to search for food and had landed in the expectation that food would be provided, as had been the case throughout its life to this point.

We continue to regard this, however, as a major success in being the first case we know of where Cape Vulture eggs have been artificially incubated (pictured above), hatched and returned to the par-

breeding programme is to repopulate Cape Vultures in Namibia, where the numbers of this species have fallen below sustainable. Our current hope is that the first of the captive bred birds raised for this purpose can be released to the former Waterberg Plateau colony site in Namibia four years from now.



Would you like to advertise here in future issues?

Contact Kerri Wolter at kerri.wolter@gmail.com

VulPro and Boehringer-Ingelheim team up to combat NSAIDs which poison vultures

VulPro has been closely involved since its inception in 2007 in the search for, and testing and approval of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) which are not toxic to vultures (Naidoo V et al., 2010. The toxicokinetics of ketoprofen in *Gyps coprotheres*: toxicity due to zero-order metabolism. Arch Toxicol 84:761-6). A new collaboration between leading pharmaceutical company, Boehringer-Ingelheim, and VulPro accompanied the introduction early in 2012 of Boehringer-Ingelheim's meloxicam (metacam), a raptor-friendly NSAID. The partnership began in late-2011, when the Boehringer-Ingelheim undertook to donate a percentage of the proceeds of

metacam sales towards the vulture conservation programme, which actively promotes the use of livestock medications that are not toxic to raptors. In

relation to NSAIDs, VulPro advocates care by veterinarians in their choice of which drug they prescribe. Most of the drugs remain in an animal at levels which are dangerous to vultures for three weeks or longer after the last dose was administered. Even though the safe drugs come at a higher price, the environmental cost from their use is much lower, and it is the responsible thing to do to switch to them. Boehringer-Ingelheim see this partnership as part of their responsibility and commitment to the health and welfare of our wildlife. In addition to the percentage of all sale proceeds of metacam being donated to the Vulture Programme, Boehringer-Ingelheim has reinforced its support for vulture conservation with a R70 000 donation to VulPro's running costs.



Boehringer-Ingelheim have had this key ring locally crafted to mark the occasion of its agreement with VulPro

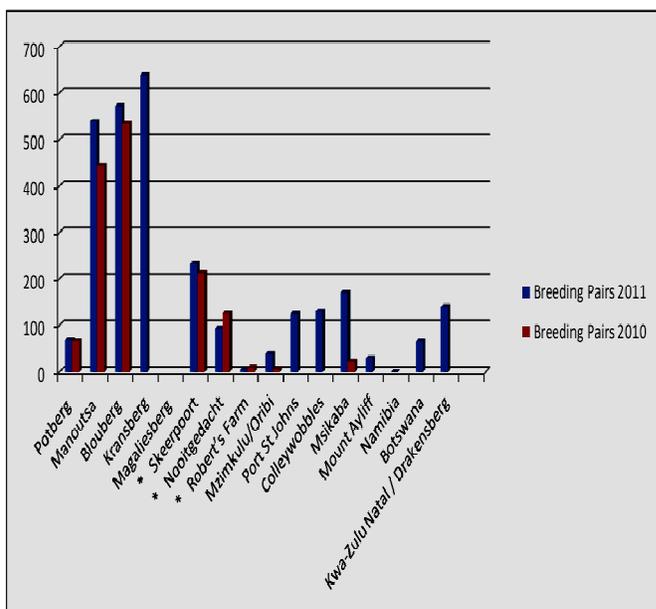
First report of the Cape Vulture Task Force—some good news

In the light of concerns over the alarming decline of the Cape Vulture the Cape Vulture Task Force (CVTF) was formed in 2006 under the auspices of the Endangered Wildlife Trust's Birds of Prey Programme and with the aim of coordinating all conservation efforts and monitoring for the species, collating the information and implementing strategies to reverse the decline in this species.

The first formal report emerged in April, announcing the achievement in 2010 and 2011 of the first complete counts of Cape Vulture colonies in years and the encouraging picture they have shown in all sites excepting Namibia (see Figure below). The reliability of the data has been ensured by the establishment of standardized monitoring and reporting protocols for all the sites. The report lists the

threats perceived at each location and the actions being taken to address these threats. The breeding programme being developed to repopulate Namibia has been covered above and in previous issues of this newsletter.

