

This issue of *Lanioturdus* is devoted to the raptor workshop which was held at Waterberg Plateau Park from 18-19 February 2005. The workshop was organized by the Namibian Nature Foundation and was open to all who were interested in raptors.

## CONTENTS

VOLUME 38 (3-4) 2005

BROWN, C. Welcome and introduction .....	1
BRIDGEFORD, P. & BRIDGEFORD, M. Status of vultures in Namibia .....	1
OSBORNE, T. & M. WINK. Taxonomy of African raptors with emphasis on Namibian species .....	7
BRIDGEFORD, P., BRIDGEFORD, M. & DÜRR M. Monitoring and ringing of Lappet-faced Vultures on the Namib:1991-2004 .....	9
BRIDGEFORD, P & HEINRICH D. Ringing of African White-backed Vultures on commercial farms .....	13
MENDELSON, J, BROWN C., MENDELSON M. & DIEKMANN M. Observations on the movements of adult Cape Vultures in central Namibia .....	16
OWEN-SMITH, G. Raptor issues within conservancies .....	21
HENGARI, G. M., CUNNINGHAM P. L., & ADANK W. The use of vultures by traditional healers in Namibia .....	22
KOMEN, L. Where we are and where we can go with poison and raptors: a perspective from NARREC .....	29
ROBERTSON, T. & JARVIS A. Raptors and the Avifaunal Database .....	36
BRAINE, S. Raptor road counts - the need for continuation .....	45
JOUBERT, D. Raptor road counts with students at Polytechnic of Namibia.....	46
DIEKMANN, M. The capture and attachment of satellite- and radio-telemetry equipment on vultures in the Waterberg area .....	50
RAPTORS NAMIBIA. <i>Action Plan</i> .....	52

## Welcome and introduction

Dr Chris Brown

Namibia Nature Foundation, PO Box245, Windhoek

Namibia's vultures, other diurnal raptors and owls are increasingly under threat from factors such as disturbance, particularly at breeding sites; the misuse of poisons and pesticides; electrocution and collisions with overhead lines; habitat degradation; persecution; illegal harvesting; and drowning in reservoirs.

Much work has been done on raptors in Namibia in the past. People have come and gone, however, resulting in a lull in activity which is now picking up again. By collaborating in a close-knit group rather than in isolation we will be able to achieve more, encouraging one another and pooling our resources in effective, coordinated synergies. There is also a need for new actions, which will be incorporated into existing programmes/initiatives where possible, with a focus on increasing public involvement.

This is why the time is right for our workshop on birds of prey at Waterberg Plateau Park on 18-19 February 2005. We are privileged to welcome a healthy mix of "old-time" raptor enthusiasts here who bring years of experience to the table, and a new cohort of young conservationists who will carry the flag into the future. One of our main outcomes will be to develop an action plan for these threatened birds (see the plan below).

## Status of vultures in Namibia

Peter & Marilyn Bridgeford

Vulture Study Group Coordinator Namibia

pmbridge@iway.na

## Introduction

Vulture research in Namibia started in the 1960's in the Namib Desert Park, now part of the Namib-Naukluft Park (NNP). Sauer (1973), Jensen (unpublished reports), Clinning (1978) and Brown (1985, 1986) all worked on vultures in the same area over the years. The present project of ringing Lappet-faced Vultures

The results we are reporting are preliminary, based on limited samples from various raptors when we have been able to collect data. The molecular phylogeny is an ongoing study and we are still trying to collect DNA samples from a wide range of raptorial birds.

Of interest to Namibian biologists are birds which are conspecifics or species pairs. These are birds like the Black-breasted Snake Eagle *Circaetus pectoralis* and the Short-toed Snake Eagle *C. gallicus* as well as Bonelli's Hawk Eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus* and African Hawk Eagle *H. spilogaster*. Both these species pairs were treated as single species in Brown and Amadon (1968).

Our results indicate both the hawk eagles are closely related, but are good species; however they are close enough to other members of the genus *Aquila* to be included within the genus. Similarly the two snake eagles are closely related, but are good species. Surprisingly, the closest African raptor to the snake eagles is the Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus*.

Our findings show that the African White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus* is actually a closely related to the Cape Griffon *G. coprotheres*. Traditionally the African White-backed Vulture has been thought to be a species pair with the Indian White-backed Vulture *G. bengalensis* and the African form was previously classified as *G. bengalensis* in Brown and Amadon (1968) and McLachlan and Liversidge (1978). The Indian and African species are quite distantly related.

The African and Madagascar Fish Eagles *Haliaeetus voifcer* and *H. voifceriodes* are more closely related to the Black and Yellow-billed Kites *Milvus migrans* and *M. aegyptius* than to other raptors.

