



In this issue:

- 1 More vultures illegally poisonedLiz Komen
- 2 Wind farms 'displace' rare birds.....BBC
- 2 Farmers & sponsors to the rescuePeter Bridgeford
- 3 News flashes
- 4 Kavango raptorsNeil Thomson
- 4 Who am I?
- 5 Vultures and eggsPeter Bridgeford
- 5 Maori legend of man-eating bird..... Paul Rodgers
- 6 Satellite tagged Black Harriers, filming and feathersRob Simmons
- 6 Aerial survey of Lappet-faced Vultures ..Peter Bridgeford
- 7 Roost sign for kestrel and falcon conservation
- 8 A study on urban Rock KestrelRauna Gebhard
- 8 Vets help vulture seeNews 24

They were all Lappet-faced Vultures, the largest vulture species in Africa. This latest poison event comes just a couple of weeks after a fundraising dinner, organised by Vultures Namibia, raised N\$8 000 to assist in the conservation of this species.

During a brief search around the site a partially consumed carcass of a black-backed jackal, only 10 metres from the nearest dead vulture, was picked up. This carcass was reasonably well hidden in the dense grass on the side of the road and signs of struggle seen on the gravel road were probably from the poisoned and dying birds as they attempted to fly away.

It is not difficult to piece together the scenario leading up to this poisoning incident. A farmer probably had a predator problem or an attempt at predation or simply had heard jackals calling at night. This time of the year, jackals are very vocal.

The farmer had poison stored or obtained it from a neighbour. The farmer set out the bait with a large amount of poison in it. Probably no attempt was made to determine if the bait was consumed, nor any effort to follow the victim, in this case a jackal.

The jackal must have consumed a lot of poison to be able to kill so many large vultures. These birds died from secondary poisoning, without even being able to fly away from the poisoning scene.

Vultures use air currents and thermals to rise and search for carcasses on the ground. Thermals only develop once the ground has been warmed by the sun, which means that the vultures only start their search for food by mid-morning.

They depend entirely on carrion for food and are in fact very useful to farmers because of their ability to find carcasses and thus alert farmers to livestock deaths. They also clean the veld of rotting meat, thereby limiting fly development and the spread of disease.

Interestingly, only one report of the dying and later dead birds was received. Yet during the time that the Ministry officials and Narrec were on the road searching for possible poison survivors, at least six cars passed the site.

During the hours between the initial report and the removal of the carcasses, it is quite possible that 20 to 30 cars passed these large birds lying on the edge of the road.

The use of poison as a livestock management tool has been discussed within the agricultural, veterinary and environmental fields for decades.



Poisoned vulture

Photo: Liz Komen

More vultures illegally poisoned

Liz Komen

Vulture conservation in Namibia is hampered by ongoing poisoning events. On Friday August 14 a tourist reported seeing a number of vultures that seemed to be unable to fly on the Wilhelmstal–Omaruru Road.

By the time that Ministry of Environment and Tourism officials and Liz Komen of Narrec arrived at the scene, only dead birds were found.

Farmers have been asked not to use poison as it is an indiscriminate tool that cannot accurately target the actual livestock predator. Farmers who use poison tend to have ongoing issues with predators, as they continuously remove resident territorial animals and open the land to roving individuals.

Farmers have been asked not to use poison, and in fact poison use is illegal. Moreover if there is understanding of poisonous chemicals and of the mechanism of food chains, then only micrograms of a chemical would be used to avoid secondary poisoning of non-target species.

Co-operation is the key to the future survival of large birds of prey.

Wind farms 'displace' rare birds

Hen harriers are among species researchers believe affected
BBC NEWS

Some of Scotland's rarest birds are being displaced by wind turbine developments, a study has suggested.

