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Vulpro

NEWSLETTER
April - June 2024

contents

A word from our CEO

Kerri Wolter

Saving vultures in an ever-changing landscape, with growing human encroachment, makes one ponder the future and what it all means. Can vultures adapt to this fast-paced, new way of life, or is extinction inevitable? This question is always on my mind as I consider not just the future of vultures, but wildlife as a whole.

Life is becoming more challenging for everyone. Each year, the cost of living rises, populations grow, infrastructure struggles to keep up, and the pressure on natural resources intensifies. Economic pressures, climate change, and the loss of natural habitats further complicate our ability to thrive, making it increasingly difficult for both humans and wildlife to survive. We must adapt because we have no choice, and the same applies to vultures and other wildlife. To survive, we must innovate and find new ways to live. Crucially, we need to reconnect with Mother Earth and nurture her, as our survival depends on hers.

Amidst these challenges, let's rediscover life's simple pleasures: the warmth of the sun on a cool winter's day, the grace of vultures soaring overhead, the beauty of a butterfly's wings, and the gentle hum of an African bee as it goes about its day. Life's true wealth transcends material possessions and financial gain. It resides in Love, Peace, Friendship, Companionship, Values, Protection, Humanity, and Ethics – qualities that cost nothing but enrich our existence profoundly.

I am truly humbled to be part of this journey with VulPro – a journey of life, dedication, and the relentless effort to protect, preserve, and conserve vulture species for the present and future.

This edition of our newsletter embodies these values. Our commitment to saving even one individual vulture reflects our dedication to preventing the extinction and decline of these magnificent creatures.

Your support is your legacy, helping us leave this world a better place.

With gratitude,
Kerri Wolter,
CEO

Amid all the media hype surrounding the relocation of the breeding vultures to VulPro@Shamwari, there has been some confusion, with many believing that VulPro@Harties is closing or has already closed down. Nothing could be further from the truth; VulPro@Harties is here to stay. We continue the crucial work of rescuing and rehabilitating grounded or injured vultures throughout South Africa, and monitoring the nesting sites of wild vultures. Additionally, our ever-growing and vital educational programme, and our involvement in environmental impact assessments, remain central to our mission. Most of our tracking and research data is also managed through VulPro@Harties. This facility remains essential in our efforts to preserve southern Africa's threatened and endangered vulture species.

We have been extremely busy this quarter, with several changes aimed at growing the organisation. When the opportunity arose to establish a new vulture breeding facility at Shamwari Private Game Reserve, a decision had to be made regarding the management of both facilities. Kerri Wolter, the CEO and Founder of VulPro, moved to VulPro@Shamwari to lead and manage the new breeding facility while continuing as CEO. A further decision was made to create a new position of General Manager to lead the VulPro@Harties team. This is where I come in, and I am privileged to have been given the opportunity to lead this dedicated team.

The relocation of the breeding vultures provided us with an ideal opportunity to refurbish and maintain the enclosures before transferring our remaining vultures into their new local homes. Many days were spent scrubbing walls and water troughs, replacing perches, repairing shade cloth, repairing breeding boxes, and giving every enclosure a general overhaul. I am proud to say that VulPro@Harties looks stunning.

Our state-of-the-art vulture clinic has been well-utilised this quarter, with a record number of vultures treated. Seven African White-backed Vultures and twenty-three Cape Vultures have been rescued and treated at this facility. Vultures from as far afield as Upington in the Northern Cape and Blouberg in the north-western section of the Limpopo province have been rescued. This often entails many hours of travelling by both staff and volunteers. Our statistics show that the main reasons for vultures needing rescue are grounded fledglings (12), collisions with power lines (8), and adverse weather conditions (4). We are very grateful to Ford South Africa for the loan of the Ford Ranger, which has become indispensable in transporting rescued birds.

The transfer of the unreleasable breeding birds from VulPro@Harties to VulPro@Shamwari was a mammoth undertaking, requiring meticulous planning both beforehand and on the day at a local level. Plans and lists were drawn up weeks in advance, procedures were practised, and preparations were made to reduce stress on the vultures, starting four days pre-crating. A time limit was set to crate and load the birds to further minimise their stress. I am pleased to report that everything went according to plan, and within two hours, all 163 vultures were loaded into individual crates and transported to the two DHL super links. Within three hours, the vultures were on their way to their new home, 18 hours away. Thanks to the concerted efforts of all involved, all vultures arrived safely and in good health. This achievement would not have been possible without my dedicated team of staff members and volunteers. My sincere thanks to them all.

The ever-increasing infrastructure development in the country and the corresponding need for more electricity supply networks have meant that VulPro@Harties has had to comment on eight Environmental Impact Assessments this quarter alone. Collisions with power lines, and electrocution, are major hazards to wild vultures and must be mitigated. Each project proposal is unique, and requires individual study and reporting. This can be very time-consuming, but is essential to protect our wild vulture populations.

VulPro@Harties has a 'live-in' volunteer programme where people from around the world volunteer their time at no cost. This quarter has been no exception, and we have had invaluable help and knowledge sharing. To these volunteers, many thanks, and we hope to see you all again.

Our local volunteer programme continues to be a valuable and important aspect of our operations. Many of these volunteers not only offer their time, but also use their own vehicles at their own cost to rescue and transport vultures back to VulPro@Harties. These volunteers are the unsung heroes of VulPro@Harties. Your valuable contributions to VulPro and the vultures cannot be adequately expressed in words. Thank you.

Of significant importance is the successful sinking of a far more productive borehole. We can now pump around 2,000 litres of water per hour, compared to the previous 400 litres an hour. An anonymous donor generously provided the funds to equip this new borehole. Your donation is truly appreciated.

To those who have supported me in the past few months, thank you.

I would like to end by inviting you to visit VulPro@Harties, see first-hand the work we do, and join in our ethos of "The Vultures Come First."

Alistair Sinclair

By Alistair Sinclair, General Manager, Vulpro@Harties

Vulpro @ SHAMWARI
PRIVATE GAME RESERVE

Captive Breeding 2024

With the relocation of our breeding vultures towards the end of January, we had uncertain expectations for the 2024 breeding season. While we hoped the birds would breed, we anticipated they might start a month later to allow them more time to settle and adjust. To our surprise, the first egg was laid in early April, three weeks earlier than in previous years. This early arrival has resulted in a bumper breeding season with more eggs than expected. Although a number of these eggs have proven infertile, likely due to the very early breeding season and over-eager females, we still have a significant number of fertile eggs. This gives us hope that we might achieve our goal of producing 20 fledglings this year, supporting the wild populations and preventing further decline of the species.

In addition to the bustling breeding season at VulPro@Shamwari, we continue our Lappet-faced Vulture semen collection and artificial insemination efforts. Our goal is to stimulate our three pairs of Lappet-faced Vultures to eventually produce viable offspring for release without assistance. We are committed to aiding in the survival of Lappet-faced Vultures in the country, as we believe this species is on the verge of being up-listed to critically endangered.

Our most exciting news is the arrival of our very first pair of Egyptian Vultures, in collaboration with the World Bird Sanctuary in Missouri, USA. This pair marks the beginning of what we hope will be South Africa's core breeding population of Egyptian Vultures, aimed at reintroducing this species back into the country. This project has been in the pipeline for over a decade, and finding suitable sub-species has been challenging. However, with this new partnership, we are excited to move forward and support this objective as part of the greater Vulture Biodiversity Management Plan for the country.

https://www.salifemag.com/post/vulpro-and-partners-take-major-step-in-egyptian-vulture-conservation-in-south-africa

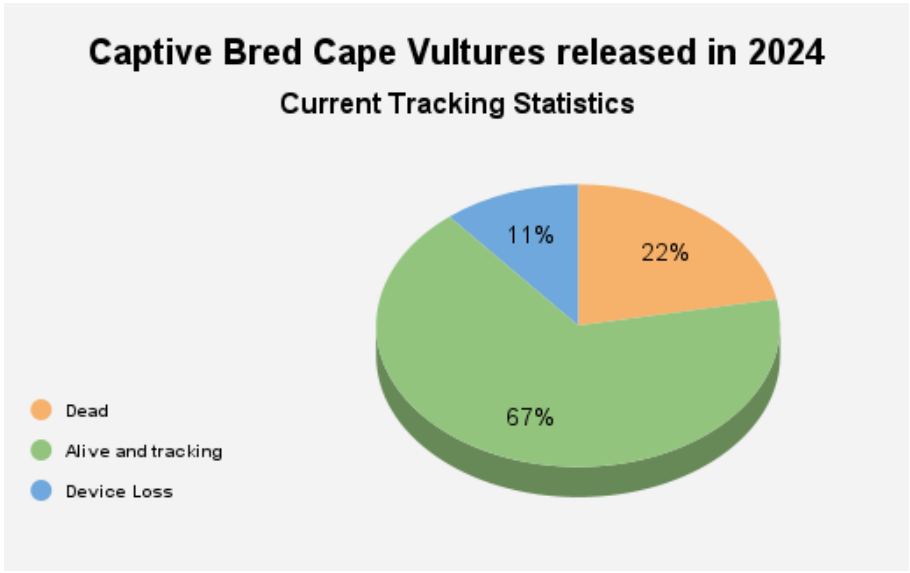
As of the end of June 2024, we currently have four Cape Vulture chicks with their parents at VulPro@Shamwari, one Cape Vulture chick at our smaller satellite site in Bronkhorstspruit, and our first African White-backed Vulture chick, still in a brooder before joining its natural parents.

We look forward to keeping you updated on these developments and hope our work continues to benefit the wild populations.

Release of 2023 captive bred Cape Vultures

In May, we released all 16 of our 2023 captive bred Cape Vultures into the Eastern Cape at Shamwari, using a soft release method. The birds were housed in a release enclosure on top of a mountain to prepare for their freedom. Additionally, five rehabilitated Cape Vultures joined this group to provide the captive inexperienced birds with experienced individuals to follow. Of the 16 captive bred birds, 13 were bred at VulPro@Harties and three at the National Zoological Gardens in Pretoria. Three rehabilitated individuals were cared for by Kate Webster, our sister organisation in Queenstown, and two were from VulPro@Harties. Each bird was fitted with a tracking device to monitor their survival and movement patterns.

Of the 18 satellite devices fitted on our captive-bred releases this year, 12 are still active on our GPS tracking platforms as the birds continue to explore their surroundings in search of food and other colonies to join. Of the remaining six, two devices have fallen off the birds and were retrieved from their last transmitted locations. Out of the remaining four birds, three were unfortunately found dead – two due to severe electrocutions resulting from power line collisions, and the third for unknown reasons. The final bird was sadly found grounded with a broken wing. After much deliberation, the decision was made to euthanise the vulture, as the specific type of amputation required for its injuries would have compromised the bird's quality of life to an unacceptable degree.



Vulpro @ SHAMWARI PRIVATE GAME RESERVE

Captive Breeding 2024

Vulpro @ SHAMWARI
PRIVATE GAME RESERVE

Captive Breeding 2024

On a more positive note, one of our captive-bred vultures released this year has yielded remarkable information. A captive-bred Cape Vulture, hatched on 11 June 2023, and identified as Purple-White 70, has exceeded our expectations. Released on 30 April 2024, from VulPro@Shamwari, Purple-White 70 has undertaken an incredible journey, covering hundreds of kilometres to fly back towards VulPro's centre in Hartebeestpoort.

