

# THE VULPRO FLYER & RESTAURANT NEWSLETTER JULY 2021

"Protecting African vultures through collaboration and innovation"



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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## Executive Summary

Learning to live during the Covid-19 pandemic has been a real challenge for many of us and yet, humans are resilient and have proven to be adaptable during such trying times. Conservation is so incredibly hard already; add in a global pandemic and trying to protect and save a species that is mostly unloved, and the magnitude of what we are trying to achieve, is that much harder and near impossible. However, I am pleased to say VulPro continues to survive, and we are so incredibly fortunate to be able to continue with our work and make a real positive difference to African vultures. Our work is not only felt within South Africa, but throughout Africa as we spread our expertise to those in other countries. VulPro has become a real shining example of a multi-faced conservation organisation that focuses on protecting vultures in a holistic manner. I am truly proud that many other organisations are starting to follow our lead and look at captive facilities for population supplementation and reintroduction programmes. Of course, conserving vultures in their natural habitat is the primary aim but, time is no longer on their side and captive management and breeding programmes for conservation purposes is a recognised key element in the survival of Africa's vultures.

In this edition, we are excited to highlight some of our main activities over the past 6 months. Activities that would not have been possible without the support of each one of you; our funders, friends, families, volunteers, colleagues and partners; we thank and salute you.



# The VulPro Flyer

## Statistics

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# Vulture Rescue & Rehabilitation Statistics

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VulPro had another busy rehab season at the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021. We hit the ground running on 1 January 2021 with the a rescue of a downed Cape Vulture in Swartruggens, North West Province. The young bird has since recovered well and was released on 14 February 2021.

Since 30 November 2020 and to date we have been able to rescue 59 vultures, with Cape Vultures making up 83% of these rescues and African White-backed Vultures making up the rest. The biggest cause for rescues of Cape Vulture this season was power line collisions (14), followed by starvation (six). African White-backed Vultures were most commonly affected by poisonings (three), followed by power line collisions (two). We also rescued a Spotted Eagle-Owl, African Fish-Eagles, a Barn Owl, a Black-chested Snake-Eagle and an African Harrier-Hawk.





# Vulture Rescue and Rehabilitation

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We had some very special rescue stories in the last six months. One in particular will always stand out. In May 2021, we were informed of an African White-backed Vulture which had his head and beak stuck in a piece of old PVC pipe (as shown in photograph).

The bird was spotted in a tree in the Olifants River Private Game Reserve (ORPGR) by Mr and Mrs De Wit, shareholders at the reserve. They called VulPro on the evening of Tuesday, 4 May 2021. VulPro left first thing the following day, but the bird remained elusive until Thursday morning where the team started efforts to capture him.

All usual methods were considered, but unfortunately none were viable, and therefore, for the first time in vulture conservation, a dart gun was employed to immobilise and catch the bird. He was successfully darted by vet, Dr Ben Muller.

Upon examination the bird was found to be skinny and dehydrated. His tongue was badly damaged where the pipe had cut into it.

To ensure the best care and rehabilitation possible, he was brought back to VulPro.

As the bird was in too much pain to feed itself, the dedicated VulPro team came up with the innovative idea to feed the bird meat smoothies until his beak and tongue had healed enough for him to feed himself.

We are happy to report that, after much care and dedication, the bird made a full recovery and was returned and released in the area he was found on 1 June 2021. We will continue to track his movements to ensure he remains fit and healthy.

We were extremely proud to be a part of this rescue, and we offer our thanks to all the relevant parties that helped us with it including the warden of the reserve, Nick Liebenberg, the vet, Dr Ben Muller, Mr and Mrs De Wit, and Limpopo conservation for allowing us to continue to conduct our important work in the area.



Image received of African White-backed vulture with head stuck in the pipe



The bird was given immediate veterinary care in the field before being taken to VulPro for full rehabilitation.

# Vulture Rescue and Rehabilitation

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Movement of rescued African White-backed Vulture from 31 May - 15 June 2021.

In February 2021 we had a number of spectacular releases. On 12 February 2021, we released four young African White-backed vultures in the Tosca area of the North West Province. The four birds were made up of one captive bred bird from the 2020 breeding season, and three rehabilitated birds. The first of these birds was found at VulPro in September 2020 after he was grounded for unknown reasons. Fortunately, he only had minor injuries which he quickly recovered from. The second was found in Stella, North West Province, in December 2021. The young bird was grounded for unknown reasons and was skinny and emaciated. After two months of rehabilitation, he was ready for release. Finally, the last bird was a young chick found in the Roedtan area in September 2020. This bird was found in his nest with holes in his abdomen from Demestid beetles (see our December 2020 edition for more info on this lucky bird).

All four birds were taken to the Tosca where they were released and three of the four birds have found great success, having flown huge distances across Southern Africa. Unfortunately, as a sad reminder of the challenges these birds face daily, the young vulture originally from Stella died after colliding with a power line, only a few days after being released.

# Vulture Rescue and Rehabilitation

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Two of our rehabilitated birds being released back into the wild.



Tracked movements of two rehabilitated African White-backed vultures from 12 February - 15 June 2021.

In other release news, we were able to release the young Brown Snake-Eagle that was electrocuted during April 2020 which defied all odds by surviving. He sustained burns to his primary and tail feathers leaving him flightless. After moulting and regrowing his beautiful new feathers he was fit to fly again. In March 2021 he was released at the GH Braak Farm in Bronkhorstspuit, Gauteng, where he sat quietly with a small family of horses, before flying off. We are very pleased that we were able to release this bird despite the odds being stacked against him.



Our successfully rehabilitated Brown Snake-Eagle observing a family of horses before flying off, back into the wild.

