



THE CAPE VULTURE

Gyps coprotheres

**RHINO & LION WILDLIFE CONSERVATION NON-PROFIT ORGANISATION
(VULTURE PROGRAMME)
DE WILDT CHEETAH & WILDLIFE TRUST**



Introduction

The Cape Vulture is one of the most threatened vulture species in South Africa. Various factors are linked to their continuing decline namely; food shortage, poisoning and powerline collisions and electrocutions. At present one of the largest populations of these birds is around the Magaliesberg cliffs where at present ± 380 breeding pairs live. A potential link between the declining fortunes of the Magaliesberg Cape Vultures and agricultural and urban expansion in surrounding areas has been suggested.

Vultures are an important component of the southern African ecosystem and their presence indicates a healthy ecosystem. Landowners are aware of the positive role vultures play in devouring carcasses, thereby preventing the spread of diseases and reducing blowfly outbreaks. Formal conservation areas represent a small portion of southern Africa's surface area. Not only are there few conservation areas, but many are only relatively small isolated pockets of land, much smaller than the ranges over which vultures normally forage.

Major Threats:

Powerlines

Since the erection of powerlines, vulture numbers have declined rapidly due to powerline collisions or electrocutions. Vultures use electricity poles and towers for perches from which to observe their surroundings. As vultures are large birds, they run the risk of being electrocuted on certain structures as well as colliding into the overhead wires causing permanent wing damage. Powerlines are a major concern for vulture conservation and methods are underway in erecting safe and vulture friendly powerlines with safe perches and insulating live conductors.



Vultures roosting on powerlines



Poisoning

Vultures are victims of irresponsible poison use and has thus led to the disappearance of vultures and other birds of prey from around southern Africa. There is a lack of education regarding the correct use of poisons and their effects on our wildlife. Vultures congregate in large numbers at carcasses and it is for this reason that many are killed at one time.

Vulture restaurant at the Rhino & Lion Nature Reserve



Loss of Available Food

Many years ago, vultures could fly for 250 km in any direction around the Magaliesberg range, across highveld grasslands or Acacia savanna populated by a wide variety of potential food. Today, their way is blocked in all directions; in the south by the densely populated Witwatersrand, to the east by the city of Pretoria and to the north and north-west by some of the world's richest platinum mines and the city of Rustenberg. All of this has resulted in the substantial loss of available food for vultures.

Rehabilitation

With the many threats our Cape Vultures are facing, vulture rehabilitation is an important activity undertaken by the *Vulture Programme*. Vultures that become grounded, injured, poisoned and disabled are collected, rehabilitated and if possible released back into the wild with a monitoring device i.e. wing tag or cellular tracking device.

For more information on the *Programme* and vulture rehabilitation, contact Kerri Wolter:
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Vulture being released at the Nooitgedacht breeding colony



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