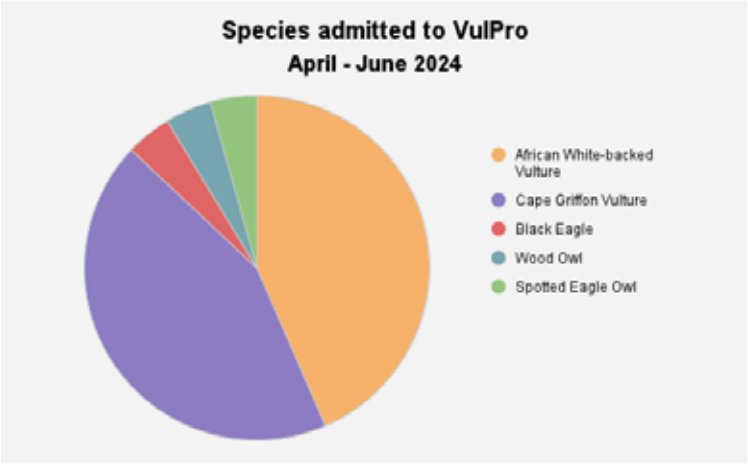
This journey demonstrates the resilience and adaptability of these birds, showing that even those bred in captivity can thrive in the wild. Purple-White 70's journey highlights the success of our conservation efforts and the capability of vultures to effectively adapt, navigate, and survive in their natural habitat.

Rescue & Rehabilitation

As we reach the midpoint of 2024, VulPro's rescue and rehabilitation efforts remain as crucial and dynamic as ever. During the past three months, from April to June, our dedicated team has treated a total of 23 patients. Each bird that comes into our care presents a unique set of challenges and requires tailored treatment plans, reflecting the diverse array of circumstances they face in the wild.

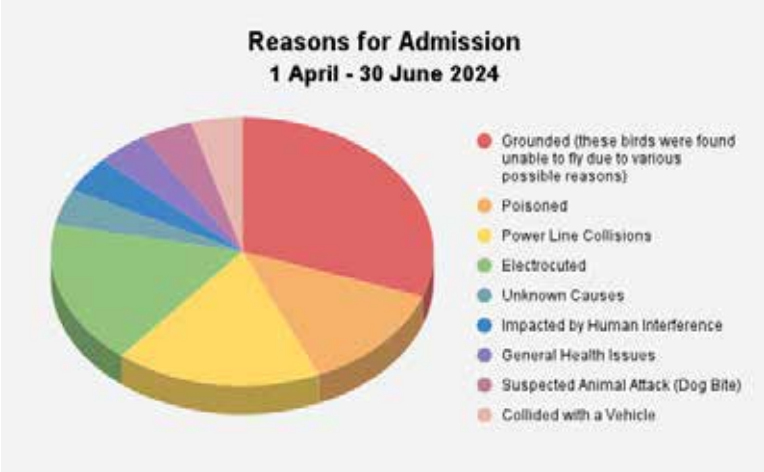
Species admitted to VulPro (1 April – 30 June 2024)

10 African White-backed Vultures
10 Cape Griffon Vultures
1 Black Eagle
1 Spotted Eagle Owl
1 Wood Owl



Reasons for Admission (1 April - 30 June 2024)

7 Vultures grounded: These birds were found stationary and unable to fly because of various possible reasons.
3 Birds poisoned
4 Birds collided with power lines
4 Birds electrocuted
1 Bird with unknown causes
1 Bird impacted by human interference
1 Bird with general health issues
1 Suspected animal attack (dog bite)
1 Bird collided with a vehicle



More than a third of the patients were admitted due to negative interactions with power lines, which sadly continue to contribute significantly to the decline of vulture populations. One patient was admitted for unknown reasons, one was impacted by human interference, and another experienced general health issues. It is unfortunate that one bird had to be euthanised after careful consideration of its overall wellbeing and the limited options for further treatment.

We are pleased to share that two vulture patients admitted between April and June 2024 – a Cape Griffon Vulture and an African White-backed Vulture – have fully recovered. They were successfully reintroduced into the wild on 12 June, equipped with tracking devices to monitor their ongoing progress and ensure their wellbeing. This success highlights the resilience of these birds and the dedication of our team. During the period from April to June 2024, VulPro successfully released 32 vultures, including 28 Cape Griffon Vultures and four African White-backed Vultures, all of which were admitted at separate times.

This quarter has seen a slight decrease in the number of patients compared to the same period in 2023. This reduction is encouraging, and may indicate that our efforts to improve conditions and raise awareness are making a positive impact.

Rehabilitation highlight

Resilient Wings:

Two Cape Vultures' Journey to Freedom

Purple White 97 leaving the crate

Yellow Black A24 and Purple White 97, both rehabilitated Cape Vultures under VulPro's care, exemplify stories of remarkable recovery and the resilience of these birds.

Yellow Black A24 arrived at VulPro on 6 February 2024, needing critical care after being found grounded. Through meticulous rehabilitation and treatment, Yellow Black A24 regained strength and was released on 18 April 2024, at our Nooitgedacht release site. Since then, Yellow Black A24 has embarked on an impressive journey, travelling from Namibia, and continuing into Botswana within three months. This migration showcases the resilience and adaptability nurtured through rehabilitation efforts, highlighting the crucial role of conservation in safeguarding these birds.

Meanwhile, Purple White 97 faced its own challenges, being admitted on 5 December 2023, following injuries sustained in a collision. Purple White 97 underwent intensive rehabilitation, and recovered well enough to join Yellow Black A24 for release on 18 April 2024. Currently, Purple White 97 is exploring territories as far as Zimbabwe, a testament to VulPro's expertise in facilitating successful reintroductions of rehabilitated wildlife.

This impressive migration illustrates the resilience and adaptability of these majestic birds in their natural habitat. Each stage of their journey underscores the crucial role of conservation efforts in safeguarding the survival of these vital species.

Yellow Black A24: Day of admission

Purple White 97: Day of admission

Research

Our research projects and collaborations

At VulPro, our GPS tracking devices not only allow us to monitor the movements of rehabilitated, captive-bred, and wild-tagged vultures, but also provide us with invaluable datasets to address broader questions in vulture conservation. Many of our collaborations with research institutes and organisations hinge on sharing this information, and deriving insights from the analysis of these extensive datasets.

One ongoing project involves a collaboration with Mpumalanga Parks and Tourism to deploy up to ten GPS devices on wild vultures within the province. Our goal is to deepen our understanding of vulture activity in the region. Despite an initial unsuccessful trapping trip earlier in June, our team is finalising arrangements for a second expedition scheduled for the first week of July. The data collected will offer crucial insights into this understudied species in the province and help assess the potential impacts of proposed wind and solar developments.

Simultaneously, our team is engaged in a project aimed at estimating survival rates among Cape Vultures, based on data gathered from the Skeerpoort colony near our centre in Hartbeespoort. In 2019, our researchers rappelled down the cliffs where these birds nest, successfully fitting tracking devices on 20 fledgling Cape Vultures. Now, five years later, we are utilising this data to evaluate the survival rates of these fledglings and investigate the primary causes of mortality. This information is crucial for implementing evidence-based conservation strategies and will inform future vulture action plans. While we are still in the early stages of data analysis and draughting our first manuscript, we anticipate having initial results ready for submission in the coming months.

By Caroline Grace Hannweg

Research

Assessing the effects of thermal factors on the spatial ecology of a critically endangered African vulture.

Since March 2024, we have been eagerly working on completing the analysis for the chapter focussing on breeding success. This chapter focusses on the effects of climatic variables on the breeding success of African White-backed Vultures in seven sites across southern Africa between 2000 and 2023. We considered a number of variables we thought may be drivers of breeding success or failure, including maximum temperature and total precipitation during the breeding season. We are pleased to say these models are being finalised, and final results and discussions on this chapter are being compiled for this chapter of the project.

The next step for this project will be to focus on the two chapters in this project based on the tracked movements of African White-backed Vultures in southern Africa. The first of these chapters will look at the home ranges of these birds, analysing whether climatic variables may be altering their movement patterns. The second chapter will focus on the foraging and roosting sites of these birds, again considering the effects of climatic variables on these critical parts of their day-to-day movement. As mentioned in previous reports for this project, this chapter will be using data from years of tracking work that has been done by VulPro and through collaborations with other organisations who have gathered similar data, giving us tracking data for over 100 individuals. Working with processing tools such as MoveApps and Env-Data, we hope to provide evidence for the effects of climate change on these critical parts of a vulture's life and survival. By understanding the movement of these birds under the influence of climatic variables, we hope to understand which areas are most important to protect for these birds in order to ensure their survival well into the future.

Our thanks, as always, go to our collaborators and partners who have made this project possible up until this point, including Dronfield Nature Reserve, Endangered Wildlife Trust, Leibniz Institute, National University of Science and Technology, Zimbabwe, Max Planck Institute, North Carolina Zoo, Raptors Botswana, University of Eswatini, University of Pretoria, Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust, and Wildlife ACT. We are extremely grateful for the part you have played in making this project successful.

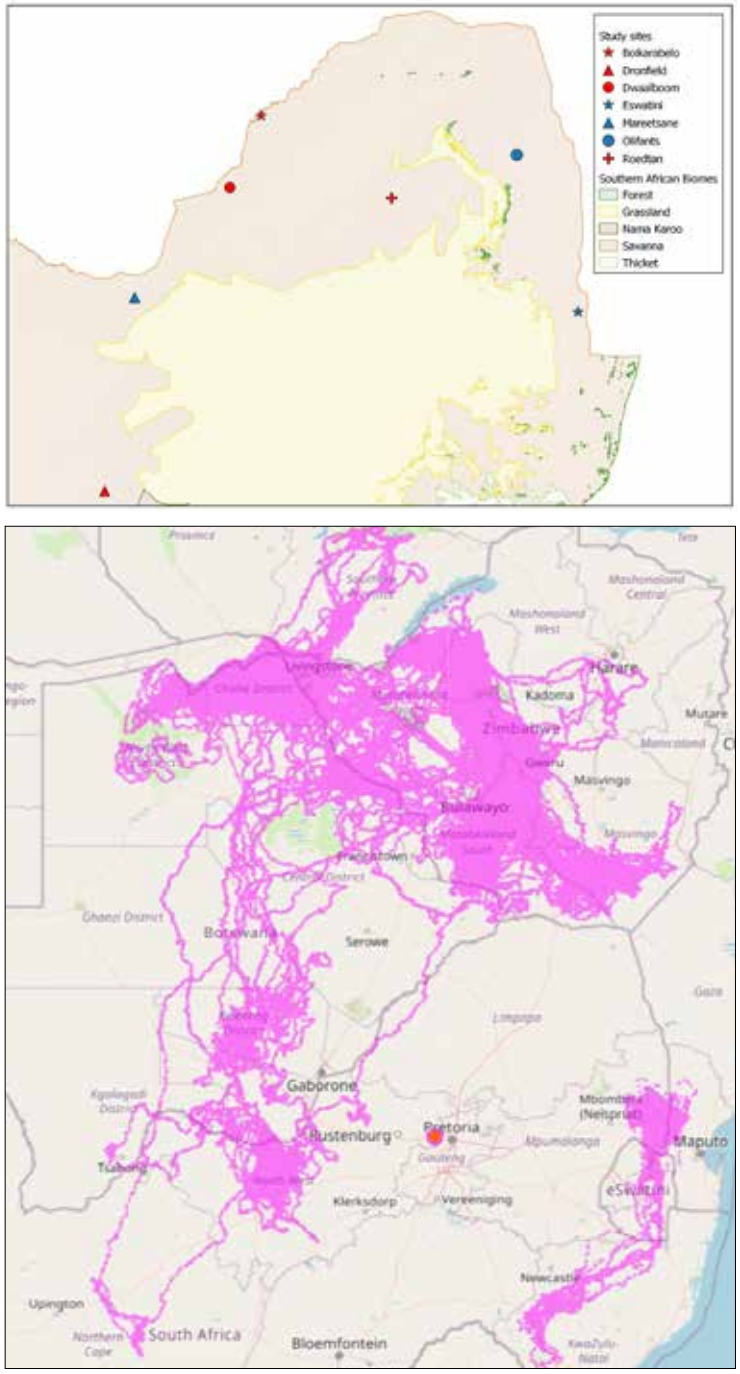


Figure 1: Some of the tracked movements of the 20 wild African White-backed Vultures fitted with GPS tracking , in the last two years. These movements will form an important part of the next chapters of this project.