Hen harriers and golden plovers were among the birds found to be breeding in fewer numbers close to wind farm sites. RSPB Scotland, which part-funded the study, said the findings showed turbines should not be sited near vulnerable bird populations. The research, newly published in the *Journal of Applied Ecology*, looked at 12 upland wind energy sites in the UK. The distribution of birds across each wind farm was compared with that on similar nearby sites without turbines. Seven species - buzzard, hen harrier, golden plover, snipe, curlew, wheatear and meadow pipit - were found less frequently than would be expected close to the turbines. RSPB Scotland said breeding densities of these species were reduced by between 15% and 53%, within 500m of the turbines. SNH welcome the publication of this important paper
Andy Douse, Scottish Natural Heritage

However, lead author James Pearce-Higgins, senior conservation scientist with RSPB Scotland, said the displacing of species could extend as far as 800m. He said, "There is an urgent need to combat climate change, and renewable energy sources, such as wind farms, will play an important part in this." However, it is also important to understand fully the consequences of such development, to ensure that they are properly planned and sited. "That is why we conducted this research which to our knowledge is the first multi-site assessment of the effect of wind farms on a wide range of upland bird species." Andy Douse, ornithological policy and advice manager with Scottish Natural Heritage, said it was an outstanding piece of research. He said, "SNH welcome the publication of this important paper, it provides us with unequivocal evidence of both the nature and scale of bird displacement at operational wind farms". It will allow us to make better, more informed assessments of proposed wind farms in future and so reduce some of the uncertainty that has existed about potential impacts." The research was funded by RSPB Scotland, the Scottish government, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Mountaineering Trust.

Farmers and Sponsors to the rescue

Peter Bridgeford

Although many vultures are found in conservation areas in Namibia, the majority are found on commercial and communal farms. They feed on dead domestic stock and game and are regularly seen floating across the blue skies of our country. Because most of the poisoning and persecution of vultures and other raptors takes place on private property, it was decided to work on farms to make people aware of vultures.

The vulture-ringing project on farms started in 2003. This was a sequel of Dirk Heinrich's talk and demonstration of bird ringing at a Black Nossob Conservancy meeting. As a result, he was invited to ring vultures on two farms in the Hochfeld/Steinhausen area. In September 2003, Dirk and I set out to the farm Kataneno of Heiko and Carene Binding. After successfully ringing several White-backed Vultures, we moved to Okatjosenjiva of the von Hacht family. Here we ringed several more WBV and the whole family joined in to see the crazy vulture people. Then on to the farm Erdwolf of Wolfi and Anke Zimmer. We talked vultures, climbed ladders, ringed vultures, talked vultures, climbed ladders and handed out posters and booklets about vultures and raptors. Not only to the farmers, but their wives and children and often their hunting guests and farm workers. Everywhere we went, we were welcomed in traditional Namibian hospitality. We made new friends and people became aware of vultures, the threats they faced and their importance.

We went back every year, visiting some of the same farms, but expanding the project to involve other farmers. Only in 2008 did we not manage to do any ringing and that was due to logistical and financial constraints. Dirk could not go every year and Holger Kolberg joined the team. The year 2006 found us ringing on two farms in the Kalahari with Anne and Mike Scott. In 2009, with the help of several other bird ringers, we ringed and tagged vultures on ten farms.

We have had tremendous support from farmers and their families. In September 2009, while ringing on Okatjosenjiva, the chairman of the The Black Nossob Conservancy, Achim von Hacht, donated funds to assist the Vultures Namibia team. In addition, they accommodated the ringers and fed them like kings. Thanks to Fritz, Dora, Gitte and Achim.

The next stop was to visit our friend Hermann Cloete working somewhere on a farm near Mount Etjo. We had heard there were vultures on the farm. On a hot summer's afternoon, we found ourselves on the farm Ovikere 105 of Dirk and Stienie Mudge. Anyone who knows anything about the history and politics of Namibia will know who they are.



Achim von Hacht making a donation to Vultures Namibia

Photo: Holger Kolberg

Continued on page 3

We were welcomed and after explaining what we were doing, set of to ring vultures on Ovikere and the neighbouring farm Gross Ozumbu. When Holger and I left the next day, we were presented with a donation to Vultures Namibia. Thank you Dirk, Stienie and Hermann.



Photo: Holger Kolberg

Dirk Mudge, Herman Cloete, Stienie Mudge and Peter Bridgeford on farm Ovikere

On the farm Springbokvallei, a donation of a different kind was made. When Dirk arrived there, Jürgen Bergmann used his helicopter to fly around the game farm to find the nests of breeding vultures. This is the second year that Jürgen has taken time and trouble to help the vulture ringers. Jürgen, may you only have safe landings.

