

# Lead poisoning in vultures

**Vultures are subjected to a range of threats, of which poisoning is the most significant. As a result many species are plummeting towards extinction.**

**VULTURES ARE ENDANGERED**

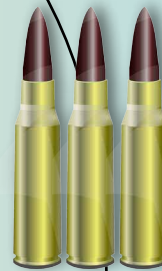


## Vultures are exposed to lead poisoning

High levels of lead have been confirmed in several vulture species in southern Africa. This can result in diminished functionality or death of these birds, whilst chicks fed lead-containing meat by their parents are known to develop brittle skeletons, which will make them prone to future wing injuries.

## The importance of vultures

By removing rotting carcasses from the environment, vultures maintain healthy ecosystems and may prevent the spread of diseases such as rabies, anthrax and canine distemper.



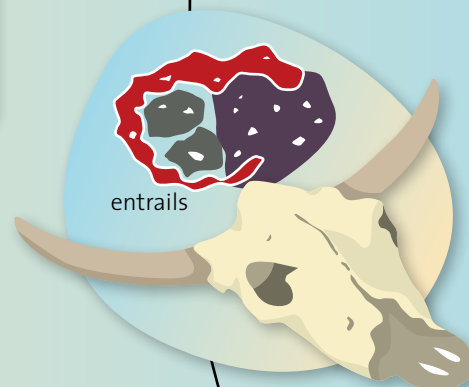
## How are vultures exposed to lead poisoning?

Although various avenues of lead poisoning are being explored, it is known that bullets leave varying amounts of lead fragments in the tissue of shot animals.

Lead fragments may spread widely in a hunted animal, endangering the health of humans and scavengers alike.



Springbok shot with .308 (above) and .243 (below) caliber lead-core bullet.



By scavenging on carcasses and discarded entrails containing lead fragments, vultures are exposed to lead.

## Reducing the risk of exposure to lead from ammunition

1. Use lead-free ammunition for hunting, culling or management practices. If your supplier does not have lead-free ammunition for your rifle, ask them to start importing it.
2. Only use carcasses that contain no lead and/or that were shot with lead-free ammunition for supplementary vulture feeding sites or 'vulture restaurants'.
3. Do not dispose of lead-containing entrails, heads or meat in the environment. Although removal of flesh around the wound reduces the risk of lead fragments remaining behind, the risk can never be entirely removed.
4. Participate in efforts to identify and reduce the risk of exposure of vultures to lead, including testing and promoting lead-free alternatives.



## Risk to humans

Lead is a toxic heavy metal that can damage every organ system in the body, particularly the nervous system. By eating game meat shot with lead ammunition humans too are at risk of ingesting fragments of lead. Children are particularly vulnerable to lead poisoning.

## Symptoms of lead poisoning in vultures

The symptoms of lead poisoning are more subtle and non-specific than those of other poisons, and may include (but not be limited to) lethargy, drooping head and wings, green diarrhoea and lack of co-ordination. If you suspect that a bird is suffering from lead poisoning, please contact your nearest wildlife vet or rehabilitation facility.