

Vulture Conservation Programme

Please find below information on the Vulture Conservation Programme which focuses its attention on the Cape Vultures of Magaliesberg. If any vultures are found grounded, dehydrated, injured, electrocuted etc, please contact Kerri on 082-808-5113. If anyone is interested in assisting this project or want additional information, please e-mail kerri.wolter@gmail.com. Arrangements can also be made to visit the rehabilitation centre.

Executive Summary

Vultures form an important ecological component of our natural environment, cleaning up dead carcasses, decreasing the spread of some diseases and playing a social role in some early societies, most notably the Egyptians and the Hindu. Today, they face an unprecedented onslaught from modern mans developments, including electrocutions and collisions with electrical structures, poisonings, land-use changes, decrease in food availability etc.

The vulture programme approaches vulture conservation in a multidisciplinary and networked fashion, with the benefit accruing to both the vulture and society at large. This is achieved by combining the disciplines of education and good science, with networking, capacity building and knowledge generation. The veterinary disciplines of toxicology, pharmacology, clinical pathology and medicine are combined with the science of cell-phone telemetry and the banking of genetic resources, with the end goal being of significantly influencing the well-being of our natural resources to the benefit of society. By focusing actions on the vulture, positioned at the top of the food chain (literally) and an indicator of the health of the environment below it, this project is destined to not only influence but also impact on the well-being of our natural environment.

Cell-phone tracking devises are used for the first time to determine foraging and home ranges of a large number of vultures in Southern Africa. The output from such research allows for the monitoring capture-release of free-ranging vultures, the mapping of areas for further actions, such as community education and the safeguarding of vulture food through the monitoring of vulture

restaurants. The educational impact of vultures will be felt both locally, through educational talks and interaction with both tame and wild vultures at the Lion and Rhino Nature Reserve, as well as regionally, through the follow-up of vulture home range and feeding studies, determining drug residues in carcasses and lobbying communities and society for appropriate measures and actions to the benefit of our natural environment. This project is therefore a pro-active attempt to determine, evaluate and monitor veterinary drugs / chemical residues in carcasses that are made available to vultures, build dedicated laboratory models for predicting avian toxicity, use a mass awareness campaign in order to involve and get feed-back from public, determine the home ranges of vultures, so as to better understand their foraging habits and bank down appropriate biological samples for current and future project use.

With the many threats vultures are facing throughout southern Africa, vulture rehabilitation has become an essential part of the Vulture Programme. Collecting grounded, injured, poisoned and disabled vultures around South Africa, special emphasis within the Gauteng and North West Provinces, we are able to save many vultures that would have met their untimely death. By doing this, we are in a position release those that are fit and healthy back to their freedom and keep those that cannot be released, in captivity for educational purposes. Providing a safe haven for these misunderstood birds. As present, this is the only facility approved by Gauteng Nature Conservation and recognised by North West Conservation for vulture rehabilitation.

Objectives

- Improve our understanding of the emerging risks of veterinary and other chemicals entering the vulture food chain.
- Determine the home range / foraging range of vultures, using GPS/GSM telemetry and tagging.
- Awareness Campaign of the plight of the vulture and its effect on other species, including man
- Vulture rehabilitation

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