One of the keen supporters of the ringing project is Wolfi Zimmer on the farm Erdwolf. He knows were all the breeding vultures are long before we arrive on his farm. He not only personally accompanies the ringers, but also helps to carry the heavy ladder. When Dirk left, he was presented with a cash donation to assist the ringing project. Thanks Wolfi.

On Saturday 19 September, several ringers and vulture supporters met at Aris, south of Windhoek. We proceeded to the farm Aris, under the command of Hanjo Böhme. Here the trees are much higher than in the Namib and to reach the nests of the WBV's, a long ladder is needed. Well, we had just the right ladder for the job, thanks to Francois Retief of Retief Sales Promotions in Windhoek. It was a monster in three sections and when fully extended, reached 16 metres! Now we have to find someone brave (or foolhardy) enough to reach new heights. After ringing several WBV, we ended the session in a traditional way. Braaivleis, boerewors and beer. Francois, many thanks for this very useful and sturdy piece of equipment. Hanjo, thanks for facilitating the donation and support of this and other conservation projects.



Photo: Claire Kolberg

Francois Retief with a White-backed vulture chicken

Other supporters of the vulture project were Klaus and Annemarie Lakemeier of the farms Hantam and Ondekaremba Süd. Klaus and two of his workers accompanied us for a whole day. Fortunately, they did, or we would still be lost on the well-wooded farms and many tracks. The assis-



Photo: Peter Bridgeford

Klaus Lakemeier, the Nambura brothers and Holger Kolberg weighing a vulture chicken

tance of the Nambura brothers was appreciated, as they are the people who work in the veld and are likely to find dead vultures. Thanks for providing accommodation and meals and off course, ice-cold beer.

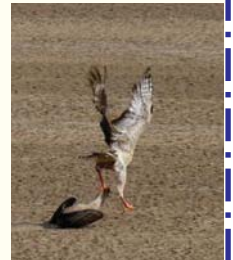
Holger also went east to Friedrich Nauhaus' farm Nabatsaub to spread the gospel. Here he ringed four WBV in the company of several friends and farm workers. Thanks to Friedrich who went all the way to Swakopmund to attend the fundraising Vulture Gala Dinner. See you there next year, Friedrich.

Just before going to press, Holger reports he went to Bernd von Freyer's farm Haris and found a small Lappet-faced Vulture. He will return later to ring and tag. Dirk has been to Ganaib, bordering Wiese, to ring two Lappets with Nadia Sternagel and to a farm next to the international airport outside Windhoek. Here he found WBV's breeding close to airport, in the flight path of the big commercial aircraft like Boeings, Airbus and Piper Cubs etc.

Many other people assist Vultures Namibia in promoting vulture conservation and awareness. As in so many similar projects, there are people working quietly behind the scenes without fanfare or recognition. A special word of thanks to them.

News Flashes

- ▶ A few weeks ago I took this photo of a juvenile Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk. I am not sure if it actually killed the cormorant, but it was definitely busy eating it when I arrived and tried to take off with it when I got too close.Naude Dreyer
- ▶ On 14 September Vion van Rooyen and I saw 47 Lappet-faced Vultures congregated under and around a Camelthorn tree which had a lone vulture sitting on it. Unfortunately, we were too far to check for tags.Barry Lewis
- ▶ I observed 47 Lappet-faced vultures at the Saffier waterhole on Aandstêr. We had to euthanase an oryx this morning that was caught and badly injured in the border fence with Saffier. I put the carcass out at the vulture restaurant. Only one of the adult birds was tagged and there were 13 sub-adults in the group. I also recently discovered a single nesting site of the vultures near Straussenwasser and had observed 52 Lappet-faced there one day at an oryx killFlorian Weise
- ▶ Early on Sunday morning 30/08/2009, on a farm between Kalkrand and Hoachanas, Namibia, I went for a walk and saw vultures wherever I looked. In the vicinity of a cattle carcass, I counted 270 White-backed and 6 Lappet-faced Vultures. There were probably more hidden from view. I've never seen so many in one place beforeWessel Swanepoel



