



Save the vultures

Hartbeespoort – VulPro, an NGO that works tirelessly to safeguard Africa's vulture populations through rescue and rehabilitation, has experienced an alarming number of rehabilitation cases for December 2018 to early January 2019. During the month of December, 23 vultures were brought to VulPro for treatment for dehydration, starvation and calcium deficient injuries. Since then the numbers have escalated to staggering number of 13 birds collected within just 6 days which means more than 2 birds per day for the month of January. These injuries and deaths form part of an alarming trend that, if left unchecked, could lead to extinction.

Most of these cases have coincided with the fledgling stages of our endemic Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres* and African White-backed *Gyps africanus* vulture species.

A large percentage of these birds are young fledglings that have either left their nest too early, or have not had sufficient calcium in their diet. The climate conditions of extreme heat, lack of available water and sufficient food, makes survival difficult.

VulPro founder and manager Kerri Wolter said: "It feels as if the entire Magaliesberg fledgling population is presently being treated at VulPro! For our team, it has been physically exhausting and emotionally draining, requiring long hours on the roads to fetch grounded birds and many hours treating, rehydrating and feeding these birds 24 hours a day. Some have come in with broken bones, dislocated joints or bent bones which is a sure sign of calcium deficiency. Some we have sadly not been able to pull through. This too has stretched our manpower resources; however, we have a responsibility internationally to safeguard African vultures and will continue to do so."

Cape Vultures are classified as globally endangered with fewer than 4200 breeding pairs left, and the African White-backed vulture is listed as critically endangered.

These vultures are typically slow breeding, reaching maturity between five and seven years of age and laying only one egg a year.

Fledglings leave the nest towards the end of November, beginning of December.

While the majority of South Africa has been experiencing extreme above normal temperatures, and together with the continued drought in many parts of the country, this has led to environmental conditions beyond the norm for the young fledgling vultures. Many of these birds are found in areas way out of their range, often in urban areas, or along highways, extremely dehydrated and more than likely have been without food for up to 10 days.

These birds seem totally disorientated and unless assisted will certainly die.

VulPro appeals to members of the public to contact them directly should they see or find birds that are grounded, disorientated or injured. For more information, contact 082 808 5113 or kerri.wolter@gmail.com.

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Kerri Wolter with a vulture under her care.



A vulture under the care of VulPro.