



REHABILITATED SECRETARYBIRD GOES BACK INTO THE WILD

17th July 2015

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After a lengthy period of treatment to one of its eyes at FreeMe, a Secretarybird is due to be released back into the wild thanks to Lukas Marima who rescued the raptor in Soshanguve, north of Pretoria on the 24th of March. Marima who found the bird which had been fitted with a tracking unit turned the bird over to the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT). Due to the contact details listed on the tracking device, Marima was able to call the EWT to urgently attend to the bird of prey.

The iconic Secretarybird is listed as Vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and its image can be found on the coat of arms of South Africa. The EWT's Birds of Prey Programme Manager, Andre Botha is collecting the bird from FreeMe on Sunday, 19 July at 8am to transport it to a release site close to where it was originally fitted with a tracking unit in December 2014 near Nylsvley in Limpopo. This will be done en route to the Lowveld.

Andre Botha said, "we are eternally grateful to Mr Marima who rescued the bird which, at the time of its rescue, being chased and harassed by community members before he stepped in, took it into safe custody and contacted the EWT through the phone number located on the tracking unit that was fitted to the bird". The tracking unit was fitted to the bird on a nest in the vicinity of Nylsvley, Limpopo on the 1st of December 2014. After leaving the nest, it wandered a distance of 96km over a period of five months before it ended up in Soshanguve where it was rescued.

The EWT took the bird to FreeMe for treatment and rehabilitation in order for it to be nursed back to health. FreeMe's Senior Wildlife Manager, Nicci Wright, explains, "When Andre Botha brought the injured bird to our facility for rehabilitation, I conducted a full physical examination to assess his condition. The bird presented with no fractures or wounds but I did notice that his left eye was not functioning optimally. I was concerned because the nictitating membrane was only partially working. We took the bird to the Johannesburg Animal Eye Hospital for assessment by the ophthalmic veterinarians".

The terrestrial bird which is endemic to Sub-Saharan Africa went through a series of examinations and

treatment. Upon examination, it was discovered that the bird had a corneal ulcer and that the eye membrane was partly dysfunctional.

Dr Isaac Venter, Dr Anthony Goodhead and Dr Lohan Odayar are three of the veterinary eye specialists that examined the bird. The bird was subjected to weekly examinations and daily treatment and administration of specialized eyedrops, sometimes four times a day.

FreeMe's Nicci Wright, said "We are particularly excited that after several weeks of being in our care the bird was successfully treated and is now ready to be released back into the wild", she continued, "We are confident that the eye's condition is good and that there is no risk of future infection or discomfort".

"As the bird has been fitted with a tracking unit we will be able to monitor its movement after release. The bird will be released in the area where it originally fledged from and we trust that it will in future avoid areas of dense human settlement" concluded EWT's Andre Botha.

The EWT's Birds of Prey Programme actions conservation projects for a wide range of raptors, including vultures and other large birds throughout southern Africa. For more information on the EWT - Birds of Prey Programme (EWT-BOPP) work on the Secretarybird contact André Botha on 082 962 5725 or andreb@ewt.org.za or www.ewt.org.za.

FreeMe exists to help in the care and rehabilitation of injured, orphaned and sick wildlife including birds, mammals and reptiles. The centre handles up to 10 000 cases per annum and can be contacted on +27 11 807 6993 or info@freeme.org.za or www.freeme.org.za.

*Photos available on request.

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