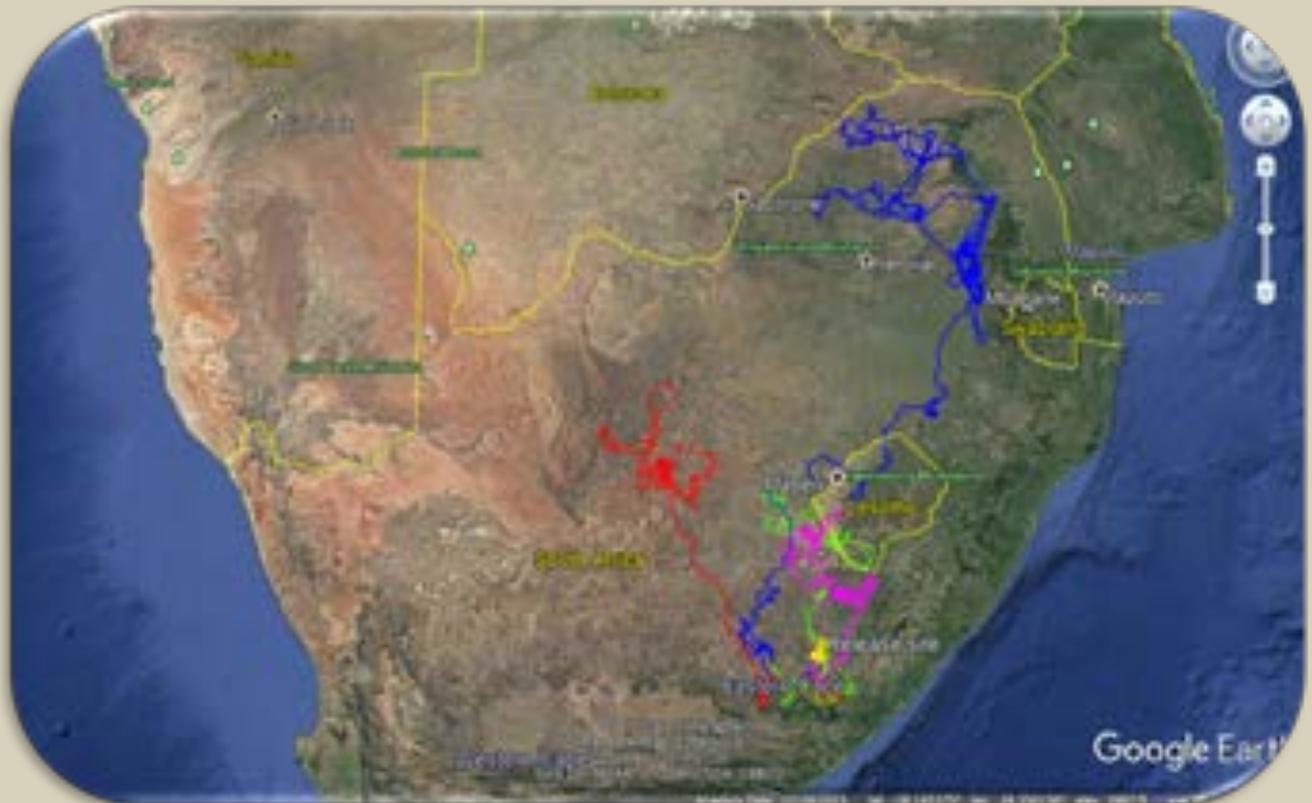
# Vulture Captive Breeding Program

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Captive breeding supplementation programme

(Follow-up of 2019 and 2020)

As a continuation of our Cape Vulture supplementation programme in the Eastern Cape, all 2020 captive bred Cape Vultures were transported to our associate Kate Webster in Queenstown, Eastern Cape, by our generous sponsor, DHL. The birds remained with Kate in captivity for a further 2 – 4 months before they were released.

