



SPOTLIGHT



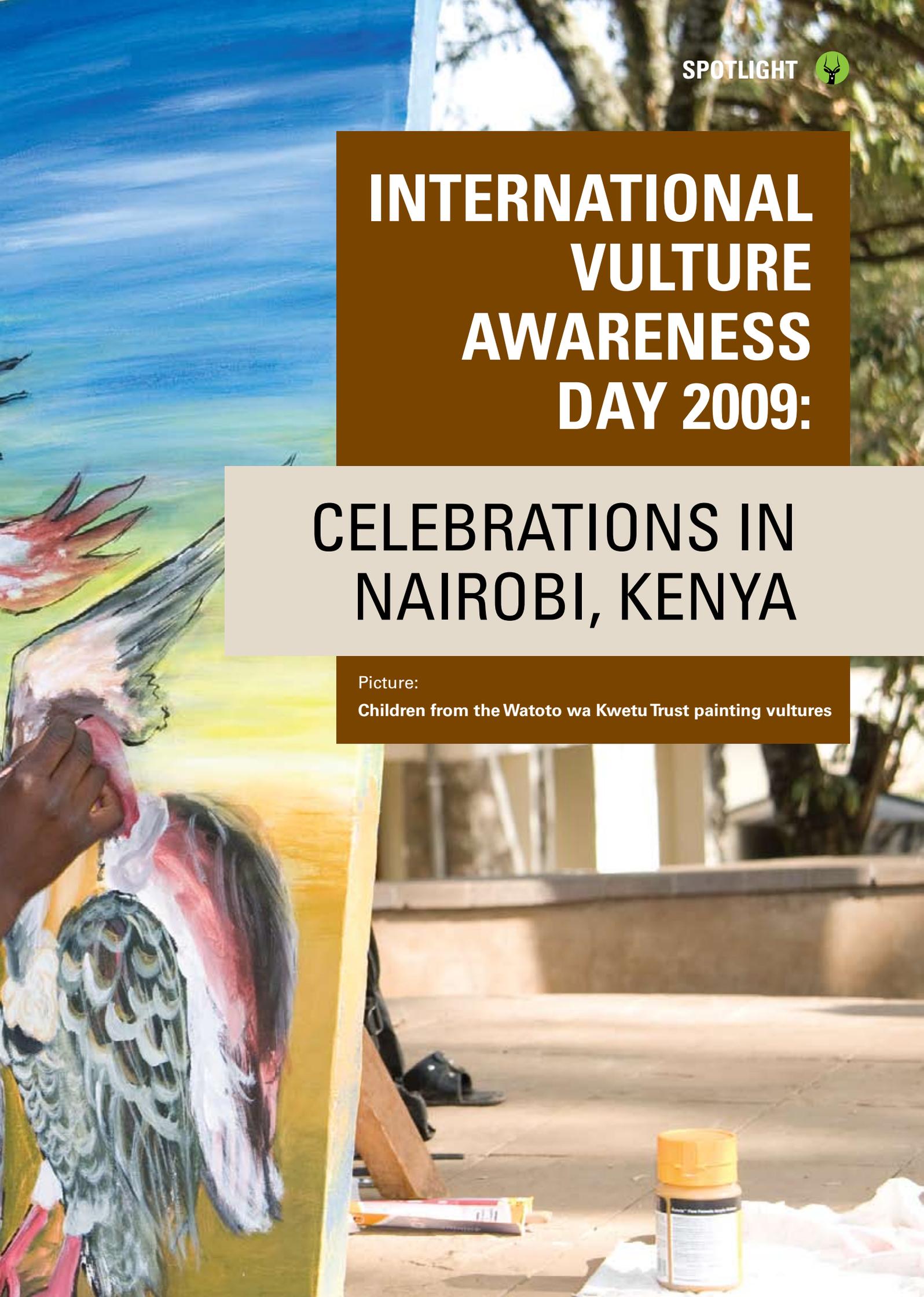


INTERNATIONAL VULTURE AWARENESS DAY 2009:

CELEBRATIONS IN NAIROBI, KENYA

Picture:

Children from the Watoto wa Kwetu Trust painting vultures





The aim of IVAD is to help increase public understanding and awareness about the need to not only conserve vultures, but also to appreciate them

