

Raptor Rescue Newsletter

May 2016



Greetings

Research papers and reports from rehabilitation and conservation organisations are showing an alarming drop in the numbers of all vulture species across Southern Africa. There is no doubt that our vultures are facing a crisis, and that some of our vulture species are teetering on the brink of extinction. It is not an easy job for a scavenger to find food on a daily basis, and research has shown that vultures often fly incredible distances in their search for food. During these forays they run the gauntlet of collisions and electrocutions on power lines (often the only point in an area high enough to roost on) as well as the risk that the carcass they eventually find is laced with poison. How sad that one of our most vital cleaning agents in any ecosystem has become more valuable alive than dead, for it is partly the black market value of their body parts that is driving malicious poisoning incidents. The superstition behind the demand is that vultures possess the ability to see into the future, and thus anyone partaking of a body part will be blessed with the same clairvoyance. Logic should tell us that for a bird which can supposedly see the future, arriving to feed at a carcass that will kill it, is a really short-sighted move. For those of us that truly try and see into the future, we can only speculate on what diseases will spread through our wildlife parks and farming communities once vultures are no longer there to fulfil their vital role.

Admissions:

During May we had 14 new admissions: 1 Cape Eagle Owl, 1 Peregrine Falcon, 1 White-faced Owl, 1 Little Sparrowhawk, 2 Jackal Buzzards, 3 Spotted Eagle Owls, 2 White-backed Vultures and 3 Cape Vultures.

All of the vultures were recovered from a poisoning incident in Dundee. A farm owner and his manager noticed that the vultures, who often came down to the river on the property, were behaving in a strange, disorientated manner. The report came in to us and a team was dispatched to the scene where four live vultures and a dead one were recovered – all showing signs of organophosphate or carbamate poisoning. The scene was attended to over the next few days by



members of the Endangered Wildlife Trust, the Glencoe Stock Theft Unit, Honorary Officers from Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, Raptor Rescue, the farm manager and Sylva Francis, a Wildlife Rehabilitator from Newcastle. While the Airwing division searched the area for signs of a possible poison site and more vultures down, the team on the ground went on to recover another live vulture, and eight more dead ones. The scene was cleared of further contamination, and all the vultures found alive were stabilized and have made a full recovery at the clinic. A case has been opened with the Glencoe Stock Theft Unit to investigate the matter.



Releases:

Only 1 bird was released this month due to the fact that we are holding a few birds over the worst of the winter, especially the migrants.



Our release was the Little Sparrowhawk that was admitted in January. The bird was only a fledgling at the time, and she had injured a wing while learning her way around. Once recovered, she was passed on to a falconer at the Natal Falconry Club who spent the past five months getting her fit and hunting successfully. She is now a proficient hunter and her chances of survival are high. With birds of prey having a natural 70% mortality rate in their first year of life, this little bird has definitely been given a helping hand.

Research:

The Owl Box Project, one of the projects run under Predatory Bird Projects and supported by Raptor Rescue and the University of Kwazulu-Natal, has received funding from the N3 Toll Concession to further its impact in rural schools and communities along the N3TC route. The aim is to introduce the schools and communities to owls and owl boxes and educate them on the importance of preserving and protecting owls as important and

useful predators in the ecosystem. The project will start in June and run through till the end of the year, and all data collected from the project will go towards research.

Donations/funding:

Thank you to all our sponsors and supporters. We continue to need funds to support the daily running costs of the clinic; including our vet bills and transport costs. With this in mind, we are appealing to folks to consider setting up monthly debit orders for small amounts (R50, R75, R100 etc) that will not dent their bank balances, but will make a big difference in helping us to cover costs each month.

And to end:



Kind regards,

Tammy

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