

**'Vultures are misunderstood creatures, which are seen as ugly and smelly when in fact they are majestic birds'**

**Kerri Wolter, 30, is doing her bit for the environment by fighting for one of the most despised scavenger species – vultures. She manages a conservation vulture programme at the Rhino & Wildlife Conservation NPO, including a vulture rehabilitation centre on her plot in Skeerpoort.**

'Vultures are incredibly misunderstood,' says Kerri, while we admire Percy, her hand-reared Cape Vulture who is enjoying his moment of fame in front of the camera, spreading his wings in the wind and loving all the female attention.

'Vultures are perceived as ugly and smelly, when in fact they are nothing of the sort. They are majestic birds – incredible creatures, each with its own unique personality and character.

'They soar at great heights and distances, adapting to the ongoing changes in the environment caused by man, and have managed to survive against the most incredible odds, despite the fact that they are seen as vermin.'

Kerri's interest in vultures started five years ago when she met Prof Gerhard Verdoorn, director of BirdLife South Africa. 'I didn't know anything about vultures at that stage, and he "took me under his wing" and I grew to love these birds. Like a lot of people, I never understood them, but after spending some time with them and then having an incredible opportunity to hand raise a Cape vulture, Percy, my passion grew.'



Furthermore, only a few people are aware of the important role they play in the ecological system.

'Vultures and other avian scavengers clear the veld of carcasses by rapidly consuming the remains of dead animals, and by doing this also prevent these carcasses from acting as host to various diseases that may spread to livestock.

'Vultures are constantly facing challenges in their environment, such as exposure to poisons and dwindling eco-systems that stem from the expansion of human settlements and other man-made hazards such as power

lines and electrical pylons.'

According to Kerri, as a result of the continued pressures placed on vultures, species such as the Cape Griffon Vulture have become endangered, while others such as the African white-backed vulture are destined for extinction without human intervention.

'I didn't grow up as a bird person, but that has all changed. I will continue to educate the public about the importance of vultures, hopefully changing people's attitudes about these birds, and teach them to appreciate and love them for their uniqueness.'

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