Leukocyte reference intervals and influencing factors in Cape vultures (Gyps coprotheres)

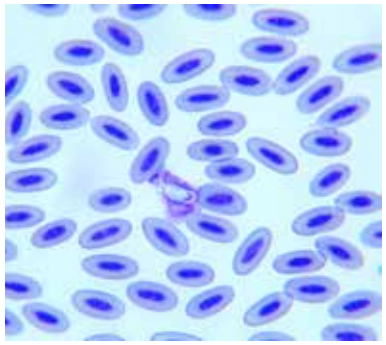
LF Pepler, Y Rautenbach, K. Wolter, KN Koeppel

The Cape vulture (Gyps coprotheres) is the only vulture species endemic to southern Africa. With a population size of 9621-12 714 mature birds, they are listed as vulnerable. Despite their conservation significance, there are no published leukocyte reference intervals (RI) in this species. Haematological findings are critical for monitoring health and disease assessment in captive vultures.

Firstly, our aim was to establish the leukocyte RIs, and secondly to identify the factors influencing RIs in a captive breeding population of Cape vultures.

Blood samples were collected from 42 clinically healthy Cape vultures at VulPro's conservation facility during their annual health assessments in December 2023. Indirect leukocyte counts were determined using Phloxine B stain with an Improved Neubauer hemocytometer on EDTA blood samples. Differential leukocyte counts performed on blood smears stained with Diff Quick were used, in conjunction with the indirect counts, to calculate leukocyte counts. RIs were generated using Reference Value Advisor V2.1 software according to the Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute and the American Society for Veterinary Clinical Pathology guidelines. An ANOVA test was performed to identify factors influencing total white blood cells (WBC).

Forty-one samples were included in the study (two nestlings, four fledglings, two juveniles and 33 adults). The following leukocyte RIs were determined with a 90% confidence interval: total WBC 8.97-27.27 x109/L, heterophils 7.20-17.27 x109/L, lymphocytes 0.61-16.35 x109/L, eosinophils 0-2.55 x109/L, monocytes 0-2.30 x109/L and basophils 0 x109/L. Haemogregarina, a haemoparasite species was found on blood smears in 29% of the population. Infection with Haemogregarina had a significant ($p < 0.05$) impact on total WBC, and a trend between age and total WBC was reported. Sex and body condition score showed no significance.



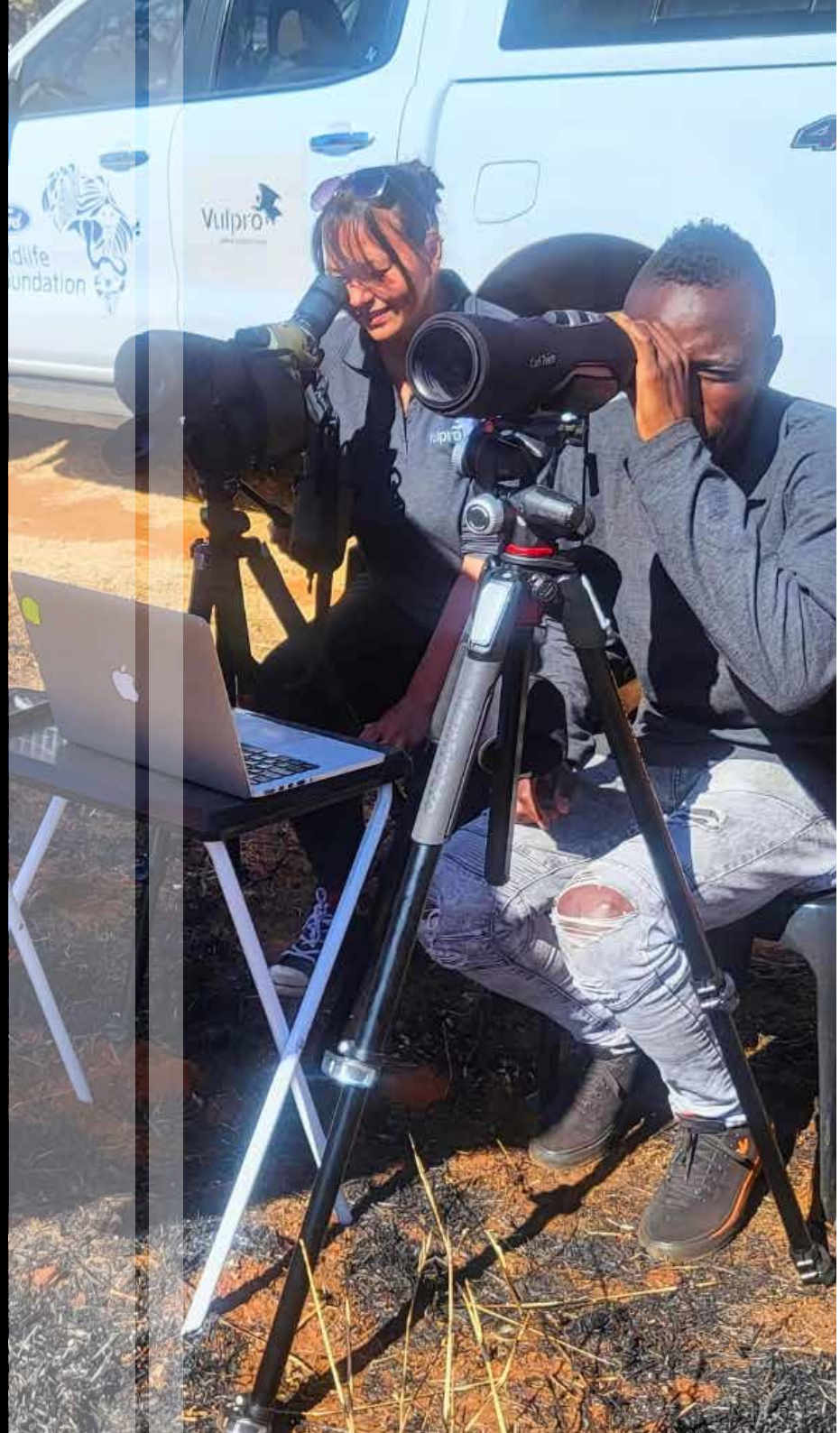
The reported RIs can be used for health monitoring, and blood smear evaluation assists with identifying subclinical Haemogregarina infections in Cape vultures. Although, Haemogregarina infection is asymptomatic, it is often associated with leukopenia. As previously shown, age influences leukocyte counts.

Short report on study

Le Roux Pepler

I am a final-year veterinary student at the University of Pretoria, Faculty of Veterinary Science. I have had the privilege of serving as the chairperson of Vet Books for Africa, a student-driven initiative. This role has allowed me to connect and collaborate with many incredible individuals across the African continent who are dedicated to conservation. My passion for animals and working with people has been a constant throughout my life. In recent years, I have developed a special interest in African vultures, and I thoroughly enjoy learning more about these magnificent birds.

Research & monitoring



At VulPro, our research team plays a pivotal role in advancing our understanding of the ecology and behaviour of the birds we are committed to conserving. We meticulously track individuals released from both rehabilitation and captive breeding programmes, alongside monitoring wild vultures and their nesting behaviours. Currently, we are actively tracking 63 individuals using specialised devices that transmit crucial data to our servers. Nineteen of these devices are deployed on wild-caught birds, while the remainder are affixed to vultures from rehabilitation and captive breeding initiatives.

Our monitoring efforts are vital, as they enable us to track the progress of released birds in their natural habitats. Should a device cease transmitting data for prolonged periods, or indicate that a bird is nearing potentially hazardous areas such as wind turbines or power lines, our intervention team promptly mobilises. Their task is to assess the situation and, if necessary, retrieve the vulture to ensure its safety. This proactive approach not only safeguards the birds, but also enhances the ongoing success of our conservation endeavours.

Recommended mitigation strategies

The report on these developments includes a section outlining recommended mitigation strategies aimed at minimising threats to wildlife. These strategies include:

1. **Automated shutdown systems:** Implementing technology that automatically shuts down operations when birds are detected in close proximity to turbines or solar arrays.
2. **Employing live observers:** Utilising trained personnel to monitor bird activity and intervene when necessary to prevent collisions or other harmful interactions.
3. **Blade markings:** Marking turbine blades to increase their visibility and reduce the likelihood of bird collisions.
4. **Carcass eemoval:** Removing potential carcasses from the vicinity to prevent poisoning incidents and reduce attraction to scavenging birds.
5. **Powerline management:** Implementing measures to deter birds from perching on associated powerlines, minimising the risk of electrocution or collision.

VulPro's ongoing monitoring and advocacy

VulPro remains vigilant in monitoring the progress of these projects and assessing the potential establishment of new developments that could impose unsustainable pressures on our already-vulnerable vulture populations. Through continued engagement in environmental assessments and advocacy for stringent mitigation measures, we strive to ensure that renewable energy projects in South Africa proceed responsibly, minimizing adverse impacts on wildlife, while supporting sustainable energy goals.

Monitoring

2024 Nest monitoring efforts

At VulPro, our 2024 nest monitoring activities are currently in full swing, focusing on both tree and cliff nesting habitats for White-backed and Cape Vultures, respectively.

Cliff nesting

This year, our monitoring efforts cover three cliff nesting sites:

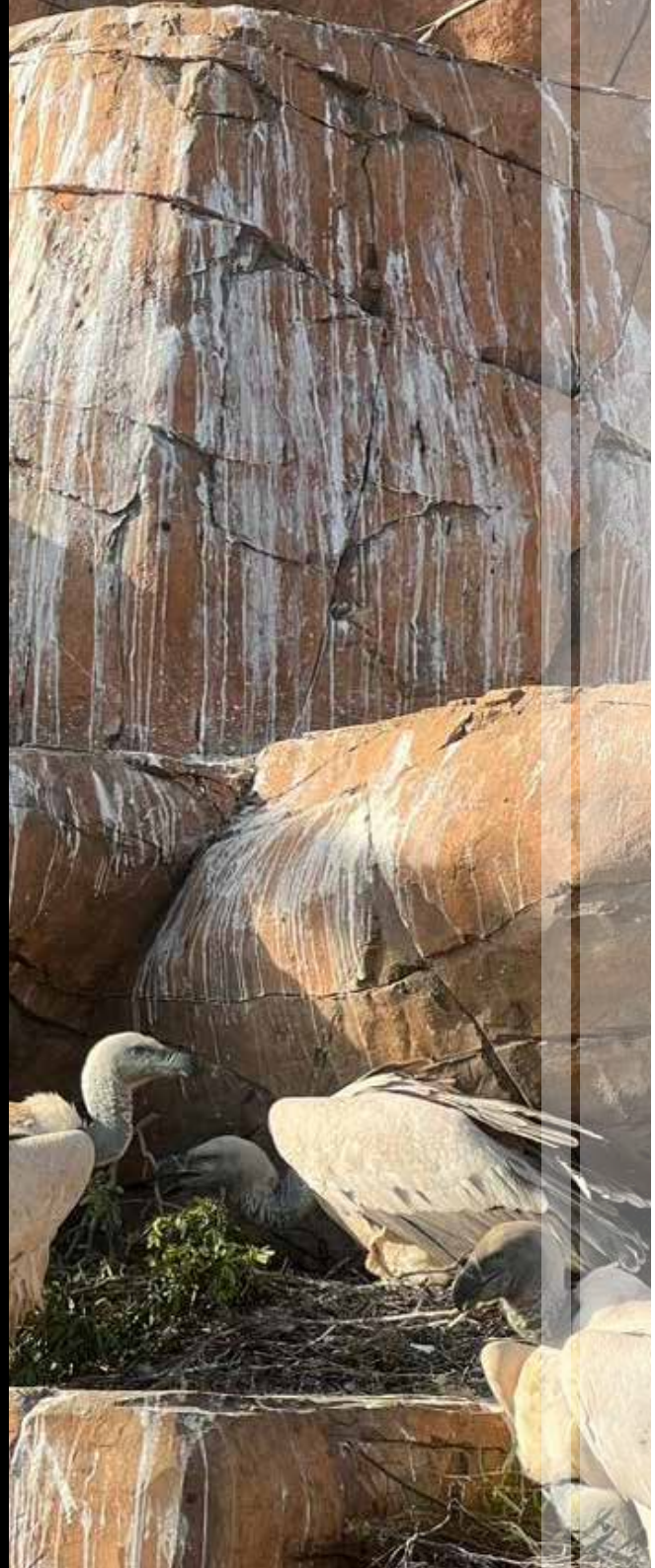
1. **Skeerpoort Colony:** Located in the Magaliesberg mountain range, this is our largest monitoring site.
2. **Marakele National Park:** Another significant site for cliff nesting vultures.
3. **Moletjie and Soutpansberg Colonies:** These sites are also included in our monitoring efforts.

