

In this issue:

- 1 Air show for Namibia's most endangered species, the Cape Vulture, a soaring success!.....REST
- 1 Migrating Kestrel ProjectAnthony van Zyl
- 1 Have you seen this Cape Vulture?.....
.....Maria Diekmann & Ann Scott
- 2 Vultures celebrate N-NP centenary ..Peter Bridgeford
- 2 Newsflashes
- 3 Vulture ringing in the Namib.....Peter Bridgeford
- 4 Birds and PeopleMark Cocker
- 4 Barn Owl under siege.....Jeremia Mwapopi
- 4 Raptor Road Count VariationsNeil Thomson
- 4 NamPower initiates modifications to vertically configured (HLPD) power line poles
.....Ann Scott & Karl-Heinz Wagner
- 5 Further progress with NamPower/NNF Raptors Namibia partnershipAnn & Mike Scott
- 5 Newsflashes

Air show for Namibia's most endangered species, the Cape Vulture, a soaring success!



REST
The Flight for the Plight air show, at the Otjiwarongo airstrip on Saturday, 17 November 2007 was a resounding success.

Approximately 6 000 people enjoyed this event. Air Show announcer extraordinaire, Brian Emmenis, kept the spectators well informed on the various planes buzzing around the skies of Otjiwarongo throughout the day. The variety of planes was fantastic. The Namibian Air force flew in K8 trainer jets, an Alouette helicopter and a transport plane. We had one of only a few Antonov 2's flying in southern Africa, a Pitt S-B2 plane, Polish Wilga, sky divers and a variety of microlights, kit planes, Tecnams and Cessna's. We also had a great team flying radio controlled planes, like the Grippon, whose owner is ranked 8th on the world circuit.

Radiowave personalities Vikki Matjila and Deacon projected portions of the day live to the nation, as well as providing a soundtrack for all the days' events. Along with their great music, the day was also captured nicely by One Africa Television, and a myriad of photographers, including Sabine Bernert, Scott Hurd and Luc Zwijsen were there.

This year, we partnered with the Okorusu Mine and launched our 'helping people who help the environment' campaign. An HIV Awareness Walk began in the city centre and all the participants walked out to the airfield early on the morning of the air show. We also joined with the Sunshine orphanage and the young 'vulture squad' helped keep the area clean and enjoyed sponsored food and drinks.

Okorusu Mine organized a bus to transport spectators from Otjiwarongo to the airstrip and back, every half an hour for

the entire day. Once the day began, Otjiwarongo Christian School teachers, students and helpers ran a number of activities for children and adults alike. This year activities included an 8m tall water slide, the crazy hat contest, paper airplane building, face painting, colouring and the Crazy Tower – which had contestants simultaneously stacking and climbing soda bottle crates while hooked into a climbing harness. In the same fashion as the '05 Flight for the Plight, Otjiwarongo Rotary Club ran the 'volleyball for all' and a busy bar tent all day long, paired nicely with the great food and refreshments sold by Mias Vermaak.

This year we added the Tafel Lager music mania concert for an evening event. The music was fantastic and began with Fred Kazandjian followed by Danella, Jackson Kaujeua and Theo's mix. DJ Martin Pool then played some great music for those who wanted to dance a bit.

Maria Diekmann, founder and Director of The Rare & Endangered Species Trust (REST) was astounded by the support of sponsors, the public and the participants. Everyone enjoyed the day and plans and additions are already being talked about to make the 2009 event even more fun. Most importantly, the image and message about the Cape Vulture – Namibia's most endangered species – went out to thousands of people and hopefully we will all continue to care about this magnificent and useful bird.