Continued on page 4

- ▶ On 28/9/09 Jakobus Kooper and Corris Kaapehi found two dead adult White-backed Vultures that had apparently drowned in the Prosopis reservoir on NamibRand Nature Reserve (sadly, in prime condition; neither was ringed/tagged). We suspect that these birds could have been poisoned, as it is well-known that excessive thirst is often associated with poisoning.
.....*Ann Scott*
- ▶ During September/October I 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.*Pieter Mostert*
- ▶ On 03/09/2009, on the farm Onanis, at the waterpoint next to the Namib-Naukluft Park boundary we saw 15 Lappet-faced Vultures and 13 White-backed Vultures, but did not see any tags on birds. Of interest is that Gembokwasser had no water and the pumping installation was missing. The waterpoint on Onanis will probably attract more vultures due to this. On 04/09/2009 at Hotsas we spotted tag no. F045 (on a Lappet-faced Vulture) in addition to 17 Lappet-faced Vultures and 1 White-backed Vulture. The tagged bird was ringed by Günter Waetzoldt at Kriesrus in the same Park on 07/10/2007. Elapsed time 698 days and the bird moved 38 km. We read the tag at a distance of 150m and then again at +300m. With a good scope and some patience it certainly is rewarding to check for tagged birds.
.....*Marc Dürr*

Eagle, Bateleur and Shikra over the next couple of days. On the Friday we visited the Mahango Game Reserve and shortly before the gate saw a flock of about 40 White-backed Vultures accompanied by a couple of Lappet-faced Vultures spiraling up over the road. Once inside the park raptors were scarce. We saw another four White-backed Vultures, African Fish-eagles and had further sightings of Bateleur including juvenile birds. We left the river and headed for the Singwerengwere waterhole in the dry side of the park where I had seen a lot of bird activity on previous visits. On arrival there, the place appeared to be deserted but closer inspection revealed a number of starlings, weavers etc. sitting very quietly in the bushes on the far side of the water. The reason for this became apparent when we saw the Lanner Falcon eyeing them from the top of a nearby tall tree. Saturday was set aside for a visit to the Buffalo Core Area on the eastern side of the river. Here again raptors were by no means plentiful. We had sightings of African Fish-eagle, Bateleur and a probable Brown Snake-eagle in the far distance before we came across an African Harrier-hawk on the floodplain close to the track. What was surprising about this bird was that its facial skin was a pinkish colour, as one would expect in a displaying bird rather than the usual yellow. The bird stayed on the ground for a few minutes while we watched before flying off into nearby trees and the facial skin then returned to the normal yellow colour. I can only imagine that it was somewhat stressed by being in the open with our vehicle in close proximity hence the pink facial skin. On leaving the park, we had an excellent sighting of a juvenile White-headed Vulture circling low over the road. On the return trip on the Sunday, we saw a Dark Chanting Goshawk, a Bateleur and four unidentified small raptors between Divundu and Mururani. From Mururani to Windhoek our count was very low with only 11 raptors seen (six Black-shouldered Kites, 1 Bateleur, 1 Brown Snake-eagle and 3 Southern Pale Chanting Goshawks). Later in the year, we would no doubt have seen far more raptors in the Kavango Region when migratory species are present and we were not lucky enough to see any of the specials of this region such as Dickinson's Kestrel, Ayres's Hawk-eagle or Western-banded Snake-eagle. One raptor I was surprised we did not see however was African Marsh-harrier. To me the Kavango region is a magic birding destination (160 species recorded on this trip) and in spite of the low raptor numbers present this time, our visit was well worthwhile the effort to get there.

