

Vultures soar free again

THE Rhino and Lion Wildlife Conservation NPO was launched on Friday with the release of the surviving six African white-backed vultures that were poisoned in Delareyville earlier this year.

The vultures were released after being tagged and treated by Kerri Wolter, leader of the vulture project and Dr Paul Bartels of BioBank SA/NZG.

Ed Hern, founder of the Rhino and Lion Nature Reserve and an avid conservationist, said "We need to make a difference in our world if we want to leave a legacy of animal and bird species for our children and grandchildren to en-

joy.

"Everyone needs to get involved and be more informed about what is happening in the world around them."

Twenty-two African white-backed vultures were found dead alongside a sheep carcass on the farm Klippan near Delareyville earlier this year. Eleven vultures were still alive, but very weak.

Professor Gerry Swan, the Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Science, University of Pretoria at Onderstepoort and Director of the Vulture Conservation programme was the guest speaker at the

launch.

He said: "Wildlife is often the victim of environmental degradation and human persecution with many known examples of disasters that have affected their livelihood. As scientific and conservation communities we need to understand the risk imposed on our wildlife and to respond appropriately.

"The response of these communities to the Asian vulture crisis is a good example of how scientists and conservationists from all over the world worked together to resolve a crisis."

The catastrophic crash in the

previously common Eurasian white-back vulture population and other vulture species on the Indian sub-continent where their status classification changed from common to critically endangered in just 12 years, has given society a serious wake-up call as to the emerging threat that vulture populations now face, namely veterinary chemicals or drug residues and lead in carcasses.

The vulture project partners are the Rhino and Lion Nature Reserve, the University of Pretoria, Faculty of Veterinary Sciences, BioBank SA/NZG and the Gauteng Directorate of Nature Conservation.

The aim of the project is to research the flight patterns of vultures, their breeding habits and foraging ranges to mention a few.

New project partners are Rand Merchant Bank, Computer Facilities, E Oppenheimer and Son (Pty) Ltd, the Tony & Lisette Lewis Foundation and Natural Encounters.

Apart from poisoning, vultures are currently facing threats such as habitat destruction, drowning in farm reservoirs, lethal electrification on power lines, illegal capture for the making of traditional medicines and more recently, for predicting winning lotto numbers!

When spotting or coming across a vulture, the public can assist in the project by checking vultures' wings for a tag with an ID number.

For more information contact Kerri Wolter at kerri.wolter@gmail.com or 082 808 5113 or go to www.rhinolion.co.za



KERRI Wolter holding a juvenile Cape Vulture with Dr Paul Bartels stretching out its wing and showing the patagial identification tag.

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