

# Bearded Vulture Project



ENDANGERED  
WILDLIFE TRUST

BIRDS OF PREY  
PROGRAMME

conservation in action



## Background:

The Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus meridionalis* is a large solitary bird that inhabits mainly mountainous regions.

In southern Africa a drastic decline in the Bearded Vultures' range and numbers during the past century has resulted in an isolated population that is

restricted to the Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains. Due to this restricted habitat and its susceptibility to various anthropogenic threats, the Bearded Vulture has been classified as "Endangered" in the Red Data Book.

This Project was initiated by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife in 2000, with the initial aim being to monitor nest sites in order to determine population trends. The project is now coordinated by the Bearded Vulture Task Force of the Endangered Wildlife Trust's Birds of Prey Programme. The project is being expanded from a purely monitoring project to include the implementation of various actions aimed at mitigating the threats to the species. The project has a group of enthusiastic and dedicated volunteers who monitor the Bearded Vulture throughout its range in Lesotho and South Africa.

## Project aims

The overall goal of the Bearded Vulture Task Force is to ensure collaboration between Lesotho and South Africa in implementing the actions identified in the Bearded Vulture Conservation Action Plan. Successful implementation of the actions will prevent further declines in the numbers and range of the Bearded Vulture.

## The project aims to:

- Obtain an accurate estimate of population size and nesting success for Bearded Vultures in southern Africa.
- Identify and address any conservation threats, such as a decrease in habitat and food supply, human persecution and disturbances at nests, poisoning, and

collisions with powerlines.

- Encourage the establishment of feeding sites throughout their foraging range to ensure a regular source of "safe" food.
- Ensure the long-term survival of the species by protecting at least part of its breeding and foraging range through partnerships between conservation organizations and land users.

## More about these endangered birds:

The Bearded Vulture is a specialized species in terms of its habitat requirements and food choice. It prefers mountainous regions far away from human disturbances and, as a result, Bearded Vulture populations are usually small and isolated. It nests predominantly on basalt cliffs in potholes at an altitude of about 2500 m.

Breeding success is high but many fledglings die before they mature. Adults have a high survival rate. Bearded Vultures are scavengers that cover large distances, and are often seen outside protected areas. The Bearded Vulture was called the 'Lammergeier' because it was thought that these birds preyed on lambs. This is incorrect because it feeds almost exclusively on bones from carcasses and does not hunt or kill prey.

## Bearded Vulture Project activities Monitoring:

Intensive monitoring is currently underway to obtain accurate baseline data on the size and range of the breeding population. Monitoring also takes place regularly at selected roost sites and feeding sites throughout the species range to obtain information on population age structure and habitat use.

## Recording nesting activity:

Nest site champions are a group of volunteers and other interested people that record the nesting activity of this species during the breeding season. All observations are recorded in the vulture database. This information is essential to guide conservation efforts.

**Tracking movements:**

During 2007 the Bearded Vulture Task Force fitted satellite transmitters to three individuals to obtain more information on their movement patterns and causes of juvenile mortality. The project's activities require an extensive education and awareness programmes which together with a concerted effort to address the threats to the species will go a long way to ensuring their long-term survival.

Text by Sonja Krüger

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**You have a role to play in ensuring the survival of the Bearded Vulture!**

- Help dispel the myths that these birds “catch lambs”
- Do not kill the bird; it is not a threat to your livestock.
- Do not leave poisoned carcasses to kill this bird or other animals.
- Work with the conservation authorities to establish vulture feeding sites.
- Report all vulture sightings to the project coordinator.
- Keep an eye out for marked birds, i.e. birds with bleached wing feathers.
- Become a nest site champion.
- Take part in the annual Vulture Count Day which is held on the last Saturday in August.
- Sponsor the tracking of a vulture to obtain valuable scientific information.

