

In this issue:

- 1 Pale Chanting Goshawk kills owl Peter Bridgeford
- 1 Appeal for help to count kestrels Anthony van Zyl
- 2 The misfortunes of a Cape Vulture John Mendelsohn
- 2 News from Etosha Wilferd Versfeld
- 3 Newsflashes
- 3 A couple of interesting observations on raptor road counts Holger Kolberg
- 3 Short Kaokoveld trip August 2007 . . . Hugo Hausman
- 3 Air show — 'The Flight for the Plight of the Cape Vulture' REST



Marsh Owl photographed by Eckhard Demasius during August

Pale Chanting Goshawk kills owl

Peter Bridgeford
During September this year, in the Kuiseb River delta, a few kilometres from Walvis Bay, Francois du Toit and I witnessed an unusual sight.

Francois saw a Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk (PCG), *Melierax canorus* swoop onto something in the grass, close to the track near the salt works. Both observers stopped

and saw the PCG standing over another bird that was struggling to escape. The goshawk started plucking its partly subdued prey, but it was firmly held in the talons of the PCG and on its back. After some minutes, a wing of the prey was seen and eventually identified as a Marsh Owl, *Asio capensis*. The PCG continued plucking the owl and then started feeding. A second PCG was nearby, but was not seen to assist what we presumed to be its mate.

The next day a visit to the site and a collection of feathers confirmed the identification of the owl. A Marsh Owl weighs between 230 and 375 grams. A male Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk has a mass of 610-870 and the female 670-1600 grams.

Eckart Demasius photographed a Marsh Owl at the Walvis Bay Lagoon on 21/7/2007. In September, Naude Dreyer saw another Marsh Owl in the Kuiseb River delta, in the vicinity of the one killed by the Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk.

Appeal for Help to Count Kestrels

Anthony van Zyl

Why count kestrels?

Lesser Kestrels are listed as Vulnerable in the Red Data book and recently Red-footed Falcon populations have also declined significantly. Almost the entire global populations of these species migrate to southern Africa where large numbers roost in trees, often in towns. The Migrating Kestrel Project was initiated in 1994 by the Birds of Prey Working Group of the Endangered Wildlife Trust with the aim of counting Lesser Kestrels, Amur Falcons and Red-footed Falcons to estimate population size. This project has gained international recognition from the bird community for these population estimates.

What kind of help is needed?

Each year, between 64 and 84 roosts are counted in South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Malawi but there are at least 67 towns where roosts have been recorded but not counted and most probably many more unknown roost sites. To improve our kestrel population estimates, we require volunteers to visit roost sites to count roosting kestrels or look for new active roost sites to count. We also need more volunteers to count in Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Angola and Zambia. A list of known roost towns is available on www.kestreling.com or from Anthony van Zyl (see contact details below).

What do volunteers do?

Volunteers are required to count kestrels at the roost on 19 January 2008 or the nearest possible day. The only requirement is that volunteers are able to get to the roost site and be able to identify these three species as some roosts have both species roosting together. Counting can be difficult as there could be thousands of birds at a roost, but the main aim is to estimate as best as possible how many birds there are at the roost. Better counts can be obtained by having several volunteers count the roost together and by practicing counting flocks of birds. Counts must be made either very early in the morning as they leave the roost trees, or in the late afternoon when they come in to roost. Please note that this project operates on a very small budget so cannot provide any compensation or payment of expenses to volunteers.

How can I help?

More information on the project is available at www.kestreling.com. If you would like to participate in this exciting project, please contact Anthony van Zyl on anthony@kestreling.com, telephone 021-7810230 (after hours), mobile 082 3782226 or by post at 56 Glenhurst Rd, Welcome Glen, 7975. Alternatively, you can contact Andre Botha of the Birds of Prey Working Group at the Endangered Wildlife Trust on andreb@ewt.org.za or 011-4861102 (office hours).

The misfortunes of a Cape Vulture

John Mendelsohn October 2007

This short note about a single Cape Vulture could be just an anecdote, or it may suggest something useful about the reliability of food for these birds and what limits their numbers in Namibia. The bird, a male, boringly called CV5 by me and Dragon Rider by the more evocative Maria Diekmann, has been monitored since the 15th of January 2005 when it was fitted with a satellite transmitter at REST, 50 kilometres north-east of Otjiwarongo.

Later that year the bird nested in a tree near REST on the Diekmann's farm Uitsig. The breeding attempt began in late March and ended in late June when the nestling disappeared. Joerg Diekmann thinks that a Tawny Eagle robbed this nest and two others in trees nearby. Dragon Rider nested again in a tree during 2006, this time on the farm Okaputa Suid, close to the Otjiwarongo-Otavi road. The 2006 breeding attempt was probably successful because the bird was recorded at the nest consistently between February and November. The actual nest used in 2006 is shown in Figure 1, although two other vultures were there when the nest was photographed on the 29th of April 2007.



