

Fundraising dinner a roaring success

The later it became, the louder grew the roar. Vultures are generally silent birds, except when excited. It appears that vulture supporters have inherited some of the same characteristics.



On Saturday evening, 1 August, more than 80 vulture supporters and party 'goers' gathered at a 'watering hole' at Alte Brücke Resort and Conference Centre in Swakopmund. The special occasion was the **Gala Dinner** to raise funds for **Vultures Namibia**.

The first fund-raising dinner, in 2008, was the brainchild of Susann Kinghorn. The success of that evening was due to the music provided by Trio Feminale, the excellent dinner prepared by Albi, Christine and staff of Alte Brücke and vulture friends from near and far. Under the pretext of fund-raising, some party-animals decided it was time for another bash and so the clans gathered again in 2009.

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Thanks to Sandra Dantu, Mark Boorman, and Elinor and Marc Dürr for organising the very successful party and even transport so as not to fall foul of traffic officers. Was it the rumour that the music would be by 'George in a G-string' (the mind boggles) that attracted curious vultures (I mean friends)? Thanks to George and Amanda for the music and getting the people on the dance floor. It was good to meet old friends and make new ones.



Several people from near and far did not attend, but made generous donations. Many thanks to all of them and the friends that gathered at the waterhole in support of **Vultures Namibia**. See you at the next bash.



Brown Hyaena surprised by Cape Fur Seal 5/7/2009

Observer: Dana Allen

The brown hyaena - sometimes known by its Afrikaans name of 'strandwolf', or beach wolf - is a specialised scavenger and carnivore of the most arid areas of south western Africa. This shaggy and mysterious creature does not occur anywhere else on earth and its haunts are the semi-desert climes of the Karoo, the Kalahari and even the hyper-arid Namib Desert. This specialised habitat and its nocturnal wanderings make this elusive creature highly sought after by travellers to southern Africa with Namibia an excellent place to try and track it down.

On a recent trip to the Skeleton Coast we were extremely lucky to have no fewer than five sightings of this animal! The most exciting sighting occurred after an extremely early morning departure from Skeleton Coast Camp to get to the Cape Frio seal colony about 80km to the north-west. These seal colonies are a vital source of protein for the brown hyaenas that dwell in this most inhospitable part of the desert and draw hyaenas from many kilometres around (some great work has been done around Luderitz on this subject in a project partly funded by the Wilderness Trust. See further details here). We hoped that by getting to the colony early we'd catch the last of the nocturnal foragers in the early morning light and manage to get a couple of photographs.

Sure enough as we approached the colony at sunrise we were ecstatic to spot a very shaggy individual sloping his way towards the outskirts of the colony in that way so characteristic of the species. We soon noticed that it was headed straight towards a dead seal pup lying isolated from the colony. Mortality rates of the pups in the crowded colonies are high and this ensures a good source of food for the hyaenas.

As the hyaena lowered his jaws to the seal pup, he suddenly reared backwards as the supposedly lifeless seal bared its own formidable set of teeth and sent the would-be predator packing! This gave us a fantastic photo opportunity and an insight into the interaction between these two species that live 'cheek by jowl' on the Skeleton Coast.

The colony of course hosted plenty of black-backed jackals, another specialised desert carnivore, and unusually a sub-adult Lappet-faced Vulture. This last sighting was unexpected and especially interesting given that we are unable to find any reference to seal-scavenging records in this species. (Wilderness Safaris copyright ©2009)



Our thanks to Wilderness Safaris for letting us use this interesting article, which with many more and other news, can be found on <http://www.wilderness-safaris.com/news/>

Dana Allen took all these photographs.

Raptors in Botswana

Hugo Haussmann,

Reporting from a cold Otjiwarongo on a recent trip to Botswana Birding has once again been rewarding. If anyone wants to see White-backed Vultures in their hundreds if not thousands, visit the Boteti River in the Makgadikgadi National Park. They are sitting everywhere, even next to the road and at the artificial waterholes. You may spot Lappet-faced Vultures as well. Next to the road, we were lucky to spot a pair of Lanner Falcons on a dead camel thorn tree (bull elephants seem to be destroying many of the large trees). On the plains, you will definitely spot Greater Kestrel. Just before we left the Park, we were lucky to spot a nest with breeding Bateleurs.



