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Migrating Kestrel Project

Anthony van Zyl has sent the Migrating Kestrel Project Newsletter for 2008, as well as the count form. You can contact him at: antman@iafrica.com for full particulars or we can forward these to you on request. He is particularly keen to find more observers in Namibia who are interested to take part in the Migrating Kestrel Count and in particular on Saturday 24 January 2009. Please let him know if you can help!

In his letter, Tuesday, October 14, he says,

"Please remember to write down the date and report to me when you see your first kestrels, as they should be arriving in the next week!"

Our national count day will be on Saturday 24 January 2009 but you are all encouraged to count on a monthly basis, because this additional data will be very valuable to the project. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, my contact details are in the Newsletter

Kind regards
Anthony
Co-ordinator: Migrating Kestrel Project
Birds of Prey Working Group
Endangered Wildlife Trust.



Photo: Marc Dürr

Lappet-faced Vulture (*Aegypius tracheliotos*) sighting in the Ganab area

Marc Dürr

Hockey, Dean & Ryan (2005) describe the immature bird as "Mantle initially heavily dappled with white, becoming blackish brown".

As can be seen on the photograph, this individual has an excessive amount of white feathers on the mantle; in fact, the entire mantle is white with a few feathers showing a greyish brown edge. Steyn (1989) states that "At the end of the first year the young vulture has acquired a dappling of white feathers on its mantle and upperwing coverts which gradually disappear".

This is what made us look so closely. Is it a white-backed lappet-faced or a lappet-faced white-back? It would seem to be to be an immature Lappet-faced Vulture. The leg plumage is black, as is the neck ruff, and the head is unmistakable. Leg plumage (trousers) only start showing white at the end of the second year. (Steyn 1989) Using the telescope, this bird clearly had no white on the trousers, and we can assume that it is a 1-2 year old bird.

It would be interesting to get more records of this colour/immature plumage.

References:
Hockey PAR, Dean WRJ, Ryan PG (eds) 2005. Roberts-Birds of Southern Africa, VIIth ed. The Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town.

Steyn, Peter 1989. Birds of prey of southern Africa. Tanager Books, Dover.

What a waste!

Peter Bridgeford

Secretarybirds are sparsely distributed over the arid west of southern Africa, but are even seen striding across the grass covered plains of the Namib Desert. Last year, while ringing Lappet-faced Vultures in the Namib-Naukluft Park, a very small Secretarybird chick was found. This year, during a similar exercise, another Secretarybird was found north of Sesriem.

However, this adult Secretarybird was found drowned in a circular water reservoir. The drowning of most raptors and other birds can be prevented. The simplest and least expensive way to prevent this recurring, unnecessary loss is to place old wooden fencing posts in the water. The posts float on the surface and small birds can perch on them to reach the water surface. Birds falling into the water can scramble onto the floating posts. However, one post alone tends to roll and it is better to tie two posts together to provide a stable platform. Alternatively, place a large branch, with several side branches, into the reservoir. Fix one end to the top of the reservoir wall. When the water level drops, it hangs into the reservoir and birds and other animals, such as baboons can climb out. A dead baboon or large bird fouls the water.

Every year, hundreds of birds drown in farm reservoirs. You can help prevent this unnecessary loss by placing a float in the reservoir. Act now!

Books on Namibian birds and conservation

BIRDS OF NAMIBIA, a photographic journey

By Pompie Burger

In July 2008, a book by one of Namibia's leading bird photographers was published. The excellent photographs by Pompie Burger are well known to Namibians. They regularly appear in print.

The photos are accompanied by lively text that takes a ramble through the prime birding areas of Namibia. So, if you want to know 'where-to-see' those special birds, or just enjoy looking at birds, get Pompie's book. Besides the first-rate photos, he has included a section on raptor conservation and pictures of vultures (reason enough to buy the book). Thanks Pompie. They are available from bookstores in Namibia or enquire at Venture Publications, e-mail: bonn@mac.com.na

NAMIB Secrets of a desert uncovered

By Mary Seely and John Pallett

Published in October 2008, this book celebrates the centenary of the Namib-Naukluft Park. A large portion of the present park was proclaimed a reserve by the German Colonial administration in 1907. It covers a very wide range of subjects: history, climate, geology, fauna and flora, vegetation, peoples, and Lappet-faced Vultures of the Namib. This is an excellent reference source on the largest conservation area in southern Africa. Available from bookshops in Namibia or from Venture Publications: bonn@mac.com.na



Photo: Joe Noci

The drone taking off

A new way to finding breeding vultures?

