

Dear Namibian Raptorphiles

I am sending the same message to all the bird working groups (Cranes, Ringers, Wetland Counters, Bird Club, etc) so apologies if you get this more than once - it is an indication of the diversity of your birding interests!

I would be grateful for your views on the following:

Some 10 years ago the Directorate of Environmental Affairs (I was the bird-oriented Head of the DEA at that time) in partnership with the then ornithologist (Rob Simmons) and the Namibia Bird Club approached BirdLife International to explore the possibility of establishing BirdLife Namibia. We were rudely rejected by BirdLife, who told us that Namibia was not a priority country and that we would not be considered.

Since then, things have changed. BirdLife is now rather interested in Namibia joining and becoming BirdLife Namibia. Over the past two years we have had two people from BirdLife visit Namibia to explore the options, and we have another person coming out in October / November. I think that the change in BirdLife's view came about when they realized that there is a small but active group of people here doing a diverse set of things, and that Namibia's conservation and research activities are amongst the best in Africa.

There are some clear advantages to Namibia becoming part of BirdLife. The first is the international linkages and access to information and technical support. The second is access to some funding to assist the work of various birding groups in the country.

We currently have a number of active groups / organizations / individuals that are more or less formally constituted. These are:

- (a) wetland bird counting "group(s)"
- (b) raptor working group
- (c) crane working group
- (d) bird ringing "group(s)"
- (e) rehabilitation work (NARREC)
- (f) environmental education (cross-cutting)
- (g) data and information (avian database - road counts, museum data, atlas data, etc)
- (h) specific research projects and visiting researchers
- (i) Namibian Bird Club

(Sorry if I have overlooked any important areas)

If Namibia were to join BirdLife International, I would see

(a) to (h) being the technical working groups of BirdLife Namibia. (i) - the current Namibia Bird Club - would become the core of the membership part of BirdLife Namibia.

Currently there is limited networking between the various groups and insufficient support to the groups. Also, with no ornithologist in the MET, and according to Holger, little likelihood of getting such a dedicated post, we need to look for other solutions. As part of the establishment of BirdLife Namibia, we could raise funds to appoint a dedicated full-time coordinator, whose main functions would be to support the membership and the work of the technical groups, to gather and collate data and information, and to make this available to the members. We are talking about setting up a full-time support service for birders and working groups in Namibia.

The NNF would be happy to house such a coordinator. This need not be a permanent arrangement. If BirdLife Namibia were to grow to the point where it would like to fledge and set up its own office, then that should happen.

I have long been concerned about the amount of really valuable data and information being housed only in the MET. The bird data sets are amongst the largest in the country. The safety of the data is far too dependent on the whims of individual people, and given the lack of a dedicated ornithologist in the MET, and that organization's lack of dedication to ornithology (and other taxa), I think that it is incumbent upon us to set up a parallel data housing / curation mechanism that is safe, accessible and under dedicated group accountability. I would see this also falling under the BirdLife Namibia coordinator, in collaboration with a data/information working group.

I have been in contact with a number of the working groups, as well as long-standing members of the Bird Club, to get their views. One of the BirdLife visitors, Dr. Norbert Schäffer, has also travelled around the country and discussed these ideas with many of the stakeholders, including people on the various working groups. To date, people have been in strong support of the idea. However, before we go ahead and put in an official request to BirdLife International, I would like to get the views and confirmation from the active birders in Namibia that this is indeed what you want.

Please give this some thought and let us know how you feel.

Kind regards,

Chris

Please send replies to:
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E-mail: cb@nnf.org.na Editor



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Vulture hide built on NamibRand

Peter Bridgeford, Vulture Study Group Namibia

During April and May 2006, a vulture hide was built on NamibRand Nature Reserve. Raleigh International sent two groups of 14 Venturers to Keerweender to build the hide.

During the first week, the group from various parts of the UK, plus three Namibians, dug out old telephone poles. In the sandy areas it was easy, but in the rocky parts, the going was harder, but everyone learned to work with a pick and a shovel. The next two weeks were spent preparing the site, cutting the telephone poles and building some of the steps up the dune to the hide. The hide was built on a granite koppie and some of the large boulders were incorporated in the walls, also built of the telephone poles.

The group was taken for two game drives on the Reserve and also visited the Dunes Lodge.



Photo: Peter Bridgeford

Raleigh International venturers at work on hide, May 2006

The next group again assisted with the removal of telephone poles, but certainly worked hard in the rocky terrain. This group included Namibians and three Venturers from Uganda. The steps and a toilet were completed. The hide was given a shade-cloth roof, benches and a shelf for binoculars, books and cameras. Now all that is missing are the vultures. NamibRand will supply food for the vultures and carcasses of domestic stock from neighbouring

farms. Posters on the threats facing vultures, their breeding biology, the species seen on NamibRand, research and monitoring and other information, are being prepared.

The Vulture Study Group of Namibia would like to thank wardens Danica Shaw and Nils Odendaal for having the hide built and promoting vulture conservation. Andreas Keding for organising the building material, helping with the planning and assisting with the construction. Namibia Nature Foundation is thanked for their financial assistance. Without the help of the Raleigh Venturers, it would not have been possible.

The Namibia Environmental Fund, which is now sponsoring Raptors Namibia through DANIDA, is thanked for its support.

News Flashes

❖ On 21 June at about 08h30, Barbara and I saw a perfectly healthy, adult Marabou Stork on the coast exactly 49 km south of Mōwe Bay, on the road to Terrace Bay. As far as I can work out, this would be a first record for this species on the coast in the park. I think that there is a record from the floodplain.

John Paterson

❖ Vulture killed by space shuttle - During the launch of a rocket by NASA in the USA, the rocket hit a vulture. With over 40 launches, this is the first known and filmed bird strike. The bird, either a Black or Turkey Vulture, collided with the rocket on take off and was then incinerated by the flames from the rocket.

The area around the site is a wildlife refuge with many birds and other animals. In an attempt to prevent further bird strikes, music and loud noises are used to scare off birds. Noises at certain decibels appeared to work best. The report did not specify the music preferred by the vultures.

From a radio report on the BBC

❖ At least three Lappet-faced Vultures are nesting on NamibRand Nature Reserve. An egg was seen in one nest.

Andreas & Viktoria Keding

❖ Rumour has it that vultures with patagial tags have been seen! These sightings are of **great importance** to the Vulture Study Group, Namibia.

Please send details of all nesting, tagged, mortalities and/or other vulture sightings of interest, to the VSGNam co-ordinator at pmbridge@iway.na.

Peter Bridgeford

Missing Newsletters?

Could anyone who didn't get the last *Raptors Namibia* newsletter - No 5 of May-June 2006 - please let me know what to resend. There were three pages altogether.

Thank you to all who have already notified me.

Remember please to send change of email addresses, new addresses of people interested in receiving the newsletter or to let me know if you want to be taken off the list.

Marilyn



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