

Conservation Corner

By Jane Doherty

Towards the end of last year I asked people on the Cape Bird Club's WhatsApp group to name the closest spot to Cape Town that they had ever seen a vulture. I received information from only 6 people, which is not enough for a decent survey, but the details are interesting in any case: 1 Hooded Vulture at Zandvlei in 2018; 1 White-backed Vulture at Darling Hills Road in 2020; 1 Cape Vulture between Stormsvlei and Swellendam in 2020; 1 White-backed Vulture at Cape Point in 2022; 1 White-backed Vulture at Paardevlei in 2023; and 3 Cape Vultures near Napier in 2023.



White-backed Vulture over Paardevlei, May 2023

Photo: Charles Britz

Since then, many people would have seen photos of a young Cape Vulture that landed on an open plot of land in Belville. The vulture was subsequently captured, treated for mites and released near De Hoop.

The point is that, apart from these occasional sightings, vultures are no longer a common feature of the landscape in and

around Cape Town. It is difficult to imagine, now, that Cape Vultures were frequently sighted around Table Mountain in early colonial times, and that the past distribution of Bearded, Egyptian and Lappet-faced Vultures reached almost to where the City now lies.



Cape Vulture in Belville, February 2024

Photo: Michael Mason

All South Africa's vultures have faced steep declines in recent times, with Bearded, Hooded, White-headed and White-backed Vultures now classified locally as Critically Endangered. It is only the Cape Vulture that is now seeing a slow turnaround in numbers, thanks to intensive conservation efforts.

If you'd like to know more about the threats facing vultures in Africa, click [here](#) to watch a 10-minute video with interesting animations.

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