



ENDANGERED WILDLIFE TRUST

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Start

Ninety landowners help vultures to reclaim their Karoo home

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) proudly announces the declaration of the first official Vulture Safe Zone (VSZ) in the Karoo, just in time for International Vulture Awareness Day on 4 September. A Vulture Safe Zone is an area in which landowners and communities work collaboratively to implement targeted conservation measures to address critical local threats to vultures, such as poisoning. Through extensive engagement and collaboration with the EWT, the Rupert Nature Foundation, South African National Parks (SANParks), the Mountain Zebra Camdeboo Protected Environment (MZCPE), SANParks Honorary Rangers, Karoo farmers, and other landowners have created an extensive Vulture Safe Zone in the Great Karoo that spans around 23,000 square kilometres, encapsulating three major protected areas: The Camdeboo, Karoo, and Mountain Zebra National Parks, as well as the MZCPE. By linking these key protected areas through a VSZ, our long-term goal is to encourage Cape Vultures to return to their historical ranges throughout the Great Karoo and ultimately recover this population. The area represents an extremely dynamic threat landscape, where the risks to vultures are complex and challenging, and a committed, long-term conservation presence is required to address them. Hence, we have a ten-year strategy in place to work closely with this extraordinary group of farmers to have a sustained and meaningful impact on the future of this species.

The initial phase of this project aimed to generate awareness of the plight of vultures in the area, particularly the Cape Vulture, and assess what changes need to be made to make the area Vulture Safe. Now, with a landmark 90 landowners signed up and their collective properties amassing nearly 700,000 hectares worth of Karoo landscape committed to being Vulture Safe, we will now focus on addressing the threats to vultures on these properties. However, one of the properties has always been Vulture Safe as Tom and Ruth O'Sullivan, cattle farmers near Middelburg in the Eastern Cape, have managed their farm in a vulture-friendly manner since the day they set foot on the property several years ago. It was with great pleasure, enormous pride, and a wide smile that the project team handed over their Vulture Safe Zone signage this month and officially classified the property as the first to be completely Vulture Safe within the Karoo landscape.

In other good news, the EWT's Birds of Prey Programme has also established the presence of a Cape Vulture breeding colony close to the boundary of the project area. We strongly suspect that this population has been the source of the individual and small groups of birds sighted within the project area over the last year and may represent a vital link to Cape Vulture strongholds in the Eastern Cape. The Karoo Vulture Safe Zone Project is an enormously important initiative for the persistence of this Endangered species and has the additional benefit of providing a safe area in which immature birds looking for new roosts and breeding sites can thrive. By keeping a finger on the pulse of the colony that forages in and traverses this area, the team can better take conservation action to benefit the species moving forward. All in all, International Vulture Awareness Day 2021 is one to celebrate positive progress for the conservation of our threatened vulture species.

The EWT sincerely thanks the Rupert Nature Foundation, Charl van der Merwe Trust, Rand Merchant Bank, SANParks Honorary Rangers, the landowners, and other partners for their support in making this project a success.

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About the Endangered Wildlife Trust

Founded in 1973, the Endangered Wildlife is driven by a team of passionate and dedicated conservationists working through 13 specialised programmes across southern and East Africa, each falling under one of our three key strategic pillars: Saving species, conserving habitats, and benefitting people. Our critical work includes conducting applied research, supporting community-led conservation, training and building capacity, addressing human-wildlife conflict, monitoring threatened species, and establishing safe spaces for wildlife range expansion. The EWT works alongside key partners, including communities, business, landowners, academic institutions, and governments, to create a sustainable future for wildlife and people. Find out more at www.ewt.org.za.

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