Peter Bridgeford

In October, during the ringing of Lappet-faced Vultures in the Namib-Naukluft Park, a new way of finding the nests of breeding vultures was tested. Because Lappet-faced Vultures generally do not breed in the same nest in consecutive years, all trees have to be inspected the following breeding season. A drone, fitted with a digital camera and linked to a computer, was used for the first time to find occupied vulture nests. The preliminary tests were successful and the resulting videos clearly showed the vultures on the nest. If the drone can be programmed to fly over all the trees and photograph them, then it would be relatively simple to get the coordinates of each occupied nest from the computer.

Joe and Gisela Noci are sure that this unmanned aerial observation system, christened Kiwit, can do the job. The first test has been encouraging and Joe is hard at work to improve the drone's capabilities. Gisela is working on the software to improve control of the drone and accurately plot the position of the occupied nests. Vultures Namibia looks forward to continued cooperation with this new project that could save it thousands of dollars a year. Contact address: Joe Noci: +264 (0)81 124 4056



Lappet-faced Vultures poisoned

On 29 September 2008, Helmut Boshoff of the farm Onduri, south of Okaukuejo in the Etosha National Park, found dead vultures on the neighbouring farm, Nubes. He contacted Wilferd Versfeld in Etosha who went to the farm to collect the rings and tags. Wilferd found three dead Lappet-faced Vultures and they had been dead for some time. One, a marked bird, had been ringed and tagged near Okaukuejo by Wilferd on 13 September 2007. The distance between the two points is about 70 km. Wilferd suspects poison, but not on Onduri or Nubes as they are game farms.

Thanks to Helmut for reporting the dead birds. He also reported birds found drowned in a reservoir.

Aerial survey in the Namib-Naukluft Park

Peter Bridgeford

The annual aerial survey of the breeding Lappet-faced Vultures was made possible through the generous support of several companies and individuals. The plane, a Cessna 182, was hired at a reduced rate from Farm Feeds, a Windhoek company supplying the agricultural sector with feeds. For the past five years, pilot Rob Field of Zebra River Lodge, has donated his time and experience to fly the 20 hour aerial survey. He has logged 100 hours on behalf of Vultures Namibia!

The survey almost did not take place as planned. When the Vultures Namibia vehicle arrived in Windhoek to pick up fuel, it was found that there was no avgas available. Without the cheerful assistance of Peter Keil of Westair Wings Charters, the survey would not have taken place as planned. Not only did Westair Wings Charters provide the fuel required from their private stock (kept for emergencies), but they also donated a drum. A regular supporter for the past five years has been SGA, chartered accountants and auditors of Windhoek. Their financial assistance with the ever-increasing costs of aircraft fuel has kept the project going. Several of the partners and their families have also assisted with the ringing of the vultures and provided delicious meals in the field.

Nedbank Namibia, through its Go Green Fund, has sponsored vulture conservation since 2003. Without their generous financial assistance, the aerial survey and ringing project in the Namib-Naukluft Park would not have been possible. In addition, the very important extension work in the farming areas, through Farmer's Unions and conservancies, could not have taken place. Their commitment to continue funding these projects has just been received.

A new sponsor this year is Rössing Uranium. Their support came at an opportune time and helped to pay part of the costs of the aerial survey. In May 2008, the ladies of Trio Feminale donated their time and musical talents to Vultures Namibia. A profitable fund raising gala-dinner was organised in Swakopmund. Thanks to all who organised, attended and supported the evening.

Weltevrede Guest Farm and Solitaire Guest Farm are thanked for their support over the years. The aerial survey in the south has taken place from Weltevrede for several years. Many thanks for the accommodation, lovely meals and cold beer!

To all the vulture friends and vulture fanatics, thanks for the support. See you next October.



Some news on the Black Harriers

Rob Simmons

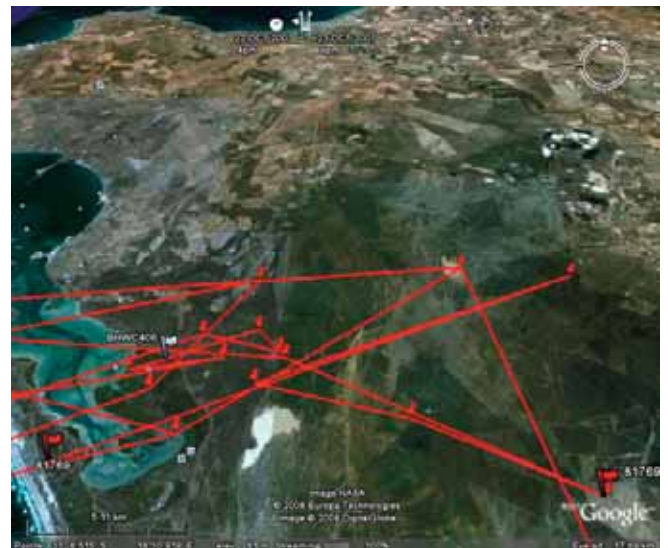
Exciting news is that the first harrier in southern Africa has been successfully satellite tagged.