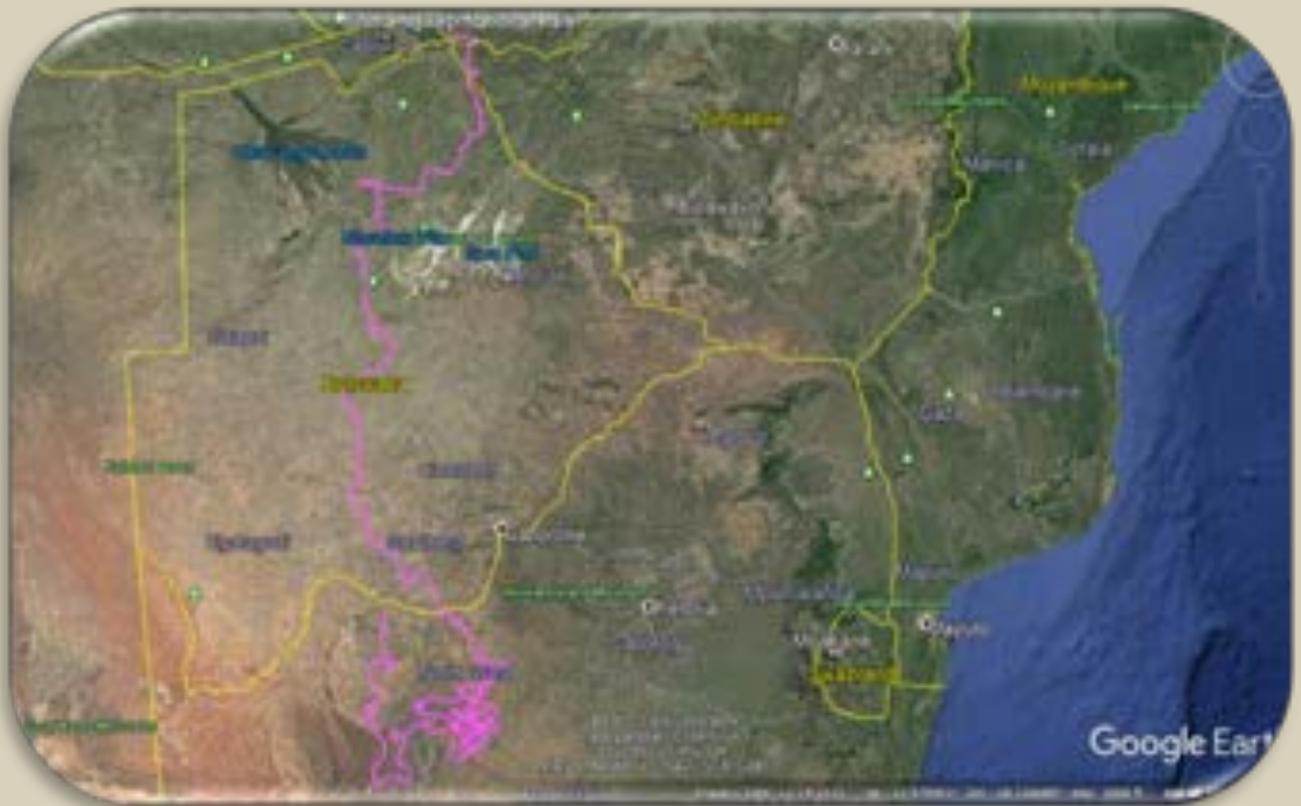


Movement of the 2019 captive bred vultures from release to current location: 11 June 2021

# Vulture Captive Breeding Program

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During the first half of 2021, all remaining 2019 and 2020 captive bred Cape Vultures were released from Kate Webster's Rookwood Farm. Prior to release each bird was fitted with a tracking device and coloured leg band for monitoring purposes. Although many of the birds have remained in the comfort of their release site; two of the 2019 and two of the 2020 captive bred Cape Vultures have shown interesting movements. In addition, one of our released captive bred African White-backed vultures has already travelled as far as Zambia covering an approximate distance of 1700 kilometres.



AWBV Captive bred that was released at Tosca on 12 February 2021

# Captive Breeding Program

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On 7 April 2021 our captive breeding programme started almost a month earlier than previous year's egg laying dates.

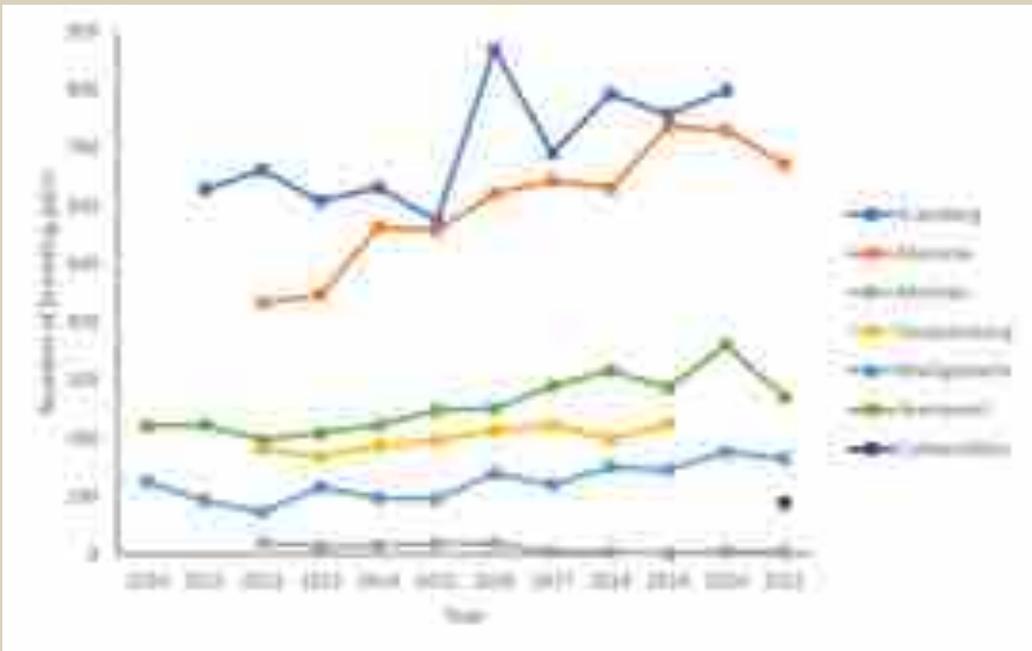
In summary, as of 11 June 2021, our captive population has produced a total of 41 eggs: 34 Cape Vultures and 7 African White-backed Vultures. Our egg fertility rate appears to be very high this year with only 7 known infertile eggs so far. Unfortunately, 3 naturally incubated eggs have broken and as such these pairs' second eggs have subsequently been replaced with dummy eggs to allow us to safely artificially incubate the real eggs. We have also double-clutched 6 pairs this year which allows us to provide those pairs with infertile eggs, the opportunity of raising a chick themselves and maximizing our successes.

Without any assistance, our first chick successfully hatched inside our hatcher on 4 June 2021. The chick was strong enough to be placed inside the enclosure with its foster parents for raising, to prevent human imprinting. The second chick was inverted in the eggshell and was unable to internally pip on its own. Despite successfully assisting the chick, due to complications, the chick passed away 2 days later. Our third chick is currently in the process of hatching. We are hopeful for a positive outcome and a successfully hatched chick which can be placed with its parents in the next few days. We will keep you posted in the next edition of our newsletter.

# Vulture Population Monitoring

## Cape Vulture

During the first half of 2021, we monitored four Cape Vulture colonies across the northern parts of South Africa and one colony in the southern parts of South Africa. A total of 1201 active nests were observed during the initial surveys so far. Kransberg and Soutpansberg will be surveyed in the next three weeks. Preliminary results show a decline in the number of active breeding pairs compared to last year. Manutsa showed a decline of 8% in breeding pairs which is in line with annual variation. However, we are concerned about the Skeerpoort colony, which declined by approximately 25%. We are unsure of the reason for this decline as the Nooitgedacht colony, approximately 20km away, remains stable. From personal observations, we suspect it might be due to the increased activity (e.g., increase hiking and para gliding) around the colony. We will continue to monitor the colony closely to see if we can better understand the factors driving this decline in breeding numbers.