KAVANGO RAPTORS

Neil Thomson, batqs@mweb.com.na

Having decided to take two days leave and incorporate Heroes' Day into a five-day break we headed for the Kavango Region. We raptor road counted our way up to the Mururani Veterinary Control Point seeing a total of 27 raptors (15 Black-shouldered Kites, 1 Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk, 1Tawny Eagle, 1 Bateleur and 9 unidentified birds) along the way. Shortly beyond Mururani, we were very surprised to see a solitary Black Kite. We thought that late August was very early in the season for this migratory species to be present in Namibia. From there to Shamvura Camp, we saw only one more small, unidentified raptor and even at Shamvura, we only heard African Fish-eagle calling without seeing it. The following day we had a good sighting of a Dark Chanting Goshawk between Shamvura and Divundu while Ngepi Camp and the immediate vicinity produced sightings of African Fish-eagle, Martial



**WHO
AM I?**

This picture was taken at Klein Namutoni, Etosha National Park, Namibia by David Serrano

Vultures and eggs

P Bridgeford

When ringing Lappet-faced Vultures in the Namib, several questions are often asked.

The vulture bible, *The Vultures of Africa* by Mundy, Butchart, Ledger and Piper, has this to say:

“All species lay one egg only, except for the Egyptian and bearded Vultures, which lay two eggs.

All species that have been closely studied at the nest have been found to lay replacement eggs for earlier losses.

We would expect all species to be capable of laying replacements, providing that the first-laid egg was lost early enough in the breeding season. It is unlikely that any of the vultures is able to lay a replacement egg after the loss of a nestling or even a hatchling.

Two-egg clutches have been recorded in several species. Several two-egg clutches have been recorded for Lappet-faced Vultures in the Namib. The problem with two-egg clutches is, of course, to determine whether they have been laid by the same, or by two different females. In captivity, two eggs have been laid by Cape Griffons and Lappet-faced Vultures and so the possibility certainly exists that one female could lay two eggs in the wild.



Photo: Peter Bridgeford

First publication of this photo of two Lappet-faced Vulture chicks found in one nest.

In all species that have been well studied, both parents incubate the egg, with a 24-hour or often longer incubation stint.

In all species, both parents brood their nestling when it is small. They guard it when it is larger and both feed their youngster.”

(With over 700 breeding records for Lappet-faced Vultures in the Namib, several two-egg clutches were found. However, only ONE nest was found with two chicks in it. This was in the Tsondeb River in 1991 in a 15 m *Acacia erioloba*. Both chicks were ringed by Jacques Erasmus and seen later on two occasions sitting in the nest. Although colour ringed, these two birds have not been seen since then. We don't know if the eggs were from the same or different females.)

Maori legend of man-eating bird

Creature that features in New Zealand folklore really existed, scientists say

By Paul Rodgers

A Maori legend about a giant, man-eating bird has been confirmed by scientists. Te Hokioi was a huge black-and-white predator with a red crest and yellow-green tinged wingtips, in an account given to Sir George Gray, an early governor of New Zealand. It was said to be named after its cry and to have "raced the hawk to the heavens". Scientists now think the stories handed down by word of mouth and depicted in rock drawings refer to Haast's Eagle, a raptor that became extinct just 500 years ago. From: *The Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology*.

Haast's Eagle (*Harpagornis moorei*) was discovered in swamp deposits by Sir Julius von Haast in the 1870s. But it was at first thought to be a scavenger because its bill was similar to a vulture's, with hoods over its nostrils to stop flesh blocking its air passages as it roved around inside carcasses. But a re-examination of skeletons using modern technology, including CAT scans, by researchers at Canterbury Museum in Christchurch and the University of New South Wales in Australia, showed it had a strong enough pelvis to support a killing blow as it dived at speeds of up to 80kph.

With a wingspan of up to three metres and weighing 18kg, the female was twice as big as the largest living eagle, the Steller's Sea Eagle. And the bird's talons were as big as a tiger's claws. "It was certainly capable of swooping down and taking a child," said Paul Scofield, the curator of vertebrate zoology at the Canterbury Museum. "They had the ability to not only strike with their talons but to close the talons and put them through quite solid objects such as a pelvis. It was designed as a killing machine."

Its main prey would have been moa, flightless birds which grew to as much as 250kg and 2.5 metres tall. "In some fossil sites, moa bones have been found with signs of eagle predation," Dr Scofield said.

