

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust Malvern Local Group

The Global Vulture Population Crisis by Dr Neil Homer-Forbes

Vultures may not be the most loveable of birds, but they are endlessly interesting, and very important. Important not just to the environment, but also to human health. In Dr Neil Homer-Forbes' own words, they are "Nature's clean-up crew" essential in effectively and quickly clearing up dead animal carcasses. Their unique digestive system can ingest and neutralise harmful toxins, viruses and bacteria that would harm the human population should vultures themselves die out. Some frightening statistics were presented – 99.9% of all Asian vultures disappeared in the last 20 years, with equally dramatic depletions in Africa and southern Europe. They fall prey to a huge number of threats including chemicals injected into cattle that die on the plains, deliberate poisoning by poachers to protect game kills, flying into overhead cables and the use of vulture carcasses in black magic. However, something is being done. Dr Homer-Forbes works in the field with conservation groups Vulpro and The Vulture Alliance to train African conservation workers in basic avian veterinary skills and equipping park rangers with antidote kits that can save a poisoned vulture's life. In this work he is joined by Jemima Parry-Jones, well known locally for her pioneering work at the Newent Birds of Prey Centre. Most importantly, said Dr Homer-Forbes, everyone must be made aware that this crisis in the vulture population could threaten us all.

Next meeting: 7.30 pm on 04 November The Lyttelton Well, Church Street, Malvern. Tom Kitching and Marina Palacios: Bat Conservation with Vincent Wildlife Trust. £2.50, all welcome.