



6 September 2019

The EWT creates safe spaces for imperilled vultures

Start

As we prepare to celebrate International Vulture Awareness Day on Saturday, 7 September, the Endangered Wildlife Trust's (EWT) Birds of Prey Programme is preparing to extend its conservation wings in the form of a long-term vulture conservation initiative that will ultimately see the establishment of three new important Vulture Safe Zones in strategic sites across South Africa.

Since its inception in 1973, the EWT has played a leading role in vulture conservation throughout southern Africa. In order to combat the concerning decline of vultures across South Africa, we have developed a suite of conservation interventions geared to address the key threats and stabilise and recover vulture populations. Now we are excited to be spearheading the establishment of the first Vulture Safe Zones in South Africa. The use of Vulture Safe Zones has been identified as a priority conservation intervention in the [Multi-species Action Plan \(MsAP\) to Conserve African-Eurasian Vultures](#) (2017). Vulture Safe Zones are one of the most effective ways to tackle the threats to vultures in South Africa's dynamic landscapes. They allow us to protect areas that are important to vultures by focusing on an area, identifying what the threats are, and implementing specific conservation interventions to address these threats.

Within these zones, we actively mitigate and, where possible, remove all major human-related threats to vultures. An important step in this process is the direct involvement of landowners in the establishment of Vulture Safe Zones, engaging and empowering owners across large areas to commit to managing their properties in ways that will create safe spaces for vultures and other wildlife to thrive. This ensures that existing vulture populations stabilise and, importantly, provides the opportunity for vultures to return to their traditional home ranges and breeding sites. Vulture Safe Zones can also function as release sites for captive-bred birds and provide benefits for many other species.

To achieve this broad-scale conservation initiative across southern Africa, we have partnered with SANParks, private reserves including BlyOlifants and Timbavati Private Nature reserves, and other key stakeholders including the Kruger 2 Canyons Biosphere (K2C), Raptors Botswana, BirdLife International and BirdLife South Africa, to create Vulture Safe Zones in important vulture breeding and foraging habitat across the SADC region.

The first Vulture Safe Zone is in the vulture-rich region of Mpumalanga, with a focus on protecting important breeding clusters of Critically Endangered White-backed and Hooded vultures along the Lowveld riparian systems of the Blyde and Olifants rivers – a highly threatened vegetation type, which will also benefit from our conservation work. The second Vulture Safe Zone falls within the central Karoo district around one of the southernmost breeding colonies of White-backed Vultures in Mokala National Park. In the third site, we will establish a Vulture Safe Zone in the south-central Karoo to recover Cape Vulture populations that historically frequented – and even bred – in the region. Our focus here comprises a critical conservation zone that spans across approximately 23,000 km² in and around three major protected areas: the Karoo, Camdeboo and Mountain Zebra National Parks.

In all of the sites, we will work with farmers, game breeders, private reserves and SANParks to develop landscapes that provide protection to breeding populations and encourage vultures back to areas where they have previously been driven away. Our work will help to develop sustainable land practices that benefit both the people and wildlife. Importantly, this approach encourages positive action for vultures, focusing less on prohibition and negative messaging, and more on sound environmental practices that could provide landowners with reputational and economic benefits. Initially implemented by countries in Asia, and recently in Zambia, Vulture Safe Zones offer conservation solutions that are effective, realistic and achievable at ground level. The launch of this initiative encapsulates the ethos of International Vulture Awareness Day, by bringing stakeholders together and focusing on positive actions, making it the perfect way to celebrate.

What is a Vulture Safe Zone?

A Vulture Safe Zone is an appropriately sized geographic area in which targeted conservation measures are undertaken to address the key threats relevant to the vulture species present. Vulture Safe Zones are developed in southern Africa as an approach to complement national and international efforts to reduce the impact of existing and emerging threats to stabilise and promote recovery of existing vulture populations.

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About the Endangered Wildlife Trust

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) has worked tirelessly for over 45 years to save wildlife and habitats, with our vision being a world in which both humans and wildlife prosper in harmony with nature. From the smallest frog, to the majestic rhino; from sweeping grasslands to arid drylands; from our shorelines to winding rivers: the EWT is working with you, to protect our world.

The EWT's team of field-based specialists works across southern and East Africa, where committed conservation action is needed the most. Working with our partners, including businesses and

governments, the EWT is at the forefront of conducting applied research, supporting community conservation and livelihoods, training and building capacity, addressing human wildlife conflict, monitoring threatened species and establishing safe spaces for wildlife range expansion.

A beacon of hope for Africa's wildlife, landscapes and communities, the EWT is protecting forever, together. Find out more at www.ewt.org.za

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