

## FACT SHEET – White-backed Vulture

This species is currently the most numerous vulture in Botswana; however considering that its counterpart the Asian White-backed Vulture was one of the most numerous vultures in the world, and is now faced with imminent extinction, there is certainly no room for complacency as far as the conservation of this species is concerned



Photos: P Hancock

- collision and electrocution on powerlines,
- accidental killing (by vehicles) of birds scavenging on roadkills,
- incidental and deliberate poisoning.

The White-backed Vulture is beset by the same lethal set of factors that confronts all vultures in Southern Africa:

- habitat conversion, including bush encroachment, and destruction of preferred nesting trees by elephants
- direct persecution and killing for traditional medicine,



Of these, poisoning is emerging as the most significant threat in Botswana – in the past two years, 80 and 50 birds have been killed in two separate incidents in the Hainaveld alone. Nesting colonies in this part of the country are vacant, and without recruitment into the population, the future here looks bleak.

A recently identified threat has been the discovery that the vulture killer drug Diclofenac is available in Botswana. This is a Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drug (NSAID) that is used to treat livestock, and which is fatal to vultures when ingested at livestock carcasses. Discussions are underway with the Veterinary Department to get this drug banned in Botswana.

Given the range of threats described above, it will require a great deal of work and dedication to ensure that all vultures, including the White-backed, continue to grace our skies in the future.