The tiny (12.5g) satellite tags I have for following Black Harriers was (solar) charged in early October and the first one attached to a breeding male in the West Coast on 11 October with the help of Phoebe Barnard and Esme Beamish (best known for her baboon studies).



The device is attached with a harness to the bird (see photo) and then 5 to 10 fixes a day (mainly in a five hectare block in the afternoon) show where the bird is. I have attached a Google Earth image of his tracks so far. Many are of low resolution or accuracy but some good ones show he is foraging in farmland at least 17 km from his nest - a huge surprise given that we have never seen a marked male farther than 3 km from his nest site!

We hope to put another two transmitters on before the end of October and the whole process may be filmed by a local company. The more exciting times come when the birds leave their breeding grounds in December/January and head north to destinations unknown. Because each transmitter is solar powered we should be able to follow these birds for more than a year!



Special thanks to all those who made this possible - Natural Research (UK) for funds, (especially Mike McGrady and Ruth Tingay), Keith Bildstein and Dave Barber at Hawk Mt (USA) for transmitters and advice, and Francois Mougeot and Beatriz Arroyo for teflon and valuable input.

Please continue to send in your sightings and please diarise next July for the start of a full country survey of these ever surprising and beautiful birds.

Caring for Vultures

Nico Wagner

A number of local folk who care about vultures spent an interesting and informative weekend at Ganab in the Namib Naukluft Park assisting with the annual ringing and tagging of Lappet-faced Vulture chicks.

Scaling long ladders to get to the nesting-site at the top of thorn trees is a precarious business and all who took part were trained in the process of measuring, ringing and tagging young vulture chicks. Thereafter, the participants had to put their training into practice and in doing so, managed to ring and tag 41 chicks, some of which weigh as much as adult vultures. This process is vital to the work of Vultures Namibia, who monitor this endangered bird on an on-going basis.

These vulture chicks were located in their nests by using GPS co-ordinates that had previously been obtained during an aerial survey of the Ganab area.

During the day Peter Bridgeford of Vultures Namibia and other experienced ringers kept a watchful eye on those individuals designated to carry out the tagging and ringing of these magnificent birds. Utmost care is taken to ensure that there is minimal disruption or stress caused to the chicks. At sunset, the teams returned to Ganab campsite to discuss the day's events.



Photo: Nico Wagner

Anyone who observes a marked bird should read the number on the ring and/or tag and report it to Vultures Namibia at 081-260-7375 or email pmbridge@iway.na. The date and place of observation would also be required.

Tiniest chick found during 2008 ringing/tagging, almost back in the nest. The tag will be put on when the chick has grown

Vultures in the spotlight

Andre Botha

Saturday 6 September 2008 was designated as the third National Vulture Awareness Day. The Birds of Prey Working Group of the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT-BoPWG) and its partners and associates, including provincial conservation bodies and several other NGOs involved in vulture research and conservation, initiated this annual event in 2006. The aim is to create awareness of the plight of all vulture species occurring in the southern African region, and to highlight the work done by the conservationists who monitor populations and implement measures to conserve vultures and their habitats. EWT-BoPWG field staff are arranging vulture counts at key colonies and feeding sites across South Africa on this day, with the help of volunteers and landowners interested in the conservation and monitoring of vultures in their area.

Photo: DHP

Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk killed

Penelope Orford and Volker Schubert

In September 2008, at a waterhole near Nossob in the Kalagadi National Park, we witnessed the following incident: four Southern Pale Chanting Goshawks came hurtling to the ground near the water. Three birds attacked the fourth, which appeared to be bigger than the other three. They attacked "her" with their talons, but being outnumbered, the bird could not defend itself. It crawled under a bush where it was found dying the next morning.



Photo: Penelope Orford / Volker Schubert

Has anyone seen a similar incident or can anyone shed any light on the strange behaviour.

(On average, a male weighs 700 g and a female 900g Ed.)



