

South African Proposal to list the Southern African Bearded Vulture Population on Appendix I of the Convention on Migratory Species

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forestry, fisheries
& the environment

Department:
Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



The Bearded Vulture

- ▶ Two sub-species:
 - ▶ *Gypaetus barbatus meridionalis*- sub-Saharan Africa (East and southern Africa)
 - ▶ *Gypaetus barbatus*- north Africa, Europe and Asia
- ▶ Large raptor -110 cm length, 6kg, 2.7 m wingspan
- ▶ Monogamous, solitary cliff nester, nests in potholes at altitudes >1800 m a.s.l.
- ▶ Obligate Scavenger- diet of primarily bone
- ▶ Primary threats: unintended poisoning (including lead), human disturbance and persecution, collision with energy infrastructure (powerlines), food availability, habitat loss and degradation.

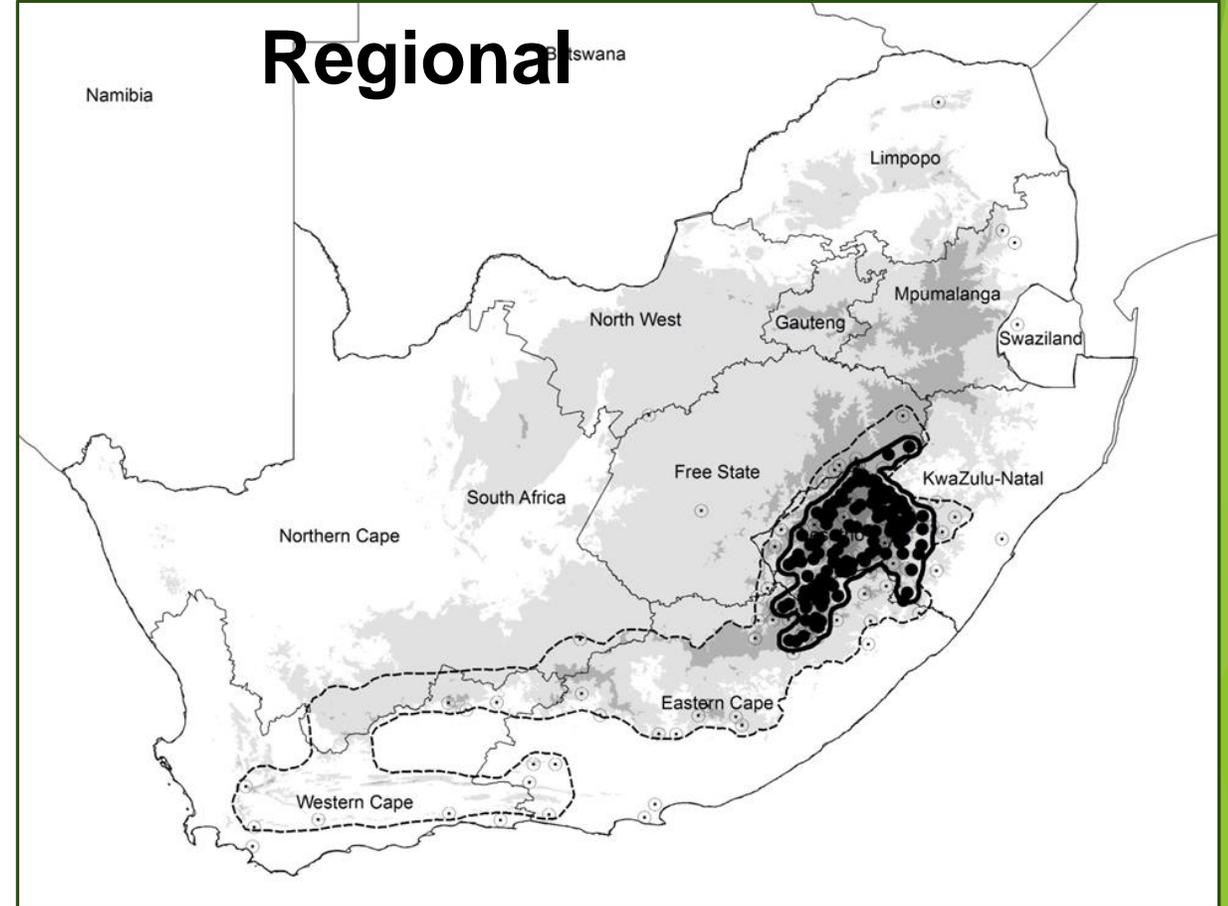


Distribution and Status



Near Threatened

BirdLife International. 2022. Species factsheet: *Gypaetus barbatus*. Downloaded from <http://www.birdlife.org> on 27/10/2022.



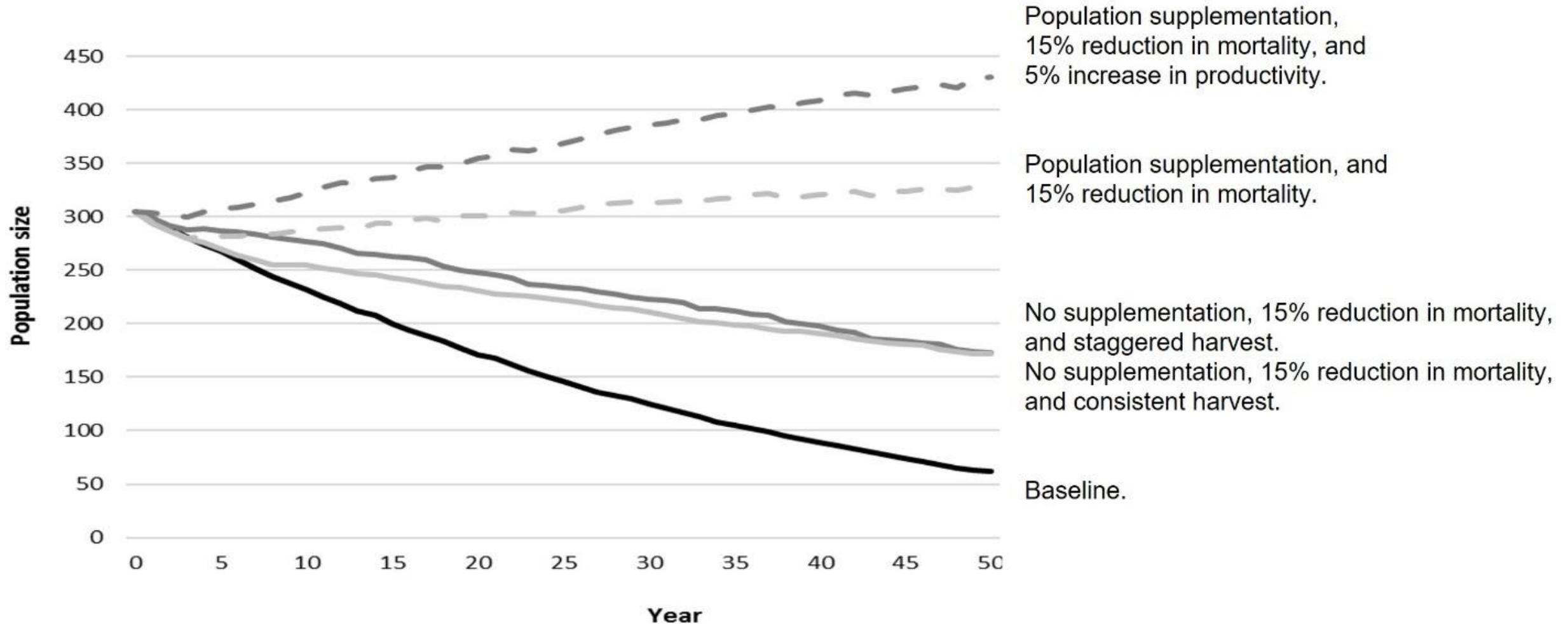
Critically Endangered (Southern Africa)

Krüger, S. 2015. Bearded Vulture. In: Taylor, M.R. (editor) The Eskom Red Data Book of Birds of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland. BirdLife South Africa, Johannesburg.