New Zealand has no native land mammals because it became isolated from other continents in the Cretaceous, more than 65 million years ago. As a result, birds filled niches usually populated by large mammals such as deer and cattle. "Haast's Eagle wasn't just the equivalent of a giant predatory bird," said Dr Scofield. "It was the equivalent of a lion." The eagle is thought to have died out after the arrival, 1,000 years ago, of humans, who exterminated the giant moa. The latest study shows it was a recent immigrant to the islands, related to the Little Eagle (*Aquila morphnoides*) an Australian bird weighing less than 1kg.

Remains of Haast's Eagles are rare because there never were many. They lived only on New Zealand's South Island, with probably not more than 1,000 breeding pairs at any one time.

This interesting article was sent in by Hannes Holtzhausen

Satellite tagged Black Harriers, filming and feathers

Rob Simmons

The two satellite tagged birds - Motlanthe (from West Coast NP) and Charlize (Koeberg) gave excellent data over 8 and 6 month periods.

Motlanthe foraged long distances while rearing chicks and was found at; least 30 km from his nest (towards Hopefield - where new breeding areas have been uncovered). He wintered in the Hopefield area before heading back to the Langebaan. There something strange happened - and he shot off to the Berg River about 90 km and died! I spent a long time trying to find him and his transmitter to determine the cause of death. I used students (first try - no success), police tracker dogs (second try- no success) and then joining the last 4 locations and then searched every damn restio at the intersection for about 2 h in an ever increasing circle and found his remains under a tree (not many of those) and his ring and transmitter intact. He had clearly been eaten by a mammal and the only curious thing was the lack of any tail feathers in the remains.

The female Charlize similarly died once back in her previous breeding area (Koeberg) just as early territories would be sorted out and I wonder if early competition over nest sites may have led to both birds' demise. This is period in their lives we know little about.

A newly tagged bird is now giving data from the Niewouldtville plateau, just east of Oorlogskloof. Called Lockie, (from the farm Lockenburg, owned by Mr and Mrs Locke) she is a big female rearing a single chick. All seems to be well after 6 days carrying the tag and she is, as expected, operating around her nest. I am hoping to get one more tag on a male in the same region to determine what these northern Cape birds do post-breeding.



Black Harriers

Photo: Rob Simmons

The Homebrew team (the ones who recently showed the Shorelines series on SABC) is doing a second series on threatened species in South Africa and top of their list was the Black Harrier. The team followed me to Niewouldtville to film the capture of the Lockie female above (which took rather longer than we wanted!) and then to the West Coast where they filmed birds at the nest with a small fish eye lens at the nest. On the farm Rondeberg we were lucky enough to find one nest with two day-old chicks and got footage of the female ripping up prey and delicately feeding it to her young. A surprise was that she was metal-ringed and we hope the high definition film will reveal the number and her identity and age. At the second nest we got rare footage of a male at the nest protecting the eggs and shading them from the sun. All in all a productive 3 days work. The film is likely to be released overseas but I may get a copy to show other harrier fans at a later stage.

A new study is shortly to begin using the Black Harrier as model - collecting and analysing feathers to determine the genetics of a small population.

We need moulted feathers please from all of you watching over nests. The females drop their first secondaries early in incubation and they can often be found around favoured perch areas. Please collect and attach some Scotch tape to the stem giving (i) date, (ii) place and (iii) your name. Please send them to me!

Good hunting and please continue to send in your observations. Many thanks

Aerial survey of breeding Lappet-faced Vultures

Peter Bridgeford

On Monday morning, 28 September 2009, a number of people descended on Ganab in the Namib-Naukluft Park. Two literally descended from the sky in a Cessna 182 and landed on Ganab international airport. They were pilot Rob Field, previously from Zebra River Lodge and now resident in South Africa and passenger William Turner from a little further north (somewhere near a small town called London, England). To welcome them were Joe and Gisela Noci and Hartmut Kolb from Swakopmund and I from Walvis Bay. Holger Kolberg, from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, arrived later the morning from Windhoek.

