

VULTURES

NEWSLETTER
October - December 2024



www.vulpro.com **Vulpro** 



contents

A word from our CEO, Kerri Wolter	2
VulPro Harties, Alistair Sinclair	3
Rescue & Rehabilitation	4-6
Release	7
Emergency Assistance	8
Captive Breeding	9-12
Research & Monitoring	13-18
Threats	19-23
Eastern Cape Report	24-25
Education	26
Protecting Vultures	27
Vulture Adoption	28-29
Media	30
Publications	31
Chris Eley	32
Tracy Karam	33
Kudu Awards	34
Wish List	35
Sponsors	36

“Vultures are the silent protectors of ecosystems, cleaning up what is left behind so that nature thrives.”

– Kerri Wolter

A word from our CEO



Kerri Wolter



This last quarter of 2024 has cemented our vulture conservation reach in earnest, completing some significant operational accomplishments through the success of bringing Cape Vultures back to the greater Indala Reserves in the Eastern Cape.

In less than a year, our aim, which we thought would take a few years, has already started to yield favourable results with a large group of regular visitors of Cape Vultures foraging amongst the reserves in and around the Shamwari Private Game Reserve. We could not be prouder as this is indicative of the lengths, passion and determination VulPro and its project partner, Shamwari Private Game Reserve, have gone to in making this a reality, and it is an example of what can be done when partnerships are established with a united and clear goal of supporting biodiversity.

Continuing with the success of our commitment to vulture conservation, I am proud to highlight my personal achievement in being named the SanParks Kudu Women in Conservation for 2024. It is a huge feather in my cap, especially coming from the largest conservation body in the country. I am incredibly proud of this award, especially because it highlights vulture conservation in this manner. To have this recognition from SanParks is truly an honour for me.

As we close the chapter on 2024, you'll notice a shift in our branding, as we embark on an ambitious project to make a greater impact and take a stronger stand for vultures. With the addition of our new marketing manager, whom we'll introduce in this edition of our newsletter, we're ready to elevate our brand awareness to new heights. It's a time for greater success and significant milestones in our mission to prevent further vulture decline. Looking ahead to 2025, all communications, reports, and newsletters will align with our new branding, reinforcing our commitment to a cohesive message for vulture conservation. This shift will ensure consistency across all platforms as we continue our vital work and strive for even greater achievements in the years to come.

Having said that, this final edition of our VulPro flyer for 2024 gives you, our readers, supporters, friends and family a very brief glimpse into the work, lives and efforts every staff member undertakes. We are still a very small team, each one dedicated to making a difference to every single bird that comes into our care, no matter how long, short, temporary or permanent.

We are there for the birds, and with each one of you, our ability to do more, be better and strive for greater success and accomplishments with the ever-pressing pursuit of reducing the everyday decline of vultures would simply not be possible.

With the utmost thanks and appreciation, thank you. Wishing you and your loved ones a MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR.

Quarterly Report: October to December 2024

By Alistair Sinclair, General Manager, VulPro Hartbeespoort

The rescue season has commenced in earnest at our Hartbeespoort facility, with 40 vultures admitted between 24 October and 20 December.

Once again, power line collisions remain the predominant cause of fractures, often necessitating wing amputations for affected birds. The recent heatwave has also led to a concerning rise in cases of dehydrated and grounded vultures.

Our rescue teams have been tirelessly travelling across the northern and central regions of South Africa to save these birds. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the compassionate individuals who have rescued and contained vultures while awaiting our team's arrival. Many of these vultures would have faced prolonged suffering without your swift action. Please remember to contact VulPro +27 82 254 4162 or +27 808 5113 if you see a vulture in distress.

The illegal capture of vultures remains a pressing issue. Many of these birds are caught for traditional medicine trade, where they are killed, and their parts are used for superstitious purposes. Despite the lack of scientific evidence supporting such practices – including claims that consuming a vulture's brain can bring lottery luck – this gruesome trade persists.

We are immensely grateful for our partnerships with other organisations to combat this threat. A notable example was a joint sting operation between VulPro and the NSPCA Wildlife Unit, successfully rescuing two vultures in the Mahikeng area destined for the traditional medicine trade.

We owe a special debt of gratitude to The Bateleurs, particularly their coordinator, Steve, and pilot extraordinaire, Roger Bozzoli. These dedicated individuals have supported numerous rescue missions, generously and personally covering the costs of fuel, landing fees, and expensive aircraft maintenance to assist wildlife in need. We salute your unwavering commitment.

In a tragic poisoning incident in Zimbabwe's Shangani area, only two vultures survived – a Lappet-faced Vulture

and an African White-backed Vulture. We fitted them with tracking devices to monitor their movements and gather critical data on their flight paths. Unfortunately, poisoning events in Zimbabwe, often targeting carcasses and waterholes, remain all too frequent, with devastating occurrences.

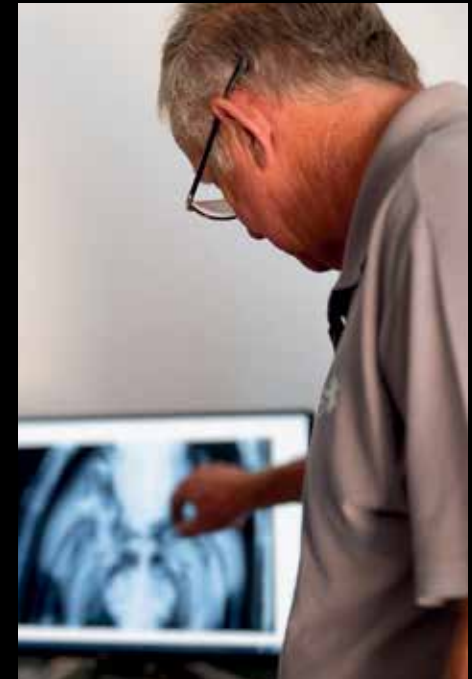
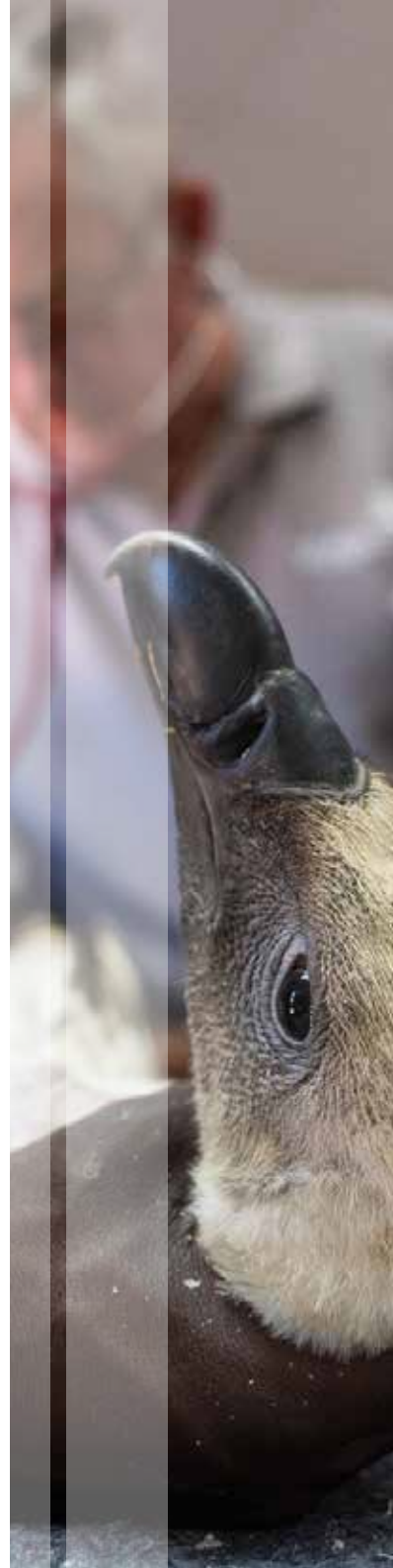
We have been fortunate to welcome local and international volunteers, who have assisted with everything from grounds maintenance to nest monitoring and rescues. Their dedication to vulture conservation – at their own expense – is truly inspiring.

November marked the transfer of more non-releasable vultures to their luxurious new home at Shamwari Game Reserve. DHL generously sponsored their transportation, while Chery South Africa supported the accompanying veterinarian, Dr Jenny Hewlitt, and our staff members. These birds will undoubtedly thrive under the care of our CEO, Kerri Wolter, and the VulPro team at Shamwari, the official breeding programme partner.

In December, we completed our annual health checks for all resident birds, including vultures and eagles. The Hartbeespoort facility buzzed with activity from early morning through late night as physical examinations and blood sample processing were conducted. Thanks to the state-of-the-art equipment sponsored by the Detroit Zoo, we could perform these critical tests on-site. We extend our gratitude to the veterinarians and laboratory technicians who worked tirelessly to ensure the process was seamless.

As the year draws to a close, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the staff who work alongside me for their hard work and passion in ensuring that every bird entering our facility receives the best possible care and attention.

The team at Hartbeespoort wishes everyone a safe and joyful festive season. Thank you for your continued support. Together, we are making a difference for vultures and wildlife.



Alistair Sinclair

“If we save the wild places,
we will ultimately save ourselves.”

— Ian Player

(South African conservationist)



Rescue & Rehabilitation

Over the past three months of 2024, our rescue teams have been hard at work across the country, responding to critical situations and admitting a variety of vulture species. Between 1 October and 31 December 2024, we welcomed a total of 45 patients into our care, this included Cape Vultures, African White-backed Vultures, a Black Eagle, and a Steppe Buzzard.

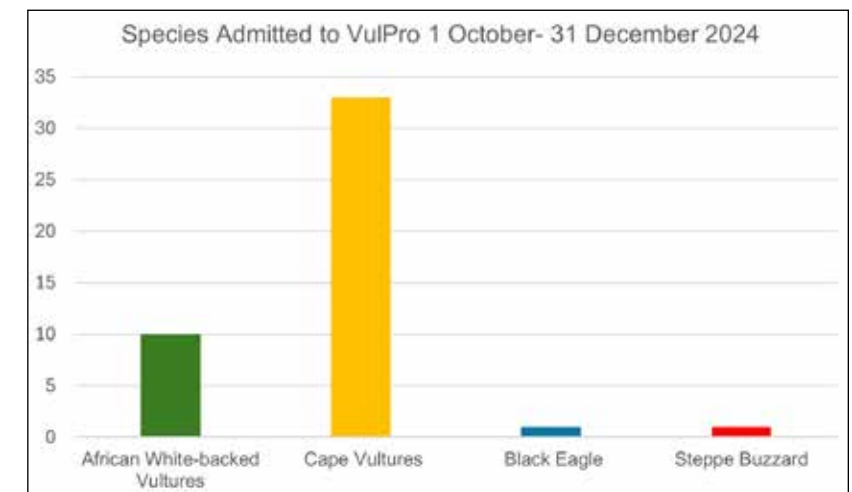
While the threats vultures face remains significant, our commitment to their rehabilitation and conservation continues to drive meaningful progress. This quarter, we are proud to announce that 3 vultures have successfully been released back into the wild, contributing to the ongoing recovery of their populations. For those that require further care, they remain under our dedicated supervision until they are fully recovered and ready for release.