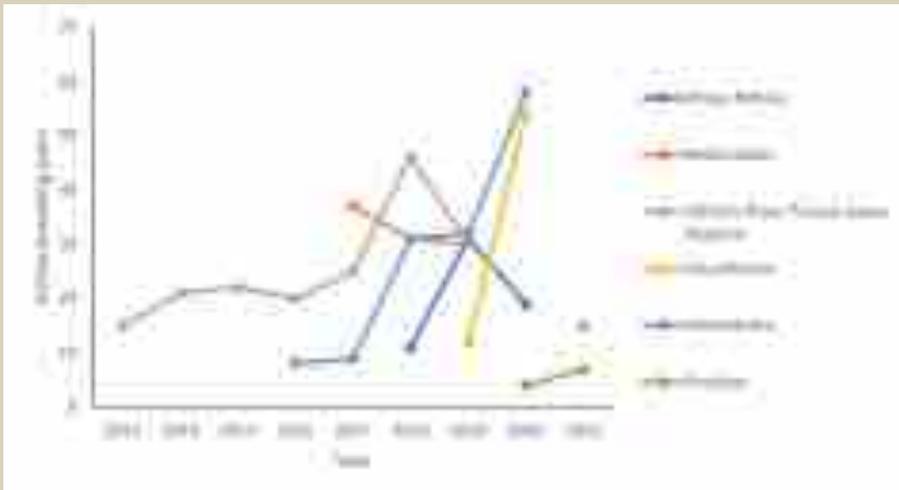
Annual estimates of the number of breeding pairs at each Cape Vulture colony monitored by VulPro throughout Southern Africa.

# Vulture Population Monitoring

## African White-backed Vulture

African White-backed Vulture tree nesting surveys were conducted at only two (Roedtan region and Olifants River Private Game Reserve) of the six sites so far this year. All the other sites will be surveyed in the next three weeks. The increases over the last couple of years in Roedtan, Mareetsane and Dwaalboom is due to expanding our monitoring efforts to new properties. However, the number of active breeding pairs at Olifants River Private Game Reserve has drastically reduced since 2018 from 46 pairs to only 15 pairs this year, the lowest recorded since 2013. This is really concerning and we are therefore monitoring the population on the property continuously and engaging with relevant stakeholders to see what we can do to get their numbers back to the numbers we observed in 2018.

Vulture counts are only possible with the support of all landowners involved: Leopard Lodge, Plumari Nature Reserve, Manutsa Game Farm, Griffon's Bush Camp, Moletje Nature Reserve, Soutpansberg, Olifants River Private Game Reserve, Omega Game Ranch, Bakoven Farm, La Rancho Farm, Khaya Ndlovu Estate, Ultimo Farm, Nando Farm, Leeuwdoorn Farm, Loggerinde Hoek, Soetdoring Farm, Numzaan Safaris, Laastepoort, TKB Farms and Bosveld Farm.



Annual estimates of the number of breeding pairs at each African White-backed Vulture area monitored by VulPro throughout Southern Africa

# Eastern Cape Report

## Kate Webster



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### Rehabilitation:

The bird from Tarkastad, mentioned in my previous, recovered extremely well and was released during March fitted with a tracking device. This bird spent some time down in the 'plains' of the Bedford/Adelaide area living dangerously close to those wind turbines. It subsequently started migrating up through the Winterberg range past the Hofmeyr roost and is presently foraging east of Kimberley. One is always amazed at how different they are and how one cannot determine where they will go.

During the month of February, I had two call outs for rehab birds. The first bird was seen sitting in a camp and fortunately Mr Kelly realized it needed assistance. Sadly, this bird was definitely a power line casualty. The burns were so bad that the wing had started rotting which resulted in my local vet, Dr Werner Wentzel, being called upon to perform his first wing amputation which he performed skilfully. The bird has recovered well and is even adapting to getting up onto perches.

The second bird came from Clifford area, where it seems that this young bird had been unable to take off after colliding with a fence. Fortunately, I was able to call upon a farmer from Dordrecht to assist in catching her and I collected her the following day. This bird has made a full recovery and has been released fitted with a tracking device. She seems to prefer the Rookwood vulture restaurant at present.

In the beginning of April, I received a call from an elderly lady from Russouw area who picked up a vulture injured from power lines. Grant Wiehahn, my Dordrecht farmer, once again came to the rescue. Sadly, we had to remove the ends of both wing tips as they were badly burnt and breaking off. This young bird will live in my enclosure with my other young birds until they are of breeding age.

My last vulture was a lovely young female bird, from Bethulie/Knapdaar area near the Orange river, that sat patiently in the corner of a camp after colliding with a power line and badly breaking the joint in her wing. She has regained all the weight she lost while waiting to be rescued and has now been moved into the large enclosure with the other permanently injured birds.

Of course, one gets the calls for other rehab birds. My rehab Booted eagle was finally released as it had managed to regrow enough primary feathers (after the previous person had cut them) and took to the skies quite comfortably. I then received a call for a young immature Verreaux's Eagle which was brought in from the Winterberg area. I passed this bird onto Dr Johan Joubert of Shamwari as I felt it would have a better chance of being released into the wild there as I have resident eagles here which would make life difficult for this youngster. My most recent rehab birds are Barn owls' chicks which were sadly removed from their nest and brought to the vet to dispose of. As some were still very young, Dr Wentzel and I divided them up to make management. My four owlets have now grown are being prepared for soft release back into the wild.

Sadly, my last 'other' rehab was a Blue Crane which was found down in the Dordrecht area but clearly not able to see with very milky eyes. Dr Wentzel and I decided it was in the birds best interest too euthanize it as it was not eating and able to see after a week of care.

