



A vulture restaurant is a feeding site for scavenging birds of prey



Vultures are magnificent soaring and gliding birds of the skies and essential cleaners of the veld.



A vulture restaurant supplements the bird's natural food supplies in an undisturbed area with safe meat and offal. Bones can be chipped to ensure calcium and mineral availability.

Using restaurants farmers contribute to conservation efforts with a practical, economical and hygienic carcass disposal method.

Monitoring, recording of ringed and tagged birds and other scientific studies are facilitated at vulture restaurants.

At a viewing hide tourists are given fascinating observation and photographic opportunities.

Besides vultures other birds of prey, including eagles may visit a feeding site. A number of small and medium size birds will come to pick at bone marrow or to feed on maggots and flies. Mammals have also been recorded at unfenced vulture restaurants; besides the usual scavenging species, like jackals and hyenas, visits from warthog, baboon and porcupine have been regularly recorded.



Photo: Dirk Heinrich

All Namibia's vulture species are listed in the threatened to endangered CITES categories. In Namibia, the first vulture restaurant was established in 1987 in the Waterberg Plateau Park. The aim was to provide a regular, uncontaminated food source for the Waterberg's declining population of Cape Vultures, a globally threatened species. South Africa developed feeding stations for the Bearded Vulture in 1966 and for Cape Vultures from 1978. Today, vulture restaurants are active all over the world, as globally a range of environmental threats force population declines of these magnificent and useful scavenging birds.

FOR A SAFE FEEDING STATION, VULTURE RESTAURANT, CONSIDER THE CHOICE OF SITE, THE "FURNISHING" AROUND THE SITE AND THE SOURCE OF THE CARCASSES USED FOR FEEDING.

VULTURES ON FARMS

Vultures circling in an area can attract a farmer's attention to stock deaths. Vultures quickly consume a carcass and reduce the potential spread of diseases and the breeding of blowflies. A vulture restaurant will supplement decreasing natural food with carcasses uncontaminated by agri-chemicals and veterinary drugs, boost the survival rate of young birds and attract vultures to areas that have been abandoned by them. Vultures are an awe-inspiring sight for tourists and photographers, both in the air and on the ground. To contribute to research and conservation, tags and rings on birds should be recorded and reported to relevant organizations (the organizations and their contact details are listed).



Photo: Dirk Heinrich

CHOOSE A SITE AND MANAGE A VULTURE RESTAURANT

- Choose a site away from disturbance; passing vehicular or pedestrian traffic.
- The area should be at least one hectare (100 x 100 meters) of fairly open debushed ground. Vultures need clear views of carcasses from above and an unobstructed runway for take-off after feeding.
- Large perching trees in and around the area make the birds feel safe. They use them before and after feeding. Once the vultures have fed, they often rest on perches or on the ground in the shade of trees.
- Power cables, poles and pylons can cause injury to or electrocute birds. Birds can also cause power outages. The site should be at least 300 meters away from the nearest power-lines. Collision with telephone lines can also cause injury.
- Fences can injure birds, especially during landing and take-off. The one- hectare site can have a jackal-proof fence to keep out mammalian scavengers if they are a problem on the farm. High game fences should be at least 100 meters from the carcass site.
- Keep the site clean and the grass short. Remove old carcasses, skins and bones especially during the rain season, so that old bones do not become infected with botulism.

VULTURES AND WATER

After feeding vultures like to clean themselves. Providing fresh water and a safe place to bathe is an added attraction for the birds. If possible, provide fresh water in a shallow saucer-shaped trough near the feeding site.

FOR THE BIRDS - TYPE AND QUANTITY OF FOOD

Carcasses from any species of animal can be used. To facilitate access for the birds, open the carcass along the abdomen and inside of legs. Do not have constant food at the site as this can potentially cause disease conditions.

AVOID ACCIDENTAL DEATH OF SCAVENGING BIRDS OF PREY

Check on how the animal died as birds are highly sensitive to contaminants - poisons and some veterinary drugs.

NEVER USE A CARCASS from an animal that has died under anaesthetic or an immobilizing drug or been euthanised (killed by injection).

AVOID any pentobarbitone; *Euthanase*® and *Euthapent*® M99®, *Zoletil*®, *Dormicum*®.

DO NOT USE CARCASSES that have died within a week of the last treatment with painkillers and anti-inflammatories e.g.: *Finadyne*®, *Cronyxin*®, *Pyroflam*®, *Ketofen*®, *Tomanol*®, *Phenylarthrite*®, *Equipalazone*®, *Fenylbutazone*®.

DIPS: Skin animals that have died within 5 days of being dipped for external parasites. Pour on and injectable parasiticides may be toxic to birds if the animal dies within 72 hours after treatment, e.g. *Front-line*®, *Dectomax*®. Avoid carcasses that were recently treated for tick-bite fever (Redwater).

LEAD SHOT: Lead is highly toxic and shot/bullets should be removed.

ANTIBIOTICS: If an animal was treated with antibiotics 72 hours before dying, the carcass is presumed safe. An animal that has died within 24 hours after being injected with a long acting antibiotic, can be used, **PROVIDING** the muscle mass at the injection site, the liver and the kidneys are removed.

If it is not possible to avoid antibiotic carcasses, destroy the liver and kidneys, these organs contain the highest concentrations of these drugs.

Carcasses that are dangerous for birds are best burnt but can be buried under ash or lime or under a dense cover of cut bush.

BURN ANY CARCASS FOUND BLEEDING FROM THE NOSE AND/OR RECTUM.



POISONS ARE DEADLY

All poisons that kill mammalian predators will poison birds, whether the bird feeds directly on the poison bait or on an animal that has died from eating poison



VULTURE RESTAURANTS AND THE NEIGHBOURS

Neighbors need to know why vultures are circling in the area. Informed neighbors may provide safe carcasses for the restaurant, but need to be alerted to the chemicals that are dangerous for birds. Discuss predator issues to find solutions that do not endanger non-target species. Fence the vulture-feeding site to avoid accusations of supporting predators such as jackal.

CREATE A VIEWING HIDE

Do not build a viewing hide until the vultures have accepted the feeding site. This may take several months.

- Place the hide on the north side of the site so observers have the sun behind them.
- The perching trees around the feeding site should be in view from the hide.
- The hide can be as close as 15 meters from the carcass.
- Access to the hide should not disturb the birds. Develop the parking area far from the hide, have a covered walkway or build the hide on a hill-crest with the approach invisible to the birds.
- Visitors should keep quiet and still once in the hide.

ENCOURAGING CITIZEN SCIENCE AND RECORD KEEPING



Many vultures and a number of eagles are in the CITES endangered and threatened conservation categories. Keeping a record of the species and the number of birds using the feeding site will assist current and future conservation strategies. Record and note keeping also gives visitors a great sense of involvement and purpose.

LOOK OUT FOR ANY BIRD THAT IS TAGGED OR RINGED

- Note the date, place, tag number and color.

REPORT TAG and RING sightings with your name and contact details to: VULTURES NAMIBIA

Tel: 064 220 443

Cell: 081 260 7375

pmbriidge@iway.na

NARREC

Tel: 061 264 409/264 256

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