



Media Release

28th of August 2012

For immediate release

Starts

INTERNATIONAL VULTURE AWARENESS DAY – 1 SEPTEMBER 2011

The first Saturday of September every year is observed as International Vulture Awareness day by the Birds of Prey Programme (EWT-BoPP) of the Endangered Wildlife Trust, its partners and associates including provincial conservation bodies and several other NGOs involved in vulture research and conservation in South Africa. The purpose of this day is to create awareness of the continued plight of all vulture species and to highlight the work done by conservationists to monitor populations and implement effective measures to conserve these birds and their habitats.

“The day evolved from the Sasol National Vulture Awareness Day that has been celebrated in South Africa since 2005” says the Manager of the EWT-BoPP, André Botha. “This initiative received such interest from organisations elsewhere in the world that the first international event was celebrated by 159 organisations representing 44 countries in 2011. We expect global support to be even greater this year.”

South Africa is home to no less than nine vulture species. Seven of these species are listed in the Red Data Book of Birds of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland (Barnes, 2000) as facing a certain degree of threat of extinction. The Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus*, whose range in southern Africa is restricted to the Maluti-Drakensberg mountains in South Africa and Lesotho is classified as “Endangered” and continues to decline in numbers due to a range of factors. The Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres* only occurs within southern Africa and the conservation of this species remains one of the main focal areas of the EWT-BoPP. Both the Hooded *Necrosyrtes monachus* and African White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus* were up-listed to “Endangered” in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species during the last 12 months. Other species, such as the Lappet-faced *Torgos tracheliotus* and White-headed *Trionocephs occipitalis* mostly occur in large conservation areas in South Africa and are listed as “Vulnerable”.

Vultures are faced with a range of threats such as poisoning, persecution, electrocution and collision with power-lines, drowning in farm reservoirs in drier parts of the country, shortage of safe food supplies and loss of suitable habitat. The potential impact of indiscriminately placed wind-energy installations is today recognised as a major emerging threat to large soaring birds such as vultures. A considerable number of installations of this nature are planned for South Africa and it is imperative that the placement of such sites should consider and attempt to avoid the potentially devastating impact that they may have on the populations of these already threatened birds.

Recent research has shown that these birds are highly mobile and can cover several 100 kilometres in a day in search of food. This makes the implementation of effective conservation measures to benefit these species a daunting task, which needs to be approached from a national, or more likely an international perspective. In an attempt to address this in an African context, the Pan-African Vulture Conservation Strategy was developed during 2012 and will be implemented across the continent to attempt to address the alarming decline in many populations of these birds.

The Endangered Wildlife Trust in collaboration with the VulPro and BirdLife South Africa will be hosting a fun-filled family day at the VulPro's facilities near Hartbeespoort Dam. Activities will include talks on vulture conservation, vulture feeding and lots of activities for the children. You can contact André Botha at andreb@ewt.org.za, Kerri Wolter at kerri.wolter@gmail.com, or Ernst Retief at conservation.gauteng@birdlife.org.za for more information on the day's activities. A number of rehabilitation centres and vulture restaurants in the country will also host special events and showing vultures to members of the public.

For additional information please go to www.international-vulture-awareness-day.org on how you can become involved.

Ends

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