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How to hold a vulture while in the grip of a jackal

Submitted by Darcy Ogada

'Show me where the jackal bit you' was the first thing my six-year old gleefully asked when I returned from a week in the field. No hugs, no 'I missed you', just show me your wound. Clearly, he watches too many predator shows on Nat Geo Wild and I was just one more victim with a story to tell.

Noosing a jackal was not part of the plan, nor was the melee that ensued between feathered, furred and fair-skinned beasts. I'm no Muhammad Ali and this was one rumble in the jungle where bigger was certainly not better. I was outfoxed by a fox.

Our targeted Ruppell's vulture was alone at the carcass. When it flapped its wings, I knew we had our bird. Jamming the car into second gear, we arrived in less than a minute. Problem was the jackal arrived even faster. He no sooner arrived for the feast, then got cluttered in the coat rack while he attempted to dine and dash.



Leaping from the car my trapping partner Simon yelled, 'you get the vulture, I'll get the jackal'. Jackals are not infrequent uninvited guests, so Simon was prepared. One arm ensconced in a thick leather glove, Simon attempted to entice our unwanted guest towards freedom. Quickly into my mother hen mode I settled the vulture, but clearly the jackal was Wile E. Coyote on speed. My allegiance firmly with my roped in feathered friend meant taking one for the team. And I did, on my left hip.

Perhaps the bite was a release of pent-up jackal aggression. Let's face it, it can't be easy playing second fiddle to a host of sexy alpha predators strutting their stuff on Big Cat Diary. Soon subdued and released, my mind flashed through what jackals are most notorious for, carrying rabies. Before I could start foaming at the mouth, we had a vulture to attend to. Fortunately the bird proved to be the polar opposite of Wile E. Coyote and mellowly reclined into my lap while we attached a transmitter and quickly sent him on his way.

Happily back into the skies, our bird is already showing us the important sites it needs for nesting and roosting. Protecting these with the help of Kenya Wildlife Service is what we must do to ensure the

future of these spectacular and highly imperiled scavengers. And who knows we may just feed a few jackals along the way, but preferably next time it will be with our bait rather than my butt.

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Owl Conservation is Life's Work

Submitted by Darcy Ogada

Many cultures loathe owls, African cultures are no exception. Throughout Africa owls are believed to be harbingers of death. It is widely believed that if an owl lands on your house someone inside will die and their hooting call spells misfortune. That's why Kenyan Paul Muriithi is an exceptional individual.

The charisma of owls captivated Paul in his youth when he would hear eagle owls calling from the cliffs near his home in Central Kenya. Though local residents could not understand his fascination with these 'dreaded' birds, Paul was determined to learn all that he could about owls. He was soon guiding birders to the secretive haunts of the Mackinder's Eagle Owl, an uncommon species found in scattered locations in the Kenyan highlands. He shared the proceeds from his guiding forays with local residents. Not surprisingly, local attitudes towards owls gradually began to change. Now some of the converted are Paul's biggest source of information regarding the breeding and conservation of these birds within the local area.



Through numerous television and radio programs, the 'owl man' of Kenya has a huge following and continues to convert many more. During a radio program in 2011 the local network provider had to shut down the phone lines as calls from over 4000 individuals overwhelmed local capacity. Over the airwaves, Paul had inspired thousands of Kenyans keen to learn about owls.

Since 2012 Paul has led three expeditions up Mt Kenya in search of the elusive Abyssinian Long-