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INFLUX OF DICKINSON'S KESTRELS *Falco dickinsoni* IN NORTHERN BOTSWANA IN WINTER 1994

Marc Herremans & Diane Herremans-Tonnoeyr

The Dickinson's Kestrel occurs from northern Namibia and northern Botswana, across Zimbabwe to Mozambique in the east, and the distribution extends to Zaire and Tanzania in the north (Brown 1982; Maclean 1993). The species is generally indicated as uncommon, scarce or rare and localized (Irwin 1981; Brown 1982; Tarboton & Allan 1984; Hartley 1989; Newman 1989; Brown 1990; Maclean 1993; Sinclair *et al.* 1993). In the eastern Caprivi, however, Dickinson's Kestrel is sometimes found to be the most common small diurnal raptor (Branfield 1990), but it was not recorded in the area by Koen (1988), suggesting considerable dynamics.

We confirm Borello & Borello (1988) and Skinner (1988) that the species occurs in the Makgadikgadi area and we use all land north of 21°S in this study as the potential range. From May 1991 to April 1994, we recorded only six Dickinson's Kestrels in 21,705 km of roadside observations within the range of the species in northern Botswana (i.e. 3,618 km per bird). Other than during roadside counts, we had only three more encounters with the species in three years, confirming that it is indeed rare. In February and March 1994 none were seen in 238 spot-counts from random places in northern Botswana. During each spot-count the sky and horizon were scanned for all raptors during 5 minutes.

During June and July 1994, Dickinson's Kestrels were suddenly much less rare than before in northern Botswana: 11 birds were recorded in 3,259 km of roadside counts (296 km/bird), and in 604 random spot-counts, another 11 birds were observed. It appears that during winter 1994 Dickinson's Kestrels were *ca.* 10 times more common in northern Botswana than during the previous three years. Records of Dickinson's Kestrels in winter 1994 were in the Makgadikgadi (2025), in the Okavango Delta (road from Maun to Xaxaba), Moremi, Savuti, Chobe Riverfront and in the Northern Plains, but none were seen in 736 km of road surveys west of the Okavango Delta.

Movements of the Dickinson's Kestrel are poorly documented. The species is generally considered to be resident (Brown 1982; Steyn 1982; Tarboton & Allan 1984; Hartley 1989; Newman 1989; Maclean 1993; Sinclair *et al.* 1993), but some evidence of movements outside the summer breeding season is also indicated (Brown 1982; Steyn 1982; Maclean 1993). In Zimbabwe and Zambia, where probably the largest population of the region occurs (Hartley 1989), there are considerable seasonal movements, mostly during the winter months (Irwin 1981; Hartley 1989; Tree 1991). Borello & Borello (1988) mention a peak in observations in the Okavango from June to

August and Brewster also connotes for the area west of the Okavango that the species appeared to be most widespread in the dry, winter season.

The evidence indicates that the sudden change in abundance of Dickinson's Kestrels in northern Botswana in winter 1994 was due to a fairly large scale influx.

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AN ACCOUNT OF SECRETARY BIRDS *Sagittarius serpentarius* BREEDING IN THE JWANENG GAME PARK

Mike Soroczynski

On 17 October 1993, a pair of Secretary Birds was seen about seventy metres apart striding through the veld in the Jwaneng Mine Game Park. One bird had a large sheaf of brown, dry grass in its beak whilst the other had a beakful of larger twigs and small dead branches. I watched as they walked away from us still gathering grass and twigs. I drove ahead and parked the vehicle at a waterhole where we could see the birds walking towards us but almost a kilometre away. We sat a hundred metres or so from a three metre high, flat-topped *Acacia tortilis*

tree as the birds continued their approach. The first bird, carrying the grass sheaf, took a short run, took off and landed on top of the nearby tree. The second bird, carrying the heavier twigs, started its run-up, then aborted its takeoff and headed off in the direction from which it came. Turning round, and now with its run-up much longer, it started running and took off, landing on top of the tree in which the other bird had arranged the grass. After dropping the load into the nest, the two birds began "necking" - swanning their heads and necks in graceful movements.