

In this issue:

- 1 Wing tag K070News from Birdlife Botswana
- 1 How long before vultures become extinct? . . .Liz Komen
- 2 Newsflashes
- 2 Migrating kestrel project updateAnthony van Zyl
- 2 Peregrine in LondonBBC website
- 2 Down memory lane! – More birds blown to the coast by the east wind.Marlene Coulson

**News from Birlife Botswana
LOOK OUT FOR K070**

On 18th October, 2006, Abrie Maritz was sitting at the top of a long stepladder at the nest of an African White-backed Vulture in Vanzylsrus District in the Northern Cape of South Africa. His objective was to put a patagial (wing) tag on the vulture chick, which he succeeded in doing. This chick, tagged K070, later fledged successfully, and flew off into the unknown.

On 25th May, 2007, David Dugmore was checking the waterhole in the Boteti Riverbed at Meno-a-kwena in the Makgadikgadi area when he noticed an immature White-backed Vulture sporting a bright yellow wing tag. Closer investigation revealed that it was numbered K070 – some 760 kilometres from 'home'! David managed to take a clear photo of the bird and sent it to BirdLife Botswana – this enabled the bird's origin to be traced.



Photo: David Dugmore

Wing tags are conspicuous and legible

How long before Vultures Become Extinct?

Liz Komen

More than 25 years ago Charles Clinning, the then ornithologist for Nature Conservation in Namibia, wrote an article titled *How long before Vultures become extinct?*. Mr Clinning described the six known vulture species that occur

in Namibia and noted then that the Egyptian Vulture had become so rare that any sighting of that species caused a stir in bird-watching and ornithological circles. He also noted that 300 Cape Vultures were counted in 1969 on the northern cliffs of the Waterberg Plateau Park and that just a decade later in 1979, only 15 birds were recorded. Since 1979, further decreases in population sizes are known to have occurred, with many reports on poisoning of these scavenging birds. The White-backed Vulture is the most common vulture seen at carcasses. The Lappet-faced Vultures are far fewer in number but also regularly seen. All the other species are rarely seen in Namibia.

Over the past decades, locally and globally, much positive work for the conservation of birds of prey, has taken place, but the question remains *How long before Vultures become extinct?*. In order to halt the extinction of any species, innovative methods of following movements and activities and identifying individuals in a population have been used. In Namibia and other SADC countries, vultures have been marked with leg rings for decades. In fact, the very first bird-ringing project in southern Africa was with Cape Vultures in 1948. The first rings used on vultures were simply a stainless steel metal band with a number engraved onto the band. Later on coloured plastic rings were used and vultures that were caught would leave the ringer's hands with no less than five colour-coded rings adorning their legs. However, this did not always help with identification; plastic colour rings faded or even perished and fell off. The rings also got dirty and identifying the colours became impossible after a few years, even using binoculars.

Since 2006 a new identification method has been used on vultures and other large birds such as pelicans. This new method has been copied from the simple livestock identification ear-tag. In birds, it is a wing-tag. The ear-tag is an essential primary step in the traceability of meat and has recently become mandatory in Namibia for livestock destined for export to the European Union. Wing tags are attached through the patagium of a bird's wing. The tags have been tested over years on birds that fly long distances on migration and no ill effects have been recorded. The wing-tag used for identification of migrants has resulted in excellent conservation information. One Namibian ornithologist, who wing-tagged migrant Wahlberg's Eagles, was rewarded with the first records of "our" birds wintering in central Sudan.

Wing-tagging vultures may be an essential step in the conservation of these awe-inspiring and graceful sky-gliders. The letters and or numbers on the tags are large and boldly printed so that they can be read from a distance. Remembering that birds do not see boundaries, look out for tags on vultures and pelicans in all southern African countries.

All Namibians and visitors to Namibia will contribute enormously to bird conservation projects if they can report on any tags seen. Please note the wing-tag's number and colour, the date, time and place of seeing the bird and any other relevant information.