Our monitoring protocol involves systematic observation of cliffs, using telescopes and comparing current observations with mapped diagrams from previous years. By conducting surveys at each site twice annually, we can effectively track nesting activity, evaluate breeding success rates, and identify factors influencing population dynamics.

These monitoring efforts are essential for understanding the health and trends of vulture populations, informing conservation strategies, and ensuring the long-term survival of these iconic birds in South Africa.

Nesting

"Vultures, known for their long lifespans and low reproductive rates are particularly vulnerable to population declines."

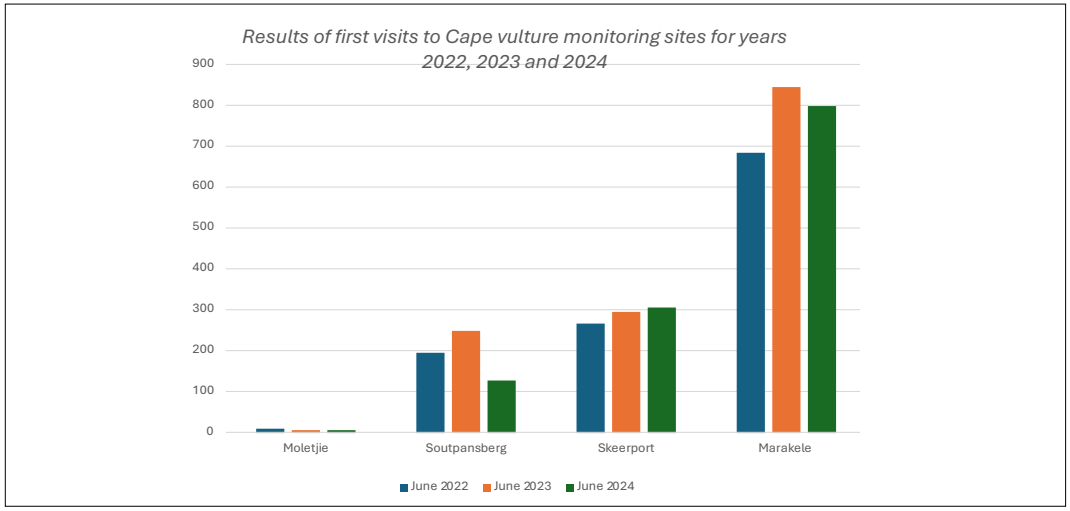


Decline in cliff nest numbers

Preliminary analysis of our 2024 monitoring data indicates a concerning trend of decreasing active cliff nests among vulture populations. Except for the Skeerpoort colony, which has shown stability, our other monitored sites have experienced significant declines. Notably, the Soutpansberg colony has seen nearly a 50% reduction in active nests.

This decline underscores the urgency of our monitoring and conservation efforts. Understanding the factors contributing to these declines, such as habitat loss, disturbance, or environmental changes, is crucial for developing targeted interventions to support vulture populations.

As we continue to analyse and interpret our data, VulPro remains committed to implementing effective conservation strategies, collaborating with stakeholders, and advocating for policies that safeguard vultures and their habitats in South Africa.



The observations from our 2024 monitoring efforts are indeed concerning, especially when considered within the broader context of declining vulture populations. Vultures, known for their long lifespans and low reproductive rates – typically producing only one offspring per year – are particularly vulnerable to population declines. Each loss of an individual has a significant impact, bringing the threat of extinction closer.

Several human-induced factors contribute to these declines. Habitat loss, power line collisions and electrocutions, poisoning incidents, and illegal wildlife trade are all key issues affecting vulture nesting numbers. Vultures, like many bird species, often form lifelong pair bonds. When one of the pair is lost due to these threats, the surviving bird must find a new partner. Depending on the timing of this loss, the bird may skip a reproductive season until it forms a new bond, further hindering population growth.

Addressing these threats requires concerted efforts in habitat conservation, mitigation of infrastructure impacts, stringent enforcement of wildlife protection laws, and public awareness campaigns. By taking proactive measures to safeguard vulture habitats and reduce human-induced pressures, we can help ensure the survival and recovery of these essential scavengers in southern Africa.

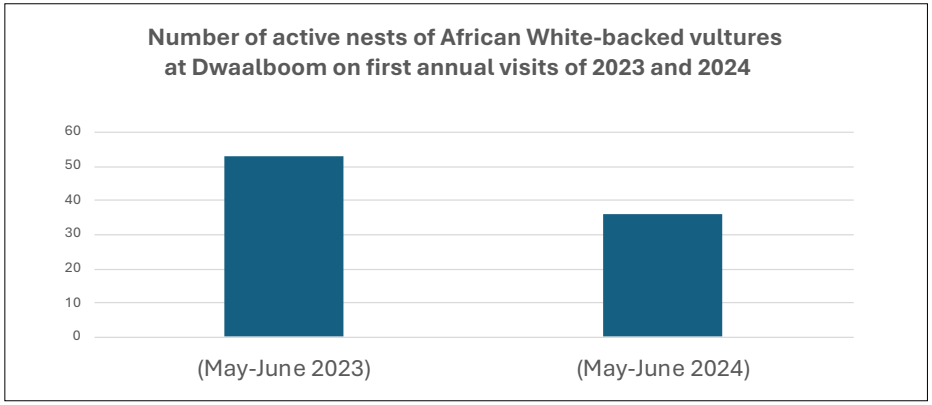
Tree nesting

Since 2015, VulPro has been actively monitoring numerous tree nesting sites across southern Africa twice a year, adhering to internationally recognised monitoring standards. Our focus is on three primary sites in northern South Africa: Mareetsane in the North-West Province, and Dwaalboom and Roedtan in the Limpopo Province.

Armed with GPS devices and binoculars, our dedicated researchers meticulously record the presence and behaviours of vultures at each nest site. Simultaneously, we gather data on environmental variables, such as temperature and aridity, to better understand their impact on nesting behaviours. Any new nests discovered during surveys or reported through ongoing community outreach are promptly integrated into our study.

Similar to our cliff nesting monitoring efforts, we conduct bi-annual surveys at these tree nesting sites. Following the completion of our initial visit to Dwaalboom, we are currently preparing for forthcoming monitoring expeditions scheduled for July. Subsequent visits are planned for September and October, ensuring comprehensive data collection throughout the nesting seasons.

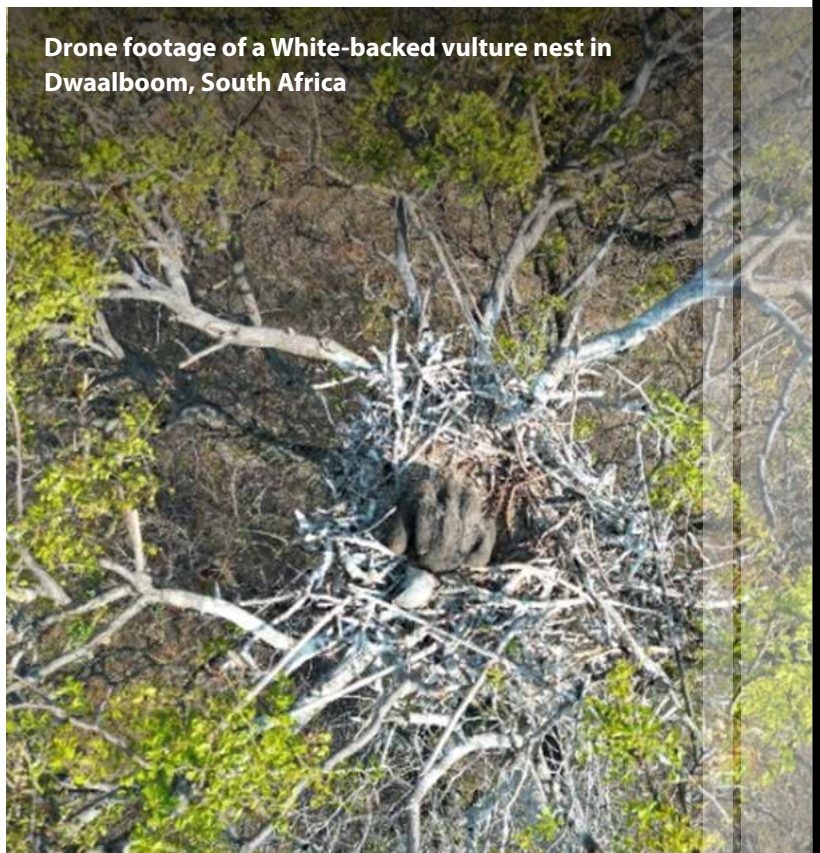
This systematic approach allows VulPro to continuously assess nesting trends, evaluate reproductive success, and identify potential threats faced by vultures in tree nesting habitats. By maintaining rigorous monitoring protocols and expanding our dataset, we aim to inform effective conservation strategies that support the recovery of vulture populations across the region.



The comparison of our 2024 observations with data from 2023 has revealed a concerning decline in nesting activity, particularly notable in the Dwaalboom area. While it's premature to draw definitive conclusions, these initial findings highlight potential trends that warrant further investigation. We look forward to completing our monitoring visits to Dwaalboom in September/October, which will provide more conclusive insights into population trends for these critically endangered vultures.

In conjunction with our tree-nesting monitoring efforts in the Northwest and Limpopo provinces, where we operate, our records of White-backed vulture hospitalisations reveal several primary threats facing these birds.


A pair of African White-backed Vultures guard their nest, Dwaalboom, South Africa.


Drone footage of a White-backed vulture nest in Dwaalboom, South Africa

"Any new nests discovered are promptly integrated into our study."

Nesting

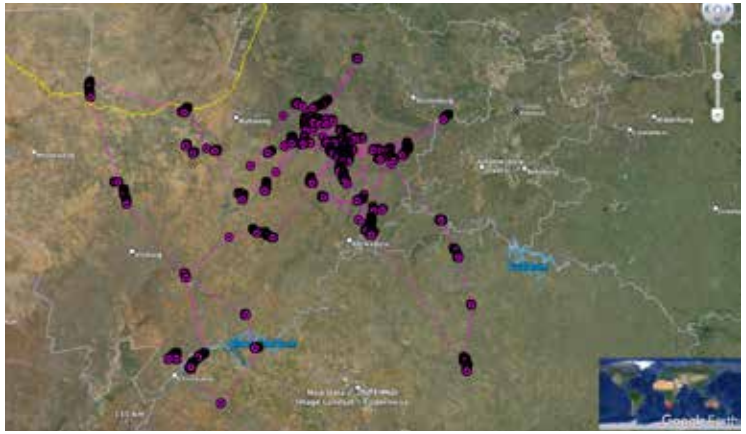
Tracking

GPS Tracking: April - June 2024

During our nest monitoring visit to Dwaalboom last year, our team had an unexpected yet delightful encounter with a Lappet-Faced fledgling. Following the fitting of a GPS tracking device, we diligently monitored its movements for nearly 10 months. This effort has yielded a significant dataset that offers invaluable insights into the behaviour of this rarely observed species.