Rob had already piloted the plane on five previous aerial surveys and Hartmut was into his third. Both Gisela and Joe flew last year, so they were soon off on the first flight of the day. On Tuesday, we had some technical problems and Rob had to fly back to Windhoek to have the fault seen to. He was back after lunch and we continued the survey with a long stint to make up for lost time. On Wednesday morning we completed the Ganab area and after refuelling the plane, left for Saagberg and Tsondabvlei. Holger, Gisela and I drove the vehicles to Weltevrede Guest Farm, from where the rest of the survey took place. We all stopped at the metropolis of Solitaire to have something to eat and the

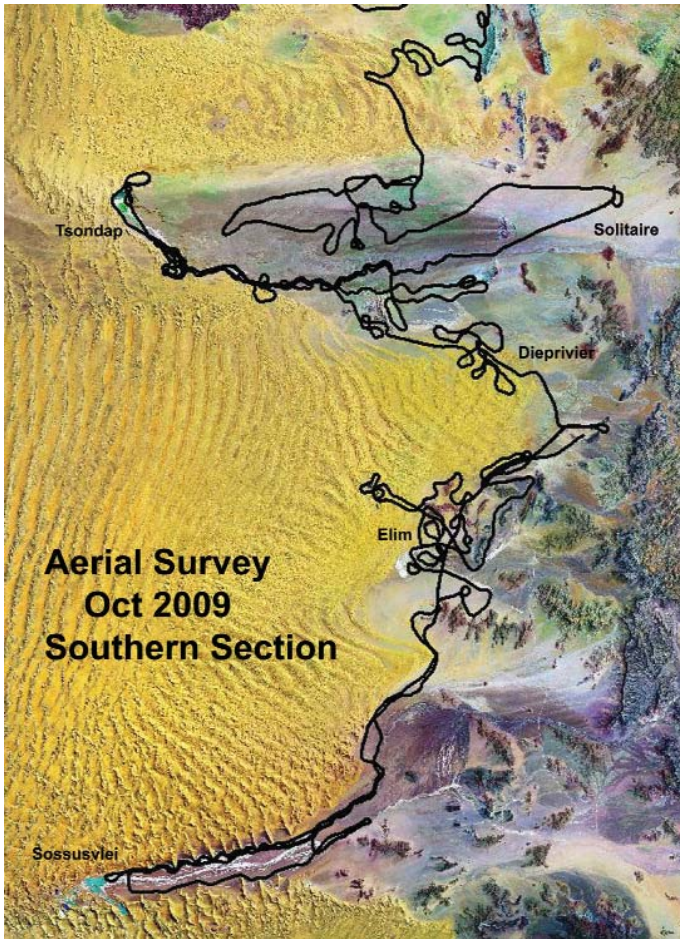


Photo: Gisela Noci



Photo: Gisela Noci

plane also landed to give the crew a chance to stretch their legs. Soon it was back to work and we next met the plane at Weltevrede. I flew the afternoon shift to Sossusvlei and because of the heat, the flight was uncomfortable. But at least we found two breeding birds in the Sossus area. We landed after six, refuelled and then moved to Die Valle in the Namib-Naukluft Park. We camped there, relaxed, and celebrated another accident-free and successful survey with a friend, Johnny Walker, from Scotland.

Swakop Uranium, a mining company prospecting in the Namib-Naukluft Park, sponsored the aerial survey. The company paid for the plane hire, avgas and fuel for the vehicles used for ringing. Martin Spivey and Swakop Uranium are thanked for the assistance.

WestAir Wings Charters of Windhoek once again assisted, not only with avgas, but also with the logistics of obtaining the fuel. Thanks to Peter Keil for his help.

On Thursday morning, Rob left for Windhoek and the rest of the team started ringing in the Sossusvlei and Tsamsvlei areas. Thanks to all who helped with the aerial survey.



White-backed Vultures and a Cape Vulture feeding on a zebra carcass in the Mangetti Reserve, Namibia. This photo was taken by Andre Baumgarten and sent to us by Holger Kolberg

Remember to report all sightings of kestrels and falcons to Anthony van Zyl, Estern Cape Raptor Research Programme, Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology, Private Bag, Univeristy of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
 Email: anthony@kestreling.com
 Go to www.kestreling.com/ for more information and to download the roost sign shown below.