Species Admitted to VulPro

1 October- 31 December 2024

- (10) African White-backed Vultures
- (33) Cape Vultures
- (1x) Black Eagle
- (1x) Steppe Buzzard

Total: (45)



In conclusion, despite the ongoing challenges vultures face, including poisoning, powerline collisions, and illegal capture, VulPro remains committed to their rehabilitation and protection. Through continued collaboration with stakeholders, communities, and authorities, we strive to reduce these threats and ensure a safer future for these vital species.

The final quarter of 2024 has proven to be an exceptionally demanding period for VulPro, with a significant number of rescues underscoring the urgent need for continued vulture conservation. In October, three rescues were undertaken, a figure which increased to 10 in November, and escalated further in December, with 35 birds requiring intervention. These figures highlight the considerable challenges faced during the season. Many of the rescued individuals were fledglings, making their first departure from the nest, only to encounter various threats necessitating immediate attention.

Our dedicated team has worked relentlessly, often managing multiple rescues in a single day. Thanks to their swift response and highly specialised rehabilitation efforts, many of the birds have been afforded a second chance at life. Regrettably, seven of the 45 birds rescued during this quarter succumbed within 24 hours of arrival or were humanely euthanised due to the severity of their injuries. Despite these losses, the overall success rate of our efforts is a testament to the unwavering commitment of our team in safeguarding these magnificent birds.

For those birds whose injuries result in amputations or other long-term consequences, some will remain at VulPro to contribute to our breeding programme, thereby playing a crucial role in the ongoing conservation of their species. The remaining individuals, once fully rehabilitated, are preparing for release in the coming year, marking another step forward in our mission to protect and restore vulture populations.



Rescue & Rehabilitation

R Rehabilitation Highlights



Rehabilitation Highlights

On 23 October 2024, VulPro's team was alerted to an urgent situation in Mafikeng, where two African White-backed Vultures were being held illegally, likely destined for sale in belief-based practices. The illegal wildlife trade remains a significant threat to vultures across Africa, as their body parts are often exploited in traditional medicine and rituals, exacerbating the decline of these already endangered species.

The Rescue

Upon receiving the distress call, we promptly mobilised and coordinated with the National Council of Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (NSPCA). Together, we intervened swiftly, ensuring the birds were rescued in a timely manner.

The first bird, a fledgling African White-backed Vulture, was swiftly seized and transported to safety. It had likely only recently fledged and was already exposed to the traumatic effects of human interference.

The second vulture, an adult African White-backed Vulture, was discovered bound and concealed in a bag on the back of a donkey cart. This deplorable method of transport highlights the appalling treatment that these majestic birds often endure at the hands of traffickers.

The Condition of the Birds

Both birds arrived at VulPro's facility in critical condition. Severely dehydrated and lethargic, they exhibited clear signs of prolonged neglect and stress.

While immediate hydration and medical intervention were provided, the fledgling's condition revealed further complications. Testing indicated significant lead toxicity, a widespread issue for vultures that ingest contaminated carrion, often linked to the use of lead ammunition. The bird's fragile state had endured too much, and despite our relentless efforts, the severity of its injuries left no viable path to recovery. In a heart-wrenching decision, we were compelled to humanely euthanise the bird, a sobering reminder of the myriad threats facing vultures.

In contrast, the adult vulture displayed remarkable resilience. Despite its severe condition upon arrival, it began to show signs of improvement with each passing day. With intensive care, proper nutrition, and medical treatment, this strong survivor has made a significant recovery. Its journey serves as a beacon of hope in the ongoing challenges of vulture conservation.

Release Highlights

This quarter, we are pleased to announce the successful release of Yellow Black A28, a Cape Vulture that had been rehabilitated after sustaining significant injuries in Ermelo, Mpumalanga. Her recovery serves as a testament to the critical role rehabilitation plays in the conservation of these magnificent birds.

Yellow Black A28 was admitted to VulPro on 20 April 2024, after suffering a clavicular fracture and muscle atrophy of the right pectoral muscle due to an accident while landing on a roof. Following extensive care and rehabilitation, she made an extraordinary recovery and was cleared for release by the Onderstepoort Veterinary Academic Hospital. On 8 November 2024, Yellow Black A28 was successfully released at Kudu Ranch, near Lydenburg, Mpumalanga, with a tracking device fitted to monitor her movements. The release was attended by ornithologist Theo Mol from MPTA, along with Kudu Ranch caretakers Steve and Ann.

Upon release, Yellow Black A28 initially hesitated but soon regained her confidence and soared into the skies, heading south towards KwaZulu-Natal.

This successful release highlights the effectiveness of our rehabilitation efforts and underscores the importance of offering these remarkable vultures a second chance at life. We are eager to track Yellow Black A28's journey and look forward to observing where her path leads in the wild.



Release Highlights



VulPro staff member Juliana Pinto and volunteer Daisy Bessant carrying the crate holding Yellow Black A28.

Emergency Assistance for Injured Vultures and Large Birds of Prey



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Vulpro
@
SHAMWARI
PRIVATE GAME RESERVE

1

Assessing the Situation:

- Check the bird's status (dead or alive).
- Count and observe: Note behaviour and location details.
- Take pictures and videos for documentation.

2

Recognising Symptoms:

- Note symptoms like wing drooping, fluffed feathers, or difficulty flying.
- Pay attention to any signs of distress.

3

Prompt Action:

- Contact VulPro immediately for assistance.
- Provide precise location details and GPS coordinates.
- Stay with the bird until help arrives.

4

Handling and Transportation:

- Approach the bird calmly and minimise noise.
- Consider weather conditions and provide suitable shelter.
- Consult VulPro for guidance on safe handling and transportation.

5

Emergency Response:

- Act swiftly to save birds lives.
- Your quick response could be the lifeline for vultures in need!

Vulpro's Permits and Registration:

- Fully authorised and registered as a vulture specialist conservation organisation and rehabilitation facility.
- Permits cover multiple provinces within South Africa and provide advice and consultation across Africa and beyond.
- Specialises in the rescue, treatment, and release of vultures and other large birds of prey.
- Only facility specialising in both in-situ and ex-situ vulture conservation strategies.
- Achieves a 75% survival rate post-release.
- Releases 64% of all cases coming into the facility.
- Incorporates individuals unable to be released into a captive breeding programme.
- Offspring from the breeding programme are released, preventing species extinction by replenishing wild populations.

2024 Breeding Success: A Milestone Year for VulPro's Vultures

The 2024 breeding activity report highlights the remarkable dedication of the birds to fulfilling their reproductive roles and serving as vulture ambassadors for Africa. Their efforts inspire immense gratitude and admiration, showcasing the beauty and significance of these peaceful creatures.

This year has undoubtedly been our most successful yet, with no nestlings or fledglings experiencing calcium issues. This success is attributed to finely tuned management practices and proper nutritional and bone chip support. As a result, all 20 nestlings and fledglings have survived, with all but two successfully fledging to date.

Our three White-backed Vulture fledglings have been successfully relocated to our Hartbeespoort facility, with the invaluable assistance of DHL. These fledglings are now being prepared and nurtured for their release. We are thrilled to have secured tracking devices for each of them, made possible by a generous grant from Hunan Global Messenger Technology Co., Ltd. These devices will enable us to monitor their survival and movement patterns closely. Updates on their progress will be shared in due course. If anyone is interested in adopting one of these birds and giving it a name, please contact us at admin@vulpro.com.

All Cape Vulture captive-bred fledglings are now in their temporary enclosures and are being prepared for relocation to the release enclosure on the north side of the Shamwari Reserve. Each fledgling has undergone a full health check and received a clean bill of health. This year, most fledglings are in excellent condition, with an average weight of 8.5 to 9 kg per bird. Alongside preparing these 17 individuals for release, we are thrilled to have attracted a large kettle of Cape Vultures now roosting and moving within the Shamwari Reserve. Their presence offers a unique opportunity for the captive birds to form strong connections with wild individuals at the release and feeding sites, ensuring a soft and successful transition to freedom.

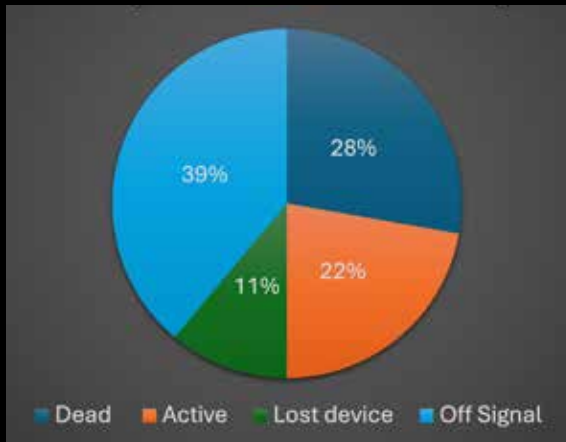


Captive Breeding

"The earth is not ours; it is a treasure we hold in trust for future generations."
— African Proverb

Captive Breeding

Tracking Data



Breakdown of the fate of each captive bred Cape Vulture released in Shamwari Private Game Reserve in May 2024



The Importance of Tracking Data

Tracking devices are indispensable to VulPro's conservation efforts, offering real-time data on the movements and behaviours of captive-bred and rehabilitated vultures post-release. This technology enables VulPro to assess their integration into natural habitats, refine restoration strategies, and respond swiftly to emerging threats, such as power line collisions, electrocutions, and poisoning incidents.

In addition, tracking data underpins critical scientific research, including studies on climate change impacts on vulture behaviour and survival rates, as well as the causes of human-induced mortality across Africa. Furthermore, the data enhances community engagement by raising awareness of the challenges vultures face, fostering a sense of stewardship, and encouraging local participation in conservation efforts.

By delivering actionable insights, tracking technology plays a pivotal role in shaping conservation strategies, protecting vultures, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of these keystone species.

