

Dallas Zoo hunts for escaped vulture

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A female vulture flew the coop Sunday morning, leaving her male companion behind at the Dallas Zoo. Zoo officials are continuing to take leads and search for the African White-backed Vulture, which left at about 09h00. Chris Brown, the zoo's curator of birds, said the female vulture might have squeezed through the bottom of a closed door into an uncovered holding pen. Susan Eckert, Dallas Zoo spokeswoman, said the bird poses no threat to the public. "It's no threat to children, people or pets," she said. "It's a vulture, and it only eats dead things." The bird has a black face, black beak, a brownish-grayish body, a white neck and white belly. Its wingspan ranges from 4 to 5 feet. "Its look is typically vulturish, but its long neck is what is going to distinguish it," Ms Eckert said. Mr Brown said veterinarians spotted the creature atop a tree on other side of the zoo. However, a tranquilizer dart missed. "They think it just hit the feathers because they went right through its legs," Mr Brown said. The bird headed south along Marsalis Avenue and was last spotted on the roof of a house outside the zoo. The bird probably sought a place to settle down and sleep Sunday night, Mr Brown said. And it's difficult to tell where it might head today. "She'll probably be sitting most of the time," he said. "She'll probably just fly wherever she wants to. If for some reason anybody startles her, she'll fly off, I'm sure." Mr Brown said the vulture would prefer high

places such as tall trees and telephone poles. "She might even be spotted on highways sitting on those light poles," he said. "Usually vultures like that like to be in high open places so they can see around them." And how is the vulture's male companion holding up? Mr Brown said he's doing fine because the birds weren't a bonded pair like a married couple. "They're just more companions sharing the same space," he said. "I don't think he's disturbed by her being gone. Definitely not as much as we are." The vultures are native to the southern parts of Africa, primarily the grasslands. It isn't an endangered species. "They're the typical vulture that you see on the major shows eating off the antelopes that lions kill and everything," Mr Brown said. The African White-backed vultures have been at the zoo since August. They're expected to be part of an exhibit that is undergoing renovations. Mr Brown said vultures are hardy, resourceful animals. When the missing bird becomes hungry, she'll go on the lookout for a dead dog or rabbit. "They're adapted for living long periods without eating," he said. Mr Brown said there are no natural predators for the bird in Texas. "I think as long as she stays up high and stays away from dogs, she'll be fine," he said. "As far as being in any danger, it's like anybody being out in the world. She can be exposed to anything." Anybody who spots the bird should call the zoo at 214-670-6826.

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