Migrating Kestrel Project

Anthony van Zyl, antman@iafrica.com

Welcome to our new Migrating Kestrel Project season. Note that the kestrels normally arrive this month, so as usual, keep a look out for them at the roost and record the date they arrive. The core count day is 19 January 2008, but it would be fantastic if you could rather do monthly counts if possible. Lastly, we are still looking for volunteers in Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Malawi, so spread the word! This year we all need to look out for colour marked Red-footed Falcons, so if you see one, make sure to check the legs for rings. If there are any queries, please let me know. I look forward to hearing from you, have a good season.

Have you seen this Cape Vulture?

Maria Diekmann & Ann Scott

Nesher (Hebrew for vulture) is a young captive-raised Cape Vulture that was released at REST (Rare & Endangered Species Trust), near Otjiwarongo, in March 2006. Until mid-2007 he never left the area for any length of time. In June 2006 he undertook two major flights of 100 km. He has twice stopped for food at farm houses. Nesher may be recognized by his colour ring combination: LEFT green-green-metal; RIGHT yellow-yellow-yellow. The farming community is asked to support the effort by leaving the bird free to explore; a piece of meat may be left for him outside the farm gates, away from dogs.

Cape Vultures are Critically Endangered in Namibia. REST has been spear-heading the conservation of this species for the past seven years. Please let Maria Diekmann of REST know if you hear any reports of sightings of this bird: email rest@iway.na



Photo: Susann Kinghorn

Wally bringing his bird down, while Mark does the nest measurements

Vultures celebrate Namib-Naukluft Park centenary

Peter Bridgeford

The Namib-Naukluft Park is 100 years old this year. The vultures of the Namib have joined in the centenary celebrations. For the first time in the seventeen years of the ringing and monitoring project, the Lappet-faced Vultures have laid 100 eggs in one season.

In 1907 the German colonial government proclaimed a large part of the plains south of the Swakop River as Game Reserve No 3. Since then, the Park has grown in size to be amongst the largest proclaimed conservation areas in Africa. The fact that it is the largest protected area in Namibia and that Sossusvlei, the second most important tourist destination in the country, lies within this huge desert Park, is cause for celebration.

The past few good rainy seasons have resulted in an influx of animals to the plains between the Swakop and Kuiseb Rivers. There are large numbers of oryx, springbok, mountain zebra, ostriches, warthog and even a few giraffe. The good news is that the Lappet-faced Vultures of the Namib have reacted to these favourable environmental conditions, that is, an abundance of food, by breeding more than in the recent past. Further south in the Park, at Saagberg, Tsondab and even Sossusvlei, the number of breeding birds has increased.

When we started the annual aerial survey at Ganab on 1 October 2007, we had no idea what was in store. Rob Field of Zebra River Lodge was our pilot for the fourth year and again donated his time and expertise. Observer Hartmut Kolb joined us for the first, but apparently not last time. Holger Kolberg of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) and Julia Schweitzer from Germany aus, were our ground crew. By the end of the first day's flying, we knew something was up. After day two, we had seen more occupied nests than in all the previous years. On Wednesday morning we flew south of the Kuiseb River to the Saagberg/Kamberg area, while Holger and Julia moved our camp and fuel to Weltevrede Guest Farm who supplied food and accommodation. Then over the dunes, (so quick in the plane), and we completed the Tsondab River, vlei and plains before heading for a late but very welcome lunch at

Weltevrede. After a rest and refuelling, we checked the Sukses area as far south as Elim Dune. By now we knew we were on a winning streak. On Thursday morning we tackled the Sossusvlei area and because of the decline during the past few years, we flew along the Tsauchab River three times to make very sure we did not miss a nest. Even here we were pleasantly surprised to find a single breeding bird in the river and another in a small tributary to the north of the Tsauchab. Then to NamibRand Nature Reserve, concentrating on the dunes along the Namib-Naukluft Park boundary and south of Wolwedans. We landed safely at Weltevrede after 16,5 hours of flying (excluding ferry time). Thanks Rob.