# Eastern Cape Report

## Kate Webster

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### Eskom reporting:

The last year the killing of vultures due to power lines has been the WORST I have ever experienced since I have been working with the birds. I put it down to two main issues:

- Better reporting (people are reporting incidents more due to exposure of this problem on social media)
- Weather conditions such as the extreme dry conditions up until January, have forced the birds to forage quite widely in areas outside their usual range.

| Date       | Infrastructure type | Comments                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 13.01.2021 | Distribution line   | 2 x Cape vulture collision (dead)<br>Camdeboo area of Graaff Reinet – reported to me                                                                            |
| 17.02.2021 | Distribution line   | 1x Cape vulture – wing amputated<br>Unfortunately, we cannot pin point which line as bird was found away from lines<br>Morne Hattingh – Tarkastad/Golden Valley |
| 01.04.2021 | Distribution line   | 1 x Cape Vulture (permanent injury)                                                                                                                             |
| 02.04.2021 | Distribution line   | 1 x Cape vulture collision<br>Thomas river – Dave Wardle                                                                                                        |
| 28.04.2021 | Distribution line   | 1 x Cape vulture electrocution(dead)<br>Nigel McMaster- upper Cathcart                                                                                          |
| 29.05.2021 | Distribution line   | 1x collision - permanent wind damage<br>Isak Jacobs – Knapdaar/Bethulie                                                                                         |
| 30.05.2021 | Distribution line   | 1 x Cape vulture (dead)<br>Neil Evans – upper Cathcart                                                                                                          |

Due to circumstances, I have been unable to go into the field to investigate these reports but should catch up with them soon. It also seems quite evident that Eskom is clearly moving away from trying to take on the responsibility to mitigate their structures. We can only hope that with enough public support they can still be held liable for the environmental responsibility they have.

# Eastern Cape Report

## Kate Webster

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### Media:

Mariska Spoormaker did a second radio interview with me via whatsapp (Covid regulations then!) which was broadcast in RSG 360 programme early in January. An article (again Mariska Spoormaker) appeared in the Landbouweekblad of 18 February titled 'Boere help om aasvoëls in Oos-Kaap te red'. At the beginning of May the Home Brew film crew arrived at Rookwood to film for a program called Kwela which is part of Kyknet. This apparently will be shown towards the end of July.



### General:

Wind farms continue to be a threat to our Cape Vultures with news of more fatalities. As much as it is seen as renewable energy, it is also very destructive with endangered birds such as vultures and raptors being killed by the turbines. I am on the constant lookout for more potential developments that would be to the detriment of the vultures and register whenever necessary as I&AP. Information of fatalities still remains a HUGE secret with parties involved all signing non-disclosure documents!! I regularly get asked about information of vultures in various regions and yes, often in the very same foraging zones of the Cape vultures.

I reiterate that this industry remains skewed with monitoring dependent on the integrity of the specialists involved. It seems monies are being paid/supplied to 'allow' such developments to be sanctioned. The official numbers vs the actual numbers still remain a mystery with very few people being prepared to put their necks out and state what is happening.

The latest development is a taller turbine and longer blades proposed for one of the wind farms in the Bedford/Cookhouse area. According to their information Cape vultures only transverse 6% of the area so the effect will be nominal. How can this make any sense when you will never be able to tell a vulture where they can fly and how they must avoid this 6% zone!!!!

It is as bizarre as this 'Fly Safe Zone' that has been promoted with talks of 'reintroducing' birds into the Karoo with thousands of unsafe Eskom lines.....just creating more and more hotspots and obstacles for the species to overcome!!!!!!

# Eastern Cape Report

## Kate Webster

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### Thank You

In conclusion, this year has been an extremely tough year with my time constraints being restricted in working with the birds, however, I have still had the wonderful support of my children Kevin and Joy, our staff, the local vets Drs Wentzel (in particular) and Elreza Kloppers as well as the backup support from both Tim de Jongh and Dean Ricketts of DEAET. Vivan and Abraham of No 2 piggeries that keep me in constant supply of food and special mention must go to Mariza Schutte (one of VulPro's volunteers) who generously donated a deep freeze to help support my food supply at Rookwood. This is HUGE and has made my stress levels a lot lower when it comes to food supplies and storage. A big thank you must go to her and I'm sure her adopted bird, Fidelio, is equally happy as he continues to sit as a 'pigeon' on top of the enclosure waiting for the food to be delivered. Kerri, Ryno and Caroline of VulPro thank you for your continuous support and backup. I thank my sponsors Lomas Wildlife Protection Trust and DHL Express as I would not be able to do the work without their funding and support too.

Lastly in memory of my husband, who passed away at the end of March, I would like to thank him for his support over the years even though he always said 'vultures bite'. I would not have been able to grow and work with them from the time I collected my first injured bird here at Rookwood (sadly under power lines) way back in the 1990s without his support. Thank you Swithan, I know deep down you always felt strongly about the plight of the Cape Vulture.

To the landowners who always make the effort to contact me for assistance with Cape vultures, and play a very important role in keeping this species going. You guys are our ears and eyes on the ground. Thank you.



# Research

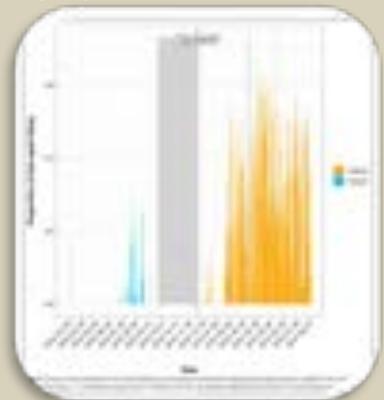
At VulPro, our research is aimed at positively benefiting African vultures and influencing conservation strategies in order to preserve and conserve the species aimed at preventing their extinction. So far, this year we have already published one scientific paper and have another three submitted, which are currently under revision and are expected to be published within the next couple of months. Furthermore, we have two publications that are almost ready for submission.

Throughout the first half of 2021, VulPro has been collaborating on various exciting projects. One such project, which we are incredibly excited about, is Caroline Hannweg's PhD. Caroline will be using basic biology and remote sensing techniques to model habitat selection for four threatened tree nesting vulture species across Southern Africa; aimed at allowing us and all conservation vulture related NGOs to make pinpointed and well-informed conservation decisions.

The second project which we are excited about is looking at global heating and its potential threat to African Vultures. This is a novel question that no one has researched in-depth and VulPro is extremely excited to be taking the lead on this. Our first question we will be addressing is "Does global heating pose a threat to the three biggest Cape Vulture colonies in South Africa: assessing past, current and future climatic conditions". This will form the basis for future investigation on the thermal physiology of African Vultures.

