



The Cape Griffon or Cape Vulture (*Gyps coprotheres*) is an Old World vulture in the family Accipitridae, which also includes eagles, kites, buzzards and hawks. It is endemic to southern Africa, and is found mainly in South Africa, Lesotho and Botswana. They nest on cliffs and usually lay one egg per year.

# Vulture programme begins its journey into groundbreaking research

**BRITS - Forty wild Cape Vultures (*Gyps coprotheres*) will be captured, tagged, ringed, sampled, photographed and released at the Rhino & Lion Nature Reserve's vulture restaurant tomorrow - a breakthrough in vulture capture and research for South Africa and for vulture conservation.**

Vulture Programme Manager, Kerri Wolter, told Brits Pos that the aim of this capture is to assist in the evaluation of vulture foraging ranges and the exposure to chemical residues in scavenged carcasses.

"Together with project partners; Rhino & Lion Wildlife Conservation Vulture Programme (lead by Kerri Wolter), University of Pretoria, Faculty of Veterinary Sciences by Dr Vinny Naidoo, BioBank SA/NZG by Dr Paul Bartels and Gauteng Dicatorate of Nature Conservation, it is hoped to improve our understanding of the emerging risks of veterinary and other chemicals entering the vulture food chain, and to also determine the home range/foraging range of vultures using patagial tags and GSM/GPS cell devices," Wolter said. She said that although the system of vulture restaurants did improve the wellbeing of vulture colonies throughout South Africa, the recent crash in India's vulture population, has raised major safety concerns on the practice of vulture restaurants. "Although not confirmed, vultures at the

restaurants are most likely exposed to carcasses from animals treated with a veterinary drug, for a particular illness, and has thus raised the following question: If diclofenac, a rather innocuous veterinary non-steroidal anti-inflammatory agent could lead to a 98% species devastation, what damage could other toxic compound such as the organophosphors cause?"

The IUCN Red Data List classifies the Cape Vulture as vulnerable, with ongoing previously identified threats, such as poisonings, habitat change, agriculture practice, pylon collisions and electrocutions contributing to this status (Van Wyk et al., 2006; A Markus, 1972).

Wolter told Brits Pos that new threats to vultures have recently also emerged in South Africa with the use of vulture parts to predict the lotto numbers.

"Elsewhere in the world, the catastrophic crash in the previously common Eurasian white-back vulture population and other vulture species on the Indian sub-continent (Status classification changed from common to critically endangered in just 12 years), has given society a serious wake-up call as to the emerging threat that vulture populations now face, namely veterinary chemicals/drugs residues and lead in carcasses that are/may be detrimental to the survival of vultures.

"The Asian Vulture Crisis also highlighted the effect of the removal of a species from the environment on other species and societies wellbeing as a whole, such as the increase in the amount of rotting meat in the environment with resultant increase in feral dog and rat populations, and associated disease outbreaks.

"The Rhino & Lion Wildlife Conservation Vulture Programme is extremely grateful to our new project partners in vulture conservation, namely; Rand Merchant Bank, Computer Facilities and E Oppenheimer and Son (Pty) Ltd," Wolter said. For further information contact Kerri Wolter at 0828085113 or E-mail: kerri.wolter@gmail.com or www.rhinolion.co.za

