

# HOODED VULTURE | *Necrosyrtes monachus*

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<b>Conservation Status:</b>	Endangered
<b>Southern African Range:</b>	Namibia, Botswana, north-eastern South Africa, Swaziland, western Zimbabwe, Mozambique
<b>Area of Occupancy:</b>	45,300 km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Population Estimate:</b>	Fewer than 50 birds
<b>Population Trend:</b>	Suspected 10% decline
<b>Habitat:</b>	Mesic woodland savannah
<b>Threats:</b>	Poisons, nest disturbance, drowning, traditional medicine trade, power line collision and electrocution



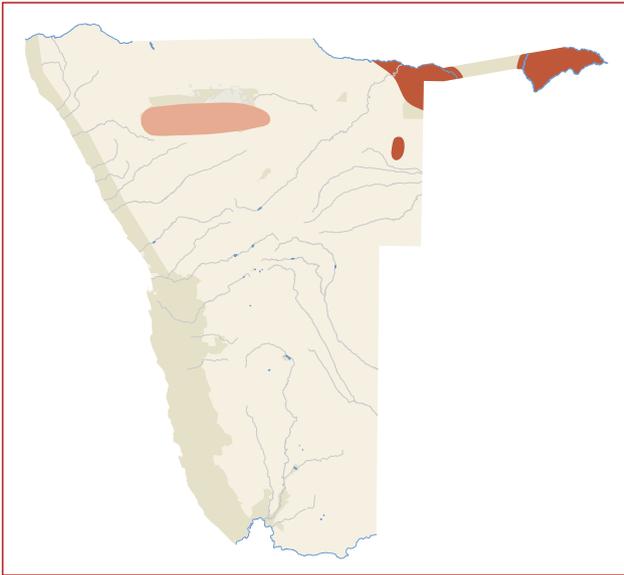
## DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The Hooded Vulture was originally considered a *Rare and Peripheral* species in Namibia, but that was amended when recent research revealed that it was declining across most of its African range in the last decade (Ogada & Buij 2011). This means that every African country in which the bird occurs is responsible for its future well-being.

The Hooded Vulture's stronghold in southern Africa is the Okavango Swamps in Botswana in pristine mesic woodland savannahs. Elsewhere in southern Africa, it is found mainly in protected areas with well-developed woodlands. Further north in Africa, particularly in West Africa, where it was once common, it is commensal with man (Ogada & Buij 2011). The African population is estimated to number about

197,000 birds, but with a steep decline of 62% over the last 40 to 50 years, with differing levels of decline in different bio-geographical regions of Africa.

The population in Namibia is estimated at fewer than 50 birds, representing much less than 1% of the African population (Ogada & Buij 2011). This population is not isolated, but linked to birds in neighbouring Botswana, Zimbabwe and Zambia. The information on its distribution in Namibia, collected over a period of 17 years as part of SABAP1, shows it to be uncommon in Etosha National Park, in the Nyae Nyae area and in the Khaudum National Park, as well as through the Caprivi Strip, in total from 42 quarter-degree squares (Mundy 1997a). The second Southern African Bird Atlas project (SABAP2) has been running for just over two years in Namibia and by early February 2015, the Hooded Vulture had been



reported from only seven pentads, along the Zambezi, Chobe, Kwandu and Okavango rivers in north-eastern Namibia. This suggests a significant decrease in both range and numbers in Namibia over the past 20 years.



## ECOLOGY

Hooded Vultures are monogamous, probably long-lived and may pair for life (Piper 2005a). There are two records of this species on nests in the Zambezi region of Namibia, but with insufficient information to determine laying dates. They tend to be secretive in their breeding habits and build their nest in large well-foliaged trees (e.g. Jackalberry *Diospyros mespiliformis*), usually in riparian woodland, close to the top of the tree where the nests are difficult to find. Across southern Africa, eggs are laid in mainly June and July (Tarboton 2011). In Botswana and Zimbabwe eggs are laid in June (11 clutches), July (20), August (eight), September (two), with the later months probably being replacement clutches. Like most other vultures it is a winter breeder and fledges its single young five months later at the height of summer (Piper 2005a).

Like other vultures, this species is a scavenger and often the first to arrive at a carcass (Mundy *et al.* 1992). In Namibia, they are most commonly seen as single birds or in small numbers. They are low on the scavenging hierarchy and are classed as 'peckers', based on their feeding method (Kruuk 1967, König 1983). Once the *Gyps* vultures ('pullers') and the Lappet-faced Vultures *Torgos tracheliotos* and White-headed Vultures *Trigonoceps occipitalis* ('tearers') have fed at a carcass, the Hooded Vultures, with their smaller, more delicate beaks peck off the remaining flesh. They are unable to tear the skin of medium and large ungulates. They will also feed on offal, small bones, eyes, droppings and insects (Mundy *et al.* 1992). In central and West Africa, they live in close association with human settlement and take

scraps from around dwellings, waste dumps and abattoirs, which is unrecorded in southern Africa (Piper 2005a). Nothing is known of its foraging range or movements, but it is thought unlikely to move more than 200 km from its nesting area (Mundy *et al.* 1992). During large game translocation operations in the Mahango area of the Bwabwata National Park in the mid 1980s, the associated wildlife mortalities attracted up to 20 Hooded Vultures, together with large numbers of other scavenging species (CJ Brown pers. obs.). The Hooded Vultures probably would have come from the Okavango Delta in Botswana, about 150 km away, and from the Kwando area of the Zambezi region, 180 km away.



## THREATS

Poisons are the main threat to Hooded Vultures in southern Africa, including in Namibia. Their presence only within major protected areas suggests that they are susceptible to poisons as well as disturbance. Recent mass poisoning of vultures at elephant carcasses in the Zambezi region and in northern Botswana by commercial poachers (Hancock 2013) presents a critical threat to the Hooded Vulture population in both countries. Disturbance and deforestation, particularly of riparian woodland, pose secondary threats.



## CONSERVATION STATUS

Given that the population in Namibia probably comprises fewer than 50 birds, and that the recent poisoning events in the Zambezi region and in northern Botswana are likely to have impacted further on this population, the Hooded Vulture is classified as *Endangered* in Namibia. It is also considered *Endangered* globally (IUCN 2014) and in South Africa (Taylor *et al.* in press), based on an Africa-wide finding that the species has gone through a long-term decline averaging over 60% in the last four to five decades and that is continuing to the present day (Ogada & Buij 2011). It should be given *Specially Protected* status in revised or new Parks and Wildlife legislation in Namibia.



## ACTIONS

The protocol on addressing poison use by commercial poachers summarised in the White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus* account applies also to the conservation of the Hooded Vulture. The use of poison for predator control should be banned in Namibia in the new Parks and Wildlife legislation, with appropriately severe penalties for transgressors (see also under the Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres* Action Plan). Surveys of the northern rivers including the Okavango, Kwandu, Chobe and Zambezi should be undertaken to determine Hooded Vulture breeding density and anthropogenic impacts in terms of human population pressures, land transformation and riparian deforestation (Mendelsohn & el Obeid 2003).