Captive Breeding Tracking Data

A critical component of VulPro's conservation efforts involves the release of captive-bred vultures into the wild to bolster natural populations. In May 2024, 18 Cape Vultures were released into Shamwari Private Game Reserve in the Eastern Cape, all equipped with GPS tracking devices. These devices are essential for monitoring their post-release movements, survival rates, and integration into the wild. By gathering tracking data, VulPro can gain invaluable insights into the vultures' behaviour, movement patterns, and the challenges they face in the wild. This data is instrumental in refining conservation strategies and improving the success rates of future releases.

In May 2024, VulPro released 18 captive-bred Cape Vultures into Shamwari Private Game Reserve in the Eastern Cape, equipping each bird with a GPS tracking device to monitor post-release movements. The release provided valuable insights into the integration of captive-bred individuals into wild populations.

Summary of Outcomes

- **Shedding of GPS Loggers:**

Two vultures (11%) managed to shed their loggers, which were later retrieved by VulPro field staff.

- **Confirmed Mortalities:**

Five birds (28%) were confirmed dead in areas surrounding the reserve:

1. Three birds succumbed to electrocution from power line interactions.
2. One bird was discovered with a fractured humerus. Due to the location of the injury and its impact on quality of life, humane euthanasia was deemed necessary. The injury likely resulted from a collision with a hard surface.
3. One bird's cause of death could not be determined.

- **Signal Loss:**

Seven devices have ceased transmitting. Potential reasons include:

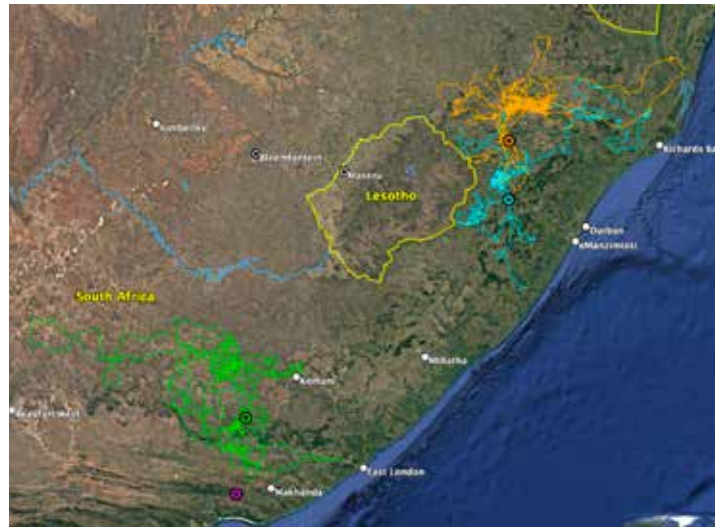
- Limited network coverage.
- Insufficient solar exposure affecting battery performance.
- Technical malfunctions.

Occasionally, tracking devices reconnect, and VulPro continues to monitor the system closely for updates.

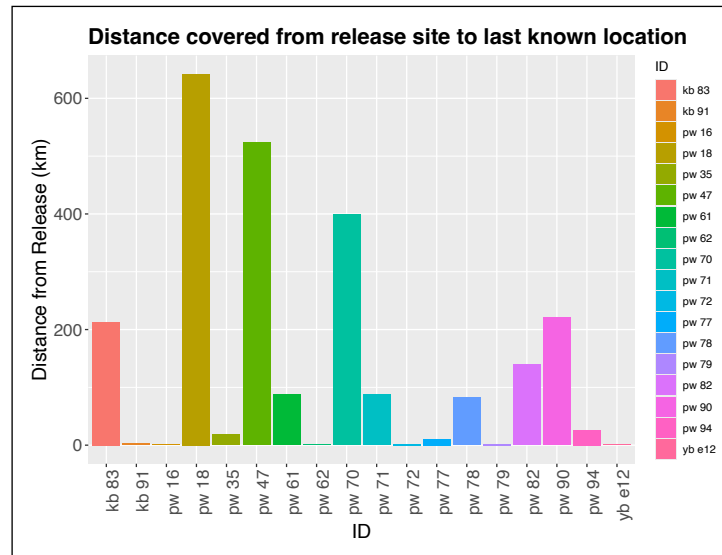
- **Active Devices:**

Four vultures are still actively transmitting data:

- **Purple, White 78:** Primarily localised near the release site, with its furthest excursion to Victoria West in the Northern Cape before returning to cliffs near Bedford in the Eastern Cape.
- **Purple, White 18 and Purple, White 47:** These vultures appear to be travelling together, exploring KwaZulu-Natal.
 - Purple, White 18 has travelled approximately 400 km, from the Drakensberg mountains to Saint Lucia on the Indian Ocean coast.
 - Purple, White 47 has ranged further, covering areas from Margate on the Eastern Cape border to Ulundi in the north.
- **Purple, White 16:** This vulture presents a unique challenge. Its GPS device consistently reports from the same location near the Shamwari release site. Despite multiple visits, the field team has been unable to locate the bird or recover the device. Monitoring efforts continue.



Tracking devices of captive bred vultures released in May 2024, still transmitting data in December 2024. Green = Purple White 78; Orange = Purple White 18; Blue = Purple White 47 and Pink = Purple White 16.



Comparison of the distances covered by each individual captive bred Cape Vulture following their release from the enclosure at Shamwari Game Reserve in May 2024.

Captive Breeding

Tracking Data

Captive Breeding

Tracking Data



Preliminary Observations

The release programme has yielded mixed results, with both significant successes and regrettable losses. A comprehensive evaluation will be conducted to assess the release's overall success and inform future strategies.

Key preliminary findings include:

- **Diverse Movement Patterns:** Some vultures remained within 2 km of the release site, while others travelled over 600 km, demonstrating the remarkable mobility of these captive-bred birds.
- **Integration Insights:** Tracking data provides vital information on the ability of captive-bred vultures to integrate into wild populations, identify suitable roosting sites, and potentially contribute to breeding stock.

Future Implications

The data collected will play a crucial role in refining VulPro's release strategies to enhance future outcomes. By understanding movement patterns, identifying potential threats, and evaluating integration success, VulPro can ensure that captive-bred vultures contribute effectively to the long-term conservation of this keystone species.

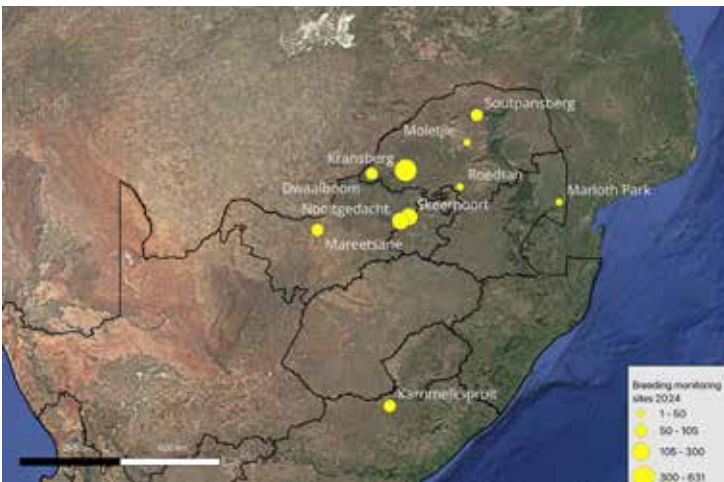
In conclusion, while the tracking data has provided encouraging results in terms of the vultures' mobility, the challenges faced by the released birds emphasise the need for ongoing efforts to mitigate threats such as power line collisions and electrocutions. This release programme has provided invaluable insights that will be used to fine-tune future conservation strategies and improve the success of vulture supplementation efforts. We are committed to using these findings to enhance our understanding of vulture behaviour and refine the techniques employed in future releases to ensure the long-term survival of the species.

In alignment with VulPro's mission to safeguard vulture populations, the fourth quarter of 2024 saw the continuation of our biannual monitoring of breeding sites. This critical initiative spans both tree- and cliff-nesting vulture species and involves comprehensive field visits across ten key breeding sites in five provinces of northern South Africa.

The monitored sites include six cliff-nesting locations – Kransberg, Moletjie, Soutpansberg, Nooitgedacht, Skeerpoort, and Kammelspruit – and four tree-nesting sites – Dwaalboom, Roedtan, Mareetsane, and Marloth Park. These visits are guided by rigorous protocols refined over more than a decade of dedicated research and conservation efforts.

By conducting at least two monitoring visits annually for each site, VulPro ensures a precise evaluation of breeding success while gathering vital data on vulture population dynamics. These insights play an essential role in identifying population trends, informing conservation strategies, and supporting the long-term survival of these iconic birds.

Our ongoing commitment to monitoring and data collection underscores VulPro's dedication to evidence-based conservation, ensuring that every step we take contributes meaningfully to the protection and preservation of vultures in South Africa and beyond.



Map of the vulture breeding sites monitored by VulPro in 2024, differentiated by colony population size.



Research & Monitoring

Nesting Activity

References:

- Hirschauer, M.T., Wolter, K., Howard, A., Rolek, B.W., and McClure, C. J. W. (2020) Population growth rates in northern Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres* colonies between 2010 and 2019. *Bird Conservation International*: 1-10.
- Jikijela, S. M. L. (2013). Co-operative environmental governance: alignment of environmental authorisations in the province of KwaZulu (Doctoral dissertation, North-West University).
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- Thompson, L. J., Davies, J. P., Gudehus, M., Botha, A. J., Bildstein, K. L., Murn, C., & Downs, C. T. (2017). Visitors to nests of Hooded Vultures *Necrosyrtes*

VulPro surveyor Obert Phiri surveying Karmmelkspruit cliff colony using telescope, 2024.



Research & Monitoring

Cliff Nesting

Our cliff-monitoring efforts primarily focus on Cape Vultures (*Gyps coprotheres*), southern Africa's sole endemic vulture species, currently classified as Vulnerable by the IUCN. Using high-resolution cameras and spotting scopes, we map and identify nests, assigning unique identifiers to track their locations. Behavioural observations, including incubation, brooding, and nestling presence, are systematically recorded using standardised codes to ensure consistency.

In 2024, VulPro documented 1,463 active Cape Vulture nests across five key sites, reflecting a 6.75% decline from the 1,569 nests recorded in 2023. It is important to note that the 2023 data included the Manutsa colony, which is now monitored independently. Excluding Manutsa, our 2024 data represent approximately 20–30% of the global Cape Vulture breeding population (Hirschauer et al., 2020), with the Kransberg colony in Marakele National Park remaining the largest.