After being tagged in September 2023, the bird initially migrated south from Dwaalboom towards the border between the North West and Free State provinces. However, it unexpectedly reversed direction and headed north, briefly crossing into Botswana to explore its surroundings. Subsequently, our Lappet-Faced fledgling seems to have reaffirmed its preference for its native habitat, returning to the Dwaalboom area.

VulPro CEO, Kerri Wolter, fits a GPS tracking device on a young Lappet-faced Vulture found during tree nesting surveys in Dwaalboom, South Africa.

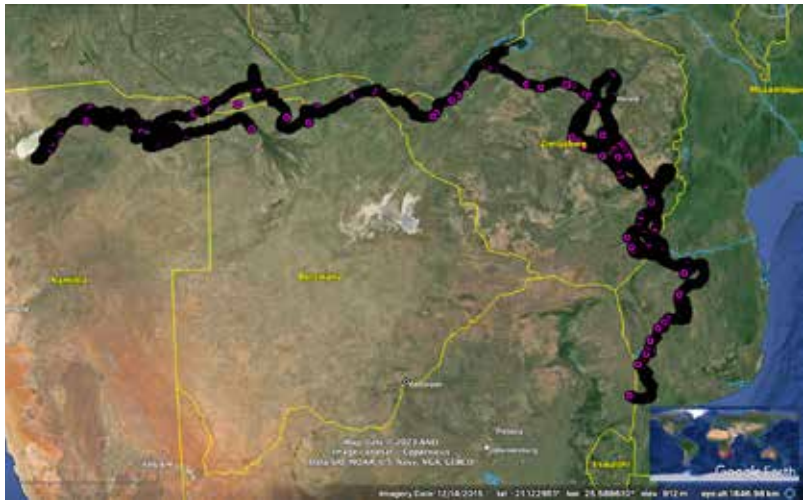


Tracking data for rarely observed Lappet-faced vulture between April and June 2024

Another compelling tracking example involves White Orange 20, a wild-caught White-backed vulture trapped in Zimbabwe last year through a collaboration between VulPro, the National University of Science and Technology of Zimbabwe, Birdlife Zimbabwe, and Shangani Holistic. This project aimed to enhance our understanding of foraging, breeding, and dispersal behaviours using tracking data, while also leveraging the devices' alarm features as early warning systems for poisoning incidents.

Our trapping team successfully captured three African White-backed vultures and outfitted them with GPS tracking devices. Since their return to Hartbeespoort, our research team has meticulously monitored their progress, documenting some extraordinary journeys. White Orange 20, trapped as a juvenile in November 2023, has traversed over 3000 km in just the past three months, flying through South Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Zambia, Namibia, and Angola.

We look forward to seeing what else White Orange 20 has in store for us as we continue to monitor its progress.



Tracking data for rarely observed Lappet-faced vulture between April and June 2024

Threats

Vultures worldwide confront unprecedented threats as human-induced pressures escalate in severity and scale. Alongside overarching environmental challenges like climate change and habitat loss, vultures in southern Africa encounter specific threats, including poisoning, collisions with power lines, electrocutions, illegal wildlife trade, and food scarcity. These challenges underscore the urgent need for concerted conservation efforts to safeguard these vital scavengers and their ecosystems.

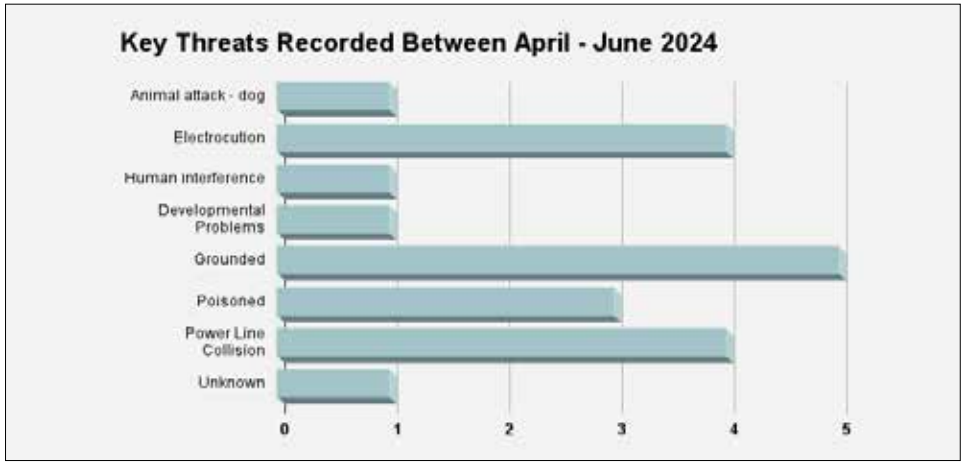
Our vulture admission records for April to June this year document a total of 20 incidents, reflecting a diverse range of causes, from dog attacks to developmental issues.

Another significant threat facing vultures across South Africa is the encroachment on their nests by Egyptian geese. These aggressive waterfowl increasingly usurp vulture nests, displacing the rightful occupants and disrupting their breeding cycles. This not only diminishes available nesting sites, but also adds pressure to already vulnerable vulture species.

Among the primary causes of admission, grounding events are frequent in our reports. Vultures may become grounded due to various health issues such as dehydration or lead poisoning. Treatment for grounded birds varies, depending on the underlying condition. Dehydration poses a significant concern, exacerbated by predictions of increased extreme temperatures due to climate change.

Additionally, power line collisions and electrocutions are prominent threats recorded this trimester, likely exacerbated by the rapid expansion of South Africa's renewable energy sector. Poisoning remains a significant issue in our records, both intentional and unintentional. Vultures are often targeted by poachers who lace carcasses with toxic substances to avoid detection. Furthermore, indirect poisoning events are rising, particularly in specific regions where vultures ingest poisoned carcasses intended for other problematic animals, or from the use of toxic ammunition, leading to incidents of lead poisoning.

These threats underscore the critical need for continued vigilance and proactive conservation efforts to protect vulture populations across the region.



Lead Poisoning

Joining forces for conservation
If you are part of the hunting community, please help reduce this threat and support vulture conservation efforts by sharing this vital information. Feel free to reach out for further details or collaboration opportunities. Together, we can mitigate the impact of lead poisoning on southern African vultures and ensure their survival in the wild.

Lead poisoning threatens southern African vultures

Among the numerous challenges facing vultures in southern Africa, lead poisoning from hunted carcasses has emerged as a significant concern for these scavenging species. Despite modern bans on , and calls to adopt alternative materials, ammunition containing the metal remains widely used. Vultures ingest lead fragments from bullets left in animal carcasses, resulting in severe health issues, and often death.

Impact of lead poisoning
Lead poisoning primarily impairs calcium function and disrupts the nervous system, compromising the vulture's ability to fly, find food, and reproduce. Symptoms include lethargy, loss of appetite, coordination difficulties, reduced spatial awareness, breast muscle atrophy, drooping wings, and a weakened immune system. Even low levels of lead can significantly impair a bird's health, with high levels proving fatal. Studies by Franson and Pain (2011), Garcia-Fernandez et al. (2005), and Haig et al. (2014) extensively document the catastrophic effects of lead poisoning on wildlife inadvertently consuming this toxic substance. Young vulture chicks are particularly vulnerable, as lead exposure during their developmental phase impedes calcium absorption, weakening their bodies and often leading to death.

Geographical
Regions with high hunting activity, such as Thabazimbi, Kuruman, Kimberley, and Upington, are focal points for lead poisoning. VulPro conducts testing and treatment for vultures from these areas, revealing varying degrees of lead contamination. Despite efforts to save affected birds, a significant number still succumb to this condition annually in the wild.

Treatment and prevention
VulPro employs protocols to diagnose and treat lead poisoning in vultures, offering a chance of recovery if detected early. However, many wild vultures perish undiagnosed due to delayed reporting. The long-term solution lies in transitioning to non-lead ammunition. Progress in persuading ammunition manufacturers has been gradual, with hunters inadvertently posing risks by leaving contaminated carcasses. Raising awareness among hunters, and advocating for alternative ammunition are critical steps in protecting these crucial scavengers. VulPro is forging partnerships with Hunting Associations across southern Africa, leveraging existing networks to disseminate information swiftly and effectively to combat this poisoning trend.

Impact of power line collisions on vultures

As South Africa's renewable energy sector expands, the incidence of power line and wind turbine-related incidents involving vultures is on the rise. These developments pose significant risks to vultures, including collisions with infrastructure along their flight paths, with the potential for electrocution.

Consequences of collisions

Collisions with power lines often result in severe, sometimes fatal injuries such as fractured limbs. Our dedicated wildlife veterinarians at the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Veterinary Sciences strive to save as many birds as possible, recognising the critical importance of each vulture given their endangered status. Despite technological advancements, saving every limb isn't always feasible, leading to cases where birds require limb amputations.

Rehabilitation and conservation efforts

Vultures that sustain serious physical or emotional trauma and are unfit for release join our permanent resident flock. These birds play a crucial role in supplementing wild populations through our captive breeding programme, while rehabilitated vultures are reintroduced into their natural habitats.

Recent incidents

In 2024 alone, 45 vultures have been impacted by power line collisions, with a total of 25 incidents reported. Ten of these incidents occurred between April and June, with only one case officially closed thus far; the remaining nine are ongoing.

These figures underscore the urgent need for proactive measures to mitigate the impact of infrastructure on vultures. By enhancing awareness, implementing protective measures, and collaborating with stakeholders in the renewable energy sector, we can safeguard these majestic birds and support their continued survival in the wild.

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	40
African White-backed Vultures	0	0	15	7	4	5	1	12	16	6	8	7	-
Lappet-faced Vultures	0	0	1	1	0	3	0	2	1	0	0	1	-
Unknown vulture carcasses	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	5
Other species	4	7	14	15	34	14	1	13	28	18	49	2	-
Total	7	25	79	85	96	122	62	77	113	83	93	66	45

Table 1: Number of species affected by power line incidents between 2012 and 2024.

Vulture Conservation

" True good work is done without ego, much like the vulture's silent labour. Their unheralded efforts in cleaning up the ecosystem prevent disease and decay, proving that essential contributions often come from those who seek no recognition."

by Orbert Phiri

VulPro's collaborative efforts for vulture conservation

VulPro remains dedicated to collaborating with Eskom and the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) to mitigate the threat posed by dangerous power lines to vulture populations. Together, we monitor ongoing efforts to protect these endangered birds. Additionally, VulPro has partnered with various external entities to advance power line-related research, such as the land cover and powerline density study mentioned previously.

Advocacy and influence

As a member of the Biodiversity Action Plan for African Vultures draughting committee, VulPro leverages its extensive expertise and credibility, built over 15 years in the field, to influence decision makers and advocate for policies regulating the development of power lines and wind farms.

Mitigation strategies

Effective mitigation strategies recommended by the scientific community to reduce the risk of bird collisions with power lines include wire-markings, known as fireflies, to enhance visibility of overhead power lines, deployment of underground cables, and insulation measures to minimise the risk of electrocution.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) participation

In South Africa, all development projects undergo Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), where environmental consultants assess potential threats, and Interested and Affected Parties (I&AP) can provide feedback on final reports. As a registered I&AP, VulPro plays a pivotal role in addressing the numerous developments that exert unsustainable pressures on endangered vulture populations.

Through these proactive measures, collaborations, and advocacy efforts, VulPro strives to protect African vultures from the growing threats posed by infrastructure development, ensuring their continued survival and ecological importance in southern Africa.

Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and renewable energy developments

South Africa is experiencing a significant expansion in both wind and solar energy farms. While VulPro acknowledges the importance of transitioning to renewable energy sources and reducing reliance on fossil fuels, many of these developments introduce new challenges, particularly for the diverse birdlife inhabiting these areas.

