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## NOTES

### Cooperative hunting of Gabar Goshawk in Namibia

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During a recent student visit to the Otjiwarongo area in north central Namibia we witnessed cooperative hunting in Gabar Goshawk *Melierax gabar* where two individuals were seen actively pursuing a Cape Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia capicola*. This was viewed from the vulture hide at REST (Rare & Endangered Species Trust) approximately 45km north east of Otjiwarongo on the farm Uitsig at 09h10 on 19 October 2006. While overlooking the vulture restaurant on a non-feeding day, doves perched in the vicinity of the feeding site suddenly erupted as a Cape Turtle-Dove flew past with two Gabar Goshawks in close pursuit. The goshawks pursued the dove cooperatively with one constantly on its tail and the other either attempting to cut it off from above or from the sides. When the dove tried to gain height one goshawk forced it down with the other partner attempting to close the distance. This high jinking pursuit continued until we lost sight of the birds through binoculars over a distance of at least 1-2km over the thorn bush savanna towards the Waterberg Plateau.

Literature reviewed on cooperative hunting of Gabar Goshawk makes no mention of such a strategy (Hockey *et al.* 2005; Maclean 1985; Pickford *et al.* 1994). The following three known hunting strategies are followed – active pursuit, still-hunting and nest-robbing – of which active pursuit involves considerable persistence (Hockey *et al.* 2005) with examples given of a barbet being pursued for 1½ minutes and a

Striped Kingfisher for over 90m before being caught (Steyn 1982). Cooperative hunting is known for raptors such as Black Eagle *Aquila verreauxii* (Hockey *et al.* 2005; Maclean 1985; Pickford *et al.* 1994), Lanner *Falco biarmicus* and Rednecked Falcon *Falco chicquera* in India (Steyn 1982), Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk *Melierax canorus* in Namibia (Heinrich *pers comm*) as well as between Gabar Goshawk and Rednecked Falcon in the Kalahari region in South Africa (Herholdt 1993). Simmons (*pers comm.*) states that Gabar Goshawks are known cooperative hunters with Braine (in litt.) confirming this by regularly observing Gabar Goshawks hunting cooperatively in the vicinity of Hobatere Lodge (west of the Etosha National Park) although never seeing them feeding together. The following is an account that Braine (in litt.) observed regarding Gabar Goshawk hunting: “Once about a year ago I was watching a pair at Ehomba hunting together (unsuccessfully) – a single normal and a melanistic – when a third bird (another melanistic) arrived and disrupted the hunting attempt. The two melanistics then attacked each other, eventually smashing into the ground claspings talons. They sat in this position for a few minutes before releasing, the one then eventually chasing off the other”. Another sighting of cooperative hunting including a melanistic Gabar Goshawk, is by Heinrich (*pers comm.*), who observed two individuals chasing down an *Agama* sp. around a rock at Chudop in the Etosha National Park (south of Halali) with one eventually nabbing the *Agama* and making off with it on its own. Such feeding on foot is known for the species (Hockey *et al.* 2005).

The main avian prey of Gabar Goshawks includes a variety of smaller bird species such as weavers, barbets, kingfishers, pipits and starlings (Hockey *et al.* 2005; Maclean 1985; Pickford *et al.* 1994; Steyn 1982). Doves are viewed as the upper limit to their prey (Pickford *et al.* 1994) although they are capable of killing larger birds such as the Crested Francolin (Hockey *et al.* 2005; Steyn 1982).

It is not known if the cooperative hunting of the Cape Turtle-Dove observed paid off in this instance, but suggests cooperative hunting as a strategy for Gabar Goshawks from Namibia. It is not clear how often

cooperative hunting as a strategy is employed or to what extent larger birds such as the Cape Turtle-Dove are included in the diet of this raptor. Why this seemingly cooperative hunting does not culminate in cooperative feeding is unclear. Either this has yet to be observed and documented, or Gabar Goshawks hunt cooperatively, but feed separately.

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