



Publication: Witness, The - Main
Title: Looking out for vultures
Publish date: 05 May 2023
Page: 3

Reach: 6405
AVE:R 30526.16
Author: Nosipho Gumede

Looking out for vultures

KZN woman gets PhD for study on use of vultures in traditional medicine

NOSIPHO GUMEDE

A KZN woman received a PhD for ecological sciences for her study of the use of vultures in traditional medicine, which purports to helping retrieve stolen goods, bring back lost lovers and acquire intelligence or good fortune.

Dr Nomthandazo Manqele obtained her PhD at a UKZN graduation ceremony held on Wednesday.

In her study, Manqele assessed the drivers and impact of illegal hunting for bushmeat and trade on serval and oribi in South Africa, focusing particularly on the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands.

It also looked specifically at the use of vultures, the most threatened group of raptors in the world, by traditional healers, focusing on study sites in Zululand.

According to a statement released by the university's corporate relations department, Manqele was supervised by the South African Research Chair in Ecosystem Health and Biodiversity in KZN, Eastern Cape Professor Colleen Downs and the SA National Biodiversity Institute's (Sanbi) Dr Sarah-Anne Selier.

Manqele found that while animals do not have intrinsic medicinal properties as plants do, in traditional medicine there are practices aimed at



Dr Nomthandazo Manqele (front left) receives a PhD in ecological sciences. **PHOTO: SUPPLIED**

facilitating the extraction of attributes and/or behavioural traits of animals for belief-based uses, such as retrieving stolen goods, bringing back lost lovers, acquiring intelligence or

good fortune and more.

"People have observed what they interpret as a 'sixth sense' or clairvoyant ability as the birds detect the presence of carcasses across huge

distances. This perceived quality, and the increasing scarceness of vultures, make them a sought-after element in traditional medicine," reads the statement.

The university said Manqele also explored hunting practices and what is luring vultures outside of the protected areas they have retreated to, saying that they are being hunted using poison and firearms, with the bird killings increasing. She was able to provide feedback to tribal authorities and contribute to the drafting of a management plan for vultures with the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment.

Speaking on her journey, Manqele said she had always nurtured a love of nature, however, a school trip to the Umbogavango Nature Reserve on the South Coast cemented her desire to pursue a career in the natural sciences.

According to a statement from the university's corporate relations department, Manqele was accepted for a Bachelor of Social Sciences in environmental management.

"She progressed to do a Bachelor of Science honours in geography and environmental management, after which she undertook an internship with Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife that provided her with more conservation skills and reinforced Manqele's desire to pursue a career in nature conservation.

"She did her master's degree at UKZN supported by funding from Sanbi" reads the statement.