Current involvement

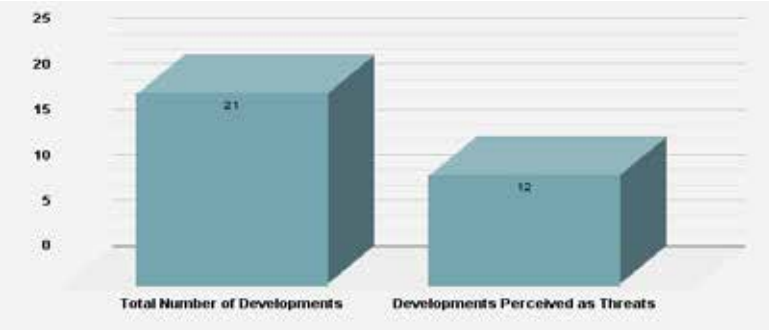
In the second trimester of 2024 alone, VulPro has identified 21 potential developments across the country, each at various stages of their Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) approval process. We have actively submitted comments for 12 of these sites to address concerns related to their potential impacts on bird species, including endangered vultures.

Balancing conservation and development

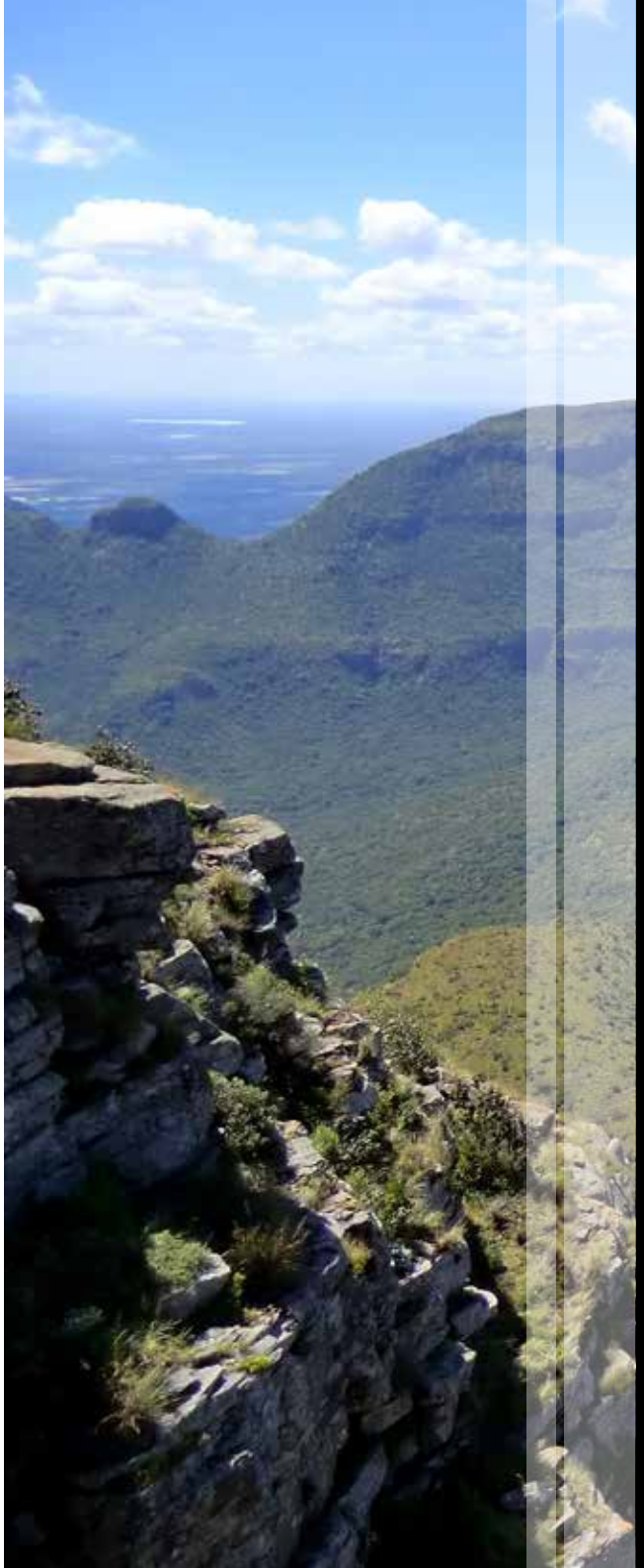
As part of our commitment to safeguarding vulture populations and other avian species, VulPro engages rigorously in the EIA process. This involvement allows us to advocate for measures that mitigate risks to wildlife, such as bird-friendly infrastructure designs and habitat preservation initiatives. By providing informed input and collaborating with stakeholders, we strive to ensure that renewable energy projects proceed responsibly while minimising adverse effects on vulnerable bird populations.

Continued advocacy

VulPro remains dedicated to advocating for sustainable development practices that prioritise biodiversity conservation alongside renewable energy expansion. Through our ongoing participation in EIAs and collaboration with industry and governmental bodies, we aim to promote environmentally sound practices that support both energy transition goals and wildlife preservation efforts.



Total number of recorded developments undergoing EIAs between April and June 2024, compared to those deemed high risk.



Environmental Impact Assessments

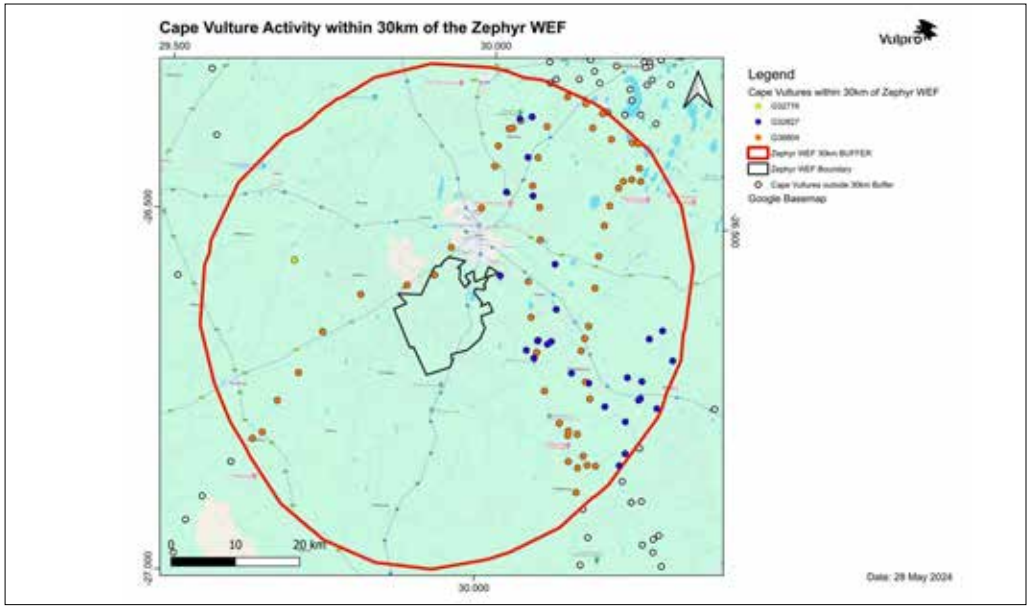
Environmental Impact Assessments

Concerns over solar and wind energy developments

VulPro is closely monitoring two solar energy facilities in Kuschke and Roodepoort, Limpopo, which are situated near multiple vulture feeding sites and intersect significantly with documented vulture flight paths, as indicated by our GPS tracking data. While some concerns raised by VulPro were acknowledged in the sites' Draft Scoping Report, we remain apprehensive that insufficient measures are being taken to mitigate the potentially significant impact these developments could have on vultures and other bird species. Following our initial comments, we are eagerly awaiting the release of their Avifaunal expert report, which will evaluate whether adequate measures can effectively mitigate these threats.

Additionally, the Zephyr Wind Energy Facility in Mpumalanga is projected to exert unsustainable pressure on the vulture species that traverse and inhabit the area. This development is one of several wind energy projects in the region, prompting concerns about the cumulative impact on the regionally endangered Cape Vulture. Our Wind Facility consultant has submitted comprehensive comments on behalf of VulPro, including data on the five vultures recorded flying over the proposed site within the past year.

These developments underscore the critical need for robust environmental assessments and proactive mitigation strategies to protect vulnerable bird populations and their habitats amidst the expanding renewable energy sector in South Africa. VulPro remains committed to advocating for sustainable development practices that prioritise biodiversity conservation alongside renewable energy expansion.



Integrating our analysis of admissions causes and breeding success allows us to underscore the broader impact of human-induced threats on vulture populations. By identifying these threats and their interplay with environmental factors, we aim to advocate for targeted interventions that safeguard vulture habitats and support their long-term survival amidst escalating challenges.

Field work and community outreach

A crucial aspect of VulPro's monitoring efforts is our commitment to community outreach and awareness-raising. During each monitoring expedition, we actively engage with various stakeholders, including local farmers, schools, hunting associations, and the general public, to raise awareness about the challenges facing vultures.

Since 2015, VulPro has been cultivating enduring relationships with community members in the areas we monitor, steadily expanding our network of vulture advocates. By involving local communities, we enhance our ability to gather crucial information about vulture hotspots and emerging threats. A community knowledgeable about vultures is also more likely to report and resist harmful activities such as poisoning, benefiting not only vultures but also the broader wildlife ecosystem.

Our educational and community engagement programmes continue to evolve and grow. We are eager to expand our outreach efforts and collaborate with new partners who share our commitment to vulture conservation. If you are interested in exploring opportunities for collaboration with VulPro, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us.

Together, through collaborative efforts and increased public awareness, we can make a meaningful impact in safeguarding vultures and their habitats for generations to come.

VulPro Operations Officer, Clarence Mabasa, and SANParks People and Conservation Officer, Sarah Letsoalo, at Marakele National Park.

Field Work

Education

"In the end, we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand; and we will understand only what we are taught."
– Baba Dioum

During April to June 2024, VulPro actively engaged in educational initiatives, hosting tours and delivering presentations to various audiences.

Tours and presentations:

- Tours at VulPro@Harties and VulPro@Shamwari: 136 guests (100 adults and 34 children).
- Presentations: 1318 guests (319 adults and 999 children).
- External Presentations:
  - Onyx, a Palm Nut Vulture on loan at Monte Casino, reached 19 937 people.
  - Stalls and external talks at markets reached approximately 185 individuals.

Looking ahead, VulPro plans to attend more markets and venues to further expand its outreach.

This year, VulPro's educational efforts, supported by PACE and the South African Wildlife College, have made significant progress. VulPro's mission includes educating communities, schools, landowners, and stakeholders on the vital role of vultures in ecosystems, dispelling misconceptions, and fostering stewardship.

Education Highlights:

9 April 2024 – Laerskool Kameeldrift

On 9 April 2024, Clarence Mabasa, representing VulPro, conducted a highly productive two-day educational session at Laerskool Kameeldrift. During this visit, VulPro successfully engaged with 15 adults and 220 children. The educational experience provided to the children was both memorable and enriching, featuring informative presentations and exciting activities designed to enhance their understanding and appreciation of vulture conservation.

15 April 2024 - SANParks Honorary Rangers

Following the visit from the Junior Honorary Rangers, VulPro was honoured to present at a SANParks Honorary Rangers meeting. Alistair Sinclair, General Manager, delivered an engaging presentation on VulPro's mission and its impact on vulture conservation. The evening proved to be a success, with 60 enthusiastic participants in attendance.

Education Highlights:

11 May 2024 – SANParks Junior Honorary Rangers

On Saturday, 11 May 2024, VulPro hosted the Junior Honorary Rangers from the Pretoria region and their parents, with 21 adults and 29 children in attendance. The day featured an engaging presentation and a guided tour of the VulPro@Harties facility led by Clarence, our knowledgeable guide. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, affirming that we have successfully nurtured a group of future vulture custodians through this enriching experience.

