

Daring ringer risks life and limb.

Holger Kolberg

On 2 September, Dirk Heinrich and I drove to Daan Viljoen Game Park, close to Windhoek, to inspect the nest boxes and repair those "vandalized" by baboons. Many of the nest boxes had been ripped open by baboons in order to get at the delicacies hidden within (by the way, if anybody has any clever ideas on how to baboon-proof the boxes please let us know, the same goes for bees). Dirk mentioned that the Fish Eagle was on the nest again and it looked like there was at least one chick. So we arrived at said nest, but having only a 12 m ladder and about a 16 m tree, some ingenious engineering was required to enable us to reach the nest. The first mission was to get the ladder extended and then drive the vehicle close enough to place it on the railings, in effect giving us another two metres. After some serious to-ing and fro-ing this was achieved and the ladder was securely tied to the bakkie's rails. Now the question was which one of us would climb up to get the chick, because the ladder was still not long enough to reach the nest and the last few metres had to be climbed in the tree. Being the younger of the two of us and still in the "potentially reproductive" bracket, I politely declined ("No, no, it's a strong tree, it will easily hold your weight.") and Dirk had to climb. Just as Dirk popped his head over the rim of the nest, the chick decided to go for its first flying lesson, or perhaps it was frightened by the sudden appearance of a hairy visage. It managed to fly just far enough to get over the "river", river here being a euphemism for stinking cesspool of semi-purified sewage. That however, did not deter us and we were soon after it trying to hop from stone to stone until splash!, Dirk slipped and was up to his knee in muck (it was only ankle-deep for me). That really infuriated Herr Heinrich and I could see the "buck-fever" rise in his eyes - he had to get this one. We walked to the place where I had seen the chick land and found nothing. We turned around to start searching wider and there it was, right in front of us. In no time Dirk had caught it and we braved the raging turd-torrent to get back to the vehicle. Quickly the ring was on, measurements taken and it was time to return the chick to the nest. Of course, 'he who rings must return', so Dirk once again had to risk the perilous ascent. The chick was safely returned to the nest, but now Dirk was stuck! Somehow he couldn't get his leg over (not in that sense) and it took some maneuvering before he once again reached the safety of the ladder. We quickly undid our 'extreme engineering' feat and returned home glowing with happiness.



Fish Eagle chick ringed

**CAPE VULTURE COMPLETES AN EPIC
JOURNEY**

A one year old Cape Vulture (*Gyps coprotheres*) made an epic journey across three international boundaries from South Africa to Namibia in 190 days. This young vulture was rescued by children of the Indermark community at Blouberg in Limpopo and rehabilitated at the De Wildt Vulture Unit in the Magaliesberg. Upon its release it flew off with a yellow wing tag, number B017 and this was what triggered Maria Diekmann's (Rare and Endangered Species Trust, REST) interest on Thursday last week, when the bird arrived at their vulture restaurant close to the Waterberg, north of Otjiwarongo, Namibia.

The De Wildt Vulture Unit rehabilitates injured, poisoned and orphaned vultures of which a significant number come from the Blouberg Cape Vulture colony in Limpopo. As the Cape Vulture is near extinct in Namibia, a number of these birds have been sent to REST for a population supplementation project in northern Namibia. This particular bird however, did not require an airticket or a CITES permit for his epic journey!

The vulture was released on the game farm Nyoka Ridge on the second of February this year after being rehabilitated and fitted with the wing tag at De Wildt. The farm is situated near

the Scheerpoort Cape Vulture colony in the Magaliesberg and it was hoped that the vulture would survive and contribute to the survival of this endangered species. To the surprise of the researchers, the vulture flew across the western region of South Africa, then over Botswana to reach its destination in northern Namibia, covering well over 1,500 kilometers. Vultures are soaring birds and thus require suitable thermal conditions to fly. This means that the vulture would have had to roost many nights somewhere in the bush after a day's journey.

The De Wildt Cheetah and Wildlife Trust accommodates a large number of captive vultures for the purposes of research, education, breeding and rehabilitation. The De Wildt Vulture Unit and REST were key players in the search for the answers to the detrimental effects of diclofenac, an anti-inflammatory drug that was responsible for the recent decimation of the Asian Oriental white-backed vulture.

Tracking vultures to determine their movements is part of both DeWildt and REST's commitment to the saving of this majestic species. REST was the first in Africa to fit satellite transmitters on to vultures which have proven to be a valuable method of tracking and gathering information about flight heights, breeding and much more.

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The De Wildt Vulture Unit and REST are grateful to their collaborators and sponsors, without whom our work would not be possible: Gerhard Verdoorn of Birdlife SA, Namibia Nature Foundation, Sasol; Rand Merchant; Computer Facilities; Eskom; Endangered Wildlife Trust's Birds of Prey Working Group; Wildlife Biodiversity Resources of the National Zoological Gardens, the Veterinary Faculty of the University of Pretoria, Air Namibia and the Bateleurs.

For interviews, photographs and information on this and other sustainable vulture projects please contact:

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Black Harriers

Rob Simmons

My recent trip to the Northern Cape and Nieuwoudtville was full of interesting discoveries.

1. The nests there are earlier than previous years
2. There was the first five-egg clutch for the one of the northern-most sites (Buffels Rivier that runs through the coastal mining town of Kleinsee)
3. A new harrier site in the Nieuwoudtville area - the first in natural renosterveld.
4. We have the impression that harriers are cool - and cool-country birds. They like mountains and especially like coastal areas in which to breed. Where they cannot get those, they choose south-facing slopes in the lowlands of the Overberg and breed in very few other places.

One of those places, discovered by chance by Andrew Jenkins while looking for Martial Eagles, was in the hot to very hot Knersvlakte plains north of van Rhynsdorp. They may be the exception that proves the rule.

