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Raptors in South Western Namibia

Pieter Mostert

I recently (September & October) had the opportunity to drive from Rosh Pinah to Aus (in the afternoon) and then three weeks later again from Aus to Rosh Pinah in the early morning and back again in the afternoon.

During the early morning drive to Rosh Pinah we saw five Jackal Buzzards at various intervals perched on the telephone poles along the road, but none during the afternoon drives. This reminded me that also I recorded these birds along the same road during 1980 - 1982 when I was stationed at Keetmanshoop and took part in the Raptor Road Counts which we did then. I once saw a bird that looked like a cross between a Jackal Buzzard and an Augur Buzzard (Jackal Buzzard body plus pale wings), but was unable to photograph it.

I was very pleased to see that the Jackal Buzzards seem to be holding their own down in the south western corner of Namibia.

Botswana raptors

Neil Thomson

On 06/12/2008 we drove from Windhoek across Botswana to South Africa to attend a ringing workshop at Wakkerstroom and returned again on 14/12/2008. Having done a raptor road count from Windhoek to Buitepos, we continued counting raptors across Botswana to help pass the time on that long haul and did the same on the return journey.

We left Windhoek in the dark and saw our first raptor some 67 km into the journey just before sunrise. Over the next 251 km from this point to Buitepos we counted 37 raptors, a density of one bird per 6,78 km. From Buitepos/Mamuno to Kang in central Botswana the count was 37 birds over 382 km, a density of one bird per 10,91 km and from Kang to Pioneer gate on the South African border we counted 31 birds at a density of one raptor per 12,96 km over a distance of 402 km.

On the return journey from Ramatlabama Border Post to Kang 76 birds were seen over a distance of 435 km (one per 5,72 km). From Kang to Mamuno/Buitepos from late morning and early afternoon the count was only 19 birds at a density of one per 20,11 km while over the 250 km from Buitepos until rain made counting impossible we saw 27 raptors at a density of one per 9,25 km.

Experience suggests that one sees more raptors along the roads in the early morning than in the heat of the day and this is certainly evident in the above. Although we saw a number of Milvus Kites they were not in large flocks which might have skewed the count. Distance from the road and light conditions at times made identification difficult but we were able to positively identify eight species in Namibia and ten species in Botswana. It seems that those parts of both Botswana and eastern Namibia through which we travelled have healthy numbers of raptors which is in sharp contrast with the densities of approximately one bird per 130 km I observed in central northern Namibia in August 2008.

News from RSA

Robin and Robyn Teifel worked as conservation officers in the Namib-Naukluft Park and in Caprivi during the nineties. They are now settled near Port Alfred in the eastern Cape and sent this delightful photo of their son Kai with a Long-crested Eagle caught in a bal-chatri. Well done, Kai!



Photo: Robin Teifel

Satellite tracking of a Hobby Falcon

Mark Boorman

German raptor specialists B.-U. Meyburg and K. D. Fiuczynski have, apparently for the first time, used a 5 g solar satellite transmitter to track a female adult Hobby Falcon (*Falco subbuteo*) breeding in Germany, slightly northwest of Berlin, as far as Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. These little transmitters have not been on sale so far. No other birds have been tracked over a long distance, with the few experimental transmitters of this size, produced by Microwave Telemetry, Inc.

“The bird which had been trapped near the nest in August had reared young and continued to behave normally after deploying of the transmitter.

Before arriving in Zimbabwe, the bird spent long time in southern Angola.

There are very few ring recoveries of the species in Africa. Using this tiny transmitter is a pilot project. Now we are very anxious to see the bird come back to its breeding territory in spring.

For more info on our raptor tracking work please visit: www.Raptor-Research.de
Bernd Meyburg”



Photo: Hannes Holtzhausen

Restaurant in Skeleton Coast Park

With diamond miners, tour operators, hunters in the Unjab River, fishermen and staff slaughtering the fish at Terrace Bay, why not a restaurant at False Cape Fria? The area north of Terrace Bay is often touted as a Wilderness area, but with all the commercial activities taking place, this seems a bit difficult to justify.

Despite this, a well-used restaurant has been established at False Cape Fria. This restaurant has probably been there for years, but only in the last few years have the vultures been seen and photographed feeding on dead Cape fur seals at this colony.

During November 2008, Steffen Oesterle of Swakopmund saw eleven Lappet-faced Vultures feeding on seal carcasses at Cape Fria.

On 31 December 2008, Dr Hannes Holtzhausen again photographed Lappet-faced Vultures feeding on seal carcasses. He also mentions the many black-backed jackals and Pied Crows associated with this rich source of food.

So if you are in the vicinity, looking for diamonds or some other nefarious activity, drop in at the restaurant, keep a lookout for the vultures and send us some photos.