NATIONAL ROOST SITE FOR MIGRATING FALCONS
 Nasionale oornagplek vir migrerende valke

Conservation
 Hier is die oornagplek vir die bedreigde en skaars voorkomende, en baie belangrike, migrerende valke. Hierdie roostplek is 'n belangrike deel van die valke se lewens siklus en moet beskerm word.

Diet
 Hier is die valke se voedselbronne. Hierdie roostplek is 'n belangrike deel van die valke se lewens siklus en moet beskerm word.

WANNERS DE SAKKE
 Hier is die roostplek vir die valke. Hierdie roostplek is 'n belangrike deel van die valke se lewens siklus en moet beskerm word.



Photo: Mike LLOYD

Rock Kestrel on dune in vicinity of Sandwich Harbour, Namibia

A study of urban Rock Kestrels *Falco tinnuculus*

Rauna Gebhard

I did six months (January to June 2009) in-service training at NARREC (Namibia Animal Rehabilitation Research and Education Centre). During this period, NARREC received one adult and six nestling Rock Kestrels, originating from the city of Windhoek. The birds were nursed in hack aviaries for 14-25 days. The Rock Kestrels were released once they had fledged.

They were released by opening a window at the back of the rehabilitation aviaries. After their release, I observed the post-behavioural activities of rehabilitated kestrels.

I believe a lot of bird watchers have seen kestrels flying around, but have any of the following activities been observed?

In April 2009, I observed two kestrels sharing a piece of meat. One held the meat with its talons and the second kestrel arrived and they both fed on the same meat.

The amazing thing is that they were observed to be co-operative hunters. They sometimes attacked animals much larger than themselves. In March, five kestrels were observed perching at the horse stable. While the kestrels were perched, a scrub hare moved past close to the kestrels. This interested the kestrels, what a nice meal! One kestrel tried to capture the hare but did not succeed. Immediately all the five kestrels spaced themselves in a circle around the scrub hare. They attacked in pairs and rested between their forays. The hare was exhausted, but finally managed to escape by walking very slowly when all the kestrels were resting. Single birds were also seen attacking a flock of Guinea Fowl. The post-fledgling Rock Kestrels were certainly very energetic and worked hard to prepare for adulthood.

These lovely birds are worth observing!

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Vets help vulture see

15/10/2009 News 24

Vets at Onderstepoort will attempt to restore the eyesight of an African White-backed Vulture on Friday, the University of Pretoria said. "This operation will be the first of its kind done on any vulture species in Africa," Chris van Blerk of the Faculty of Veterinary Science said in a statement on Thursday.

The White-backed Vulture (*Gyps Africanus*), currently in the care of Kerri Wolter of the Vulture Programme of Rhino and Lion Wildlife Conservation, was diagnosed with cataracts in both eyes, causing him to be almost fully blind. Wolter, who took the bird, which is listed as a vulnerable species, to Onderstepoort for treatment, said she got it from a wildlife rehabilitation colleague, Alma Fuller, in the Free State. Fuller collected it from a landowner at Lemoenhoek, near Bloemfontein. Wolter said that it must have been blind either from birth, or became blind as a chick in the nest, as the cataracts were at a very advanced stage. "I think it relied on its parents to survive for almost 11 months, but they would have kicked him out as they started to breed again, so I don't think it would have survived for more than a week longer in the wild," she said.

Van Blerk said the operation would entail removing the birds' lenses, causing him to be long-sighted. The bird would go back to the Rhino and Lion Wildlife Conservation facilities near Hartebeespoort Dam. "It will be on antibiotics and eye drops for about six weeks, before it will be released into a vulture flight enclosure. If we find that it copes by itself, it will hopefully be released within two months," Wolter said. "The bird would be released on a private farm near Magaliesberg where there is a vulture restaurant with easily accessible food and water." It was not being released back at Lemoenhoek due to 'poison problems' and power lines. If the bird didn't fully rehabilitate, it would be kept and used for educational purposes and become an ambassador for African White-backed Vultures".

16/10/2009 News 24 Update

The 11-month-old bird had its sight restored by veterinarians and the surgery went well. It will now spend the next six weeks recovering.

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