Figure 1. Dragon Rider's nest at Okaputa Suid in 2006.

Since the nesting attempts in trees in 2005 and 2006 were possibly hybrid pairings with White-backed Vultures, imagine our surprise and delight in 2007 when Dragon Rider returned to the traditional Cape Vulture breeding colony on the western cliffs of the Waterberg. Locations received from its transmitter showed the bird to be consistently at one spot on

the cliffs from late March onwards. Was it now possible that the bird had found itself a decent Cape Vulture mate and cliff nest, and was now behaving by the book?

Several of us went to the base of the cliffs on the 28th of July to search for the nest. One bird was spotted lying down as if it was incubating or brooding. Another bird twice flew onto the cliff where it perched about 10-15 metres above the nest. Two patches of fresh white-wash were visible around ledges that might have held other nests but these could also have been roost sites (Figure 2)

Christa Diekmann then visited the cliff on the 5th of August, when she saw three birds. She saw two birds on the 6th, but then none on the 7th or on any subsequent days over the next week. Her observations tallied with records from Dragon Rider's transmitter which showed that he left the cliffs on the 7th for good. Unfortunately, the transmitter did not provide consistent hourly locations on the 31st of July, or on the 1st and 2nd of August, but more reliable locations later showed that he went off foraging each day on the 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th.

Our transmitter records from breeding birds at several nests indicate that they seldom leave their nests to go foraging for more than a day, and then normally spend one, two or three days at the nest before again venturing out for food. Dragon Rider's four days' of consecutive foraging was therefore most peculiar, and suggests that he was short of food.

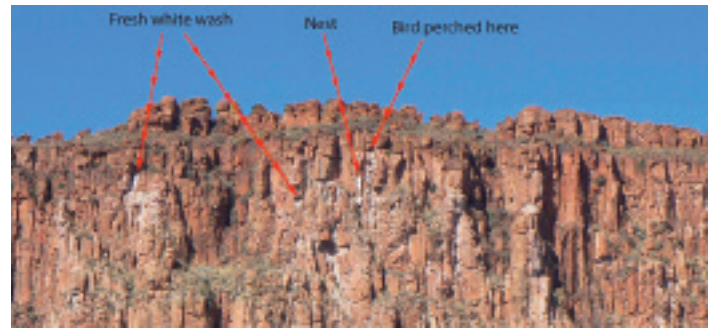


Figure 2. The nest site used by Dragon Rider on the Waterberg cliffs in 2007.

That idea was reinforced by another bout of odd behaviour after the 7th. In the two and a half years that Dragon Rider had been tracked, all his movements had been restricted to an area within a radius of about 100 kilometers of the Waterberg. He had never been to Etosha or north of Tsumeb or Grootfontein, for example. And so we were again surprised when he took off on an errant excursion through Etosha and up to the Angolan border between the 11th and 13th of August. He then returned south to his usual range around Waterberg.

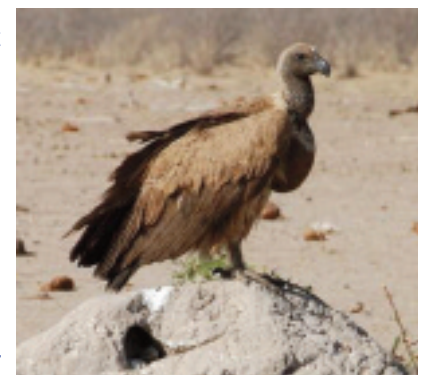
On the 27th of August he again set off north, beginning this journey east of Grootfontein, from where he flew west to Etosha, then north of the Mangetti farms and later eastwards to the Mangetti Game Reserve. From here, he retraced his northerly arc over the Mangetti farms to return south of Namutoni and back to the Waterberg area on the 3rd of September. I would assume that these wide-ranging trips were undertaken because he failed to find food in his normal range. As of the time of writing in mid-October, Dragon Rider has remained in the Waterberg area, hopefully having regained a regular supply of food.

A last anecdote about this male. This is that he is the only bird we have tracked to regularly roost on electricity pylons. Dragon Rider is therefore an apt name for a bird that possibly ran so short of food that he abandoned his nest, and then made wild trips out of his normal range. And the Dragon spends many nights recharging his batteries close to high voltages.

News from Etosha

Wilferd Versfeld

See attached photo by Werner Kilian of a White-backed Vulture at Kameeldoring in Etosha National Park with full crop. Imagine working with a bird like that and him pitching it up all over you. They were feeding on a elephant carcass.