Update from NARREC

Liz Komen

For birds of prey 2009 has not brought relief from the weaponry used on farmlands for mammalian predator control. In the first week of the new year, NARREC (Namibia Animal Rehabilitation Research and Education Centre) received two large raptor species, a poisoned White-backed Vulture and a leg-hold trapped Tawny Eagle. Both were non-target victims of careless application of predator management techniques. The vulture arrived at NARREC paralyzed with extreme muscle cramps, symptoms of strychnine poisoning. However, this bird was fortunate enough to have been found by a concerned Namibian farmer and rushed directly to NARREC. After 48 hours of intensive treatment it recovered well. Then, after a further week of therapy and rest the bird was ringed and tagged for identification and released. The Tawny Eagle was however a lot less fortunate. A farmer had set a leg-hold trap (also known as a steel-jaw trap, foot-hold or gin-trap) to catch a leopard. A meat lure is used to attract animals to the trap or the trap is set along an animal trail. The Tawny Eagle was actually seen at the trap late in the afternoon but left until the following morning by which time, the sharp edges of its broken leg bones and the steel teeth of the trap had torn all the lateral tendons on its “knee” and severed all the veins and arteries of its trapped leg. Tawny Eagles are large birds of prey. They have the distinction of finding food by regularly scavenging or pirating prey from other eagles. They have rather small talons for an eagle and are no risk to any domestic livestock. It is the scavenging nature of the Tawny Eagles’ behaviour that leads them, as non-selected victims, into the jaws of the farmers’ weaponry. As scavengers, Tawny Eagles may be caught in badly placed leg-hold traps or become primary or secondary victims of poison-baited carcasses. In the latter half of the 1980s, Dr Chris Brown, then the ornithologist at the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, studied, with the use of radio telemetry, the Tawny Eagle population in the Khomas Hochland. Over the 5-year study period approximately 80% of the adult breeding eagles in the study group were killed through direct persecution or indirectly as non-target victims when farmers attempted to catch or poison mammalian predators. A quarter of a century later, these same non-selective techniques are killing ever diminishing large birds of prey populations. Various types of traps and poisons have been used for predator control on livestock farms for many decades. Poisoning, snaring and leg-hold trapping are globally of the most contentious ways of controlling predators. The ethics of these methods are criticised for their serious negative effects on non-targeted

mammals and birds, which occasionally includes dogs, cats, and endangered wildlife species. The methods are also criticised for the inherent cruelty as animals are usually badly maimed by the traps and often left to die slow and painful deaths. A scavenging bird looks for food by sight from above. A leopard uses its sense of smell. A trap of any sort or a poison-laced bait that is well hidden from aerial view will prevent birds from becoming non-target victims. Steel jaw-traps were first described in western sources in the late 16th century. Because of the cruelty aspects and the known large number of non-targeted animals caught, the American Veterinary Medical Association, the World Veterinary Association and the American Animal Hospital Association have declared leg-hold traps “inhumane”. The European Union banned the use of the “cruel and indiscriminate” steel-jaw leg-hold trap in 1995. Namibia has enacted statutes which forbid cruelty to animals. These anti-cruelty laws relate to all animals; however, when certain predator control techniques are applied on farmlands, cruelty is simply seen as a necessary practice. The traps are sold without warnings or instructions that could assist a farmer in minimizing the catching of non-target animals and of the cruelty aspects. Modified traps are manufactured to reduce potential animal injuries, but are not readily available in Namibia. But, like any other trap, they need to be intelligently placed for the target species and to be checked very regularly. Throughout the world domestic livestock and game farm animals may be at risk of predation. The question remains as to whether any non-selective or cruel and contentious methods of predator control have a place in modern farming.

GPS transmitters on African White-backed Vultures

Mark D. Anderson, Executive Director, BirdLife South Africa
BirdLife South Africa, in collaboration with the Hawk Conservancy Trust (UK), De Beers, NaturalWorld, Gauntley Birds of Prey and the EWT's Birds of Prey Working Group is currently involved with some exciting vulture tracking work at De Beers' Dronfield Game Farm.

Last October, four African White-backed Vultures were fitted with small GPS transmitters, and the coordinates of these birds are now obtained on a daily basis. Three of the four vultures (Acacia, Angus and Alpha) are not travelling around too widely, but one of the vultures (Amur) has spent time visiting various localities west and south of Kimberley.

We are hoping that they will soon go on serious "walkabouts", as have other Kimberley-fledged White-backed Vultures (monitored from their wing tags/colour rings and SAFRING rings). One bird was seen and photographed at Hoedspruit in the Lowveld a few months after fledging, only to return to Kimberley a short while later. Another young bird was poisoned just south of Etosha in Namibia.

The aim of our research, which will be ongoing for several years, will be to determine, amongst others, the foraging areas of Kimberley's 300-odd breeding pairs of White-backed Vultures.

