

■ CONSERVATION



THIS AFRICAN white-backed vulture was among poisoned vultures incinerated on a game ranch in northern KwaZulu-Natal last year. The carcasses were burnt to ash to remove the fast-acting poison from the environment. | Wildlife Act

THE hooded vulture is listed as 'critically endangered' on the IUCN Red List owing to many cases of indiscriminate carcass poisoning, a burgeoning trade for traditional medicine, hunting, persecution, as well as habitat loss and degradation. | JOHN DAVIES Endangered Wildlife Trust



■ OCEAN WATCH

Tell a shark, ray story for a prize

RAY TO GO . . . Calls to lift shark nets and baited drum lines along the KwaZulu-Natal coast are among topics young, aspiring science writers are tackling as part of an Ocean Watch writing competition.

Organised by the environmental journalism training agency, Roving Reporters, the central theme is bringing threatened species of rays and sharks back from the brink of extinction.

But there are also many other issues the young writers are expected to delve into in submitting story pitches about rays and sharks.

Writers of the best seven story ideas will receive R750 cash and expert guidance from seasoned journalists in knocking their stories into shape for publication.

● To enter simply email your pitch and draft story or outline to matthewhattinghdbn@gmail.com before midnight, Tuesday, July 14.

● For tips on pitching good story ideas, visit www.rovingreporters.co.za



OCEAN enthusiast Cera-Jane Catton says sharks are among the misunderstood creatures of the ocean. | Blue Wilderness

Hope takes flight as birds set free

Rehabilitation and release of three poisoned vultures celebrated as threats to the species' survival escalate

WILL WESTERN

ONE swallow doesn't make a summer, but the release of three critically endangered vultures really is reason to cheer, say conservationists.

The African white-backed vultures had been nursed back to health after eating from a poisoned carcass set for them, experts believe, by muti traders.

It was one of four separate poisoning incidents in Zululand last year, said Chris Kelly, the Wildlife ACT director for species conservation.

Kelly is among many conservationists concerned that deliberate poisoning of vultures for belief-based use is on the increase.

The three released birds were poisoned in an incident that left five survivors and 56 dead.

According to records kept by the Endangered Wildlife Trust, more than 1200 vultures were deliberately poisoned in southern and eastern Africa last year.

Culprits include poachers who poison the carcasses of elephant and other game in an apparent effort to conceal illegal activities from rangers. The poisonings are referred to as "sentinel poisonings", as vultures circling over poached animals alert rangers to the killings.

On a bright winter morning last

week, the three rehabilitated African white-backed vultures made a homecoming, taking to the skies above Zululand hills, near uMkuze.

Ben Hoffman of Raptor Rescue, who treated the birds when they were rescued nine months ago, explained the significance.

"A vulture takes between five to seven years to reach maturity, and they lay one egg a year. That's two birds that need two years and a 100% success rate just to replace themselves."

Helping improve the odds are the men and women of the Zululand Vulture Project, which draws together Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, Raptor Rescue and Wildlife ACT.

"Swift response is everything," said Kelly.

"Five survivors and 56 deaths doesn't sound that great, but by responding rapidly, hundreds more birds were prevented from feeding, and by removing the poisoned carcasses and decontaminating the scene, hundreds more again were saved – as well as other species of scavenger."

Wildlife ACT took the rescued birds to Raptor Rescue in Camperdown, near Pietermaritzburg, where Hoffman, a raptor rehabilitation specialist, and his team set to work.

They flushed the birds' crops and gave them activated charcoal to absorb toxins.



FROM left, Chris Kelly, Wildlife ACT co-founder and director (Species Conservation) and professional avian rehabilitator Ben Hoffman from Raptor Rescue look on as M055, a tagged African white-backed vulture, is released back into Zululand. | CASEY PRATT

Atropine, a medicine used to treat certain types of nerve agent and pesticide poisoning, was administered.

The birds were fattened up and then allowed to get thin again to use up their toxin-storing fat reserves.

Before releasing the rehabilitated birds in the Manyoni private game reserve, the Zululand Vulture Project team fitted them with GPS trackers.

These will help conservationists better understand the vultures' feeding

and roosting habits.

It should also give them an insight into the landscapes they prefer – and to see if the birds survive.

The team chose Manyoni because it gave the birds a better shot at safety after release. It was also in the heart of an area in northern Zululand that has suffered a 75% crash in nesting vulture pairs since 2010. The area includes uMkhuze, Pongola and Magudu.

Kelly said poisoning was the

primary threat to vultures in KwaZulu-Natal and all six of South Africa's true vulture species were at risk. There were other threats facing the country's vultures, too.

"Collisions and electrocutions with power lines and pylons, and habitat change and reduction all take a big toll," he said.

The continent's vultures are in rapid decline, with most species at risk of extinction.

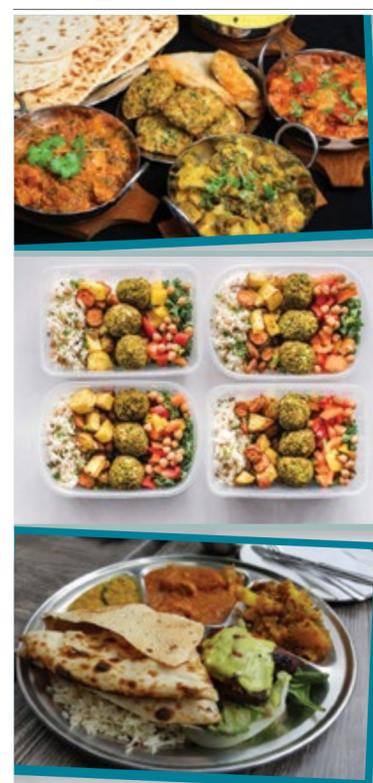
The International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species in 2017 classed 39% of vulture species as critically endangered.

The Zululand Vulture Project focuses on three nesting species: the white-headed vulture, African white-backed vulture and lappet-faced vulture.

The white-headed and white-backed vultures are listed as critically endangered; the lappet-faced vulture is endangered.

Wildlife ACT runs rural community conservation projects and education programmes to teach people about the importance of vultures to the environment. | Additional reporting Fred Kockott and Matthew Hattingh

● This story forms part of the Roving Reporters Thin Green Line series. Read more at www.rovingreporters.co.za



■ INDEPENDENT

HOME CHEF SUPREME

How do you make

Meat Free Monday meals better?

Share your delicious vegetarian meal recipe with us and stand a chance to win prizes from Hinds and Hirsch's.

How it works:

1. Email your recipe, a picture of the dish and your details to kznevnts@inl.co.za
2. Look for your recipe on the Independent Media Home Chef Supreme Facebook page @IndyHomeChefSupreme - like, share and tell everyone you know to do the same.
3. Entries with the most engagements will be asked to send through a short video of the creation process of their masterpiece.

Submissions close on Wednesday, July 8, 2020 and Facebook engagements close on July 20, 2020.

- First prize - Hamper from Hinds
- Second prize - Hamper from Hinds
- Third prize - R250 Hirsch's voucher

Terms and conditions apply.

■ INDEPENDENT

Perfect your mask make-up look

Webinar featuring master make-up artist **Aldytha da Silva**

Join us via Facebook Live on Wednesday, July 08 at 14:00 @SundayTribuneSA

Aldytha da Silva
Mrs SA 1st Princess 2016, Mrs Universe 10th place 2016, owner of Make Up Your Mind, Kryolan KZN and Skin by Aldytha

One lucky viewer who shares the video will stand a chance to win an amazing prize courtesy of Kryolan KZN

SUNDAY TRIBUNE

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