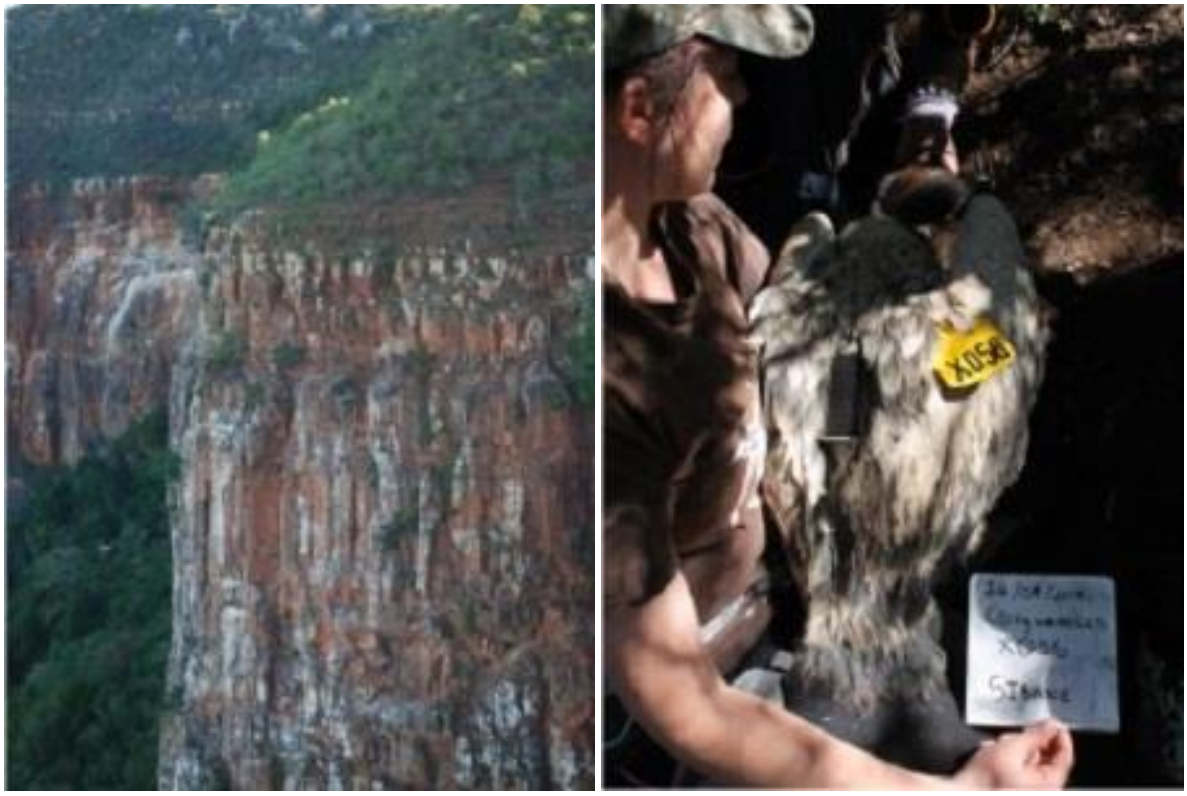
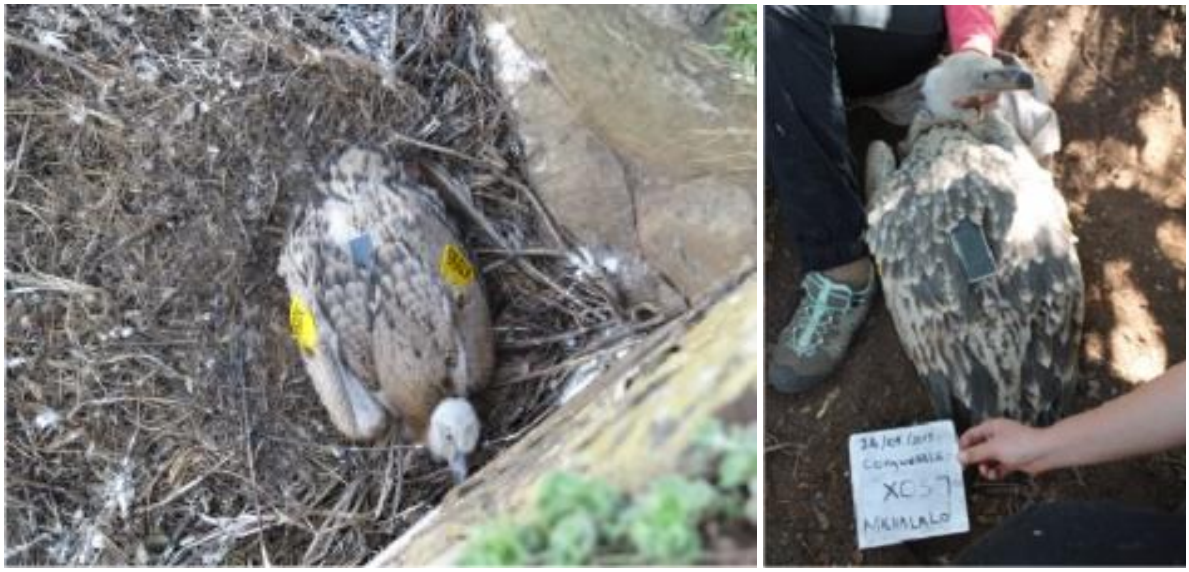
Project Update: October 2015

Following the capture of nine Cape Vulture chicks in September, I was excited to submit blood samples for DNA analysis and sexing. A fellow post-graduate student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal has been sorting through blood and feather samples from a number of African vulture species. It was requested that we opportunistically collect feathers whilst on the cliffs. The local children also contributed by assisting with the collection of feathers. Over 100 vulture feathers (identified by size and colour) were collected. Feathers found most likely came from moulting adults.

I received an email from the lab regard the results of the blood sexing. I am happy to report that of the nine chicks fitted with transmitters, there are two females and seven males! Interesting to note is that we only climbed two cliff faces (two chicks processed at one cliff face and seven at the other); and both females were from the first cliff face.



Left: An overview of the first cliff face where the only two female Cape Vultures chicks processed were from. Photo by Martyn Drabik-Hamshare. Right: One of the male Cape Vulture nestlings with cellular GPS unit attached. This vulture is called Sibane which means light in Xhosa. Photo by Camille Fritsch.



Left: After fitting the GPS unit, the nestlings were returned to the nest. This chick was also a male and was named Xobo after a nearby village. Photo by Shane McPherson. Right: Another male Cape Vulture nestling with a cellular GPS unit attached. This vulture is also named after a village. Photo by Camille Fritsch.