Introduction

- ▶ Species is Critically Endangered and declining in southern Africa
- ▶ Population of about 330 birds, declining by 3.5% per annum
- ▶ Genetically distinct from other populations
- ▶ 2022 PVA identified the need to:
 - ▶ Decrease mortality across all age classes by 15%
 - ▶ Increase productivity by 5%
 - ▶ Establish a captive population of >32 birds, to supplement the wild population
 - ▶ Need additional protection measures for the population

Graph showing population trajectories from modelled scenarios from a Population Viability Analysis workshop (Krüger et al. 2022).



Proposal:

Include the southern African population of Bearded Vulture on the Convention on CMS) Appendix I. The current status (CMS Appendix II) remains in place

- ▶ The Republic of South Africa is the only CMS Party Range State
- ▶ The Kingdom of Lesotho is a CMS non-Party Range State
- ▶ Motivation:
 - ▶ This population is Critically Endangered, threatened with extinction and therefore needs immediate support
 - ▶ Geographically separate from other populations of the sub-species
 - ▶ Genetically unique
 - ▶ Wealth of information available on the population from decades of research and monitoring to support the proposal (not available for other populations of the sub-species)

Anticipated Benefits:

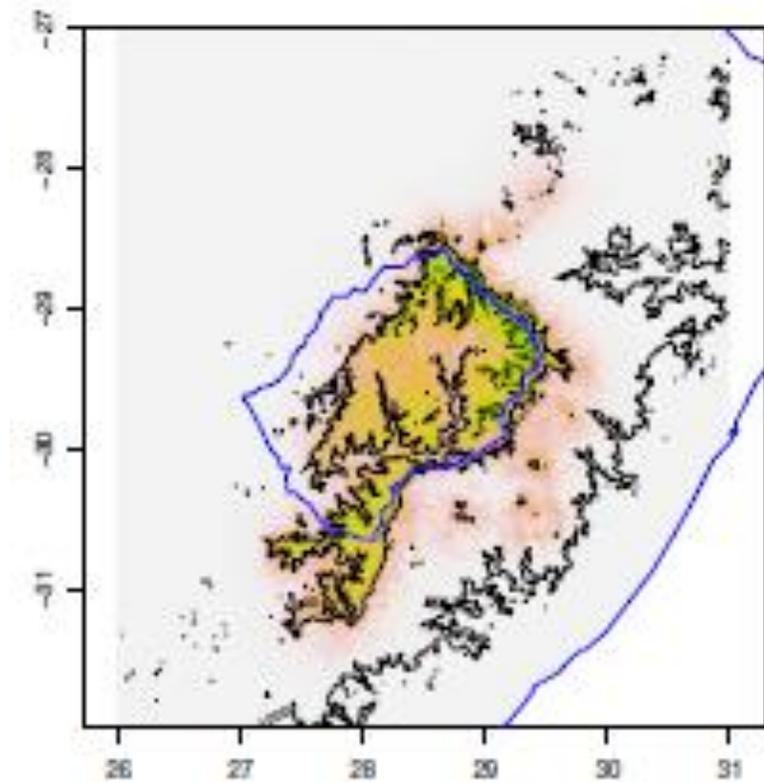
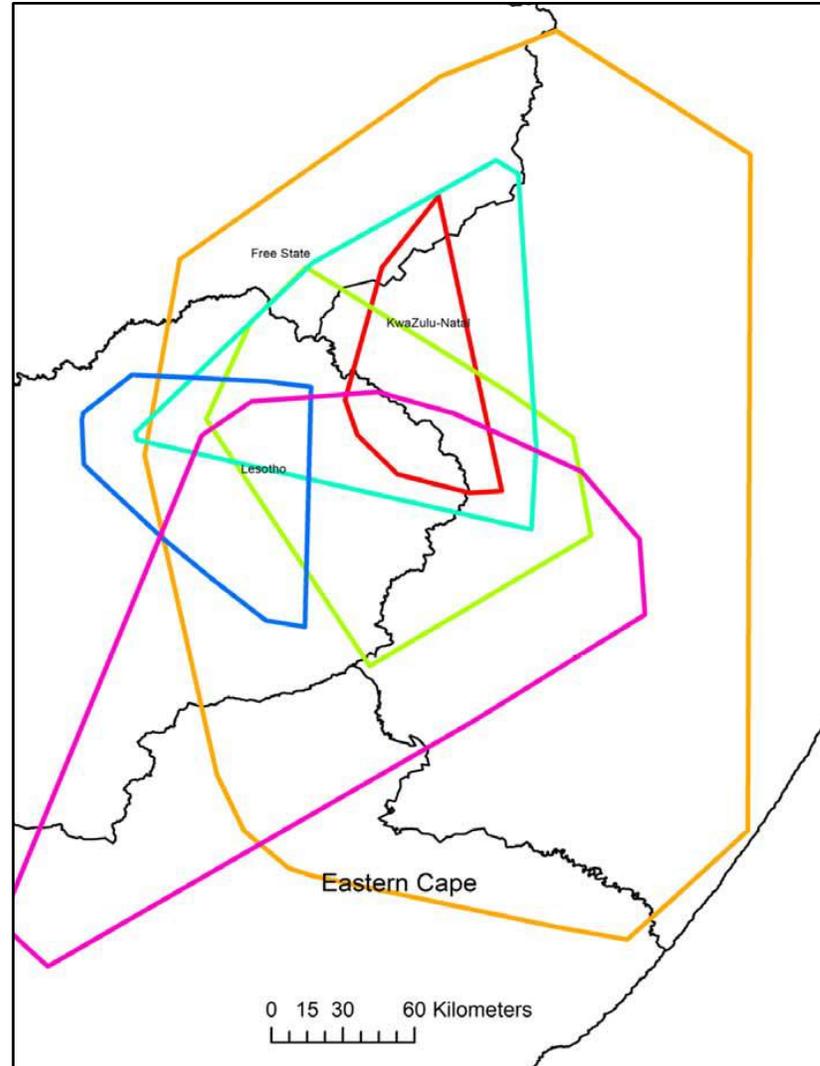
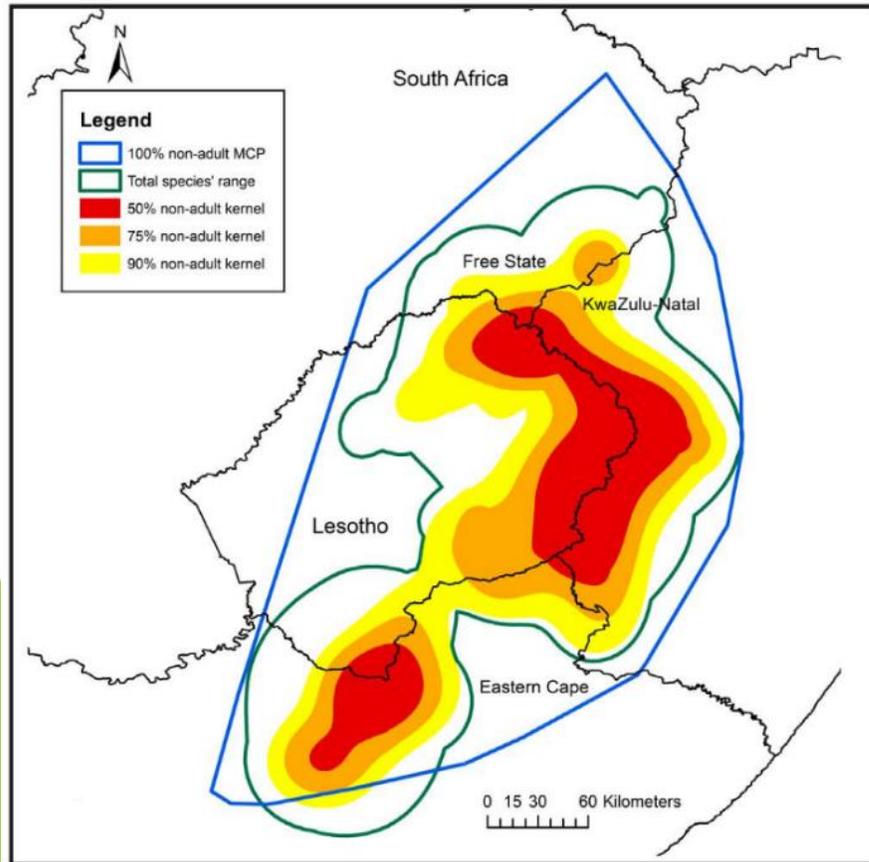
- ▶ Need to promote actions that increase cooperation between the two Range States to ensure the favourable conservation status of this species and its habitat
- ▶ Use CMS as a tool to aid in the protection of the species because the international status does not serve the regional status of the species.
- ▶ Not well represented or conserved in protected areas, and decision making by authorities consistently fails to take the needs of the species into account
- ▶ The uplisting will enforce consideration of the species' needs in decision-making processes in South Africa
- ▶ The uplisting will increase the profile of the population and improve protection and funding at an international level
- ▶ The species is a key part of our ecosystem, and our natural heritage, and is an iconic symbol for the Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Programme;
- ▶ Both Lesotho and South Africa are committed to the protection of this migratory species

