



### **Vultures: their role in Nature.**

The circle of life in nature is remarkable. The predators prey on the old, infirm or sick. Then the scavengers appear to clean up – hyenas, jackals, right down to the dung beetles. In between or sometimes first at a carcass are the vultures – expert sanitisers of the bush. A group of vultures at a carcass is called a wake.

Vultures are able to consume putrefying meat, including diseased meat. Powerful digestive juices destroy bacteria such as botulism, cholera and even anthrax.

The most common vultures found in this area are the lappet-faced, white-backed, white-headed, cape and hooded vulture. Each vulture species plays a specific role in the food chain. The largest, dominant species is the lappet-faced. It shoulders its way into the best feeding spots, using its powerful beak to tear skin and ligaments that the others cannot. White-backed and cape vultures are large and dominate in sheer numbers at a carcass. They are bulk feeders and quickly reduce the carcass to a skeleton. The white-headed is often the first to arrive, but will stand back when the other vultures arrive. Interestingly, they are the most predatory of the vultures, taking prey such as hares, monitor lizards and mongooses. The smallest is the hooded vulture, but its long narrow beak enables it to reach into cracks and joints the larger birds cannot. At a kill they will also eat lion faeces as it is rich in protein!

Sadly, all of these vultures are listed as endangered or critically endangered. Many are poisoned to be used as muti. These amazing birds are essential to the balance of nature and must be protected at all costs!

### **Aasvoëls: hul rol in die Natuur.**

Die kringloop van die natuurlike lewe is merkwaardig. Roofdiere maak jag op oues, swakkes en siekes. Dan daag die aasdiere op om skoon te maak – hiëna, jakkals en verder met die voedingsleer af, die miskruier. Tussen al hierdie, of partykeer eerste by 'n karkas, is die aasvoëls – sanitasie kenner van die bos. 'n Groep aasvoëls by 'n karkas word 'n lykwaak genoem.

Aasvoëls is instaat om bedorwe vleis te vreet, insluitende vleis van diere wat lankal dood is. 'n Sterk spysvertering vernietig bakterieë soos botulisme, cholera en selfs miltsiekte.

Die mees algemene aasvoël wat in hierdie area voorkom is die: Swart-, Witrug-, Witkop-, Krans- en Monnikaasvoël. Elke aasvoël spesie speel 'n spesifieke rol in die voedingsketting. Die grootste en mees dominante spesie is die Swartaasvoël. Hulle skouer hul pad na die beste voedingsareas, en gebruik hul kragtige snawel om vel en ligamente te skeur wat die ander nie kan doen nie. Witrug- en kransasvoëls is groot en domineer met groot getalle by 'n karkas. Hulle is grootmaat vreters en verander 'n karkas baie vinnig in 'n skelet. Die Witkop is dikwels die eerste wat opdaag maar hul sal terugstaan sodra die ander aasvoëls spesies aankom. Dit is interessant dat hulle die mees roofsugtige aasvoël is, en selfs prooi soos hase, likkewane en muishonde jag. Die kleinste aasvoël is die Monnik, sy lang, smal snawel kan bykom in plekke soos krake en gewrigte waar die groter voëls nie kan nie. By 'n slagting sal hulle ook leemnis vreet want dit is ryk aan proteïene!

Ongelukkig is al hierdie aasvoëls gelys as bedreig of krities-bedreig. Baie word vergiftig om as muti gebruik te word. Hierdie ongelooflike voël is noodsaaklik vir die natuurbalans en moet ten alle koste beskerm word!