Our final monitoring visits for 2024, conducted between September and November, yielded mixed results. While some fluctuation in breeding success was anticipated, outcomes varied across sites. The Moletjie colony, for example, exhibited very low breeding activity, with only one successful nest recorded during the second annual visit. This underscores the vulnerability of smaller colonies, where increasing human encroachment and frequent disturbances severely threaten breeding capacity. Without immediate conservation interventions, such colonies risk local extinction, with potentially significant implications for the species' overall population. Conversely, the Nooitgedacht colony demonstrated growth, with a 4% increase in breeding success compared to our initial visit in May.

Notable expansions to our monitoring efforts included Karmmelkspruit in the Eastern Cape, where 61 breeding pairs were recorded. This initiative forms part of a broader strategy to assess the success of releasing captive-bred vultures into regions where populations have been severely depleted. Additionally, monitoring efforts in Marloth Park, Mpumalanga, led to the discovery of a rare Hooded Vulture nest. With fewer than 100 nests remaining in South Africa (Thompson et al., 2017), this finding underscores the importance of expanding monitoring into under-studied areas.

At Atherstone Nature Reserve in Limpopo, however, findings were less encouraging. The overpopulation of elephants has resulted in the loss of suitable nesting trees, highlighting the necessity of balanced wildlife management. Nonetheless, a sighting of three Lappet-faced Vultures feeding on a carcass offered hope of locating an active nest on neighbouring properties. Efforts are currently underway to engage local landowners in further research.

For tree-nesting species, VulPro employs a combination of walking, drone, and vehicle surveys to monitor White-backed, Lappet-faced, and Hooded Vultures. Walking surveys are the preferred method, as they minimise disturbance and mitigate biases associated with limited vehicle access. Where walking surveys are impractical due to vast distances, dense vegetation, or potentially dangerous wildlife, drone and vehicle surveys are used to supplement data collection. Researchers document nesting activity using GPS devices and binoculars, applying the same standardised codes utilised in cliff monitoring.

In 2024, VulPro recorded 137 active tree nests across 20 properties. Roedtan reported a 57.1% increase in nests compared to 2023, partly attributable to the inclusion of a new site, New Wycombe. Mareetsane demonstrated a 26.7% increase in successful nests, rising from 45 in 2023 to 57 in 2024. Conversely, Dwaalboom recorded a decline in active nests from 84 in 2022 to 73 in 2024, although successful nests during the second visit increased from 62 to 68.

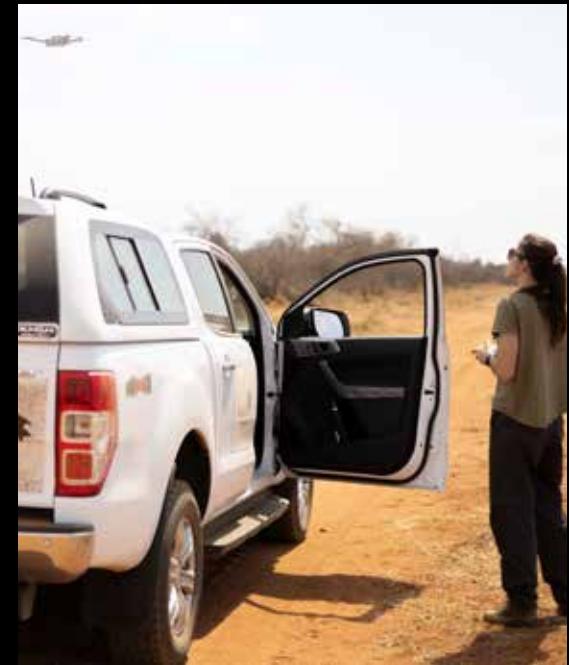
The expansion of our monitoring efforts also yielded important findings, such as the rare Hooded Vulture nest recorded at a newly surveyed site in Marloth Park, Mpumalanga. With less than 50 to 100 nests left in South Africa (Thompson et al., 2017), this discovery underscores the importance of continued monitoring in under-studied areas, as well as the expansion into new ones. Our efforts this year also extended to the Atherstone Nature Reserve in Limpopo, where our findings were less encouraging. Our November visit revealed the negative impacts of an overabundant elephant population, which has led to the loss of suitable nesting trees, highlighting the need for balanced wildlife management and adaptive conservation strategies to ensure the survival of tree-nesting vultures in these regions. On a more positive note, three Lappet-faced vultures were observed feeding on a carcass during our visit, raising hopes for the discovery of an active nest on one of the neighbouring properties. Efforts are currently underway to engage local landowners and gain access to their land for further monitoring and research.

These results highlight the dynamic nature of vulture populations and underscore the importance of adaptive conservation strategies to protect these vital species.



Research & Monitoring

Tree Nesting



VulPro surveyor Juliana Pinto operating drone for tree-nesting monitoring.

Research & Monitoring

Fieldwork and
Community Outreach



A vital element of VulPro's monitoring efforts involves engaging with local stakeholders and communities. Their intimate knowledge of the land and vulture populations offers invaluable insights for tailoring site-specific conservation actions. By fostering strong relationships and encouraging local interest in vultures, VulPro is able to better understand environmental changes, mitigate human-induced threats, and promote the long-term protection of these critical species.

This engagement also cultivates a sense of stewardship within communities, ensuring the safety of vultures even in VulPro's absence. Regular engagement and educational outreach are central to raising awareness about the ecological importance of vultures and inspiring proactive participation in conservation initiatives. Such collaborative efforts not only secure the future of vulture populations but also enhance the sustainability of the communities that share their habitat.

As we continue to expand our efforts, we invite landowners and community members to share information about vulture breeding sites in their areas. VulPro is eager to explore opportunities to monitor these sites and incorporate them into our conservation work. Your insights could make a meaningful difference – please do not hesitate to get in touch. Together, we can ensure a brighter future for vultures and their ecosystems.

Monitoring – Tracking Data

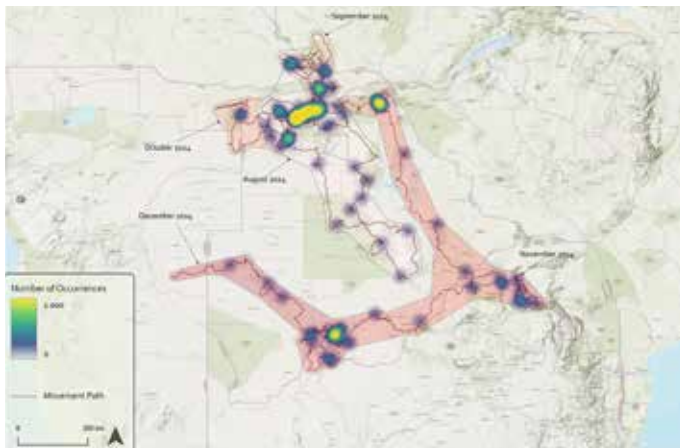
A cornerstone of VulPro’s monitoring initiatives is the precise tracking of avian species using advanced GPS technology. This includes Cape, White-headed, Lappet-faced, White-backed, and Hooded Vultures, as well as Martial Eagles. Tracking devices are affixed to various birds, ranging from rescued, rehabilitated, and released individuals to captive-bred birds introduced into the wild, and even wild-captured birds involved in research projects.

These devices provide critical data on bird movements, behaviours, and the multitude of threats they encounter across vast regions, including Angola and Zambia. The insights gained enable VulPro to monitor species over extensive areas, refine conservation strategies, and advance our understanding of vulture ecology. This comprehensive tracking approach is essential not only for the protection of these species but also for advancing research and fostering more effective conservation interventions.

Case Study: Blue White 35

Blue White 35, an African White-backed Vulture listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List, was rescued on 31 January 2024 at a shopping mall in Johannesburg following a collision with a glass window. Found in a severely weakened state with dehydration, head injuries, and temporary neurological impairment, the vulture received expert care from VulPro’s dedicated veterinary and rehabilitation team, making a remarkable recovery.

Following rehabilitation, Blue, White 35 was released on 25 February 2024 at Rooicoppies Farm in the Kuruman region,



GPS tracking of Blue White 35 between August and December 2024

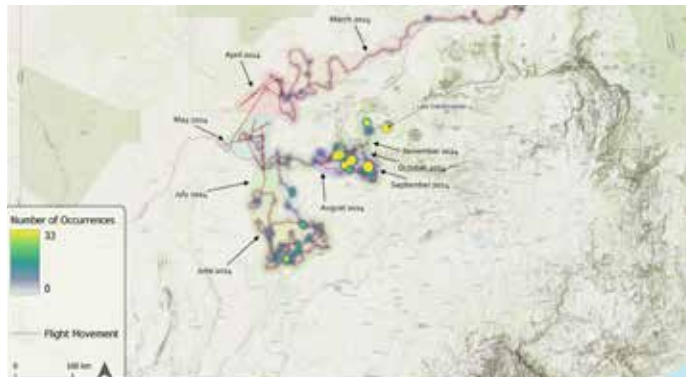
Northern Cape. Since release, the vulture has demonstrated extraordinary long-range movements, covering over 3,000 km in just three months. Its travels included the Okavango Delta in Botswana, extending into Zambia and Angola, before retracing its path southward through Mpumalanga and the Northern Cape in South Africa. Most recently, the bird ventured into Namibia, highlighting the species’ reliance on vast, uninterrupted landscapes for survival.

Case Study: Yellow, Black A25

Yellow, Black A25, a Cape Vulture, was rescued on 15 December 2023 from the illegal wildlife trade associated with traditional medicinal practices in southern Africa – a practice responsible for the loss of hundreds of vultures annually. A25 was discovered in Blouberg in a severely compromised state, suffering from dehydration, emaciation, and severe leg abrasions. After receiving intensive care at VulPro’s rehabilitation centre, A25 was successfully released back into the Blouberg area on 13 March 2024.

Post-release, A25 exhibited strong flight capabilities, covering over 1,000 km across Botswana, the Northern Cape, and North West Province. Tragically, her GPS signal was lost in Montsana, North West. Subsequent investigations revealed her tracking device abandoned on a tree branch, with no sign of the bird. Although conclusive evidence is unavailable, the circumstances strongly suggest another instance of poaching.

This incident underscores the persistent threat of wildlife crime to vultures and highlights the pressing need for enhanced conservation strategies, stricter enforcement measures, and community education to combat poaching and protect these vital species.