Reports of tagged birds seen in Namibia can be sent to:

Holger +264 61 2848111holgerk@mweb.com.na
Wilferd +264 67 229854versfeld@mweb.com.na
Peter +264 64 220443pmbridge@iway.na
Dirk +264 61 223300photographer@mweb.com.na
Mark +264 64 402765felix@mweb.com.na

News Flashes

- ❖ **Note** Coen Karsten's "Cape Vulture" is in fact an adult White-backed Vulture, but thank goodness he photographed it so's it could be checked. (Page 1, #7 June 2007). *Peter Mundy*
- ❖ **Aerial combat over Swakopmund** On 3 July at 10:00, I saw a group of Hartlaub's Gulls mobbing a White-backed Vulture over my house in Swakopmund! *Mark Boorman*
- ❖ **'Honourary raptor'** On 8 July, at Onguma next to Etosha National Park, Danny Bartlett saw a Fork-tailed Drongo eating what looked like a Cape Wagtail alive.
- ❖ A Secretarybird in poor condition was found in the dunes between Swakopmund and Walvis Bay during July. This was after severe berg (east) winds, when birds from inland are often blown to the coast. It was caught and Keith Wearne then had it sent to the Namibia Animal Rehabilitation, Research and Education Centre (NARREC) in Windhoek. Liz Komen reports that it weighed just over 2 kg (normal mass 3.5 to 4.3 kg) on arrival. It has recovered and is doing so well, it attacked her when she went into its cage. It will be ringed and released on a farm in the Windhoek area.
- ❖ A Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk (SPCG), with only one wing, was caught on a farm and taken to NARREC. The wing had been removed against the body. The wound had healed, but the cause is unknown. The SPCG was found in good condition. It had managed to survive and feed itself, despite only having one wing.

Migrating Kestrel Project Update - 2007-04-28

Virtually all of the results for the 2006/7 season are now in and the kestrels have left South Africa for their breeding grounds. The results for the count on 20 January 2007 received are:

Lesser Kestrels:88,876(40 roosts)
Amur Falcons:56,756(29roosts)
Redfooted Falcons:601(2 roosts)
Total falcons counted:146,233

Once again the volunteers of the project have produced excellent results, including the highest total every counted for the project, mainly due to better counting of the Amur and Redfooted Falcons. Birders across the country have also contributed by recording their sightings of these falcons on the Natural World online GIS. Of the all the species recorded in their database, the most sightings recorded for any species is that of the Amur Falcon. Well done to all involved.

For more go to: <http://kestreling.com/>



London's Peregrine Falcons.

One of Britain's rarest birds of prey hatched three eggs on a tower block in central London.

Down memory lane! – More birds blown to the coast by the east wind.

Marlene Coulson

During the last week in May, I saw a Pearl-spotted Owlet in one of the parks here in Walvis Bay. However, Mrs Egert, who lives nearby, found a dead one in her garden shortly after that, so perhaps he did not make it. Needless to say, the diurnal birds (sparrows, weavers, waxbills etc) in the park were in an absolute 'toestand' (frenzy) because of his presence. They flocked so close to him that he had to keep moving and did not get any shut-eye. They homed in on him, in groups of more than 50 birds at a time!

Then, there has been a Spotted Eagle-Owl as well. That was photographed on the balcony of flats nearby, I also saw it in our park and most recently, it has been seen in the industrial area of town. This was in the middle of June. I have not heard about him since.

What worries me about owls in town is that in the late 80's, during one particular year, it was very dry, up country. Then, the East wind blew fiercely and as a consequence, underweight owls were blown into town. So, I am actually hoping to see no more owls about, I would hate that to happen again!

People captured the birds, and brought them to my husband, Paul, who, at the time, was actively involved with raptors: ringing, road-counting and even with monitoring of breeding. We tried to bring the owls back to good health and succeeded in about six cases. On one side, we were looking after the owls and on the other, wildly breeding mice to feed to the owls! The owls were kept in our indoor garden, in a large run outside and one actually spent her convalescence in our bedroom, flying from cupboard top to pelmet at dawn and giving us a lovely "who-who-hoo" just as she landed. This was a spotted eagle owl, the most common species that year. We also had Pearl-spotted Owlets and a White-faced Owl. We released them all back into the wild.



**This issue of *Raptors Namibia* is funded by Vultures Namibia
Raptors Namibia co-ordinators**

Ann & Mike Scott
Swakopmund
Tel. / fax: (064) 40 4866
Cell: 081 284 5130
E-mail: ecoserve@iway.na

Marilyn & Peter Bridgeford
Walvis Bay
Tel.: (064) 22 0443
Cell: 081 260 7375
E-mail: pmbridge@iway.na

Raptor road counts and road count queries
P.O.Box 90645
Klein Windhoek
Windhoek
E-mail: raptors@mweb.com.na

***Raptors Namibia* website: www.nnf.org.na/RAPTORS/index.htm**