I have tagged 35 birds so far this season, 20 White-backed and 15 Lappet-faced. Found two White-headed nests again, one with an egg and the other a small chick. Still have one small Lappet and four small White-backed to do a bit later with the White-headed's. Gabriel has done about 8 birds and is still busy at Grootvlakte.

News Flashes

❖ Peter L. Cunningham and David F. Joubert published an interesting article on “Cooperative hunting of Gabar Goshawk in Namibia” in *Gabar 18*: dated 1 March 2007. Contact Peter at pcunningham@polytechnic.edu.na

❖ We saw what appears to be a modification in the design of a new powerline near Bergsig last month (see photo). If so, this is really good news!

Ann Scott



❖ Report from REST. More marked vultures seen. Four marked White-backed Vultures were seen at the REST vulture restaurant. The three marked with patagial tags, were ringed last year by Abrie Maritz in the southern Kalahari. One bird had a Canadian ring, number N020 and it was ringed on the farm Okatjosenjiva of the von Hacht family. It was ringed by Holger Kolberg and ladder minder Peter Bridgeford on 20 September 2006. Thanks to Maria Diekmann for the information. Holger Kolberg

❖ A Spotted Eagle Owl was picked up on the side of the road and brought to us at the snake park. (for 'repairs', not for python food!) It spent a few days with us, but was proving to be a bit of a drain on our mouse stocks, so we sent it off to Liz Komen at Narrec. It had injuries to one lower leg, and possibly some concussion, but seemed quite well otherwise. Stuart Hebbard



❖ A Spotted Eagle Owl photographed sitting on a balcony in Kramersdorf Swakopmund.

Susann Kinghorn

A couple of interesting (at least to me!) observations on raptor road counts.

Holger Kolberg

Since the Easter weekend (that was some time in April) I have done 8089 km of raptor road counts and saw 356 raptors i.e. a raptor every 23 km. The picture looks quite different if these are split into trips to the north and west of Windhoek, and trips to the south. To the north I travelled 5854 km and saw 156 raptors i.e. a raptor every 38 km. Quite worrying here is the almost complete absence of raptors to the west of Outjo (two return trips to Wereldsend made me notice this). Even a day-long excursion (because Alwyn turned right instead of left) through the Palmweg concession delivered only one SPCG and two LFV (no tags, I specially checked) over about 160 km. In comparison, the south is a real raptor paradise – 2235 km of travel delivered 200 raptors or a raptor every 11 km. What would be the reasons for this? An absence of telephone poles for perching? Lack of food?

Short Kaokoveld trip August 2007

Hugo Hausman

The lions in the lower Hoarusib River are busy reducing the oryx and thus feeding the huge crowds of Pied Crows and some Lappet-faced Vultures. Unfortunately, the vultures are quite nervous due to the heavy tourist traffic down the canyon. I spotted a medium size raptor in the canyon as well. It was brownish in colour with a bit of white on the chest. According to the book, a Marsh Harrier would have fitted best, but as far as I know, it has never been spotted there before. Can anybody help me?

Then I found a nest with breeding Black-chested Snake-Eagles north of Puros. The eagles apparently have used to cars, but when I climbed to have a look with my binoculars, both flew away. One bird was sitting in the nest while the other one was resting on a nearby tree. Maybe this is an opportunity to ring some chicks.

Today on my way back home, I saw two Martial Eagles on telephone poles next to the road between Kalkfeld and Otjiwarongo.

REST, the Rare & Endangered Species Trust has organised another Air Show called **'The Flight for the Plight of the Cape Vulture'** to raise awareness for the plight of this majestic flyer, threatened to be extinct from Namibian skies. The Air Show is taking place on the 17th November 2007 at the Otjiwarongo Airfield and will continue to be free of charge so that the entire community can enjoy the event. Gates open at 07:30am and the fun will start with fly-in displays by various power planes and other flying machines. You and the family can relax and enjoy a day out by watching the Namibian Air force fly over, parachuters jumping from a plane, or perhaps you yourself will want to take a flight over Otjiwarongo.

Air Show guru, Brian Emmenis with Radio Wave will commentate on the various activities to keep you informed on what plane is buzzing in the sky. This year the show will include an HIV Awareness Walk starting from in front of Pick 'n Pay at 7:30 for 08.00am. Please show your support and follow the march to the Otjiwarongo Airstrip. A water slide, climbing tower, 'volley ball for all' and many other games and activities will be available for the children. Great food and an abundance of refreshments will be sold by Mias Vermaak and the Otjiwarongo Rotary club .

Stick around for the evening LIVE MUSIC MANIA ENTERTAINMENT featuring several well-known Namibian artists. Please forward this exciting news to all your friends & family and we hope to see you there!



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