Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres* caught in gin trap

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Gin-traps are widely and legally used for 'problem-animal control', targeted primarily at mammalian carnivores, in many places around the world, including South Africa. These devices, however, are equally commonly regarded as unethical and their deployment is illegal in many countries.

In southern Africa, gin traps are known to have caught individuals of several vulture species, although details are typically sketchy (e.g. Maritz 1997). Bearded Vultures *Gypaetus barbatus* seem particularly hard hit and at least 16 are known to have been caught in these contraptions throughout the current southern African range of this bird: in Lesotho (n=9), the Eastern Cape Province (n=4), KwaZulu-Natal (n=2) and Free State (n=1) (Anon. 1966, Ambrose 1983, Blair & Blair 1983, Brown 1991, Colahan 1991, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife 2006). One early study reported them as the second-highest cause of mortality in this species after poisoning (Brown 1991) and even employed these devices, with their jaws padded, to capture (and subsequently release unharmed) individuals of this vulture (Brown 1989). Lappet-faced Vultures *Torgos tracheliotos* are similarly known to have fallen foul of gin traps in Namibia (n=1) (Brown

1986) and the Northern Cape Province (sample size not stated) (Anderson 2000a). White-backed Vultures *Gyps africanus* are claimed as additional victims in the Northern Cape Province but without further details (Anderson 2000a). Not all of these birds died as a result of being caught in these traps and many were subsequently released.

These trapping instances can be either accidental, e.g. where the traps are targeted at mammalian predators (e.g. Anon. 1966, Colahan 1991, Anderson 2000a), or intentional, e.g. directly aimed at killing vultures for the traditional medicine trade (e.g. Ambrose 1983). Despite the relative paucity of records of vultures succumbing to gin traps, several studies of the prevalence of these birds in traditional medicine in southern Africa mention 'trapping' as a common method of obtaining vultures; one investigation reported 24% of traded birds as having been trapped (Beilis & Esterhuizen 2005, Mander *et al.* 2007). It would seem likely that gin traps are implicated in at least some of these instances.

We can trace only a single record of a Cape Vulture *G. coprotheres* being caught in a gin trap, a bird killed in Lesotho apparently intentionally for the traditional medicine trade (Ambrose 1983). Several detailed reviews of the threats faced by this vulture make no mention of these devices (Brooke 1984, Collar & Stuart 1985, Mundy *et al.* 1992, Anderson 2000b).

While surveying the Tembukazi Cape Vulture breeding colony (Boshoff & Minnie 2011) in the Eastern Cape Province (31˚20'43.6" S; 29˚14'15.3" E) on 4 October 2012, we saw and photographed an adult Cape Vulture with a gin trap clamped to its right foot fly into its nest situated on a cliff face and containing a large chick. The chain used to tether the trap to the ground could be clearly seen dangling below the flying bird. We have no way of knowing whether the deployment of this trap was accidental or intentional relative to its having caught a Cape Vulture. We were present at the colony for only a few hours and the subsequent fate of this bird is not known to us.

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An adult Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres* with a gin-trap clamped to its right foot, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa, 4 October 2012 (photographs: Patrick Benson).

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