Raining Ospreys

Andreas & Viktoria Keding

The 25th October was a good day in the desert at Aandster on NamibRand Nature Reserve. It rained 2,5mm and we had an Osprey fishing for the bream in the reservoir near the house. It plunge-dived into the reservoir, but while we watched, it did not catch anything. It roosted nearby when it became dark.

Sponsors and farmers aid raptor conservation

Helicopter survey of breeding vultures

The aerial survey of breeding vultures was once again possible due to the financial and



Photo: DHP

moral support of various sponsors. Dirk Heinrich, for a second time, did it in style. On the game farms of Jürgen Bergmann, north of Windhoek, a Robinson helicopter was



used to look for the nests of breeding White-backed and Lappet-faced Vultures. They managed to ring six of each vulture species and a Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk. There are many more White-backed Vultures breeding on the properties, but the trees along the rivers are very tall and the nests are out of reach. Thanks to Jürgen Bergmann for his support and enthusiasm. Electro Repairs supplied a vehicle and ladder.

NamPower – NNF Strategic Partnership launched to address power line/wildlife conflicts

Ann & Mike Scott

One of the key outputs of the Raptors Namibia action plan (developed at Waterberg in February 2005) is to manage raptor populations and habitats by addressing the threats outlined in the Red Data Book, including electrocution and collisions with overhead lines. The power line network coverage across Namibia is increasing rapidly, and the extent of mortality to large raptors on power lines in Namibia is unknown. At the same time, wildlife electrocutions cause inconvenient outages, resulting in blackouts and high maintenance and repair costs. Both types of impacts are cause for concern; both are preventable or could be reduced with appropriate planning and mitigation.

Representatives from Raptors Namibia first met with NamPower, Vultures Namibia, NARREC, NamRingers and the Eskom/EWT Partnership (RSA) at Brakwater in August 2006 to discuss these concerns, as matters of mutual interest (see RN newsletter No. 9, September 2006). On 16 January 2007 most of this group again met in Windhoek, to discuss the implementation of agreed actions further with Namibia Nature Foundation, the Electricity Control Board and a group of database managers, and several activities were proposed (see RN newsletter No. 2, Feb 2007, p3 & 4).

After months of preparation, the NamPower – NNF Strategic Partnership was launched on 21 October 2008. This ground-breaking conservation initiative is being funded for three years by the European Investment Bank, aiming to become financially sustainable after three years.

The mission of the partnership is to develop a multi-disciplinary mechanism in the form of a dynamic Geographical Information System (GIS) database and mapping system, indicating all power-lines in Namibia in relation to biodiversity hotspots and sensitive areas. This comprehensive biodiversity information resource will assist NamPower with managing its impacts on the natural environment and vice versa. It will furthermore assist environmental and industry role players throughout Namibia to manage and prevent impacts on our biodiversity. Birds will form the initial focus, with the aim of expanding it to other natural resources in due course. The project will be managed by NNF and will eventually develop into an important environmental planning tool accessible to all in Namibia.

The project aims specifically to:

- promote awareness of the risks that power-lines pose to birds, and birds to power-lines;
- train NamPower and Regional Electricity Distribution (RED) staff in the management of bird interactions with power-line networks;
- monitor and investigate power-line/bird mortality incidents; and
- incorporate bird/wildlife mitigation into the planning of future electricity networks, including developing a quick screening method for all new power-lines.

The assistance of all relevant stakeholders is being obtained to help build the information database for the proposed biodiversity mapping system for Namibia. At present, the specific need is for detailed information on any forms of bird/wildlife interactions (e.g. mortality, roosts, nests, etc.) on power-lines in any area in Namibia, both historic and present. Target bird species are:

- large raptors (e.g. eagles, vultures and Secretarybirds), bustards, cranes, storks and flamingos, which are likely to be electrocuted on, collide with, or roost or nest on structures; and
- smaller birds such as Black and Pied crows, Sociable Weavers and Red-billed Buffalo-weavers which are likely to nest on the structures.

Information on any other forms of bird/wildlife interactions/conflicts not mentioned above would also be welcomed.