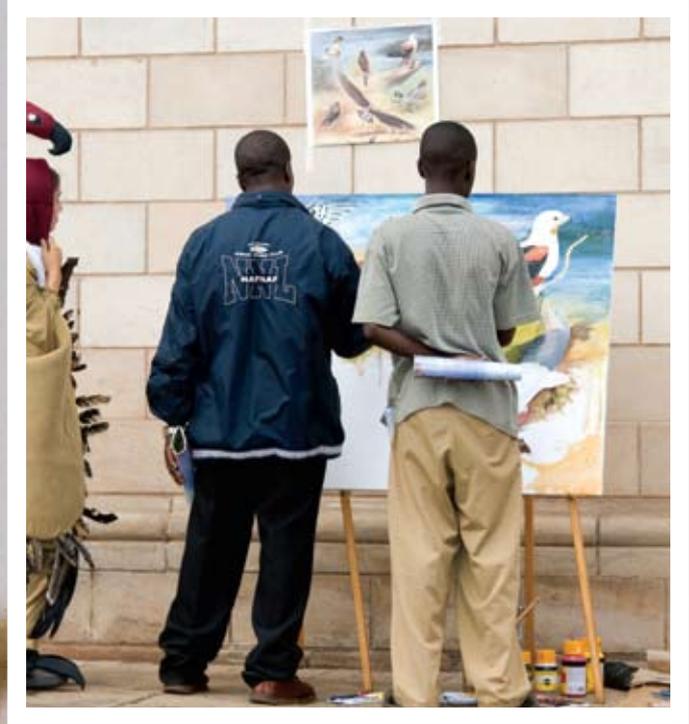


Main picture:
**White-headed
Vulture in flight**

Across:
**Adults join in on
the paintings as
Laila the Vulture
watches**

Below:
**Laila the Vulture
entertains the
crowd**

Pictures by:
Munir Virani





I knew immediately that Siddhant was a very special boy. He came up to me and asked, “Does the range of the Rüppell’s Vulture and the Lammergeyer overlap?” I was stunned. This was a 10 year-old boy asking me questions about the distribution of vultures. “Yes”, I replied, “although the Lammergeyer is a high-altitude species and we are probably left with only two individuals in the whole of Kenya.” We also call them Bearded Vultures, which is a more widely accepted name for the bird. There was a look of disbelief on his face. More like confusion. He gazed at the dead vultures on display, looked at me and waited for a response. “Poisoned”, I said, “every single one of them”. “By the time you have kids, there may not be any vultures left,” I added. “They are being poisoned by a deadly pesticide called Furadan and we have lost nearly half of our vultures.” He looked at me, smiled and said, “I like vultures, I

Top:
Rüppell's Vulture landing on carcass

Facing page:
Wing - tagged Rüppell's Vulture in flight

Pictures and article by :
Munir Virani

think they are really cool. They help maintain the cycle of life”.

This was the theme for our Raptor Working Group's 'Vulture Awareness Day' Art competition for children in Kenya as part of the celebrations for International Vulture Awareness Day www.ivad09.org (IVAD). The aim of IVAD is to help increase public understanding and awareness about the need to not only conserve vultures, but also to appreciate them. We piggybacked this special event alongside Nature Kenya's annual Nature Fair, which was held last September 5-6 at the newly refurbished courtyard of the Nairobi

Museum and attended by over 2,000 people. And what a weekend it was!

Our booth displayed a giant poster that showed all eight species of vultures that occur in Kenya. We also exhibited some vulture specimens for people to marvel at. One in particular, a Rüppell's Vulture was collected in 1936 and ironically was poisoned. Photographer Laila Bahaa-el Din (See Rear Window Page 80), despite not feeling well on that day, put up an excellent performance by dressing up as a vulture and entertained children with her vulturesque antics. Titus Kaai, a Maasai from southern

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Kenya turned out in full traditional regalia and talked passionately to hundreds of visitors about the need to conserve and appreciate Kenya's vultures. Titus lives near Magadi, at the base of the Kwenia cliffs, home to one of the largest colonies of near-threatened Rüppell's Vultures in southern Kenya.

The highlight of the day was a painting done by children of the Watoto wa Kwetu Trust, an organisation founded by Kenyan artist Jacob Njoroge. These children live in the slums of Mathare, on the outskirts of Nairobi, and their work depict scenes of the aspiration and struggle, achievements and expectations, of people in and around Mathare as seen by the young artists. Themes between the extremes of social experience are painted with acrylics on large canvases on which they work in groups. Under the mentorship of Mr Muruka, the kids put together a dramatic masterpiece of 'vultures at a kill'. I reiterate the word dramatic because these children have never seen vultures before and yet put so much heart and soul into the painting.

There was also an interactive puppet show and story telling by David Kahindi's group, where impassioned children reacted vehemently when the 'wicked farmer' accidentally laced his cows with the deadly poison Furadan, responsible for large scale mortalities of vultures and other large carnivores in Kenya. There was a section devoted to art and painting where children had the opportunity to demonstrate their artistic prowess in drawing birds. Not surprisingly, many of them drew vultures, which was extremely satisfying. Even more gratifying was seeing the comments



in our 'Vulture guest book'. One in particular from Hillary Koech stood out – "I have learned the importance of vultures – I will do my part."

It was comforting to know that Kenyans from all walks of life embraced vultures and were sensitised about the problems facing them. International Vulture Awareness Day 2009 in Nairobi was successful beyond our imagination. It showed Kenyans the value of appreciating and conserving vultures and their habitat. Many people

said that would help towards this important conservation goal by talking to their elders, teachers, friends and family about vultures and from discouraging people from using Furadan. We drove in the point that it was not that long ago when we looked at sharks and crocodiles with disdain. We have begun to appreciate these wonderful animals and we are hopeful that Kenyans will also appreciate just how wonderful and fascinating vultures are. ●

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

International Vulture Awareness Day, Nairobi 2009 would not have been possible without the support of the following organisations and corporations. African Bird Club, Nature Kenya, National Museums of Kenya, Wildlife Clubs of Kenya, Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, Northern Rangelands Trust, Birdlife International, Para Print Ltd, Imagin, and The Peregrine Fund. Many people have contributed tirelessly to ensure the success of International Vulture Awareness Day. Special thanks are due to Darcy Ogada, Peter Njoroge, Indi Bilkhu, Titus Kaai, Martin Odino, Rupi Mangat, Margaret Otieno, Mahmud Nanji, Muruka, Simon Thomsett and Laila baha-el Din.