GPS tracking data transmitted by Yellow Black A25 from March to November 2024



Yellow Black A25’s tracking device, found carefully placed on a branch in Montsana, North-West Province

Research & Monitoring

Tracking Data

Research Projects and Collaborations

Research & Monitoring

These ongoing research projects and publications are instrumental in advancing our understanding of the challenges faced by vultures and other raptors. Our collaboration with various research organisations ensures that we remain at the forefront of vulture conservation, continually refining our methods to ensure the protection and survival of these essential species.



VulPro's commitment to evidence-based conservation is demonstrated through our extensive research efforts, which are vital for understanding vulture populations, behaviour, and the threats they face. By systematically collecting and analysing data from our monitoring, tracking, and other conservation activities, we are able to refine our strategies, respond swiftly to birds in distress, and answer critical research questions. Our ongoing research projects and collaborative efforts are essential in advancing the field of vulture conservation.

Ongoing Research Projects:

- 1. Olifants Private Nature Reserve Monitoring:** VulPro continues to analyse annual datasets from Limpopo's Olifants Private Nature Reserve, which is home to White-backed, Hooded, and White-headed vultures. This research is focused on evaluating population trends and developing a standardised framework for data management, which will be applied across all of our monitoring locations. This standardisation is crucial for improving the consistency and effectiveness of our conservation efforts.
- 2. COVID-19 Impact on Raptor Ranging Behaviour:** In collaboration with global partners, VulPro is contributing to a study that examines the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on raptor ranging behaviour, using tracking data from African raptors, including our own. This study aims to understand how human movement restrictions during the pandemic affected bird populations and their movement patterns. The manuscript is currently undergoing internal review for publication, which will shed light on the broader ecological impacts of the pandemic.
- 3. Rapid Pesticide Poisoning Detection:** As part of our ongoing efforts to mitigate poisoning threats to vultures, VulPro is conducting blood sample analyses to establish baseline values for detecting pesticide poisoning in birds. The goal is to develop a rapid, field-deployable test kit that will drastically reduce the time required to diagnose pesticide poisoning, improving the chances of survival for poisoned vultures and other raptors.

Publications and Findings:

- **Biological Conservation Journal (May 2024):**
A key paper, published in the prestigious Biological Conservation Journal, analysed 1,704 mortality records across 45 avian species. The study revealed that human-induced causes, including electrocution (40.5%), illegal killing (21.7%), and poisoning (16.3%), are the primary threats to these species. These findings underscore the importance of mitigating these threats through strategic interventions.
- **Journal of Raptor Research (July 2024):**
Another important study, submitted to the Journal of Raptor Research, examines the effects of habitat loss and powerline density on vulture movement. By utilising VulPro's spatial data, this research highlights the challenges posed by rapidly changing landscapes, including increased powerline interactions, which pose a significant risk to vulture populations.

Vultures face unsustainable pressures globally, with six of South Africa's nine native species classified as Vulnerable, Endangered, or Critically Endangered. VulPro's dual approach – rigorous research and a robust rescue and rehabilitation programme – addresses these threats by identifying key drivers of decline and implementing targeted actions.

Current Admissions:

In the final trimester of 2024, VulPro admitted 53 vultures, with grounding, illegal detention, and energy infrastructure incidents emerging as the leading causes.

1. Grounded Vultures:

Grounding often indicates injury, illness, or exhaustion. Young fledglings are particularly vulnerable during heatwaves, a growing concern in the face of climate change. Diagnosing and addressing the underlying causes is critical for their survival.

2. Illegal Detention for Belief-Based Practices:

Vultures are often exploited for cultural beliefs linked to traditional medicine, with parts used as good luck charms or for foresight. VulPro rescued two White-backed Vultures this trimester from an illegal holder in Mafikeng, highlighting the widespread impact of the muthi trade. VulPro combines

education, law enforcement collaboration, and community engagement to combat this threat.

3. Energy Infrastructure Collisions and Electrocutions:

As vultures favour open areas for movement and roosting, powerlines and wind turbines pose significant risks. Injuries from such incidents range from burns to fractures. VulPro works with energy providers like Eskom and environmental consulting agencies to mitigate these risks. Despite reporting 39 powerline-related cases in 2024, only ten have been resolved, highlighting the need for further action.

Mitigation Efforts:

VulPro's multidisciplinary approach includes:

- Raising awareness through educational outreach and facility tours.
- Collaborating on Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) to protect critical habitats.
- Advocating for safer energy structures and reporting incidents to ensure corrective measures are implemented.

By combining rescue efforts with education, research, and advocacy, VulPro remains at the forefront of vulture conservation, addressing threats at their root while providing immediate support to injured birds.

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Cape Vultures	3	17	49	62	57	99	60	50	68	59	34	56	29
African White-backed Vultures	0	0	15	7	4	5	1	12	16	6	8	7	8
Lappet-faced Vultures	0	0	1	1	0	3	0	2	1	0	0	1	1
Unknown vulture carcasses	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Other species	4	7	14	15	34	14	1	13	28	18	49	2	1
Total	7	25	79	85	96	122	62	77	113	83	93	66	39

Table 2: Number of incidents and species affected by power line incidents between 2012 and 2024



Threats

Eskom's commitment to vulture safety in action



Eskom's Commitment to Vulture Safety at Shamwari Private Game Reserve

Eskom has taken a significant step in supporting vulture conservation by addressing the risks posed by power lines at Shamwari Private Game Reserve in the Eastern Cape. Power lines are a well-known hazard to vultures and other birds of prey, leading to fatal collisions and electrocutions when birds come into contact with the lines. These incidents can result in life-changing injuries that often prevent vultures from being released back into the wild.

In response to these dangers, Eskom has installed key mitigation measures at Shamwari, including power line insulation and bird flight diverters. These initiatives are crucial in reducing the likelihood of collisions and electrocutions, ensuring a safer environment for vultures and other wildlife in the region.

VulPro is encouraged by Eskom's proactive approach and is working alongside them as part of broader efforts to address the multiple threats vultures face. In addition to power line risks, challenges such as habitat loss, poisoning, and illegal hunting continue to threaten vulture populations.

Collaborative actions like these are vital in protecting vultures and promoting their recovery. Eskom's commitment to safer infrastructure is a positive step in the right direction, and we look forward to further partnership in creating a safer environment for vultures and other bird species.



Powerlines

A Deadly Threat to Vultures and Wildlife

Powerlines pose a serious danger to vultures and other large birds, as well as livestock and wildlife. Collisions and electrocutions can lead to severe injuries or fatalities, threatening the survival of these vital species and disrupting ecosystems.

We need your help!

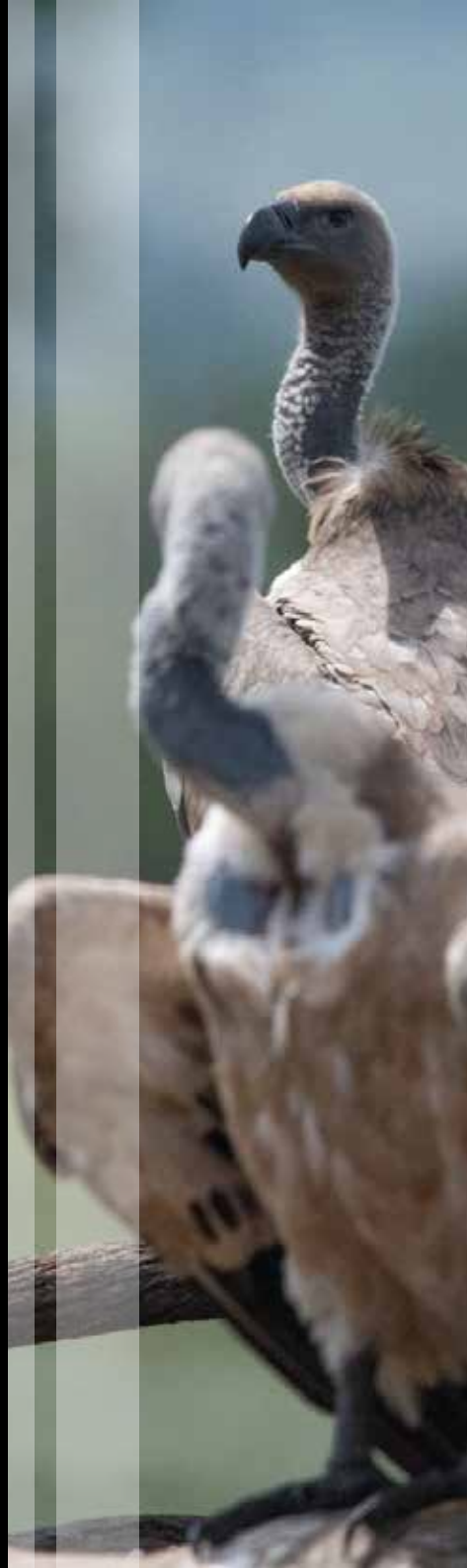
If you encounter any injured or dead birds of prey or wildlife affected by powerlines, please report it to VulPro.

082 808 5113 | kerri@vulpro.com

Together, we can protect our wildlife and preserve vulture populations. By doing so, you can help activate the Eskom Incident Management Process and prevent further harm.

<https://www.vulpro.com/>





South Africa is experiencing a significant surge in renewable energy development, with production increasing sharply between 2010 and 2023. Solar energy has spearheaded this growth, closely followed by wind-generated power, driving the country's transition towards alternative energy sources.

Over the last trimester, VulPro identified 57 active developments undergoing Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) across the country. In South Africa, the EIA process is a legal requirement for any new or expanding development that may impact the environment, under the National Environmental Management Act, 107 of 1998 (NEMA). Two categories of processes are prescribed based on the scale of the proposed development: the Basic Assessment process for smaller sites and the Scoping & Environmental Impact Report process for larger ones (Jikijela, 2013).

The process is typically managed by an Environmental Consultancy Agency, with an Environmental Assessment Practitioner (EAP) appointed to oversee its execution. The primary objective of EIAs is to identify, predict, and prevent environmental harm at the project's outset. For vultures, this often includes assessing proximity to breeding colonies, roosting sites, or feeding grounds, as well as evaluating risks such as collisions, electrocution, and habitat fragmentation. When avoiding damage is impossible, mitigation measures are enforced as conditions for project approval.



The timeline for the EIA process varies significantly depending on the site and may require detailed expert studies, including biodiversity assessments, avifauna reports, socio-economic analyses, and water resource evaluations. During the EIA, Interested and Affected Parties (I&APs) are provided with copies of these studies and given the opportunity to submit comments and raise their concerns. Conservation organisations such as VulPro contribute critical expert insights to ensure that vulture habitats are protected, and risks minimised. Upon completion, all documentation is submitted to the relevant environmental authority for review. The authority may approve the project with conditions, request modifications to mitigate risks, or reject the proposal entirely.