"Following our visit to VulPro on Saturday, I would like to extend our heartfelt thanks for hosting us and personally speaking to our Junior Honorary Rangers and their parents about the wonderful work the amazing staff at VulPro do. Clarence was amazing and had us hanging on his every word. Your faith in him is not unfounded, and I am sure he is only going to grow in confidence because of his love of these magnificent birds."
– Keren Colegate

15 June 2024 – Sandton Bird Club

We had the pleasure of hosting 23 enthusiastic guests from the Sandton Bird Club for an exciting day at VulPro. The morning began with an engaging presentation, followed by a tour of the centre. The highlight was visiting the vulture restaurant, where the group had a close-up view of vultures and marabou storks enjoying their brunch.

Community outreach

This quarter has been highly productive for VulPro in community outreach. In addition to engaging with schools, we have actively connected with various communities through market stalls, informative talks, and meetings with local leaders. These efforts have effectively spread awareness about vulture conservation.

Khogonyane Junior Primary School

Tshiungulela Secondary School

Kutama Secondary school

Community outreach day success in Paterson, Eastern Cape

On 19th June 2024, VulPro@Shamwari hosted a successful Community Outreach Day in Paterson, Eastern Cape, engaging with the vibrant local community. Over 200 adults and children participated in a day filled with enjoyment, education, and community spirit. The event featured enlightening discussions on our critical vulture conservation efforts and interactive activities tailored for children, highlighting our shared commitment to community and conservation values.

Community outreach

VulPro staff and volunteers had an exciting meeting with Sarah Letsoalo, the People and Conservation Officer for SANParks' Marakele sector, discussing potential opportunities.

As part of VulPro's outreach efforts, we have actively engaged with the community by visiting several markets, hiking areas, and numerous public events. At these locations, we set up a gazebo adorned with curios and educational materials, providing valuable information to spread awareness about vulture conservation. These efforts have allowed us to connect with a diverse audience, share the importance of protecting these magnificent birds, and highlight the critical role vultures play in our ecosystem. Through these interactions, we aim to inspire more people to join us in our mission to safeguard the future of vultures.

Volunteers

VulPro welcomes numerous volunteers, and each individual who joins us plays a crucial role not only in conservation efforts, but also in supporting VulPro itself. Whether they assist with food preparation, feeding, cleaning enclosures, or participating in rescues and releases, every volunteer contributes significantly. We have been fortunate to have exceptional volunteers at both VulPro@Shamwari and VulPro@Harties. We extend our heartfelt thanks to each and every person for their dedication in caring for these magnificent birds.

Volunteer contributions at VulPro@Shamwari

At VulPro@Shamwari, we are profoundly appreciative of the dedicated volunteers who contribute to our vulture conservation initiatives. As the sole vulture conservation organisation of its kind on the continent, VulPro is leading efforts to address the severe decline in African vulture populations. Our collaboration with Shamwari Private Game Reserve significantly enhances vulture conservation throughout southern Africa.

VulPro@Shamwari offers a secure and well-balanced environment for both in-situ and ex-situ conservation programmes. This partnership also ensures financial support and sustainability, while mitigating risks by dispersing the largest captive breeding population of vultures across various locations.

Our volunteers are integral to maintaining the high standards of care required for these magnificent birds. Their invaluable tasks include:

- **Cleaning waterholes and enclosures:** Ensuring a hygienic and safe environment for the vultures.
- **Collecting nesting material:** Providing essential materials for breeding and nesting purposes.
- **Replacing old perches:** Updating and maintaining perches to ensure the comfort and safety of the vultures.
- **Feeding vultures:** Assisting with the daily feeding routines to support the health and wellbeing of the vultures.

The dedication and commitment of our volunteers greatly enhance the care of the vultures and their enclosures. Their efforts are deeply appreciated and play a crucial role in the success of our conservation endeavours.

Volunteer testimonials

We are honoured to share reflections from our recent volunteers at VulPro@Shamwari. Their experiences underscore the profound impact of their work and the rewarding nature of their contributions to our vulture conservation initiatives. These testimonials highlight both the significance of their support and the personal satisfaction they gained from assisting with our vital conservation efforts.

Julie from France

"Volunteering at Shamwari for two weeks has been a remarkable experience. I particularly enjoyed the VulPro volunteering day. Learning about vultures and witnessing their behaviour – such as bathing in freshly cleaned water and selecting nesting material we provided – was incredibly rewarding."

Sam from England

"My time with VulPro was enlightening. I gained a new appreciation for vultures, observing their interactions and how they support each other in nest building and food distribution. Cutting carcasses for them to eat and making a new friend in PJ was an especially memorable highlight. I highly recommend this experience."

Kseniya from Russia

"Participating in the VulPro project was a wonderful experience. We saw the immediate effects of our work – cleaning the water and providing nesting materials resulted in the vultures using these resources right away. I feel very grateful to have been part of this impactful work."

Lillie from the U.S.

"Working with VulPro provided a unique perspective on vulture conservation. It's inspiring to see how VulPro's efforts are saving this often-overlooked species through rehabilitation, education, and breeding. Observing the vultures up close and appreciating their distinct personalities was a truly rewarding experience."

Vulpro @ SHAMWARI PRIVATE GAME RESERVE

Volunteers

Volunteer profile

Jake Looze

A Trip to VulPro

Last July, thirteen Rüppell's griffon vultures and one lappet-faced vulture at the Phoenix Zoo in Arizona, USA, were transferred to a new exhibit under the care of the bird team. The zoo has housed African vultures for many years and has had a highly successful breeding programme during that time. With such a significant move, we were uncertain how the vultures would react, but they settled in nicely and even nested this year! Since working at the zoo, I've been interested in African vultures, and with the new exhibit, I wanted to ensure we were providing the best care for them and giving them the best chances for breeding success. So, I thought, why not learn from the experts? I put together a presentation, was awarded one of four conservation staff grants for 2024, and headed to South Africa to learn at VulPro!

Arriving at VulPro was a surreal experience. Their massive flight exhibits and open areas for vultures that are no longer able to fly were very impressive. During my free time, I would often sit in the hide at the vulture restaurant and watch the vultures, storks, and ibis make quick work of carcasses. I spent the first day settling in, getting to know the birds, and got right to work on the second day.

I would start by removing old carcasses in the morning and placing them in the restaurant for the wild birds to enjoy. Then I would assist with the daily care of patient birds. The staff at VulPro are extremely knowledgeable, and I learned a lot about handling these magnificent animals, the threats they face in the wild, and the benefits of laser therapy treatment. After tea, we would feed new carcasses and clean out the inside pens where vulture patients would stay overnight.

Afternoons were usually dedicated to cleaning – changing out baths (vultures are exceptionally clean animals and bathe regularly), power-washing soiled mats, and raking up old bones and feathers. Occasionally, we would clear out all the carcasses from the restaurant to make space for new ones.

The routine was sometimes interrupted by search and rescue missions to look for injured birds, whether from power line or vehicle collisions. That is the unpredictability that comes with animal work – you have your regular daily schedule, but sometimes you are called to action outside of the facility. One evening, I got to assist with the pickup and transfer of a beautiful Cape vulture. They say the reward for work well done is more work, and VulPro is never in short supply!

The second week was filled with monitoring vulture breeding colonies at Skeerpoort and Nooitgedacht. Fieldwork in a foreign country has been a personal dream of mine for a long time, and it was a fantastic opportunity to not only see more of Africa but also to help further vulture research in the wild. I spent the summer of 2014 in remote Alaska studying cliff-nesting seabirds, so it was enjoyable for me to apply those skills across the world and share my tips and tricks to gather the most accurate data.

Travelling to VulPro was such a life-changing event for me. I gained new friends, a better understanding of the plight of African vultures, and a deeper professional grasp of vulture care. The hard work and total dedication of the VulPro staff continue to inspire me personally and motivate me to be the best zookeeper I can be. It was also my first trip to Africa, and I can't wait to go back!

Jake Looze

Staff Profile

"My ten-year conservation journey has been richly varied and fulfilling..."

Nicole Wilson, General Assistant

Born in Durban, South Africa, my passion for conservation and animals ignited at a young age, fuelled by countless hours absorbed in wildlife books. After finishing school, I eagerly embraced my calling, becoming a certified field guide and venturing into the wild landscapes of reserves, where every day brought new adventures and challenges.

It was at a bird sanctuary in Durban where my path took a transformative turn. I worked hands-on with various majestic birds from all over the world, where I discovered a profound connection that would shape my career. Understanding their behaviours, caring for their wellbeing, and witnessing their resilience ignited a deep-seated passion for avian conservation.

Since those formative days, my ten-year conservation journey has been richly varied and fulfilling. I've immersed myself in wildlife rehabilitation, played a crucial role in breeding endangered species, provided training, led tours and game drives, and participated in numerous rescues and relocations. Each experience has provided incredible opportunities to work closely with animals of all kinds, fuelling my passion and commitment to their wellbeing. Photography has been a constant companion, letting me capture the essence of wildlife, and share their stories visually

Motivated by my profound fascination with birds, and a mission to challenge misconceptions about these remarkable creatures, joining VulPro was a natural choice. It's a chance to make a significant impact on the conservation of these often-misunderstood animals.

Juliana Pinto, Research Manager

I joined VulPro in April 2024 as a Research Manager. My responsibilities cover a range of tasks, combining both office and field-based work. As part of our research efforts, I focus on monitoring the reproductive activity of wild Cape and African White-backed vultures, observing both cliff and tree nesting sites. This involves onsite data collection, and writing reports, creating protocols, and managing data upon returning to VulPro. My office duties primarily focus on evaluating the impact of our conservation efforts, while monitoring the constantly evolving threats that vultures face. This includes a combination of satellite tracking of tagged birds, managing large datasets, conducting research projects, writing reports, and preparing grant proposals.

My passion for wildlife and the great outdoors started at an early age, growing up in the mountains of central Italy. Fast forward a few decades, and I find myself fulfilling my dream of helping to protect keystone species and restoring functional ecosystems. I have had a deep fascination with vultures for a very long time, in line with my core interest in ecosystem functioning and species reintroductions.

The journey to where I am now has been an interesting one – and frankly a great deal of fun. I have been fortunate enough to collaborate with several inspiring organisations across the globe, including an avian anti-poaching unit in Cyprus, a sea turtle conservation project in Greece, a human-bear conflict management study in Romania, and a giant anteater reintroduction programme in Argentina, to name but a few. My work experience recently culminated in an MSc at the University of Exeter, UK, where I was awarded a first-class honours degree for my thesis on the use of population modelling for species reintroductions.

The common thread throughout my journey has been the research element underlying these conservation efforts. I love witnessing the process through which a wildlife sighting first turns into a dataset, and eventually evolves into a research paper, providing effective, evidence-based solutions to the pressing problems that our wildlife faces.

I am excited to see where this new adventure will take me, and look forward to applying the skills I have acquired along the way to conserve and protect these , yet often maligned, animals that play such a pivotal role in the ecosystems we share.

"I have had a deep fascination with vultures for a very long time..."

Staff Profile

Vulture adoption

VulPro remains steadfast in its commitment to protecting vultures and their habitats.

VulPro's adoptive vulture parents are vital to our conservation efforts, enhancing both awareness and funding. Their contributions directly support the care and rehabilitation of the vultures. Through adoptions, we foster a deeper connection between people and wildlife.

CURRENT ADOPTIONS (April-June 2024)

- Alexander H (Silke)
- Andrea Schreier
- Christina Elena Hanga
- Clive Vardakis
- Frank Schöppner
- Hanre Ferreira (Virbac)
- Hans and Ute Schute
- Katey Parson
- Kim Caldwell
- Mariza Hamman
- Mike and Amy Latimer
- Nicole Schöppner
- Peaconwood College
- Robyn (Rob Rankine)
- Rheinmetall Denel Munition
- Sascha Winninger (for Julie Edgley)

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to each adoptive parent who has chosen to support VulPro's vulture adoption programme. Your commitment and generosity are invaluable and make a noticeable difference in the lives of these magnificent birds and contribute to the broader conservation efforts aimed at preserving vulture populations for generations to come.