Overview: Management measures

- ▶ Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP) for the Bearded Vulture gazetted in 2014 (Government Gazette Notice No. 37620).
- ▶ The Bilateral Bearded Vulture Recovery Strategy & Action Plan adopted in 2023 lists all measures to be implemented to achieve the species conservation targets.
- ▶ 10 objectives prioritised based on the outcomes of a PVA workshop in 2022 held to i) assess interventions required to achieve the species conservation objectives, ii) revise the species targets if required; and iii) identify priority conservation interventions necessary to ensure the persistence of the species in the wild with a particular focus on better understanding the scale of captive breeding required to support recovery in the wild.
 - ▶ Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4 address the intention of reducing mortality by 15%.
 - ▶ Objectives 4, 5, and 6 address the intention of increasing productivity by 5%;
 - ▶ Objective 7 addresses the intention of rapidly increasing the captive flock to 32 birds
 - ▶ Objective 8 is cross-cutting and required to achieve all the objectives;
 - ▶ Objective 9 is required to measure the success of any interventions; and
 - ▶ Objective 10 is necessary to ensure implementation of the Strategy.

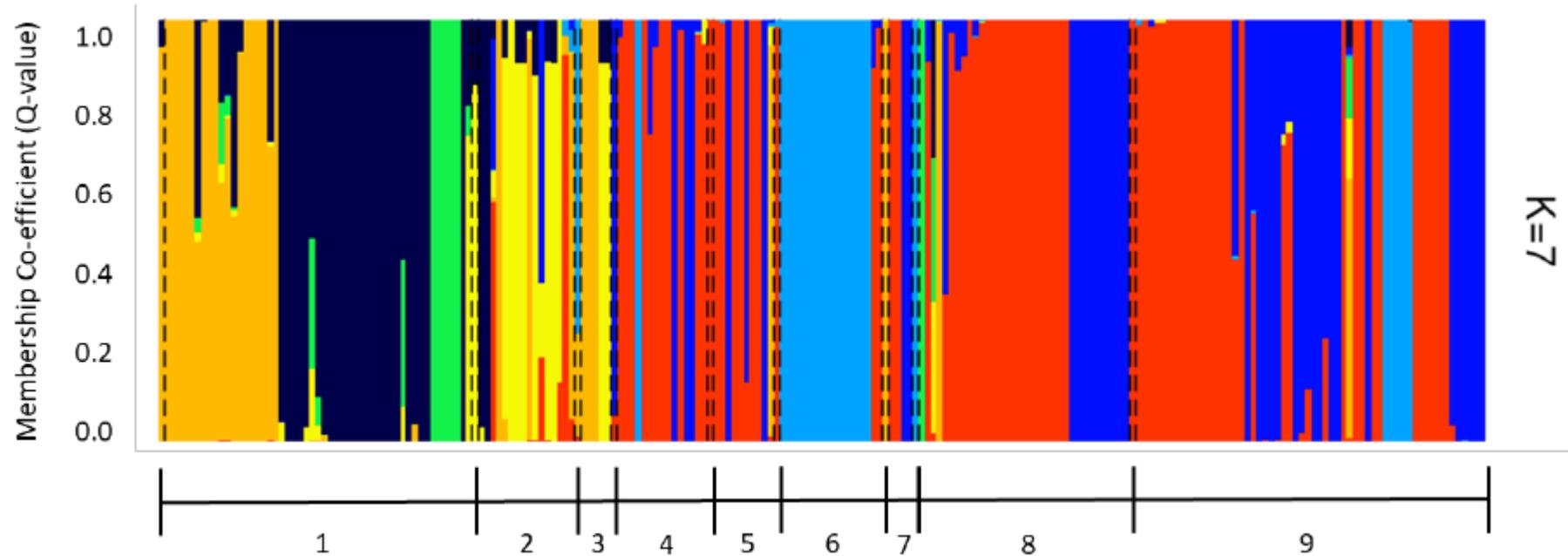
Migratory Status:

Tracking data (from 2007 to present) has shown that movements are unpredictable, cyclical and cross border between Lesotho and South Africa



Genetically distinct:

Streicher, M., Krüger, S. & Loercher, F and Willows-Munro, S. (2021). Evidence of genetic structure in the wide-ranging bearded vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*, (Linnaeus 1758)). *BMC Ecol Evo* 21:42.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12862-021-01760-6>



Regions: 1- southern Africa; 2- eastern Africa; 3- western Africa; 4- south-east Europe; 5- central Asia; 6- central Russia; 7- northern India, 8- Mediterranean islands; 9- European countries

219 individuals are represented by vertical lines which are partitioned into (max $K = 7$) coloured segments which represent the estimated membership coefficients (Q-value) of each cluster represented in their genetics.

Monitoring activities: This proposal has been informed by monitoring data collected by dozens of people over tens of thousands of person hours over 25+ years at a cost of many millions of Rands, coordinated by Ezemvelo and the BVTF



Support for the proposal:

- ▶ Bearded Vulture Task Force (Steering Committee of the Bearded Vulture Recovery Programme) represented by the following organisations:
 - ▶ The Department of Forestry Fisheries and the Environment (Transfrontier Conservation Areas Unit, Biodiversity Management Unit), BirdLife South Africa, Enviro-Rural Solutions, the Endangered Wildlife Trust (Birds of Prey Programme and Vultures for Africa Programme), Raptor Rescue, African Raptor Trust, Bearded Vulture Breeding Programme, SANParks, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, African Conservation Trust, Wildlife ACT, Department of Economic Development, Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency and the Department of Environment, Lesotho.
- ▶ Biodiversity and Protected Area Working Group; National Coordination Committee and Biodiversity Coordination Committee of the Maloti Drakensberg Transfrontier Programme
- ▶ BirdLife South Africa
- ▶ The Endangered Wildlife Trust
- ▶ IUCN Species Survival Commission Vulture Specialist Group
- ▶ Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA)
- ▶ Department of Environment Lesotho, of the Ministry of Defense, National Security, and Environment (Lesotho)

Conclusion

- ▶ There are no potential risks of the amendment only benefits
- ▶ The southern African Bearded Vulture is key part of our ecosystem, and our natural heritage, and is an iconic symbol for the Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Programme. Both Lesotho and South Africa are committed to the protection of this migratory species and South Africa will value any additional protection status that will safeguard this species.
- ▶ Existing international collaboration between South Africa and Lesotho in the management of the Bearded Vulture will be strengthened.
- ▶ Current collaboration between range states through a MoA, joint implementation of the Bilateral Bearded Vulture Recovery Strategy & Action Plan, and a Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP) for the Bearded Vulture gazetted in 2014 (Government Gazette Notice No. 37620).
- ▶ Conservation of the species will receive further support through the implementation of the Multi Species Biodiversity Management Plan for all Vultures in South Africa

Thank you



Partnerships



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Raptor
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