Although our work is only preliminary we have found interesting results. However, we are still in need of samples from many raptors. Most of the birds we need are found in central Africa from places like Congo but there are species resident in Namibia also. We need samples from Augur Buzzard, southern African breeding Booted Eagle, Ayres' Hawk Eagle, Crowned Eagle, Cuckoo Hawk, all the snake eagles, Bat Hawk, Gabar Goshawk and others. Persons interested in contributing to our project should contact Tim Osborne. This is a long term

study and we expect it will be years before we manage to collect all the samples we need for the full analysis.

#### Literature cited

- Brown, L.H. & Amadon, D. 1968. Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of the world. Hamlyn, Middlesex.  
McLachlan, G.L. and Liversidge, R. 1978. Robert's Birds of South Africa. John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town.  
Voous, K.H. 1973. List of recent Holarctic bird species. Ibis 115:612-638.

## Monitoring and ringing Lappet-faced Vultures in the Namib 1991-2004

Peter & Marilyn Bridgeford & Marc Dürr  
Vulture Study Group Namibia  
[pbridge@iway.na](mailto:pbridge@iway.na)

### Introduction

The project to ring and monitor Lappet-faced Vultures *Torgos tracheliotos* in the Namib-Naukluft Park (NNP) is now entering its 15th year. It is the longest running project of its kind in Namibia. A total of 416 vulture chicks have been ringed to date. Another 71 breeding attempts have been recorded.

The project started while PB was employed by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) in the NNP. With the encouragement of ornithologist Chris Brown, the first ringing took place in the Tsauchab River, east of Sossusvlei where three chicks were ringed. The Tsonab River was more productive and another 12 birds were marked. All birds were fitted with a metal and five colour rings.

In 2000, after PB left MET, the project almost foundered, and only a small area of Ganab and Tsonab was searched for breeding birds. The Vulture Study Group (VSG) in co-operation with MET, then took over management of the project.

### Study area and methods

The study area in the NNP is described in detail in Bridgeford (2003). Finding the occupied nests, literally meant driving from tree to tree, a time consuming and tiring task. A nest in a good condition, with other signs on the ground, such

as 'white-wash', the remains of the liquid faeces under the nest, feathers and regurgitated hairballs, was an indication of possible occupancy. A mirror on extendable aluminium pipes was then used to see into the nest without climbing into the generally thorny tree. If the nest contained an egg or chick, the extension ladder was used to reach the contents.

#### **First aerial survey of breeding vultures**

In 2000, Warden Kobus Alberts, then stationed at Ganab, managed to fly over a part of the breeding area in a Cessna 172 and plotted four occupied nests on a GPS. The same area surveyed from the air was then checked by vehicle, driving from tree to tree looking for occupied nests as had been done for the previous 10 years. Only the four breeding birds seen from the air were found during the ground search. This favourable comparison of the two methods convinced the ringers that an aerial survey was a more efficient and faster method of finding breeding birds.

In 2001, it was decided to do an aerial survey of the whole breeding area. With financial assistance from Namibia Nature Foundation and the Commercial Bank of Namibia (Nedbank), through the VSG, a plane was hired from Save the Rhino Trust and piloted by Warden Rod Braby. The survey of 15 hours, in October 2001, covered about 90% of the known breeding areas from Ganab down to Sossusvlei. Because of the low flying, an average of 500 feet above the ground and weight restrictions, only one observer could fly at time. Surveys were done in the early mornings and late afternoons when there was less turbulence. All nests with breeding or suspected breeding vultures were plotted on a GPS and additional information recorded on a tape recorder. From the air it was not always possible to determine if the birds were on an egg or chick or merely roosting. This information was then recorded to assist in the ringing. It was a very successful survey and 42 breeding Lappet-faced Vultures were found. To compare the vehicle and first aerial survey, figures are given in Table 1. Unfortunately, despite the successful aerial survey, no ringing was done in 2001. MET staff could not do it and PB had other obligations.

#### **Aerial survey and ringing 2002**

The four-day survey in October 2002 was a joint VSG/MET operation organised and financed through the VSG. The same plane and pilot was used as in 2001,

but this time 19 hours were flown. This additional time allowed inspection of areas normally not done by vehicle because of the rugged terrain. In this way, a few additional nests were found.

The ringing took place later in the month and a total of 46 chicks were ringed. The ringing took ten days and MET staff from Ganab assisted in their area. Nedbank financed the aerial survey and fuel for the vehicle supplied by Namib Rand Nature Reserve. The airfield at Ganab was used to survey that area and the rest of the survey was flown from Weltevrede Rest Camp airstrip. They also sponsored the accommodation and meals.