I have attached a photo of one of these nests sites - constructed in a bed of yellow flowers (Bulbinella). Just to prove that Black Harriers are not only beautiful, but choose beautiful places to breed!

The flowers were amazing so there are a few pictures of those as well!

Please send in your observations and any nest news as it comes to hand.

We have a Conservation Biology Student who will shortly start a study of the renosterveld and look at completing the initial studies that suggest that Black Harriers could be good indicators of the biodiversity richness of the remaining renosterveld fragments. She (Julia Jenkins) will be working in the Overberg in September and October.



Black Harrier nest among Bulbinella

News Flashes

- ❖ **BIRD DATABASE.** Work is now underway to incorporate bird data into the national biodiversity database, which is available on the web (www.biodiversity.org.na). We expect to have a system up and running by the end of the year.
Alice Jarvis & John Irish
- ❖ **RAPTOR ROAD COUNTS.** Data are being received regularly and entered, and we will start to extract basic analytical/summary info soon. Thanks to everyone who submits count sheets faithfully, and those of you who keep putting it off - now's the time to start!
Alice Jarvis & Tony Robertson
- ❖ Fifteen African Fish Eagle and two African Marsh Harrier were seen during the July wetland count in Mahongo Game Park. There were no Pels Fishing Owls as in previous counts, even at the regular roosts.
Mark Paxton
- ❖ All the newsletters are now available for download from the web site. If you are missing any, you can get them there. The web address is www.nnf.org.na/RAPTORS/index.htm.
Alice Jarvis
- ❖ Last week Dave Joubert and I took the first year Nature Conservation students to Etosha and Waterberg. One of the highlights was a young Bateleur that stopped our bus in western Etosha.
Shirley Bethune
- ❖ Monday (18/9) Maria and I were travelling with friends from the Goantagab river to Doros Crater and saw 6 Lappet Faced Vultures and jackals at a fresh springbok carcass. Nearby we also saw a dead springbok youngster. The vultures took off when we arrived at the scene but no doubt returned when we left shortly thereafter.
Hans Hoffmann

Please note: The address for feedback on web issues is raptors@mweb.com.na, not sepasal@mweb.com.na. Many apologies, my mistake.
Marilyn



Gabar Goshawk's Cere Colour

Christian Boix

I was wondering if anyone could comment on the above picture, taken at Waza NP, in Cameroon. I am sending it because I need to contact someone who has often encountered melanistic gabars and I know Namibians are likely to have seen a large number. My concern about this picture: why is the cere of the melanistic gabar YELLOW, not orange-red like the birds in Namibia? I have tried two well known raptorphiles, both French and equally useless at replying. Curiosity is now eating me and would like to use your forum to get some answers.

Could this colour difference be related to age, sex or mood? First I need to establish if this has been observed before. Can anyone help??

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Before Namibians are classed as useless, will someone please help Christian.
 Ed.

RAPTORS NAMIBIA, ESKOM/EWT PARTNERSHIP AND NAMPOWER GET TOGETHER TO DISCUSS POWERLINE-RAPTOR INTERACTIONS IN NAMIBIA

Ann Scott

How much do we know about raptor-powerline interactions in Namibia?

The Raptors Namibia action plan includes an investigation of raptor/powerline interactions in Namibia. We have very little information on species and numbers of mortalities but, according to evidence elsewhere in southern Africa, these could be considerable. A mini-workshop was therefore organized at Brakwater on 29 August 2006. A strong contingent from NamPower (Transmission), from various parts of the country was represented, as well as the Eskom/EWT Partnership; NamRingers; Namibia Animal Rehabilitation Research and Education Centre (NARREC); Raptors Namibia;

and Vultures Namibia, with apologies from Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF) and the Rare and Endangered Species Trust (REST).

Potential threats of powerline structures to raptors

Our facilitator, Chris van Rooyen (Eskom/EWT Partnership) made a short presentation, illustrating that the staggered vertical structure design has proved to be lethal to vultures in the Northern Cape Province of SA, with 86 vulture mortalities (including 46 Lappet-faced and 24 African Whitebacked vultures) recorded at four sites from February 1999 to September 2002. This structure is therefore considered to pose a serious threat to vultures in Namibia (copy of report by Kruger, Maritz & Van Rooyen available on request from Chris). Peter Bridgeford provided a background to vulture distribution, breeding sites and status/threats in Namibia.

Discussion

Issues from NamPower's side were presented and ways of preventing raptor electrocutions/ collisions on powerlines in Namibia were brainstormed. There was a keenness to work together to find solutions. It was agreed that prevention (within realistic financial parameters) would be preferable to mitigation after the event. The preferred structure for reticulation is the "inverted T".

Actions

1. Lobbying for support
 - Approach Electricity Control Board (ECB) for buy-in and support.
2. Planning
 - Provide a map showing raptor risk/hotspots in Namibia
 - Provide a map showing planned NamPower/Regional Electricity Distributors (REDS) structures
 - Integrate the above for use in planning/EIAs
3. Awareness
 - Produce a raptor ID booklet and poster to promote awareness on raptor/powerline interactions
 - Provide interactive training courses for NamPower/REDS staff, with practical demonstrations of raptor ringing in the field
 - Radio talks
4. Database on raptor/powerline interactions
 - Develop a database and incident reporting form
 - Promote ongoing reporting of incidents by NamPower/REDS and general public
 - Provide regular feedback
5. Coordination communication

Next steps

Danie Louw (NamPower) and Chris are to discuss actions further and report back.

Thank you!

Everyone was thanked for their constructive participation and Danie for the venue and refreshments. Chris was thanked for his support and for kindly facilitating the meeting.



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