Photos: Hugo Haussmann

The most rewarding experience was at Baines No 3 Campsite, Nxai Pan National Park. A breeding pair of Martial Eagles began a nest on top of the huge Baobab tree. On the photo, you can see, on the far right, the nest of a buffalo weaver and left of it, the start of the eagles' nest. The male was very tame and not disturbed by us at all, but we never managed to photograph the female. On the morning we left, I saw the Martial Eagles mating on top of a Baobab. I am a bit worried about the nest being so close to a public



Photo: Hugo Haussmann

campsite. This might be an opportunity to ring a chick (I wonder if you would find such a long ladder in Bots!).

And last, but not least, see my photo of the vultures I took in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. White Headed Vultures are quite rare to spot. In the background, you can even see a Red-crested Korhaan. The vultures were together with a dozen or so White-backed Vultures. Nearby, we later spotted a cheetah, but never saw the kill in the high grass.

(The detailed report has been sent to BirdLife Botswana.)



Vultures on NamibRand Nature Reserve

Florian Weise,

Head Researcher N/a'ku sê Wildlife Sanctuary

The reserve's ranger Corris and I recently observed two adult Lappet-faced Vultures repairing an old nest in a camel thorn near Straussenwasser on NamibRand Nature Reserve. The nest is clearly visible from the sand road, but I have not since observed birds perching on it.

In June, Corris and I investigated an oryx kill that a leopard had made and found a group of 52 Lappet-faced Vultures around it.

Yesterday I had to euthanase an oryx female and put her out on one of NamibRand's vulture restaurants. When I came back in the afternoon (16:34), I found 47 Lappet-faced vultures at the carcass. I observed an adult with a yellow wing tag on the right shoulder but was too far away to record the code.

Today, I checked the carcass again in the afternoon (16:02) finding 40 vultures feeding on it.

I observed a bird with a yellow wing tag and another adult, which appeared to have a white wing tag on the right shoulder. I had to remain at a distance of approx. 500m using high magnification stargazing binoculars and could not read the codes in the commotion around the carcass. In total, I recorded 50 Lappet-faced vultures in the wider area around the kill.

News Flashes

► Etosha is nice and cool, frost in the area but not at Okaukuejo. The Lappet-faced Vultures are on nests, of which I've found most of the central area's birds and some Tawny Eagle nests. One Tawny is using the same tree a White-backed Vulture used 2 years ago. *Wilferd Versfeld*

► On 31/07/09, my wife and I were travelling from Walvis Bay to Gobabeb. Close to Klipneus, we found a dead vulture next to the road. We stopped and had a look at it and found two yellow and one green ring on the one foot and a yellow and silver ring on the other foot. The number on the silver ring was G24005



Jürgen Böhmcker

Subsequently this bird was reported by Anne Sophie and then by Gareth Boothway of the Gobabeb Research Station. During the bad east winds in September Ernst Ritter reported a White-backed Vulture on the beach at Sandwich Harbour. Did this bird in an attempt to get inland die of starvation on the way?



► A while back, I found an African Fish-Eagle caught in a snare. The bird unfortunately flew away with the noose, got entangled in a tree and strangled. *Danny Bartlett*

► On 17 June, while working in the Langer Heinrich area, I saw three Lappet-faced Vultures and one on 21 June. They were to far away to identify either rings or tags. There were also a few Rock Kestrels. *Lothar Menge*

► On 28 June 2008, an out-of-range Cuckoo Hawk was recorded at the Hoarusib River, on Skeleton Coast in Namibia by *Courtney Johnson of Wilderness Safaris.*

► On 03-July-2009, at about 16:00 hours, while driving from Walvis Bay to Windhoek on the Gamsberg Pass road, I saw an aggregation of thirty-eight Lappet-faced Vultures. This was close to the main gravel road at the base of the Gamsberg Pass, near the Chausib watercourse crossing. They were in the company of five White-backed Vultures and two Tawny Eagles. About half the birds were circling, and the other half were sitting loosely on the ground, where one Lappet-faced Vulture was feeding on, and defending, the head of an apparently freshly dead gemsbok. No other body parts or carcasses could be seen although these could have been hidden within the rolling terrain. *Jon Barnes*



Vultures and jackals posing in the Namib Desert for Anne Sophie



Who am I?

Our mystery bird caused quite a stir. We received several mails about it. Thanks to all who answered and sent suggestions. Several raptorphiles agreed that it was a See next month's newsletter for the answer. Just joking, I don't want to get beaten up by irate readers. It was a Tawny Eagle!

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