The report is available from Kerri Wolter, Co-ordinator CVTF, kerri.wolter@gmail.com.



Above: The Cape Vulture Task Force



DON'T FORGET IVAD AGAIN IN SEP-



Rescue & Rehabilitation

Comings and goings at VulPro January-June 2012

Species	In residence at 1.1.12 (non-releasable)	Rescued/ brought in	Released	Died	Euthanased	Transferred or donated	In residence at 30.06.12 (non-releasable)
VULTURES							
Cape	55 (45)	27	24	4	3		51 (48)
African White-backed	4 (4)	1			1		4 (3)
Lappet-faced	2 (2)	2					4 (3)
Palm-nut	2 (2)						2 (2)
EAGLES							
African-Hawk	0	1	1				0
Brown Snake	2 (2)			1	1		0
Black-breasted snake	1	1	1				
Fish-eagle	0	1				1	0
OWLS							
Barn	0	2					2 (0)
Spotted-eagle	2 (2)	2	2				2 (2)
Giant-eagle	1 (1)						1 (1)
White-faced	0						0
KITE							
Yellow-billed	1 (1)						1 (1)
BUZZARD							
Steppe	3 (2)						3 (2)
OTHER							
Andean Condor	1 (1)	1					2 (2)
Kori Bustard	0	1	1				0

Unusual cases among our birds this period

January: We collected a Lappet-faced Vulture fledgling from Bloemfontein with an eye puncture. It was thought that this had resulted from a thorn in the nesting material. After a course of antibiotics, the wound has healed but the bird is blind in that eye and will join our permanent residents.

February: We collected a Cape Vulture fledgling from Northam, Limpopo

Province. It had been found under a power line with its wing smashed in two places, the bone sticking out and maggots in the wound. Despite first aid, the bird died two days after collection. Although power line collisions are a frequent cause of injuries, often severe, in vultures, this was unusually severe.

March: We collected an injured adult

Cape Vulture from Delmas, Gauteng Province. It had been attacked badly by a dog and had suffered puncture wounds through both wings. Following a course of antibiotics, this bird did well and was released on 8 April.

May: Two Lappet-faced vultures housed at VulPro have paired up and become

Continued page 4

Unusual cases among our birds this period continued

aggressive towards the other birds sharing the large rehabilitation enclosure. As they are non-releasable, a new breeding enclosure has had to be built for them. **VulPro is requesting dona-**

tions and volunteers to assist in the completion of this enclosure at the earliest opportunity.

June: The picture at right shows Cody on Kerri Wolter's lap nibbling her coat.

Such placidness in a vulture is certainly unusual!



Community Outreach & Educational Activities

As always, we welcomed the chance to host visitors, schools and other groups to VulPro, or to go out and talk to such groups in response to invitations. Our outreach activities for the first half of 2012 were:

January

- Talk to 54 "FastTrack" nursery school children in Broedestroom.
- Erin Da Silva, Grade 10, carried out her 'Job Shadowing' experience at VulPro.
- Group of 4 local residents shown around VulPro

March

- Six University of Pretoria veterinary students visited to discuss their community service project at VulPro.
- Kerri Wolter had an interesting discussion, 5 March, with 'Mark' from NABU Kavkaz about the establishment of a vulture feeding site in Russia. NABU Kavkaz appears to be a privately run conservation enterprise in Russia and we are hoping to find out a little more about Mark and vultures in Russia.

- Birdlife SA held a Bird Atlasing Workshop at VulPro, 31 March, attended by 25 delegates.

April

- Sebastian Ullrich, multimedia student, visited to demonstrate the use of digital media as a means to educate and convey lessons on conservation issues.

- 3 UK visitors, an adoption family, 2 local visitors and 2 dedicated photographers were given tours on separate occasions.

May

- On separate occasions, 83 children from the Peaconwood College pre-primary school and 300 children from the College primary school were given talks and close-up vulture experience with interactive work sheets.

- 2 local residents and 2 Canadian visitors were given tours on separate occasions.