Threats

Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs)

Key Developments of Concern

Among the developments currently undergoing the EIA process, two are of particular concern:

1. Kareekloof Energy PV and BESS Electrical Grid Infrastructure

- This solar energy development in the Northern Cape recently submitted its Draft Basic Assessment Report to the competent authorities. Prior to submission, VulPro provided comments highlighting significant concerns should the project proceed.
- This development has been classified as high-risk due to VulPro's extensive tracking dataset, which indicates that at least 18 Cape Vultures (*Gyps coprotheres*) and 3 White-backed Vultures (*Gyps africanus*) frequently visit the site. These vultures have been observed regularly flying over the proposed grid area over the past three years, using transmission powerline pylons, trees, and "koppies" as overnight roosts. This behaviour increases their exposure to potential risks from the development.
- Should the project proceed, VulPro's comments include recommended mitigation strategies such as ensuring powerlines are designed to deter perching and marked with flight diverters in accordance with Eskom's guidelines. Maintenance schedules for these measures should be implemented to prevent wear and failure. Additionally, powerlines in the same corridor must be clearly visible to prevent collisions, and water sources should be relocated or covered to discourage bird visitation.

2. Loperberg, Malabar, and Spreeukloof Wind Energy Facilities

- These three separate developments, located in close proximity to one another in Sterkstroom, Eastern Cape, have submitted amendment authorisation requests, which have been approved. Given the high risks associated with these projects, VulPro is currently in the process of submitting an appeal against the decision, citing significant vulture activity in the area.

- The proposed developments are situated near existing vulture roosting sites, further exacerbating the risks of collisions and other negative impacts on local vulture populations. Moreover, their proximity to the existing Dorper Wind Farm, which has already experienced high levels of vulture mortality, raises concerns about the cumulative impact of adding more wind farms to the area.
- While VulPro strongly advocates for the abandonment of the project, we recognise that this outcome is unlikely. Therefore, we recommend a range of mitigation strategies to minimise risks to vultures. These include:
 - The installation of automated shutdown systems to halt turbine blades during periods of high vulture activity, particularly during peak migration and roosting times.
 - Employment of live observers to monitor vulture movements and trigger turbine shutdowns when necessary.
 - Marking turbine blades to increase visibility and reduce collision risks.
 - Regular carcass removal from surrounding areas to prevent attracting vultures.
 - Implementation of anti-perching devices and bird flight diverters on associated powerlines.

Conclusion

VulPro remains steadfast in its commitment to actively participating in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, ensuring that renewable energy projects are developed in a manner that aligns with sustainable environmental practices. Through the provision of expert insights and the advocacy of comprehensive mitigation strategies, we strive to strike a balance between the pressing need for renewable energy expansion and the imperative of safeguarding South Africa's critical vulture populations. Our continued engagement underscores the importance of preserving biodiversity while facilitating responsible energy development, fostering a future where both conservation and progress can coexist.

Threats

Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs)

Eastern Cape Report

October – December 2024

Written by: Kate Webster
Eastern Cape VulPro Associate



The last quarter has been relatively quiet in terms of rehabilitation birds. To date, I have only received one bird, which was spotted by Mr Charles Featherstone on his farm, Nicholasfontein, in the Komani district. I responded to the call, and with the assistance of my son Kevin and the staff, we successfully cornered and captured the vulture. It was severely underweight and appears to have a permanent joint injury, meaning it will not be able to be re-released. The cause and location of the injury remain uncertain, as there were no powerlines in proximity to where the bird was found.

In late November, I transferred two of my older, now breeding-age, permanent rehab residents to VulPro@Shamwari. The timing was ideal, as health checks on all the Shamwari birds were underway, so these two were processed concurrently. Both birds weighed a healthy 9kg, and it was a male and female. They have been placed in the closed enclosure, with hopes they will breed in 2025 as part of the captive breeding programme. The female is from the Tylden area, and the male from Molteno; sadly, both were victims of powerline collisions.

I still have four other adult birds in my holding enclosure, which I intend to transfer to Shamwari in January 2025 to be integrated into the breeding programme for the coming year. This will help supplement the wild populations of Cape Vultures.

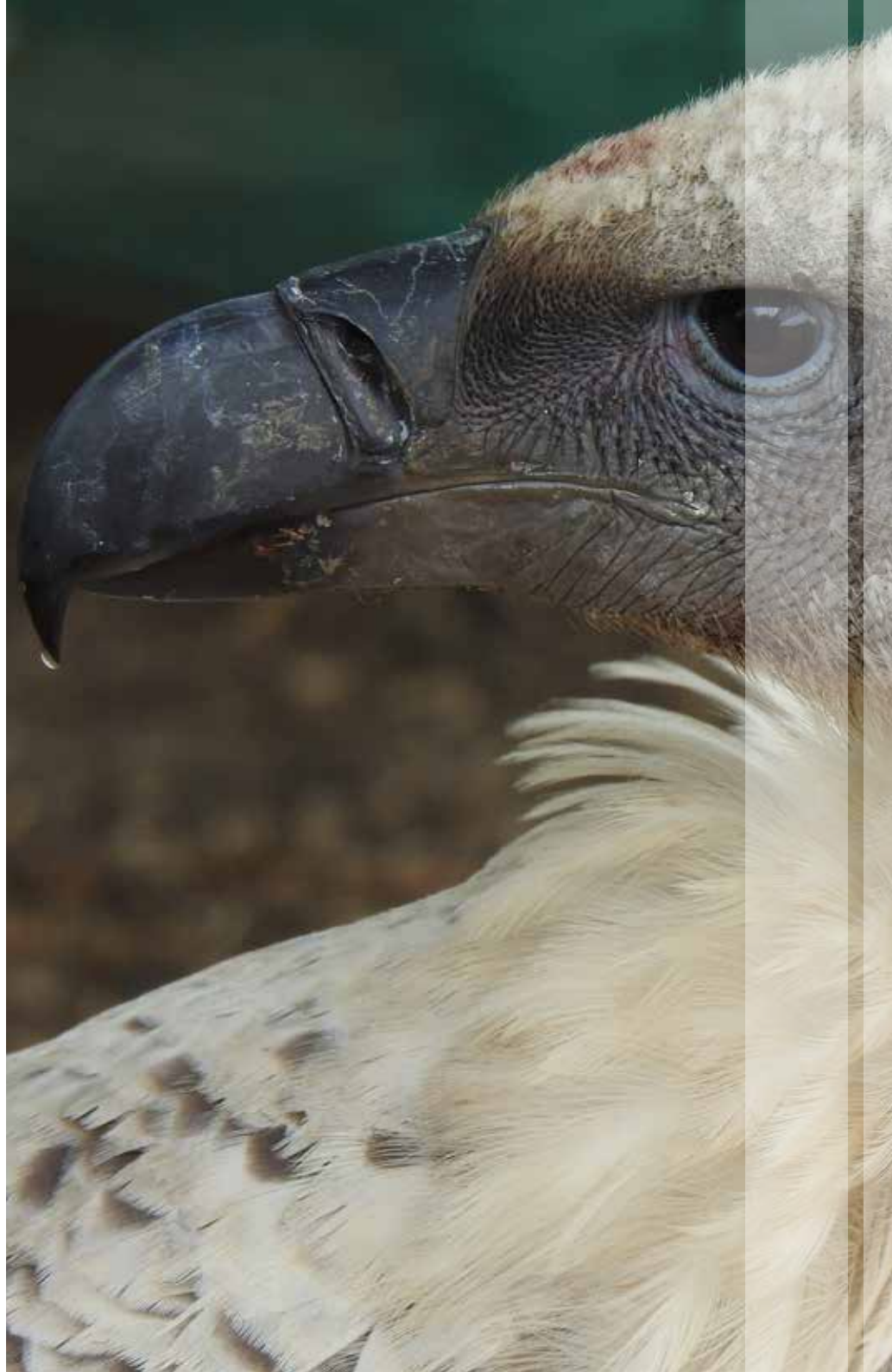
As mentioned in my previous report, one of the 2024 captive-bred fledglings (P/W78) released at Shamwari came to spend a few days at Rookwood, atop my holding enclosure. At that time, the tracking device was not working due to a lack of signal. The good news is that the device is now functioning, and the bird is currently foraging in the Winterberg Mountain range. I hope it stays safe and continues to thrive. Rookwood seems to attract previously released birds periodically. In early November, three 'roof sitters' were observed for three days, one of which was O/B78, a captive-bred bird released at Rookwood on 04/04/2023. The bird still has its tracking device and appears healthy. It departed after feeding on a carcass provided, with the last tracking signal received in early January from the Sterkstroom district.

I regularly receive calls, messages, and photographs from people reporting sightings of Cape Vultures on their properties. The most recent came from Kenny McGregor of the Murray Andrews Vulture Restaurant outside Khowa (Elliot), who excitedly informed me of over 100 Cape Vultures feeding at the site. This is incredibly encouraging news.

Even more positive is the sighting of wild birds at Shamwari from time to time. This, to me, signifies that the captive breeding programme and the supplementation of the wild population over the past four years have had a significant impact, with birds returning to their original areas despite the challenges they face. It is truly heartening to receive such reports.

Lastly, I continue to provide ongoing support and input regarding wind (energy) farm developments and policies in this industry. Unfortunately, many developers and avian specialists still appear to favour trade-offs, such as relocating food supplies or implementing offset strategies, to allow development in areas where vultures will always be at risk. As a team, VulPro, supported by our ever-growing database, will continue to work tirelessly to guide and deter developments in areas deemed unsuitable for such projects. It is an ongoing challenge, but one that we cannot simply abandon, especially in light of the recent Nojoli wind farm report, which documented 20 Cape vulture deaths.