Adopt a vulture –
make a difference today, change a life forever.

For just R4,500, you can support a vulture's wellbeing for an entire year.
Name your vulture, proudly display your adoption certificate, and receive regular updates on their progress. Enjoy unlimited visits to VulPro (by appointment only) and make a tangible difference in the lives of over 260 resident vultures, ensuring their safety and wellbeing through your generous contribution.

Be a part of preserving these remarkable birds and making a genuine difference in their lives

Media

VulPro has received significant media coverage this quarter, featuring exciting updates such as the first-ever vulture chicks born at VulPro@Shamwari, marking a milestone as the first in the Eastern Cape. Coverage extended across radio, online platforms, and printed media, including news about the translocation to Shamwari and general updates from VulPro.

18 April 2024	Vulture VulPro news	online
24 April 2024	A perfect combination	online
26 April 2024	oos-Kaapse aasvoelpaar bring vreugda	online
5 May 2024	Africa's largest vulture relocation could help save the threatenend animals	online
8 May 2024	VulPro and translocation	radio
14 May 2024	VulPro and translocation	radio
18 May 2024	Shamwari Wildlife Rehabilitation	online
21 May 2024	A vulture road trip to save them from extinction	online
31 May 2024	VulPro@Shamwari outing	online
5 June 2024	The amazing story of White-backed Vulture J151	online
12 June 2024	First endangered Cape Vulture chick hatches in captivity in the Eastern Cape	online/print
14 June 2024	Vulpro and Vultures	radio
14 June 2024	Breeding of chicks Shamwari	television
19 June 2024	Vulture chicks make history at Shamwari	online

Scientific Publications

(Peer-reviewed)

2024

1. Pepler, LF., Rautenbach, Y. Wolter, K. and Koeppel, K.N (2024) Leukocyte reference intervals and influencing factors in Cape vultures (Gyps coprotheres) (Manuscript in preparation)

2. Lindner, K. L., Farwig, N., Albrecht, J., Botha, A. J., Downs, C. T., Höfs C., Kemp, R., Krüger, S. C., Neethling M. V., Neser, 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)

3. McKechnie, A. E., et al. (2024) Effects of lead on avian thermoregulation in the heat: an 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 revision on the basis of the items raised by the referees).

4. Serratosa, 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).

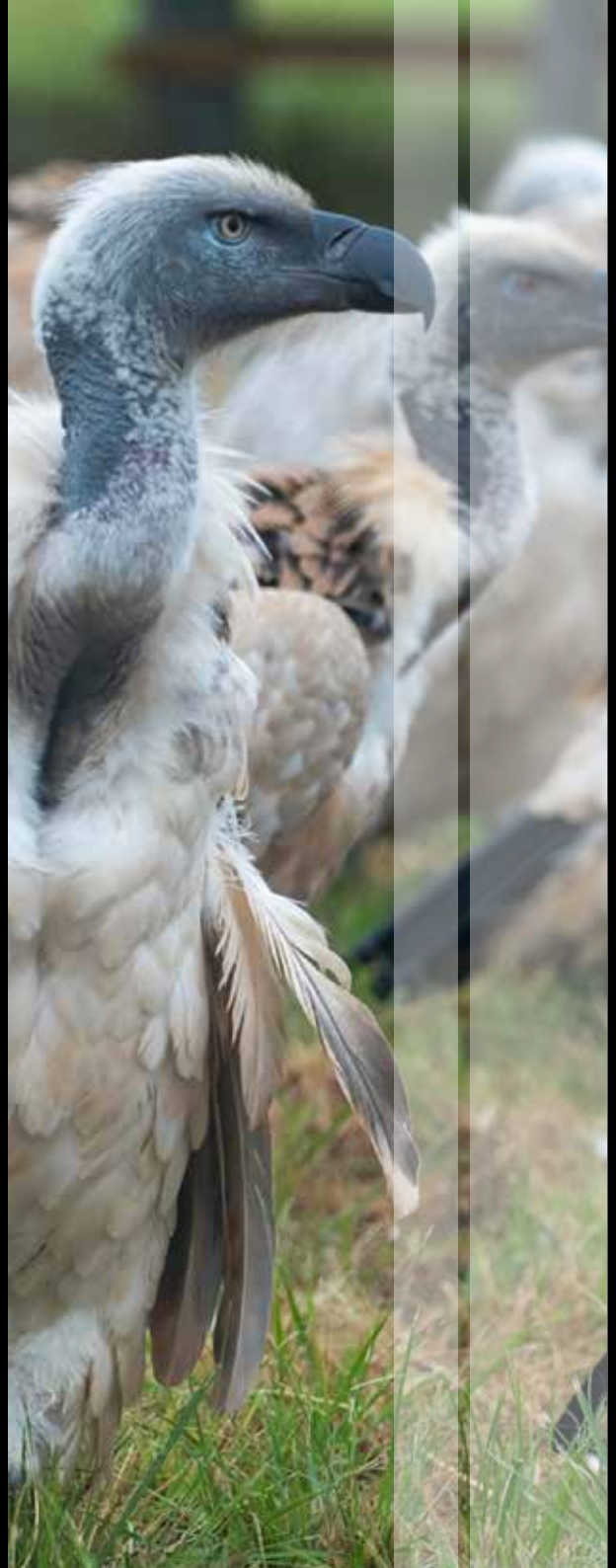
Publications

VulPro's dedication to vulture conservation is reflected in our ongoing research efforts, which have yielded significant findings. One of our papers, 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 eagerly anticipate their resubmission, and hope for 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. Utilising GPS tracking data, our analysis underscores the vultures' preference for open landscapes and low-disturbance areas, offering crucial insights for land use legislation and powerline distribution. The 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 highlight the significance of human-induced mortality for migratory birds on a flyway scale has been accepted for publication. We await the final manuscript from the journal to provide complete citation details.

Aligned with our commitment to safeguard African vultures through collaboration and innovation, VulPro continues to cultivate partnerships with numerous institutions and research units. Our goal is to deepen our understanding of vulture ecology and behaviour, address the multifaceted threats they encounter, and to 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 feel free to reach out to us.



Sponsors

We sincerely appreciate the unwavering support of our sponsors, whose commitment drives our vital conservation work and helps us make a significant impact in protecting vultures.

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Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo
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Tandy Foundation
The Tax Shop
Tulsa Zoo
World Bird Sanctuary
Zoo Atlanta
Zoo Miami Wildlife Conservation Fund

BLUE

Chessington World of Adventures Operations Ltd
Darwin Chambers
Little Rock Zoo
Roger Williams Park Zoo
Thea Erasmus
Wan4U

Emergency Assistance for Injured Vultures and Large Birds of Prey

Vulpro

Kerri: +27 82 808 5113
Alistair: +27 82 254 4162
Kate: +27 82 702 5942

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!

Permits and Registration:

- Fully permitted 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 program.
- Offspring from the breeding program are released, preventing species extinction by replenishing wild populations.

Support VulPro's vital work in treating and caring for vultures by considering a donation from our wish list below.

Stationary
- Laminating sheets
- Super glue
- Printer paper
- Printer ink (HP 912XL)
- Lithium batteries (AA)
- Pens

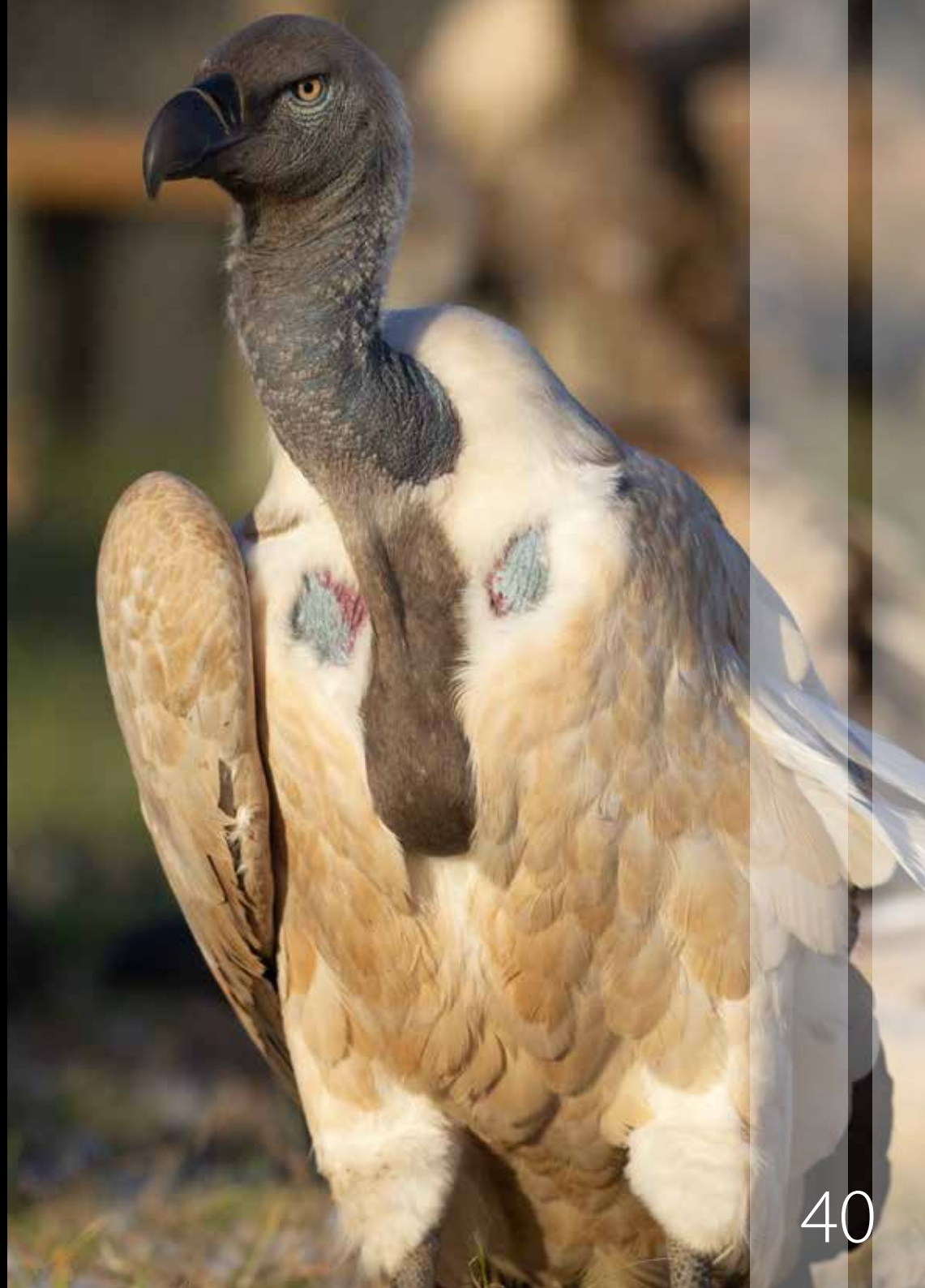
Cleaning Products
- Washing powder
- Clean Green
- Toilet paper
- Sunlight liquid
- Domestos and Savlon
- Dettol hand wash
- Scrubbing brushes
- Outside brooms
- Washing sponges
- Clothes pegs

Maintenance Equipment
- Large and medium cable ties
- Insulation tape
- Duct tape
- Garden rakes
- Garden shears
- Welding gloves
- Knives for cutting carcasses
- Wood oil
- Epoxy (green and white box)

Hospital Equipment
- Drapes
- Gowns
- Drill and hand chuck
- Ex Fix cement
- Suture material
- Cold sterilization trays
- Karbodust

Wishlist

Your contribution can save lives and ensure the future of our vultures for generations to come.



"Those who teach us the most about humanity, aren't always human"

The future of vultures

is in our hands