June

- Magaliesberg Biosphere Launch & World Environment Day at Mount Amanzi: VulPro was chosen as their prototype biodiversity project and was visited by some 250 guests from Gauteng, Northwest Nature Conservation and mining organisations.

- PE University student Megan De Souza carried out her documentary assignment at VulPro.

- 10 priests and their families from KwaZulu Natal. 25 persons in all, were given an educational talk and vulture experience with Cody.

Media attention

January

- Filming by Japan Africa for a nature documentary to be screened in Japan on Discovery Channel

March/April

VetMed (www.vetmed.co.za) : Inter-

view with Kerri Wolter.

April/May

- Sunday Times 'Lifestyle' article "One for the Birds" (profile of Kerri Wolter) 6 May issue.

June

- Kormorant: Two articles: "Environmental education" and "Magaliesberg vultures face extinction."

- Preliminary filming by Discovery Channel for TV documentary "Earth Touch"

This issue's profiles

Kit Acton

Kit, a recent zoology graduate from the University of Bristol in England, arrived at Vulpro midway through May. A keen nature lover, Kit wanted to learn and participate in the practical aspect of conservation and also the day to day running of a rehabilitation centre, feeding the birds, medicating sick birds and monitoring the progress of nests made by breeding pairs. Kit was particularly keen to understand the role VulPro played in relation to vultures in the wild, including monitoring the birds arriving at the vulture restaurant and the tracking data of birds released with tracking units. Kit was therefore often seen in the hide looking for tagged birds and with his camera photographing the wild birds. Kit leaves VulPro (with the added experience of being been bitten by a vulture!) looking to put the experience gained to use as he pursues a career in conservation back home in the UK.

(continued page 5)

This issue’s profiles (continued)

Rohan Amin

Having graduated from the University of Bristol, Rohan joined VulPro in April for 3 months to gain some hands-on experience in applied conservation. Rohan took on many of the day-to-day tasks at the centre such as the feeding and observation of injured birds, turning and monitoring the artificially incubated eggs of the Cape Vulture breeding programme, and assisting with the tagging of wild vultures. Rohan also found time to assist with a local Black Eagle monitoring project, and with Rohan’s help, the expansion plans at VulPro have progressed significantly, with three new enclosures currently being constructed. Rohan heads back to England leaving behind many new friends, both avian and human, having greatly enjoyed his time at VulPro.



Letter from German volunteer, Bettina Boemans (pictured right at VulPro 6-24 February 2012)

Hello vulture’s friends, I am Bettina Boemans, 29, from Essen, Germany. In Duisburg, where I grew up, I am an engineer for quality management in the steel production of ThyssenKrupp Steel Europe AG. When I was young I always loved spending my time in zoos watching the wonderful Eurasian Griffon vultures and any other vulture species. Two years ago I decided to become active in vulture protection and conservation and started writing an online-blog about my experiences with vultures and information I was collecting about vulture rescue organizations to make people aware of these fascinating, amazing birds. (German version: www.geierwelt.blogspot.com, English version: www.vulturesworld.blogspot.com). Vultures are my passion, which is why I started to do volunteering work when on holiday. In 2010 and 2011 I spent 7 weeks volunteering at the Eko-Centar Caput Insulae Beli, a rescue centre for Eurasian Griffon Vultures on the Island of Cres, Croatia. This year has brought me to VulPro. I was sure this place might be a paradise for people who love Vultures. And from the first day arriving here it became clear: it definitely is! It is a pleasure to be part of this wonderful, project in vulture rescue, even if, alas, I could only stay for just three weeks.



Also from Germany and Switzerland, Ulla Gorber, Dr. Med. Vet. (left)

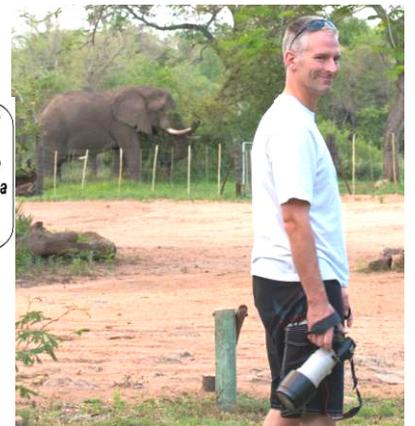
Ulla obtained her veterinary qualification in Munich and her Master’s at the University of Zurich. She has worked with farm animals in the mountains of Switzerland as well as with pets, farm animals and horses close to Basel. Ulla likes to be out of doors, hiking, horse riding as well as Enduro riding.