Additionally, we have been collaborating on two other projects since last year, with UCT and they are both finally coming to a head now. The first project is "assessing and developing a Cape Vulture collision risk model for renewable infrastructure". This study is of utmost importance to inform renewable energy developers with the correct information to reduce the impact on vultures. The second project is to "better understand the impact and the importance of supplementary feeding sites on the breeding success of Cape Vultures". This project forms part of a PhD that will be submitted in due course.

We have various other projects still running; 1.) looking at stress hormones in Gyps vultures, 2) assessing the beak and facial skin as heat radiators in three African Vulture species, 3) investigating the impact of lead on the thermal physiology of crows that can potentially be expanded to African Vultures which is in collaboration with Prof Andrew McKechnie and Prof Vinny Naidoo at the University Pretoria. As these projects progress, we will provide detailed descriptions of each of the projects.



# Publications

## Publication for 2021:

1.) Curk, T., Scacco, M., Safi, K., Wikelski, M., Fiedler, W., Kemp, R. and Wolter, K., 2021. Wing tags severely impair movement in African Cape Vultures. *Animal Biotelemetry*, 9(1), pp.1-13.

## Publications submitted:

- 1.) Aspenström S, Kemp R, Howard A, Hannweg, CG, Chetty K, Briers RA & Wolter K. (submitted) The threat of power lines on two African Vulture species. *Biodiversity and Conservation*
- 2.) Bromfield, M., Webster, K., Hannweg, CG., Kemp, R. & Wolter, K. (submitted) A GIS investigate of terrain and topographic characteristics at Cape Vulture (*Gyps coprotheres*) power line hotspots within the Eastern Cape, South Africa. *South African Geographical Journal*.
- 3.) Kane A, Monadjem A, Bildstein K, Botha A, Bracebridge C, Buechley ER, Buij R, Davies JP, Diekmann M, Downs C, Farwig N, Galligan T, Kaltenecker G, Kelly C, Kemp R, Kolberg H, MacKenzie M, Mendelsohn J, Mgumba M, Nathan R, Nicholas A, Ogada D, Pfeiffer MB, Phipps WL, Pretorius M, Rösner S, Schabo DG, Spiegel O, Thompson LJ, Venter JA, Virani M, Wolter K, Kendall C (Submitted) Size doesn't matter, it's how you use it: Using continent-wide variation in ranging behaviour of vultures to assess the feasibility of Vulture Safe Zones in Africa. *Biology Conservation*

## Publication In Prep:

- 1.) Sibanda, B., Kemp, R., Hannweg, CG. & Wolter, K. Movement behaviour and habitat requirements of a breeding White-headed Vulture
- 2.) Casey, J., Kemp, R., Hannweg, CG., Naidoo, V. & Wolter, K. Lead levels aren't driving power line collision in Gyps vultures



# Education

VulPro has always been aware of the importance of education within the field of conservation. Education provides an effective platform for creating an environmentally literate society, which understands and appreciates the vitally important role which vultures play in our ecosystem.

Through educational talks, tours, programmes, and campaigns, VulPro aims to not only reach but also engage individuals, in a manner that will stimulate a change in environmental awareness and perceptions; leading to a citizenry which would rather protect than persecute this iconic species.

One of the staff from VulPro, Obert Phiri travelled to Zimbabwe to help with the fitting of a tracking device on a bird that had gone through rehabilitation with Vic fall Wildlife trust. Obert shares more about his visit below.

*“On the 17th of April 2021 I set off to Zimbabwe to go and help with the fitting of a tracking device on a Lappet-faced vulture. The Victoria falls Wildlife Trust gave a warm welcome me on the 18th of April. On the 19th they took me a field visit to one of the biggest African White-backed Vulture colonies in Zimbabwe. We were able to survey the threats the vultures face and the key one was habitat destruction by the elephants. The elephants in the area have been able to alter the vegetation resulting in habitat loss and destruction as a result affecting the African-white backed vulture nestling. Zimbabwe currently has an elephant population estimated to be 100000 which is double the country’s carrying capacity.*

*On the 20th of April I assisted the team fit a tracking device on a Lappet-faced Vulture. The bird had been grounded with an injured wing and was rehabilitated at Vic Falls Wildlife Trust for at least 6 months. To attend the fitting of the device and release of the bird back into the wild were seven students from a Hwange tertiary institute who had come to learn more about vultures. During this we discussed the way forward on how we could work together to help these birds and we were also cementing our VulPro relationship with Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust to continue working together. One the 21st of April I had the honour of giving a presentation on the magnificence vultures with over 40 in attendance. The participation and attention given by the participants was mind blowing they were all excited to learn about vultures and were hungry for knowledge on how to help the misunderstood birds.*



Obert with the Vic Falls Wildlife Trust team tagging.



# The VulPro Vulture Restaurant and Hide

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## The VulPro Vulture Restaurant and the Sean Williams Living Creatures Trust Hide.

The main objectives for our restaurant are to supplement the ever-decreasing food supply for vultures; to provide bone fragments which are an important source of essential calcium and to provide safe food i.e., free of poisons and harmful drugs. We also get to monitor the vultures coming in to feed and are able to record numbers of visiting birds and those with patagial (wing) tags and leg bands. From the Sean Williams Living Creatures Trust Hide we have seen some wonderful activity at our vulture restaurant lately. There have been good numbers of visiting Cape Vultures, African White-backed Vultures and a few Lappet-faced Vultures that are starting to pop in more regularly. In addition to the vultures, we have had a couple of weeks with many Marabou Storks, a couple of White Storks, and daily visits from Yellow billed Kites, Sacred Ibis and Pied Crows.