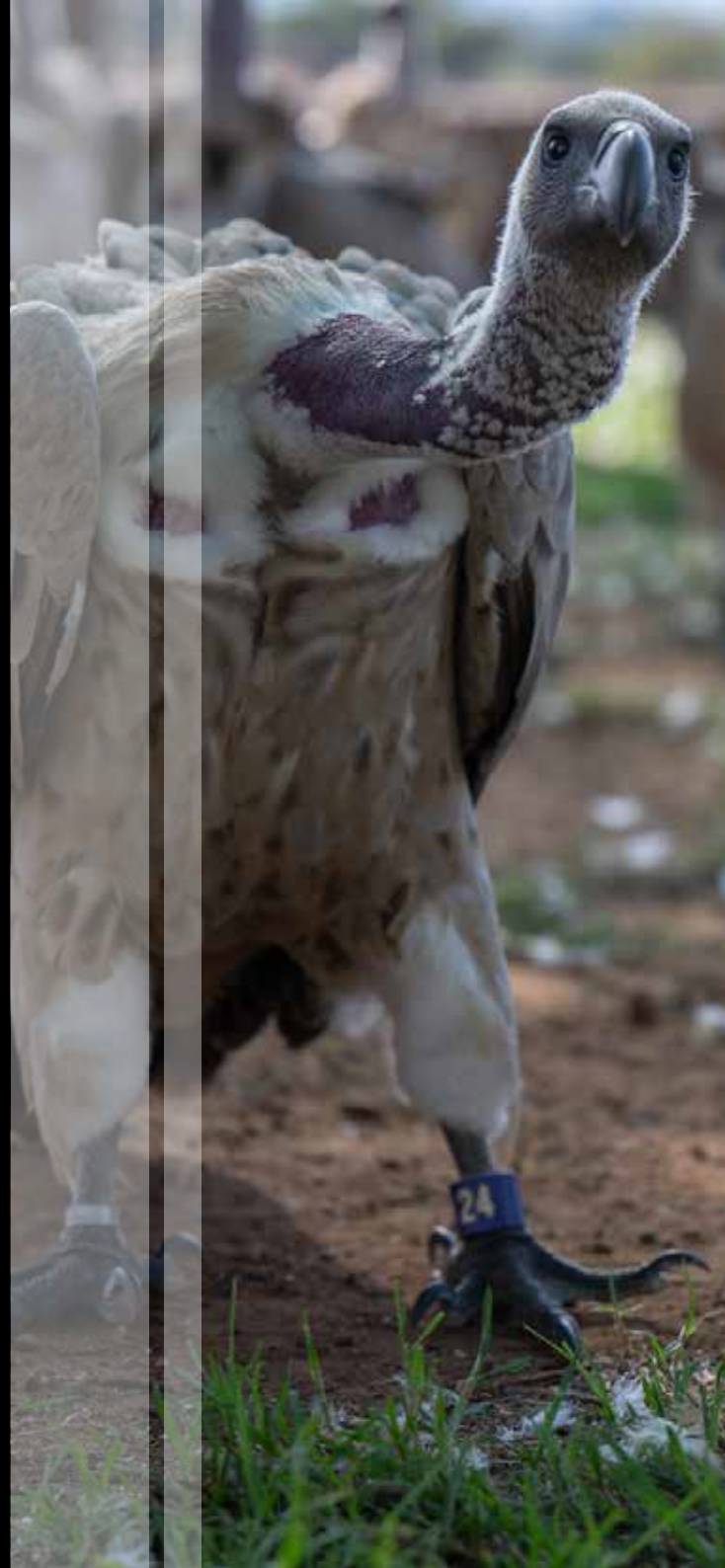
Once again, I must extend my thanks to my daughter Joy, son Kevin, my farm staff, and Kerri and her team at Shamwari for their continued assistance and guidance. I am deeply grateful for the support of such a wonderful team, without whom this work would not be possible.



Eastern Cape Report

October – December 2024

Education



Education

Raising Awareness Through Tours

VulPro hosted a total of 1,012 guests during educational tours at Hartbeespoort and Shamwari Private Game Reserve this quarter. These tours provided an immersive experience and enhanced participants' understanding of the critical role vultures play in maintaining ecological balance. Each tour highlighted the urgent need for vulture conservation, encouraging informed action among attendees.

Engaging Presentations

VulPro delivered two presentations at the Kenton on Sea Recreational Club and Bryanston Country Club, reaching 45 adults. These presentations focused on the challenges vultures face and explored VulPro's innovative solutions for their conservation, emphasising the importance of collective efforts in addressing the plight of these endangered species.

Fostering Personal Connections

A notable moment this quarter was the visit from Peaconwood College, where the adoptive parents of Cape Vulture Zazu met their bird. This interaction strengthened their dedication to conservation, highlighting the value of personal involvement in vulture protection.

Expanding Reach Beyond VulPro

VulPro's educational outreach reached wider audiences:

- Monte Casino: Onyx, the Palm Nut Vulture on loan, interacted with 6,998 people through displays and educational sessions.
- Cango Wildlife Ranch: Presentations at this venue reached 37,695 people, further promoting the importance of vultures in our ecosystems.

These initiatives have had a lasting impact, as they have educated and influenced a broad range of individuals, helping to shift perceptions of vultures and their essential role in nature.

Inspiring Action Through Education

VulPro's educational activities aim to raise awareness of the challenges vultures face and encourage action. Whether through bird adoption, supporting rehabilitation efforts, or spreading awareness, each contribution helps to ensure a future where vultures can thrive, free from human-related threats.

Protecting vultures *together*




Vulpro
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Vulpro
@
SHAMWARI
PRIVATE GAME RESERVE

Adoptions Update

We would like to express our sincere thanks to our adoptive parents and membership members for their continued support and commitment to the well-being of these vital species. Their contributions are fundamental to ensuring that vultures receive the care, rehabilitation, and protection required to thrive. Through their support, they are not only helping to safeguard the future of these birds but also advancing critical conservation efforts.

This festive season, we invite you to consider a unique and meaningful gift. For R4,950.00, you can adopt a vulture for one year, contributing directly to its care and protection. As an adoptive parent, you will have the privilege of naming your bird, receiving regular updates and photographs, and scheduling visits to see your “adoptive child” by appointment.

This gift provides ongoing support for VulPro’s rescue, rehabilitation, and conservation programmes, ensuring a lasting impact on these extraordinary creatures. To adopt a vulture and contribute to the future of vulture conservation, please contact us at admin@vulpro.com.

Adoptive Parent(s)	Adopted Vulture(s)
Alexander H (Silke)	Kira-Mathilda and Bacchus Carlo
Andrea Schreier	Johnny
Cameron Switzer	Antonio
Christina Elena Hanga	Amahle Darar Vikrant
Dr Diana Deblanc	Shikis and Gladys
Frank Schöppner	Fenja
Hans and Ute Schute	Lucky
Katey Parson	Resilience
Kerry Whyte	Family membership
Kim Caldwell	Percy
Mariza Hamman	Orpheus and Athanael
Michelle Hurley	Vinny
Mike and Amy Latimer	John Travulture and family membership
Miranda Estensen	Liebchen
Peaconwood College	Zazu
Rheinmetall Denel Munition – Rick Harness	Sponsors of tracking devices for Gold Black 85 and Gold Black 90
Robyn (Rob Rankine)	Phoenix
Sarel Venter	Single plus membership
Sascha Winninger (for Julie Edgley)	Amala



“Africa’s wildlife heritage belongs not only to Africa but to the world; it is a gift we must protect for future generations.”

– Nelson Mandela

**Vulture
adoption**



Adopt a Vulture – Save a Species, Change the Future

- **Adopt a Vulture for R4,500**
- **Name your vulture and receive an official adoption certificate**
- **Follow their journey with exclusive updates**
- **Unlimited visits to VulPro (by appointment)**

Your support provides vital care and protection, helping these majestic birds thrive.

This isn't just an adoption – it's a chance to secure their future.

Join Our Mission! Make a Meaningful Difference in Their Lives Today!



Media

We deeply value the media's ongoing interest and support, which extend our reach to new communities, foster informed dialogue, and inspire collective action for vulture preservation. Together, we are ensuring a future where vultures can thrive.

Media Coverage

The final quarter of 2024 marked a pivotal period for VulPro, with our vital conservation efforts being showcased across a wide range of prestigious media platforms, reinforcing our position as a global leader in vulture protection and rehabilitation. A key moment in this quarter was the historic return of endangered Egyptian Vultures to South Africa, an achievement that not only attracted widespread acclaim but also underscored the international importance of VulPro's work in the vulture conservation space.

Throughout this period, VulPro's initiatives received substantial media attention, with over 25 articles published across top online platforms, leading print publications, and high-profile radio broadcasts. These stories highlighted the pressing challenges vultures face, the innovative solutions VulPro employs to address them, and the collaborative partnerships that make these efforts possible. The media coverage also underscored the far-reaching impact of our rescue, rehabilitation, and release programmes. Noteworthy features included the inspiring story of 'Grey Black 04', a vulture whose journey continues to resonate long after its release, and the significant strides made within our Egyptian vulture breeding programme. The radio coverage alone reached an estimated audience of 1 million listeners, significantly amplifying the message of vulture conservation.

This exceptional media coverage reflects a growing interest in VulPro's mission, with social media impressions increasing by 40% compared to the previous quarter. It reinforces the critical importance of our work and expands our reach to diverse audiences. With over 500,000 people engaged across social platforms, the spotlight on VulPro is not just a reflection of our accomplishments but a clear indication of the increasing recognition and support for our efforts. This media momentum continues to inspire action to protect these irreplaceable birds and highlights the vital role vultures play in maintaining ecological balance.



Scientific Publications

(Peer-reviewed)

2024

1. Lindner, K. L., Farwig, N., Albrecht, J., Botha, A. J., Downs, C. T., Höfs, C., Kemp, R., Krüger, S. C., Neethling, M. V., Nesor, W., Pfeiffer, M. B., Ruffle, A. R., Spatz, T., Venter, J. A., van der Westhuizen, R., Wolter, K., Rösner, S., and Schabo, D. G. (2024) **Land cover and powerline density influence movement patterns of an African vulture species.** *Manuscript in preparation.*
2. McKechnie, A. E., et al. (2024) **Effects of lead on avian thermoregulation in the heat: experimental test with pied crows (*Corvus albus*).** *Journal of Experimental Biology.* Submitted March 2024, reviewed by two experts and deemed acceptable for publication in ETAP, pending minor revisions based on referees' comments.
3. McKechnie, A. E., Freeman, M. T., Kemp, K., Wolter, K., and Naidoo, V. (2024) **Effects of lead on avian thermoregulation in the heat: an experimental test with pied crows (*Corvus albus*).** *Journal of Environmental Toxicology and Pharmacology.* Manuscript submitted.
4. Naidoo, V., and Wolter, K. (2024) **Validation of the Lead Care II System in Cape vultures (*Gyps coprotheres*) in comparison to ICP-MS using pure standards.** *Environmental Toxicology and Pharmacology*, 110, 104530.
5. Pepler, L. F., Rautenbach, Y., Wolter, K., and Koeppel, K. N. (2024) **Leukocyte reference intervals and influencing factors in Cape vultures (*Gyps coprotheres*).** *Manuscript in preparation.*
6. Serratos, J., et al. (2024) **Tracking data highlight the importance of human-induced mortality for migratory birds at a flyway scale.** *Biological Conservation.* Awaiting final manuscript from journal to input full citation.