... and from Switzerland, Stefan Rohr, Mechanical Engineer.

Stefan (right) has worked the last 16 years as Project Leader in Research and Developing Departments of several companies in the plastics industry. In his free time Stefan loves to ride his motorbike, go cycling, hiking or skiing in the mountains. He is also a keen photographer. At Vulpro he has rediscovered an old love - paragliding, this time with the vultures of the Magaliesbergs.



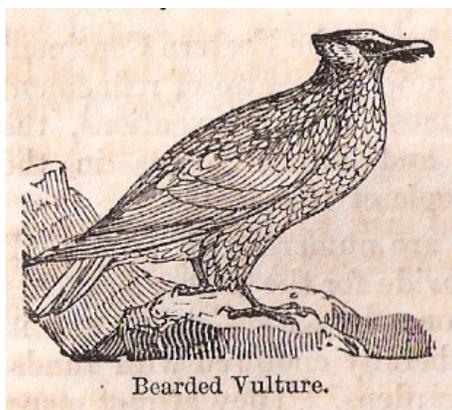
Funny - I never saw one of those huge beasts back there around these parts before. Looks like a good meal in the future though



History corner

Prejudice 157 years ago

The picture below and the text are from “A System of Modern Geography” 1855, by S. Augustus Mitchell, Philadelphia.



7. Among the more remarkable European birds is the bearded vulture, the largest bird of prey in the world, except the condor. It inhabits the highest summits of the Alps, and destroys sheep, lambs, goats, and other animals.

Extract from Wikipedia on the Bearded Vulture today

The Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*), also known as the Lammergeier or Lammergeyer, is the only member of the genus *Gypaetus*. Although the Lammergeier is threatened within its range in Europe, the species has a large range across Asia and Africa and is relatively common across much of that range. As such the species is listed as ‘least concern’ on the IUCN Red List, although there is some evidence of decline. *It was formerly killed in significant numbers because people feared (without justification) that it carried off children and domestic animals*; the bird was also hunted as a trophy.

Research areas

Current research is focusing on aspects relating to the most efficient and bird-friendly ways of monitoring released birds and wild populations. This ranges from testing harnesses carrying tracking devices to ensure no harm or negative effects on the birds to daily monitoring and constant updating of datasets. In collaboration with the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Veterinary Sciences, we are also taking fecal swabs from birds when ringed and tagged as part of a new avian influenza survey. Full reports and publications will be put out at appropriate times.

Issues

Vulture collisions with wind turbines

The merits and values of wind turbines as the appropriate way forward for meeting energy needs in a carbon-friendly way are currently under much scrutiny and discussion. Among the arguments of those opposing the construction of wind farms are their overrated efficiency, wind-dependent periodicity of generation, unsightliness in areas of natural beauty and other environmental damage and noise for nearby housing. Ed Yong in Nature News on 13 March 2012 highlighted the dangers to vultures posed by wind turbines (<http://www.nature.com/news/vultures-blind-to-the-dangers-of-wind-farms-1.10214>). Researchers Steven Portugal, Campbell Murn and Graham Martin have studied the visual fields of griffon vultures (*Gyps fulvus*) and the African White-backed vulture (*G. africanus*) and found that they have large blind spots which prevent them from seeing objects directly in front of them. They hypothesise that this enables the birds to soar without being blinded by the sun, but it also explains why they frequently collide with conspicuous structures such as power lines and wind turbines. According to the authors, vultures have become frequent casualties of collisions in wind farms. Other studies by Manuela de Lucas in Spain have shown that vultures crash into some wind turbines but not others, which she feels indicates the influence of topography and weather conditions. De Lucas has tested a system by which radar devices temporarily stop the turbines when vultures are passing through.

