

Vulture restaurants



A vulture restaurant is a place where fresh and poison-free meat and/or carcasses of domestic livestock or wild mammals are put out for vultures and other scavengers. Feeding vultures at vulture restaurants can contribute to the survival of these birds, especially during periods of food scarcity and when young birds fledge. Vultures, like many other large birds, are under pressure from many different causes in the modern world as the human population increases.

From the point-of-view of a farmer or landowner, a vulture restaurant is a cost-effective way of disposing of waste products or carcasses that are unfit for human consumption. Farmers put out domestic livestock that have died from diseases such as 'red water' or have been struck by lightning. This is a much more economical way of getting rid of carcasses than burying them or incinerating them.

When placing carcasses at a vulture restaurant it is important to ensure that they have not been treated with poisons (e.g. barbiturates to euthanize them) or with veterinary drugs, such as diclofenac and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).

A vulture restaurant is an area of open veldt where the vultures can easily land and take off

without interference. It is best placed out of sight of roads or human traffic so that the vultures can feed without disturbance. Placement far from powerlines is important to prevent collisions and electrocution. It should be about 50 m by 50 m and should be fenced to keep out black-backed jackals and other potential problem animals. If possible, the grass should be mown or burnt to keep it short as generally the vultures feel unsafe in tall grass. The placement of a nearby dead tree for them to perch in prior to coming down makes them feel safer. A small shallow pan with water is often appreciated by the vultures and this may also help keep them out of the drinking troughs placed on the farm for domestic livestock.

From time to time the breaking up of old skeletons will provide vultures with bone fragments that they consume for their calcium content. Restaurant hygiene should be practiced to prevent the site from becoming unsightly and possibly offensive to less vulture-friendly neighbours.

A vulture restaurant should only be started in areas where vultures are indeed seen from time to time. Otherwise the carcasses will just lie about the veldt, decomposing and attracting flies.

Text by Steven Piper; illustrations by Maggie Newman; layout by Africa4U



For further information, please contact the Birds of Prey Working Group:
Tel. +27-(0)11-4861102; Fax. +27-(0)11-4861506
Website: www.ewt.org.za
E-mail: andreb@ewt.org.za (André Botha) or bopwg@ewt.org.za (Erika Belz)