We recorded 129 waypoints. Of these we knew two were duplicated, two were on farms bordering the Park, one was a Black-chested Snake Eagle chick and the ringing teams did not visit two nests because they were just too far away. Of the remaining 122 waypoints, we found 98 Lappet-faced Vulture breeding attempts, either eggs or chicks, including two dead chicks (one ringed last year and dead in its nest). The ringing teams found two additional chicks not recorded during the aerial survey, a total of 100 records. It is not always possible to differentiate between roosting and nesting birds. At times we did circle if we were not sure, but even then it was difficult to tell.

Vultures Namibia would like to once again thank Nedbank Namibia, Swart Grant Angula and Academia Friendly Supermarket for their continued financial support. Without their assistance the aerial survey would not have been possible. Weltevrede Guest Farm is always ready to keep us fed and watered. Many thanks to Rob, Hartmut, Holger and Julia. Manie le Roux of MET smoothed the way through the bureaucratic quagmire.



News Flashes

- ▶ Working at a lodge near Bersig, Damaraland, I drive a lot in the area. There are not many raptors on the main road between Palmwag and Khorixas, but I see more on the smaller roads and riverbeds. There are resident Martial Eagles near the lodge and we have also recorded Black Eagles, including a juvenile, Black-chested Snake-Eagles and kestrels. A Bateleur was seen on an oryx kill as well. The Hoanib River is an outstanding place to see raptors, including Lappet-faced Vultures. Nadja le Roux
- ▶ On 13/11/2007, on a trip in the Hotsas area of the Namib section of the Namib-Naukluft Park, I saw 30 Lappet-faced Vultures at the water. Unfortunately no tagged birds could be seen. At present there are many dead ostrich around the waterhole. Hilke Riehmer



Photo: Peter Bridgeford

Martin taking the chick back to the nest

Vulture ringing in the Namib

Peter Bridgeford

I have asked this question before and I still don't have an answer. "What is it that entices normally sane people to spend days driving around the desert, climbing thorny trees, mess around with large birds that can bite, claw and worst of all, puke the most vile concoction over you?" Is it the birds, so aptly described by Francois Levallant in 1795 as that "superb vulture" and then "unquestionably the most beautiful of its genus". Is it the superb desert scenery? Is it the superb company around the campfire? Is it a combination of all these?

Whatever the reason, I am very thankful to all those hardy souls who braved the elements and the birds to help us ring and tag a record number of Lappet-faced Vultures during October. Because of the large number of birds to be ringed, determined after the aerial survey and the large number of interested people available, we divided the group into two teams. On Saturday morning, 6 October, Holger Kolberg led his group to the north of the Ganab campsite where we were based and our team went south. On Sunday morning some people left to return to Windhoek to earn an honest penny and the afternoon others left for Walvis Bay. On Monday, two pared down teams continued the ringing and tagging. Günter Waetzoldt of Waetzoldt Roofing in Walvis Bay not only supplied the additional extension ladder, he helped to carry it. By Tuesday afternoon, we had finished ringing 59 chicks, and that only in the Ganab area. The most we had ever done before was 52 (2004), but that was in the whole Park. Holger's team ringed more chicks than our team, but only because we had further to travel to find our birds. (We had to find an excuse). Thanks to Mark and Sandra, Ann and Mike, Sandra and Val, the Lombard family, Barry Lewis, Hartmut, Sonja and Günter, Phillip, Hilke, Ben and Leon.

Holger, Julia, Heike, Hartmut, Ben and Leon continued to Sukses and Sossusvlei and there they found another nine chicks, one egg and the Black-chested Snake Eagle mentioned earlier. The one and only bird in the Tsauchab River was between Sesriem and the river crossing and not west of this crossing where most breeding birds were found in the past. Thanks to Holger and his crew for the sterling effort. On the way to Sukses, they stopped at Solitaire Guest

Farm, one of our sponsors. Here Simone and Walter Swarts have accommodated and fed a succession of hungry vulture ringers. Simone is a passionate ringer herself and had found a breeding LFV on their other farm Spaarwater. This is the first breeding bird on this farm for many, many years.