View – if you can stomach it – the gruesome video clip (taken by paragliders in Crete) of a vulture struck out of the sky by a wind turbine. Enter “EPAW - Vulture struck by wind turbine” into Google. In the picture to the right from this video, the vulture has just been struck by the blade behind the “play” arrow. Also, some of the horrifying statistics relating to vulture casualties from wind turbines can be readily seen in a Google search.



Summit to save Africa's vulture populations from extinction

Kerri Wolter and Walter Naser attended the Pan African Vulture Summit convened in the Masai Mara, Kenya, April 16-20, 2012. The aim of the gathering was to garner input from a wide range of vulture specialists, researchers and government wildlife representatives from across the globe to devise and promote the implementation of a Pan-African Vulture Conservation Plan providing a template for effective conservation action that can be adjusted to suit the situation and needs of individual regions, countries and areas and to facilitate the implementation of action in areas where there currently is little or no focus on the conservation of vultures. In attendance were some 40 delegates representing 9 countries within sub-Saharan Africa together with participants from Bulgaria, the UK and the USA.



Resolutions contained in an emergent document signed by all the delegates and sent to all governments falling within the range of distribution of Africa's vultures urged these governments to recognize that the range and populations of the 11 species of vulture occurring on the African continent have declined considerably and that vultures are a critical component of the African ecosystem. The governments are urged accordingly to:

- ◇ regulate the import, manufacture, sale and use of poisons, including agricultural chemicals and pharmaceutical products known to be lethal to vultures
- ◇ legislate and enforce stringent measures to prosecute perpetrators of poisoning and illegal traders in vultures and/or their body parts
- ◇ ensure appropriate levels of protection and management for vultures and their breeding sites
- ◇ ensure that all new energy infrastructure is vulture-friendly and that existing unsafe infrastructure is modified appropriately
- ◇ support research, capacity building and outreach programmes for the conservation and survival of healthy vulture populations

VulPro SPONSORS

Invaluable donation of carcasses by Beluit Investments

VulPro wishes to express its enormous indebtedness to Mr Hugo Meyer, proprietor of the Beluit Investments farm who supplies us free of charge with most of the carcasses we need to feed our non-releasable birds as well as the wild birds visiting our vulture restaurant. Mr Meyer has supported VulPro since its inception out of his personal enthusiasm for vultures and the concern he shares with us about the threats to them; and about 70% of our food comes directly from his farm. On

page 3 of our June/July 2010 issue, we outlined the various costs involved in running VulPro. Reference back to that shows the major part of our budget that is saved through Hugo's generosity in our requirement for tens of animal carcasses each month. Although this is not a glorified monetary sponsorship, the value in itself is worth thousands of rands and without his support, we would be in a financial crisis having to purchase carcasses. A large cow alone can cost over R15 000 and in one month, we probably get 2 large cows and over 100 pigs of all sizes from

large sows weighing 300kgs to day old piglets. We also occasionally get sheep and blesbok from Mr Meyer if there are any fatalities of this nature. The variety of the carcasses (cows, pigs, sheep and occasionally other species where unexpected fatalities have occurred) enables us to provide the vultures with a healthy and varied diet with minimal need for added supplements, thereby reflecting the natural situation in the wild. Also, it gives us peace of mind knowing that the carcasses we get are safe from veterinary drugs which can negatively affect the birds.

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ALSO —

The many donations from individuals

and

ADOPTIONS

The Jeep Club, our 2 Lap-pet-faced vultures, Wrangler and Cherokee.

ABC Autoparts, the male bataleur and Cape Vulture, Harry and Mafuta.

Jika Africa, 2 adult Cape Vultures, Flaps and Ziggy.

Mike Behr's family, as a birthday present to Mike Behr, have adopted our first vulture chick of the season.

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www.vultureconservation.co.za



This programme helps to raise essential funds for schools, charities and environmental concerns throughout South Africa and is the easiest way to support the charity of your choice without cost to you. Present your MyVillageMyPlanet card when you make a purchase with participating companies, and a percentage of your payment will be made to that charity. Please contact MySchoolMyVillageMy Planet at www.myvillage.co.za or contact Kerri Wolter on 082-808-5113 or via email at kerri.wolter@gmail.com and arrange to support VulPro through this excellent scheme.