Should you wish to become involved, please register as a stakeholder with the project:

•Project management (Mike & Ann Scott): Cell 081 284 5130; email ecoserve@iway.na

•NamPower (Danie Louw): tel. +264 (0)61 3222089; email Danie.Louw@nampower.com.na Namibia Nature Foundation: tel. +264 (0)61 248345; email cb@nnf.org.na



Electrocuted Cape Vulture

Photo: Chris van Rooyen



Martial Eagles nesting on pylon

Photo: Chris van Rooyen

Dearth of raptors in northern Namibia

Neil Thomson

In August 2008, we undertook a trip to the Kunene. The main objective of this trip was ringing, although we also kept a record of the birds seen and heard and in my opinion, the raptor count was particularly low. The trip started at Farm Kakuse about forty minutes drive from Oshivelo (close to the eastern boundary of Etosha). On the trip from Kakuse to Ruacana town, a distance of over 400 km, only three raptors, two Black-shouldered Kites and a Tawny Eagle were seen. On the return trip once again only three raptors were seen, this time two Black-shouldered Kites and a Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk. A lone Bateleur was also seen on this route on a day trip to Olusati dam. West of Ruacana, diurnal raptors were also in short supply with a Black-shouldered Kite, a Martial Eagle, a Rock Kestrel and about four White-backed Vultures seen at Hippo Pools. African Fish-Eagles were seen and heard at various locations along the river and a pair of Black-chested Snake-Eagles was seen at Ehomba. Two unidentified medium to large size raptors were also seen, one at Ehomba and the other near Swartbooisdrif. A small grey raptor caused some excitement as we thought that we had found the elusive Grey Kestrel, but it flew off before it could be positively identified. This bird was seen at least 10 km from the river and on reflection it is unlikely to have been a Grey Kestrel as it was some distance from what appears to be its preferred habitat, the palm groves along the river. Owls were a lot more plentiful, with African Scops-Owl, Pearl-spotted Owlet and Verreaux's Eagle-Owl seen or heard at various locations. The trip covered more than 1 200 km over a period of thirteen days, so it appears that the raptor density is extremely low at present in this part of northern Namibia.



An abundance of birds in Bushmanland

Bruno Nebe, Turnstone Tours, Swakopmund

I have just returned from a trip to Bushmanland and pleased to report a good number of raptors. We saw more raptors in one week than we see in a year driving up and down from Swakopmund to Otavi and we often do that.

Here a list of raptors we saw:

Bateleur, up to six at once, Martial Eagle, adult and juvenile attempting to outwit a Kori Bustard, Lizard Buzzard, Tawny Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Pallid Harrier, Ovambo Sparrowhawk, Gabar Goshawk, Shikra (Little Banded Goshawk), Little Sparrowhawk, Lanner Falcon, Peregrine Falcon, Red-necked Falcon, Grey Kestrel, a pair, Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Black-shouldered Kite and Gymnogone, African Hawk-Eagle, Wahlberg's Eagle, Lappet-faced Vulture, White-headed Vulture and White-backed Vulture.

News Flashes

- ▶ At Gemsbokwater on 16/7/2008 at 16:00, I saw 26 Lappet-faced and 8 White-backed Vultures. No tags were seen Achim Lenssen
- ▶ On 14/8/08 at 16h00 at NamibRand Nature reserve, we spotted a group of nine Lappet-faced Vultures and one White-backed Vulture (+ two Black Crows + three Pied Crows) feeding on the ground, just south-west of Keerweder near the gravel pit. Two of the Lappet-faced Vultures each had a yellow patagial tag on the right wing but it was too far to read the code. Both birds looked like sub-adults, but of different years. Ann & Mike Scott

- ▶ Red Hawk: visitor at Viktoria Keding's parents verandah, in Massachusetts. They suspect that it is a young, inexperienced bird as they managed to get close to it for a good photograph



Photo: Gertrud Paulick

- ▶ Referring to the article in #5 on CV6, Peter Mundy says: that silly CG (Cape Vulture), spending so much time with White-backed Vultures, what is it thinking of? What with those hybrids at Maria Diekmann's place as well, you people in Namibia seem to be putting a jinx on this species, confusing it as to its identity, something like being a WASP in San Francisco. Well done Pete Hancock for tracking down the locstat by GPS. The large groups of Lappet-faced Vultures seen by Rosta, crazily "on the beach", remind me that the largest groups of this species to be seen in Africa are seen in Namibia, 60 or more at the Waterberg restaurant in the past.

- ▶ While ringing vultures on the farms, Dirk Heinrich also ringed a Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk chick.



Photo: DHP



Photo: Keith Wearne

- ▶ This Osprey is the one regularly seen at Pelican Point, Walvis Bay, for the past few months.

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Raptors Namibia co-ordinators

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

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

Raptor road counts and road count queries:

P.O. Box 90645
Klein Windhoek
Windhoek
E-mail raptors@mweb.com.na