The following Friday, Marc Dürr, Marilyn and I headed for the Saagberg area to continue the ringing. Günter and Bremer van Eyk accompanied us. We left a vehicle at Solitaire Guest Farm and took Simone with us, while Walter looked after the guests. Near Saagberg we met our sponsors from Swart Grant Angula. We camped on a dune against the Kamberg with a beautiful view across miles of plains and dunes. During the next two days in the Saagberg and Tsondab area, we ringed 19 birds, found two eggs and a dead chick. On Monday, Gerhard Swart, Willem and Jenny Boshoff, Martin and Melanie du Plessis, Kobus and Sophia van Zyl returned to Windhoek. Thank you for the support and assistance. Marc, Marilyn and I continued to NamibRand Nature Reserve, where we spent two nights at the Keerweder. We ringed three chicks and found one egg. Then the long road home to Walvis.

The last ringing for the season was done on 10 December, a public holiday, when we drove to the Ganab area. Mola Mola, a tour operator from Walvis Bay, kindly assisted with a vehicle and driver to transport all the eager ringers. Thanks to Sandra, Mark, Phillip, Günter, Sonja, Henda and new convert, Lalie, for their enthusiasm and assistance. Thanks to Megan and Neels Dreyer of Mola Mola and Wally Hansen, our chauffeur. Susann Kinghorn, a part-time journalist from

Swakopmund, was there to record the events for posterity. We ringed and tagged two chicks that had been too small in October and tagged another two that had been ringed by Holger.

The total of 100 breeding records for the season: 90 chicks ringed, one dead chick and nine eggs. A fantastic score! Many hours of hard work by a group of dedicated people from all over our beautiful country. Thanks to each and

everyone. Nedbank, Swart Grant Angula, Academia Friendly Supermarket, Electro Repairs, Waetzoldt Roofing, Bremer van Eyk, the Birds of Prey Working Group of the Endangered Wildlife Trust, NamibRand Nature Reserve, and Mola Mola are all thanked. The Ministry of Environment and Tourism is thanked for allowing the project to continue and for the assistance provided by Holger Kolberg.



Photo: Peter Bridgeford

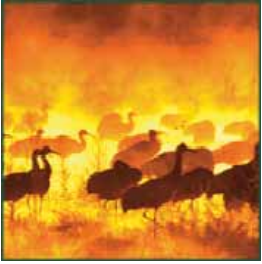
Please report sighting us!



Photo: Susann Kinghorn

Susann and the vulture she tagged

Birds and People: A Major Website and Book Project



Mark Cocker
A highly acclaimed team that includes Mark Cocker (author), David Tipling (photographer), and Jonathan Elphick (researcher) is launching a major new project entitled Birds and People. This is also a ground-breaking joint venture between BirdLife International and Random House.

Birds are one of the most captivating life forms on the planet, giving rise to a global network involving millions of birdwatchers. They have also been at the heart of human cultures for thousands of years. As images of our gods, as symbols of key human ideals such as political liberty or spiritual freedom, as emblems of almost any human product from lemonade (La Cigogne in Morocco) to the nation state (Bald Eagle in the USA), birds have been a limitless source of inspiration. They are on coins, bank notes, flags and stamps or in art, music, literature, television cartoons and myth.

On a more practical note, birds have helped to feed humankind since our origins on the African savanna. Today the humble and much-abused domestic chicken is of immeasurable importance as our primary source of meat. The relentless drive for bird flesh has inflicted many losses, most infamously in the case of the Dodo and Passenger Pigeon, the ultimate icons of extinction.

Birds and People is being launched as a website forum where anyone interested in birds and their cultural importance can discuss and place on record their experiences and observations. Many of the contributions will be used in the text of an eventual book and all contributors will be acknowledged. If you are passionate about birds and wish to get involved then visit our website www.birdsandpeople.org for more detailed information. Or email us at markcocker@randomhouse.co.uk or write to: Birds and People, Jonathan Cape, Random House, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London, SW1V 2SA UK.