In 2003 and 2004, the same procedure was followed. First the 20-hour aerial survey, and then the ringing team went in with a 4x4 vehicle. In 2004, a plane was hired in Windhoek and piloted by Rob Field of Zebra River Lodge who donated his time to the VSG. The plane, a Cessna 182 was stronger and could carry two observers, which increased the efficiency, as both sides of the plane could be checked for nests. Nedbank again sponsored the aircraft hire and fuel for the vehicles used for both the survey and ringing. KPMG provided the fuel for the aircraft. The 4x4 vehicle used for ringing was sponsored by Tok Tokkie Trails. The ringing in 2004 took nine days and a record number of 52 chicks were marked.

#### **Monitoring and ringing returns**

Neither of these aspects has received the attention they deserve. Of the 416 vulture chicks ringed, there have only been 27 recoveries or re-sightings. Of these, six birds died of poisoning, another three of suspected poisoning and 11 were found dead in their nests. One bird was caught in a gin trap and released by the farmer. From a hide at a restaurant on NamibRand Nature Reserve, four vultures were re-sighted. The fifth bird had lost one of its colour rings, and could thus not be identified. The greatest distance covered was 408 km to the Keetmanshoop district. The longest time elapsed was 63 months.

It is planned to do monitoring this year at two artificial water points frequented by the vultures in the Ganab region.

## Acknowledgements

Firstly, to Chris Brown, who started us off on a long and interesting road and for his moral and financial support. Then Gerhard Verdoorn, who made us realise that without actively conserving, there would soon be no vultures left to ring. To former colleagues, friends, neighbours and journalists who over the years gave their time and companionship to help the vultures. The other sponsors that have not been mentioned yet: Electro Repairs, a vulture friend for many years, Nicky Signs and an avid new friend, Academia Friendly Supermarket.

## References

- Bridgeford, P. 2001. Aerial survey of breeding Lappet-faced Vultures in the Namib-Naukluft Park, report to VSG and sponsors
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2002. Aerial survey of breeding Lappet-faced Vultures and ringing of chicks in the Namib-Naukluft Park October/November 2002, report to VSG and sponsors
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2004. Aerial survey of breeding Lappet-faced Vultures and ringing of chicks in the Namib-Naukluft Park September/October 2004, report to VSG and sponsors
- \_\_\_\_\_, P. & M. 2003. Ten years of monitoring breeding Lappet-faced Vultures *Torgos tracheliotos* in the Namib-Naukluft Park, Namibia. *Vulture News* 48:3-11

Table 1. Lappet-faced Vultures ringed in the NNP using two methods to find breeding birds.

Year	Number	Method
1991	15	Vehicle survey
1992	34	Vehicle survey
1993	29	Vehicle survey
1994	41	Vehicle survey
1995	29	Vehicle survey
1996	44	Vehicle survey
1997	7	Vehicle survey
1998	36	Vehicle survey
1999	37	Vehicle survey
2000	2	Vehicle & aerial survey (part of area)
2001	nil	Aerial survey (42 nests found)
2002	46	Aerial survey
2003	44	Aerial survey
2004	52	Aerial survey

## White-backed Vulture ringing on commercial farms

Peter Bridgeford & Dirk Heinrich  
 Vulture Study Group Namibia  
 pmbridge@iway.na

### Introduction

The White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus* is the most abundant vulture in Namibia and in Africa (Mundy et al. 1992). There are no reliable figures on the population size, but there are some estimates. Simmons (in Anderson in press), gives a figure of 6,000 pairs in Namibia. Using a different method, Simmons & Brown (in press) estimate the total numbers to be between 7,830 and 15,050 birds, but probably closer to 10,000. It is classed as Near Threatened. (Simmons & Brown in press).

However, like all vultures in southern Africa, they are under pressure, the main threat being poison. It is not only in the small stock farming areas, but also in other parts of Namibia. Here the vultures are generally the innocent victims in the fight against problem animals such as lions, cheetah, leopard and spotted hyenas. (Bridgeford 2001 & Bridgeford 2002).

### Creating awareness

In 2003, the Vulture Study Group Namibia initiated a project to ring White-backed Vultures on commercial farms in the Seeis, Hochfeld and Steinhausen areas. These areas were chosen after receiving information from farmers about vultures breeding on their farms. Both authors had presented talks on vulture and raptor conservation at Farmers' Union and Conservancy meetings.

### The aims of the project were:

- Gather information about White-backed and other Vultures.
- Ring the chicks.
- Create awareness in the farming community of the role and importance of vultures.
- Use the ringing as a means of involving the farmers, their families and workers in a hands-on project.
- Distribute booklets, pamphlets and posters about raptor conservation.