The breeding sites are fairly well conserved (many are on

De Beers properties or on properties belonging to very conservation-minded farmers), but we hypothesise that the vultures run into problems when the visit sheep farming areas (poisons, gin traps, hazardous farm reservoirs, hazardous electricity pylons, etc.). Knowing where they forage will help to target farmer extension programmes.

Our aim is to fit GPS-units to adult White-backed Vultures, but for various reasons we only fitted the units to nestlings last year (including because after more than a week of capture effort, and three buffalo carcasses later, we still did not have a captured adult vulture). A walk-in-trap will probably be constructed on one of the De Beers' properties.

You can check the daily movements of the four vultures on the BirdLife South Africa website (www.birdlife.org.za).

I am very grateful to Kevin Ravno, from Natural World, for the excellent work he has done to create the maps and update the movements of these vultures. Many people and organizations contribute to the vulture research in the Kimberley area, but Andy Hinton, Ashley Smith and Campbell Murn (Hawk Conservancy Trust), Johan Kruger and Corne Anderson (De Beers), Angus Anthony, Tania Anderson and Beryl Wilson (McGregor Museum), Eddie McFarlane, Julius Koen (DTEC) and Andre Botha (BoPWG) deserve special mention.



Photo: Wilferd Versveld

White-headed vulture ringed by Wilferd Versveld in Etosha National Park in 2008

Tag sightings proving more successful than ring sightings

A number of vultures were seen in November on the farm Sphynxblick, western Namibia. Among them were:

Tag V004 Ring G26052 ringed by Holger Kolberg at Hotsas on 7-10-07, Tag V024 Ring G26044 ringed by Holger Kolberg at Hotsas on 6-10-07 and Tag V038 Ring G26061 ringed by Holger Kolberg at Tinkas on 8-10-07

Tag C032 was also seen. According to the “Colour Marking Protocol” the tag series C has been issued to someone in Limpopo Province, R of SA. This is a really neat re-sighting!!

Update on the breeding success of Black Harriers and good news on satellite tagging

Rob Simmons

Eastern Cape (Anne Williams) 2 nests successful and 1 failed at Fort D'Acres

Kidd's Beach pair seen twisting and turning over coastal area (Mike Coleman) no further activity

KZN (Malcom Rivett, Pat Lowry) no further activity from Mt Currie or Kokstad

Northern Cape (Simon Todd) Black Harriers "all over the Knersvlakte" - the Succulent Karoo in coastal regions.

(Colleen Rust) Black Harrier nest at Papkuilsfontein c/4 just hatched mid Nov, no birds at Oorlogs Kloof Reserve front entrance.

Thanks to all correspondents and to Brian van der Walt for continued monitoring and sightings from the Tankwa Karoo. I spent early November travelling up the west coast of South Africa to Namibia checking on the status of harrier nests.

Synopsis

Koeberg 3 nests ... one successful, plus c/5 and c/4) both subsequently hatched by December (late!)

Jakkalsfontein 2 nests still with eggs (1 female egg laying late Nov!)

Rondeberg (race course) 2 nests still active brood of 3 and a pair ready to lay

West Coast NP 5 nests still with eggs (c/1 to c/4) all very late. Motlanthe (sat-tagged male) still feeding two youngsters.

Northern Cape Papkuilsfontein - 1 nest c/4, Oorlogs 2 pairs about to lay, Lockenberg 1 pair with 3 young flying van Rhynsdorp pylons - 4 nests all with flying young Groen Rivier mouth - 1 nests c/4, since failed (Zanne McDonald)

Spoeg River – 1 nest brood of 3

Buffels River – 1 nest brood of 3

In all, the early birds were relatively successful (not shown here), middle of season catastrophic and many birds relaying very late.

If harriers have been successful you will see brown birds with shorter tails on the wing. This is a good guide to nest areas so please report any sightings to me.

Satellite Tagging

Motlanthe, the male harrier feeding two young in the West Coast NP is busy re-writing the text books.

He was photographed mid November by Mark Anderson, feeding his 2 youngsters, with his transmitter functioning well and looking good. In 7 days (11 Dec) he will have worn it for 2 months.

We had previously radio-tracked male harriers in Bontebok by sight to about 3 km and all tagged males had been seen at this (max) distance. Motlanthe was regularly seen 10 – 15 km from his nest!

As the kids got older he was tracked to 30 km, then 40 km and once (last week) to 50 km from his nest. These last two readings were poor accuracy so they need to be confirmed, but what we can say is that (i) he is slowly extending his foraging range (ii) he hunts mostly over natural vegetation

and (iii) he roosts well away from the children now!

A second bird – a female (yet to be named.... suggestions) was caught (on a trap made by Ann Koeslag) and tagged yesterday at Koeberg (aided by Cat and Julia Simmons).

She is already sending signals and last night was 160 metres from her nest at a usual roost site. If she is half as successful as Motlanthe, then she will have done a good job!