Barn Owl under siege near the dunes of Sossusvlei

Jeremia Mwapopi

After spending an exciting morning, exploring the dunes of Sossusvlei as part of the NA12 Expedition, my guests were just starting to relax, when our attention was captured by a whirl of pale and brown feathers in the sky ahead of us. It was a Barn Owl, subjected to an aerial attack by a pair of Southern Pale Chanting Goshawks. The owl was clearly out of his depth, its eyes narrowed to slits, probably blinded by the bright desert sun.

Blood was oozing from wounds visible above the owl's tail feathers on his back, and he was retreating into a spiny desert bush, *Acanthosicyos horridus*, where he first perched and then wedged himself deeper into the shelter of the bush. The goshawks retreated, leaving us to guess about the events which might have led up to the attack. Pellets of Barn Owls which had been examined, had often revealed that a part of their diet is made up from small birds ("Birds of Africa" by Chris & Tilde Stuart). Could it have been that this owl had been waiting till after sunrise for the Goshawks to leave their roost, so it could raid the nest, when it was discovered?

Or was this owl the prey, maybe disturbed from its shelter earlier that morning and found to be an easy target, flying around half-blinded by daylight? According to "Robert's Birds of Southern Africa", goshawks had been observed attacking Guinea fowl, Francolin and even owls. Only the desert knew the answers to our questions, but we were relieved to know that, at least for the present, the injured owl was safe.

Raptor Road Count Variations

Neil Thomson

Holger Kolberg's comments (Raptors Namibia Newsletter #8) about the south being a raptor paradise confirm my own observations. In April/May 2007, I made a round trip of some 2 600 km from Windhoek to the south of Namibia via Swakopmund. The entire trip yielded 300 raptor sightings - approximately one raptor per 8,7 km travelled. Given that the Windhoek/Swakopmund legs of the trip produced only about one raptor per 24 km travelled and that none whatsoever was seen from Swakopmund until well into the desert beyond Walvis Bay, the densities in the south itself were even higher than this figure reflects.

I have also noticed that the counts on some routes are very variable. On the afternoon of 07/12/2007 a Windhoek/Swakopmund trip yielded only five raptors (one per 72 km), whereas the return trip on the morning of 11/12/2007 produced twenty five sightings (one per 14,4 km). When Black Kites and Steppe Buzzards are present the count for this route can be considerably higher and I have at times recorded more than one hundred birds on this route.

NamPower initiates modifications to vertically configured (HLPCD) power line poles

Ann Scott & Karl-Heinz Wagner (NamPower)

The new rural power line from Bergsig to the south of Sesfontein was identified as an electrocution risk for vultures during a site visit by Chris van Rooyen (Eskom-EWT Strategic Partnership) and Karl-Heinz Wagner (NamPower) in January 2007 (see Raptor News No 3, Mar 07, pp 2-3). This medium voltage distribution structure makes use of the vertically configured or horizontal line post compact delta (HLPCD) design, which is being used widely for private power lines throughout the country.

NamPower has now brought about modifications, in order to increase the perching space for vultures on the structure. The modification consists of a simple horizontal bracket attached to the top of the pole (see Raptor News No 2, Feb 07, pp 3-4 and No 8, Nov 07, p3 for further information and photographs). From a financial point the modification is relatively inexpensive. The brackets were manufactured in-house at the NamPower Brakwater Workshop. NamPower's Mr Steyn Fouche was responsible for the final design and the manufacturing. A total of 1 500 brackets were manufactured at a cost of app N\$ 20.00 each. This is approximately 1% of the total material cost of one intermediate structure. The contractor installed the brackets at no extra cost, as no holes needed to be drilled; the brackets bolt onto the back of the insulator bolt. The brackets were not painted as corrosion is not a concern in that area; however, in coastal regions they should be painted, which will have a big impact on the cost.