Visit our YouTube page to view the live streaming of activity at our restaurant during the day,

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGHVAQO-dHHMxInt1UWv2EA>



# The Jabulani Safaris Vulture Restaurant

In his 1987 book *The World of Shooting*, Peter Johnson described the Mbembezi District of Matabeleland, Zimbabwe, 70 years ago, as a countryside dotted with settlements and villages surrounded by crops, their livestock herded by day and kraaled at night. Thanks to the crops, gamebirds flourished around these villages and, in the land between them, wildlife thrived undisturbed and unhindered, in harmony with humans. Man's activities and Nature's wellbeing seemed to be in balance.

Today, in many parts of Zimbabwe outside of the national parks and conservancies, wildlife has been poached and poisoned out of existence, while inside them projects tend to benefit wildlife at the expense of people. This is unsustainable for either wildlife or people. To succeed and survive, both must benefit. To this end, Joshua Malinga and Jim Goddard are leading the effort to restore a balance between natural and human activity on some 55,000 hectares of land in the Insiza District of Zimbabwe. Called the Shangani Sanctuary and near the village of Shangani, on the main road between Bulawayo and Gweru in Matabeleland, the vision is a long-term, sustainable economic/environmental model based on livestock, crops and wildlife. To restore diversity and a pristine natural habitat, Shangani is taking a holistic approach to its entire ecosystem, from the herding of cattle, land management to wildlife management. Underlying this vision is the concept is to get to the symbiotic relationship that used to exist between people and the planet.



# The Jabulani Safaris Vulture Restaurant

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Among other programs, Shangani Sanctuary has developed a way to try to reverse the decline of vultures. Regionally, the birds' numbers are down significantly, and the Cape vulture colony at the Wabai Hill, once the northernmost known roosting site of this species, has been abandoned. A new abattoir at Pezulu Ranches, a nearby commercial farm, supports the Shangani Sanctuary's vulture restaurant project with offal, offcuts and bones that are free from chemicals and drugs.

The running the vulture restaurant falls under the responsibility of Jabulani Safaris, an eco-tourism company that operates within the sanctuary, puts out these scraps, as well as natural wildlife carcasses, for the vultures. Jabulani Safaris general manager, Luke Terblanche spearheads the project in, consultation and guidance from VulPro. Feeding occurs once or twice a week depending on the slaughter schedule of the Pezulu Ranches. Terblanche and his staff have set up cameras to establish the numbers and species of vultures that frequent the site. To date, Lappet-faced, White-backed, Cape and Hooded and White Headed Vultures have all come to feed, with the White-Backed dominating the restaurant.

With the regular feeding, the restaurant has at least 100 vultures coming in when food is put out, with as many as 350 birds having come in on occasion. At night, Brown Hyenas and bushpigs are regular visitors to the restaurant too. Recently a lone Spotted Hyena visited the restaurant.



# Our Volunteer Voices

## It flies in the family

Vultures? Like in Vultures vultures? Those disgusting birds with blood and guts hanging from them? Eeuww, sies!” This is the standard reaction when you tell someone you are a VulPro volunteer. Usually this is followed by a really poor rendition of the vulture scene from the Jungle Book and the question, why?

Three years ago Magda Kets was looking for something to fill the empty nest as her fledgling Nicole Kets was preparing to fly the coop (aka Tukkie). Although most people would simply buy a Harley-Davidson, Magda is not most people and joined VulPro after reading a plea for volunteers on a Facebook post.

Soon Caleb Townsend took up residence in the Kets nest and join the VulPro colony. Birds of a feather flock together and pretty soon Magda’s sisters, Lientjie and Janet followed in Magda’s footsteps (shout out to Mom Willa for triple clutching those eggs and producing the triplets, or a “litter” as Dad Wynand used to say). And let’s be honest, who can resist our resident vulture PJ’s charms?

The question remains why? Why do we volunteer at VulPro?

The “restaurant” smells pretty awful if the wind happens to blow “the wrong way” and the residents have sharp beaks and talons. They regurgitate on demand and catching them is like trying to wrestle a high-powered fire hose into a box without getting wet, or bitten in this case. We drive crazy far distances, scale bob wire fences (Janet has the scar to prove it), walk for hours in the veld searching for injured birds and argue with dodgy wildlife rehab centres. We have crushed bones with hammers, spent hours cutting branches for nest material, faced possible arrest for trespassing and went on covert operations with SAPS to expose wildlife smuggling and dog-fighting close to Musina.

Ignoring the fact that they are critically endangered and need all the help they can get, they simply are the most gorgeous, curious and comical animals you will meet. Working there is rewarding and fun. Have you truly lived if you have not been in a tug of war over a branch with a vulture or if PJ hasn’t followed you around like a puppy? What can be more entertaining than watching a vulture, there is always THAT ONE, who squeezes too many branches in his mouth, trips over them, loses most of them on the way to its nest, or steals carefully placed branch from the neighbour’s nest. This is usually followed by a loud amount of squawking and a tug of war.

# Our Volunteer Voices

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They provide us with a sense of purpose and accomplishment. We usually meet a bird at the lowest point of its life. It has just been electrocuted, poisoned, flown into a pylon, captured for the muti trade or landed in a dam. This bird is simply not having a great day and that is where you as volunteer step in.

We have rescued birds, literally on the brink of death, birds too weak to hold up their heads. There were times where we were sure the bird would die, only to bear witness to the marvellous transformation once Kerri and her team had hydrated and fed the bird. The exhaustion and defeat you feel for this animal are instantly forgotten when you see the flicker of light reappear in those intelligent eyes and life returning to the limp body. It is at that very moment you know why you volunteer at VulPro, that you know you have made a difference.

Thank you VulPro for rescuing us from a live of boredom and being our happy place.

Regards, Magda Kets; Nicole Kets; Caleb Townsend; Janet Bouillon; Lientjie Acker



# Cultural folklore: Vultures are a good omen

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Peace has allegedly returned to Borno state as a vulture landed in Maiduguri amid Boko Haram.

According to a Facebook user known as Comr Muhammad, the migration of birds of prey out of Borno State in the last two decades is as a result of the manifestations of evil and crime in the land.

