

# Scavengers hunt again



A tame vulture greets guests as they arrive at the launch.

## Charlie Fripp

*Kromdraai:* After suspected arsenic poisoning in the Delareyville area three weeks ago, six rehabilitated white-backed vultures were released into the wild.

The surviving six of 22 vultures were captured and rehabilitated by Kerri Wolter and Dr Paul Bartels at the Rhino and Lion Wildlife Conservation in Kromdraai.

The release of the birds of prey coincided with the launch of the newly formed non-profit organisation (NPO).

Speaking at the launch, Prof Gerry Swan said, "Wildlife is often the victim of environmental degradation and human persecution, with disaster having affected the birds' livelihood."

Prof Swan pointed out environmental pollution, such as chemical spills, heavy metal poisoning, endocrine disrupters and animal trafficking, poaching, poisoning and harvesting, contributed to the demise of the vulture population.

The NPO, Rhino and Lion Wildlife Conservation, aims to cater for all the needs of the vulture project, including further research into their breeding patterns, range and feeding habits. There are three major Cape vulture breeding colonies, with the largest in the Nooitgedacht area, with about 100 breeding pairs. "Our aim is to be the leading vulture conservation programme in society," said Wolter.

The objectives of the vulture programme stem from the need to rehabilitate birds that have sustained injury or need other medical assistance. Veterinary



## One of the released vultures takes to the skies.

research is set to help to treat future cases and enhance vulture awareness. Vultures are to be taken to schools and public talks, to educate the public on vulture behaviour.

In addition, captive vultures could be used in testing of safety structures for Eskom. Research relating to toxicity studies will also form part of the lead study.

For research, the wings of vultures are tagged to facilitate identification, and a GPS tracking and SMSing device has

been strapped on the birds' backs to make tracking easier. The device emits a signal that can be picked up over long distance to trace the location of the released vultures.

Ed Hern, owner of the Rhino and Lion Wildlife Conservation, commented, "The Vulture project is the flagship of the research and rehabilitation programme, but there are many other invaluable projects in the pipeline."