Continued on page 5

Continued from page 4

One of the actions of the proposed NamPower / NNF Raptors Namibia partnership is to compile a "raptor sensitivity map". This will enable NamPower to either retrofit (which will be expensive) or install such modifications right from the start., in areas where they pose a potential threat to vultures. Similar modifications are already being investigated for a new power line between Omajette to Otjiperongo (between Omaruru and Uis).

Further progress with NamPower / NNF Raptors Namibia partnership

Ann & Mike Scott

Certain actions have been proposed to reduce potential conflict between raptors and powerlines in Namibia (see Raptor News No 2 Feb 07, pp 3-4). Chris van Rooyen (at that stage representing the Eskom-EWT Strategic Partnership, SA) kindly undertook to develop the above ideas in the form of a draft proposal for a NamPower/NNF Raptors Namibia partnership. These ideas were discussed further at a meeting of the raptor-power lines Steering Committee in Windhoek on 22 November 2007.

The draft proposal includes the following actions:

- 1 Incorporate bird mitigation into the planning of future networks
 - Produce a map showing all power lines (transmission and distribution) and raptor risk/hotspots in Namibia
 - Develop a screening procedure with checklist for new reticulation lines
 - Perform Bird Impact Assessment studies for selected high risk lines
2. Promote awareness of the risks that power lines pose to birds
 - Use radio and printed media to promote reporting of interactions
 - Produce a booklet and poster to promote awareness on raptor/power line interactions and to assist with identification of raptors concerned
- 3 Monitor and investigate power line/bird mortality incidents
 - Promote ongoing reporting of incidents by NamPower/REDs and general public
 - Develop an electronic database for the registration of all incidents
 - Investigate reported incidents and provide recommendations
- 4 Train NamPower and RED staff in the management of bird interactions with power line networks
 - Develop appropriate training materials
 - Conduct training workshops

The way forward:

- The partnership will represent a high-level agreement between NamPower and NNF.

- Once the support of NamPower Management has been confirmed, the proposal will be circulated to interested parties (including the wider raptor group) for comment; finalized on 29 January 2008; and submitted at the beginning of February 2008.

News Flashes

- ▶ I drove from Wolwedans to the Chateau 14/11/2007 and observed about 8 Vultures randomly spaced quite far away in the trees. I found this quite amazing as they all seemed to be quite exhausted and did not fly away although I had to drive quite close to some of them. I could not see a carcass in the area, but we had some very strong winds during the previous days. I also observed 10 Vultures near the Aandstêr/Gorrisas Hunting-circles on an Oryx carcass. There were two young birds, both marked with yellow tags, but they were just too far off to make out the numbers.
Andreas Keding

- ▶ Our Spotted-eagle Owl population seems to be picking up again after a disastrous spell up till two years ago. Dead owls were being found regularly in the vicinity of town. Recently, a pair of SE Owls nested once again in a very old nest on the outskirts of town. The nest was a Hamerkop's and was placed on the roof of a small out-building on a small-holding. The nest has been there for at least 23 years. As can be seen from my picture, one of the pair of chicks was most interested in my movements!!!
Mike Soroczynski



- ▶ Hello and thank you for your wonderful webpage. We spent a few days in Hwange in August 2007 and saw this eagle during a Safari near Matobo. Could you please tell us if it is a Verreaux's Eagle?
Ariane Blanchard

- ▶ **Harrier watchers** Please send all of your sightings, especially of breeding birds, to me as soon as possible! If you have a GPS reading, please send that together with the number of young. If you have a digital picture of under 4Mb that is also very useful. We have reports of two dead birds found on the N27. These are unwanted returns (the dead kind) but very valuable all the same. Thanks for all your support and please send in your breeding activity sightings

Rob Simmons, Rob.Simmons@uct.ac.za



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