He said that elders told them that when people did not differentiate between the lawful and unlawful all the birds of prey, such eagles, vultures, hawks, etc will disappear therefore the return of a vulture is a sign of good omen hence we should deal lawfully with things.

Sharing photos of the vulture, he wrote;

## THE SIGN OF THE RETURN OF PEACE TO OUR DEAR STATE

The migration of birds of prey out of Borno in the last twenty years has been attributed to the manifestations of evil and crime in the land.

Our elders have told us that when evil deeds and corruption manifests itself and the people did not differentiate between the lawful and unlawful, all the birds of prey (eagles, vultures, hawks and their likes) will disappear.

However, today, an African Vulture came into Maiduguri and landed at the Shettima Baba Kura Kinandi's Ajaganaram camp opposite the New Prison thus indicating the return of peace to the state. These species of birds of prey lives on carcasses for survival and the moment people starts devouring the unlawful as sustenance, the birds migrate believing that, there is no difference between them and the human who eats and devour the unlawful.

We should keep on praying for peace and tranquillity to permanently return to us. Let us be mindful on our dealings in life and do good. The return of birds of prey should be considered as good omen and we should endeavour to deal justly and in lawful things. Allah knows best.

Article taken from <https://www.ghgossip.com/peace-returns-to-borno-state-as-a-vulture-is-spotted-in-maiduguri/>



# VulPro in the Media

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**Find out more about our new partnership** <https://kormorant.co.za/2021/06/25/local-vulture-centre-teams-up-with-detroit-zoo/>

**More research as** <https://kormorant.co.za/2021/06/17/haws-assists-vulture-centre/>

**Study urges the use of leg bands as** [https://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2021-03/m-wts031121.php](https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2021-03/m-wts031121.php)

**VulPro in the media as** <https://lowvelder.co.za/729069/organisation-goes-out-on-a-wing-for-vulture/>

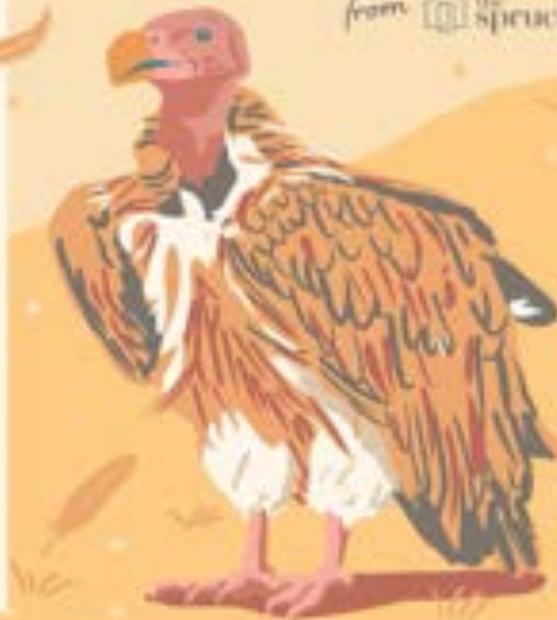
**Keep up with our captive breeding program**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5-02pNslGY>

## Fun Facts About Vultures

from  The Spruce

- There are 23 vulture species in the world
- Vultures are relatively social
- Vultures have excellent senses of sight & smell
- It's a myth that they circle dying animals
- They have weak feet & legs and can not carry prey away
- Vultures pee on their legs to cool off in hot weather
- New World vultures lack a syrinx and are nearly silent





# Comic Relief

Q. Why do vultures find it easy to fly?  
A. They only ever have carrion baggage.



# Our Adoptions

We are always so pleased to be able to give our supporters a personal look into the world of the birds they are protecting. We want to thank all our current adoptive parents for their continued support and for looking after their special bird!

- Mariza Hamman: Rigoletto the Lappet-faced Vulture, Tristan and Isolde the Cape Vultures and Orpheus the White-headed Vulture
- Clive Vardakis: Brizzle the Cape Vulture
- Fenn Bell Conservation Project: Veronica the Lappet-faced Vulture
- Katie Moning Ballinger: Peanut Butter and Jelly the African White-backed Vultures
- Nicole Schoppner: Elani the Cape Vulture and Shujaa the African White-backed Vulture
- Jonathan Chaplin: Conan and Sherry the Cape Vultures
- Garth Williams: ChickyB the Cape Vulture
- Ian Burton: George the African White-backed Vulture
- Xyla Holland: Cosmic Goddess the Cape Vulture
- Dawn Barclift: Ega the Lappet-faced Vulture
- Alexander and Silke: Kira-Mathilde the African White-backed Vulture and Bacchus Carlo and Cape Vulture
- Anastasia Korochanskaya: Indinda the Africa Fish-Eagle
- Foxfeather Zenkova: Cozacacuauhtli the King Vulture
- Carol Smith: Celeste the Cape Vulture



**Yvonne (Amelia Gale)**



**Celeste (Carol Smith)**

# Our Adoptions

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- Kevin Raber: Chelsey Byrd the African White-backed Vulture
- Suzanne Corrigan: Fionnbharr the Cape Vulture
- Andrea Scheier: Johnny the Lappet-faced Vulture
- Jessica Miller: Picchu the Andean Condor
- Annemieke de Wit: Isabis the White-headed Vulture
- Amelia Gale: Skala the African White-backed Vulture and Yvonne the Black Vulture
- Rod Rankine: Phoenix the Cape Vulture
- Tracey Robinson: TJay the Cape Vulture
- Frank Schoppner: Fenja the Lappet-faced Vulture
- John Turner: PJ the Cape Vulture
- Julie Edgley: Amala the Cape Vulture
- Hans and Ute Schutz: Lucky the Cape Vulture
- DHL: 51 Cape and African White-backed Vultures in our Open Enclosure to celebrate 51 years of DHL. Congratulations DHL, and thank you for your continued support!



**Open Enclosure (DHL)**



**Indinda (Anastasia Korochanskaya)**

# With thanks to our Sponsors



Lomas Wildlife Protection Trust