Please continue to send sightings in to me... the season isn't over yet. In turn I will try to keep you updated on happenings in the world of harriers.



A Bateleur and Secretarybird photographed in Etosha National Park during a trip with Australian tourists

Pieter Mostert

Kites follow the rain in Caprivi, Namibia

Ann & Mike Scott; ecoserve@iway.na

On 3/11/08 we did a raptor road count from Divundu – Kongola – Katima Mulilo, and then repeated it on our return on 9/11/08. The first rains started the day before the repeat count (on 8/11/08), and this was associated with very different numbers of kites along the Katima – Kongola section (see Table 1).

The birds are presumed to be Yellow-billed Kites as we did not notice any Black Kites; but we were not able to check every bird with binoculars. They appeared to be feeding on a variety of invertebrates including (dung) beetles, millipedes and especially termites, the latter being abundant after the rain. Many of the kites were circling over the tarred road, apparently foraging. We also noted at least two road kills of kites along the Katima - Kongola section.

In terms of habitat use, the Divundu - Kongola section is a protected area (now the Bwabwata National Park), whereas the Kongola - Katima section is more heavily populated, with habitat modifications including agriculture and forest clearing. It appears that the latter forms of land use have promoted the availability of food for the kites after rain.

Table 1: Raptor road counts of kites from Divundu to Katima, 3/11/08 & 9/11/08

Date	Number of kites		Kites / km
	Divundu- Kongola (195 km)		
3/11/08	9		0.05
9/11/08	10		0.05
	Kongola - Katima (100 km)		
3/11/08	4		0.04
9/11/08	190		1.73

News Flashes

► I have been doing fieldwork at Neudamm on average about 2 days per week. Every day I see large numbers of White-backed and Lappet-faced Vultures, particularly roosting on trees in the Seis River which I cross to reach my study site. I am convinced that they are breeding there.

Dave Joubert

- Unusual sightings - In Raptors Namibia No 1, Jan 2008, John and Martin Mendelsohn reported seeing several Honey Buzzards in the suburbs of Olympia and Klein Windhoek. In January 2009, Dr Thomas Falk recorded a Honey Buzzard flying over Windhoek West.
- On Osprey was seen near Rundu and another at the Windhoek Sewage Works by Vernon Swanepoel.
- Ian Oosthuysen is a lucky man. He has a Verreaux's Eagle breeding on his farm in the Gamsberg area and managed to photograph the juvenile.



Photo: Ian Oosthuysen

► Vultures in the Koigab - During the hyaena monitoring project, Ingrid Wiesel and Gino Noli, while flying to look for various collared hyaenas in the Koichab, found a Lappet-faced Vulture nest, attended by one adult with another one nearby. Ingrid says that there were egg(s) in the nest.

Jessica Kemper

Lappet-faced Vultures are known to have bred in this area, but very few people ever visit there

► Poisoned vulture- Gys Joubert on his farm Autabib, about 100 kms southeast of Windhoek, found a poisoned White-backed Vulture on 3 January 2009. He took the bird to Liz Komen at the Namibia Animal Rehabilitation, Research and Education Centre. After treatment and recovery, the bird was ringed, tagged and released on the

farm again. Thanks to Gys Joubert for his efforts to save the bird.

- During January, conservation officer Piet Burger found another poisoned White-backed Vulture on the farm Otjiwa near Otjiwarongo. The bird (ring G24006) could not be saved. It was then sent to the agriculture laboratory in Windhoek for toxicology tests, but the laboratory did not have the chemicals to do the test.
- On 5 December 2008, while revisiting Lappet-faced Vulture chicks to tag the ones too small earlier in the season, we found a chick (G23072) ringed on 18 October 2008, dead in the nest. From the wing measurements, the chick had grown considerably since it was ringed two months previously
- Herman Cloete saw nine Lappet-faced Vultures at Toskaan on NamibRand Nature Reserve, Namibia at the beginning of December 2008. They (the vultures, not Herman and his guests) were feeding at a carcass and three of the birds had patagial tags, but they (Herman and his guests) were too far to read the numbers.
- De Duine school, Walvis Bay, was fortunate enough recently to enroll three additional members, three baby kestrels. There were four but the one fell out of the nest, which is quite high.



Photo: Jonathan Wilsenach

Appeal to all Raptors Namibia readers

Students from the Polytechnic of Namibia, in conjunction with the NARREC, are busy with a survey of Rock Kestrels and other raptors breeding in urban areas. Many of these birds nest on buildings in our towns and cities. Due to ignorance, young birds are often frightened from the nests before they are ready to fly. They land in the street and if they are lucky, end up at NARREC. Some are kept in small cages or have their wings clipped. If you know of such a site, please contact:

Liz Komen at 061-264409, 081-129-0565, or email: liz@narrec.net

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