Publications

VulPro's commitment to vulture conservation is exemplified by our ongoing research initiatives, which have generated significant findings. One of our manuscripts, investigating the effects of lead on avian thermoregulation in heat using pied crows as a study species, was submitted to the *Journal of Experimental Biology* in March 2024. The manuscript has been deemed publishable, pending minor revisions currently being addressed by our lead researchers. We anticipate its resubmission and look forward to a successful second evaluation.

A second research paper, examining the influence of land cover and powerline density on the movement patterns of endangered Cape Vultures, has been finalised. By utilising GPS tracking data, our analysis highlights the vultures' preference for open landscapes and low-disturbance areas, providing crucial insights for land-use legislation and powerline distribution. This manuscript is scheduled for submission to the *Journal of Raptor Research* at the beginning of July for peer review.

Additionally, a third project focused on using tracking data to illustrate the significance of human-induced mortality for migratory birds at a flyway scale has been accepted for publication. We await the final manuscript from the journal to provide complete citation details.

In alignment with our mission to safeguard African vultures through collaboration and innovation, VulPro continues to build partnerships with various institutions and research entities. Our goal is to enhance our understanding of vulture ecology and behaviour, address the multifaceted threats they face, and develop effective, evidence-based action plans. We warmly welcome new collaborations and have several exciting projects and studies awaiting interested individuals. If you are a student or researcher interested in our work, please do not hesitate to reach out to us.

Chris Eley

Volunteer and
Conservation Advocate



My name is Chris Eley, and 2024 marks my third year as a volunteer with VulPro. I travel from the United Kingdom, where I am the Education Lead for Hertfordshire Zoo. I am also proud to say that I am the Bird Photographer of the Year Conservation Award Winner for 2024, having received the award for a sequence of images highlighting the challenges vultures face in the wild and the tireless efforts of the staff I have worked alongside at VulPro – people I am now fortunate to call friends.

I feel incredibly privileged to have supported VulPro over the last three years. Winning an international wildlife photography competition with over 23,000 entries from 115 countries worldwide is a life-defining moment for me. More importantly, it has raised awareness and drawn attention to the innovative and holistic approach to conservation that lies at the heart of VulPro's mission.

One of my photography icons, Sebastião Salgado, resonates deeply with his ability to create images that illuminate challenges across the planet while posing profound questions we, as humans, must address. He once said, "I try with my pictures to raise a question, to provoke a debate, so that we can discuss problems together and come up with solutions."

I have embraced this ethos in my own photography to highlight and showcase VulPro's incredible work in safeguarding the future of vultures for generations to come. My photos aim to depict the fragility and vulnerability of these much-misunderstood birds at a critical time when changing the narrative around vultures is essential. They also offer an up-close and personal view of the daily efforts undertaken to secure a future for vultures across southern Africa.

During my most recent visit, I had the opportunity to photograph both the Harties and Shamwari sites. This allowed me to document the rescue and rehabilitation work ongoing at Harties and to capture the wonderful new setup at Shamwari Game Reserve, with its stunning backdrop serving as the perfect setting for essential breeding programmes.

Conservation is fundamentally about collaboration and skill sharing. While I may not be the most practical person, I hope my photography serves as a tool to showcase and amplify the incredible work being done by VulPro for many years to come.

Vultures are often misunderstood – seen as mere scavengers and feared by many. Tracy Karam, who recently joined VulPro, is determined to change this perception and raise awareness about the true value of these remarkable birds.

With over 30 years of experience in marketing and media consulting, Tracy has a strong foundation in building meaningful relationships, an essential skill she believes is key to making a difference in conservation efforts. Her passion for wildlife led her to volunteer with VulPro, where she witnessed firsthand how each vulture has its own personality and role in maintaining the health of ecosystems. This experience deepened her appreciation for vultures and reinforced her commitment to changing public attitudes towards them.

In her role at VulPro, Tracy will focus on building connections with supporters, partners, and the public to create lasting change. By developing effective marketing and fundraising strategies, she aims to ensure that VulPro's vital work in vulture conservation continues to thrive. Tracy believes that through strong, authentic relationships and collective action, we can create a better future for vultures and the environments they help protect.

Tracy is excited to contribute to VulPro's mission and make a tangible difference in the conservation of these incredible birds, ensuring their survival for generations to come.



Tracy Karam

Marketing and
Fundraising at VulPro



Awards & Recognition



SANParks Kudu Awards and VulPro's Recognition

The 18th annual Kudu Awards, hosted by South African National Parks (SANParks) on 28 November 2024 at Gallagher Convention Centre in Midrand, recognised significant contributions to conservation across South Africa's national parks. The awards, supported by First National Bank (FNB) and TotalEnergies Marketing South Africa, focus on individuals and organisations demonstrating commitment to sustainability, improving livelihoods, and addressing key challenges such as anti-poaching and climate change.

Kerri Wolter Recognised with Women in Conservation Award

At the 2024 Kudu Awards, Kerri Wolter, the founder of VulPro, was awarded the **Women in Conservation Award**. This award highlights her ongoing efforts in vulture conservation, particularly her work in rescuing, rehabilitating, and releasing vultures. The recognition underscores the impact of VulPro's conservation activities and the broader efforts to protect and conserve Africa's vulture populations.

The Kudu Awards also acknowledged various stakeholders in conservation, ranging from wildlife protection initiatives to habitat restoration projects, all of which contribute to the sustainable management of South Africa's natural resources. The recognition of Kerri Wolter reinforces the role of collaborative conservation work and the importance of continued efforts to ensure the survival of endangered species like vultures.

Impact on Conservation

The Kudu Awards serve to highlight the diverse contributions within South Africa's conservation sector, from fieldwork to scientific research and public education. The recognition of VulPro and its partners through Kerri Wolter's award contributes to ongoing dialogue about the challenges and solutions required to preserve South Africa's biodiversity.



Wings of Hope: VulPro's Wish List

Stationery Supplies

- Laminating sheets
- Super glue
- Printer paper (A4, 80gsm or higher preferred)
- Printer ink (HP 912XL – black and colour cartridges)
- Printer ink (HP GT53xl black ink bottle, GT52 Magenta, Cyan, and Yellow ink bottles)
- Printer cartridge (Pantum PC-252)
- Lithium AA batteries
- Pens (black, blue, and red)
- Punch (hole puncher)
- Plastic sleeves (A4 size)
- Envelopes (various sizes)
- Pencils (HB and mechanical)
- File dividers
- Clipboards (A4 size, durable)
- Filing cabinet (lockable, multi-drawer preferred)
- Stationery cupboard (lockable, spacious for organised storage)
- Exam pads
- Whiteboard markers
- Permanent markers
- Envelopes (all sizes)

Cleaning Products

- Washing powder (suitable for sensitive skin if possible)
- Clean Green (multi-purpose cleaner)
- Toilet paper
- Sunlight liquid (dishwashing liquid)
- Domestos (disinfectant)
- Savlon (antiseptic liquid)
- Dettol hand wash (antibacterial)
- Scrubbing brushes (various sizes)
- Outdoor brooms (heavy-duty)
- Washing sponges (durable)
- Clothes pegs
- Handy Andy

Maintenance Equipment

- Large and medium cable ties (UV-resistant preferred)
- Insulation tape (various colours if possible)
- Duct tape (heavy-duty)
- Brush cutter
- Lawn mower
- Chainsaw
- Ladder (6m high)
- Garden rakes (metal-tined and plastic-tined)
- Garden shears
- Spades
- Butcher's knives for cutting carcasses (stainless steel, durable)
- Sprinklers
- Hosepipes and fittings
- Garden scissors
- Pliers
- Toolbox
- Hammer
- Spanners
- Drill and hand chuck (for maintenance use)
- Drill bits (various sizes)
- Wood oil (for treating wooden structures)
- Wood preservative
- Epoxy glue (green and white box, rapid setting)
- Paint brushes
- Shovels

Hospital Equipment

- Drapes (sterile and non-sterile)
- Surgical gowns (disposable and reusable)
- Ex Fix cement (external fixation cement)
- Suture material (various sizes and absorbability)
- Cold sterilisation trays
- Karbodust
- Vet wrap (bandaging)
- Paraffin gauze (for wound care)
- Granuflex (wound dressing)
- Gauze (100mm x 100mm)
- Cotton wool
- Paper towel rolls
- Elastoplast adhesive plaster rolls (all sizes)
- Scissors



Sponsors

We would like to express our appreciation to all our sponsors. Your loyal support and commitment are vital to advancing our conservation efforts and fostering significant progress in vulture protection. Together, we're redefining the future of vulture conservation and ensuring their survival.



Together, we're redefining the future of vulture conservation and ensuring their survival

PLATINUM

Capt. Richard Grant-Rennick and Simon Grant-Rennick
Shamwari Private Game Reserve
Tusk Trust

GOLD

Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden
DHL
Ford Wildlife Foundation
Olsen Animal Trust

SILVER

Abraham Foundation
Cheyenne Mountain Zoo
Colchester Zoo
Dallas Zoo
Detroit Zoo
Different Foundation
Fort Wayne Children's Zoo
Hair of the Dog Conservation Fund
Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust
Human Society international/Africa
Ingrid and Rudi Gerlo
Jacksonville Zoo
Lomas Wildlife Protection Trust
Max Planck Institute
Nashville Zoo
National Center for Birds of Prey
Natural Encounters Conservation
San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance
Wilhelma Zoologisch BotanischerGarten
Stuttgart Zoo
Zoo Zlin/Lesna

BRONZE

Animal Survival International
Bateleurs
Blair Drummond Safari and
Adventure Park
Designline Graphics
Gauntlet Conservation Trust
Greenville Zoo
Idea Wild
Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo
Sophie Danforth Award – Roger Williams Zoo
St Augustine Alligator Farm
Tandy Foundation
Tulsa Zoo
World Bird Sanctuary
Zoo Atlanta
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BLUE

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Veterinary Conservation Coalition
Wan4U

The future of vultures is in our hands



“Without vultures, the land is haunted by disease, decay, and imbalance. Their flight keeps nature in balance, more vital than most realise.”

– *Unknown*