

# Namibia Bird News

No 1, March 2012



## Welcome to the first issue of Namibia Bird News!

Many of you may be muttering about receiving “yet another bird newsletter” and are probably wondering what this is all about. Well, this is an ambitious attempt at consolidating various Namibian bird newsletters that are currently being circulated. Since most of us receive all the different newsletters in any case, it makes sense to me to combine them and hopefully in that way support those whose enthusiasm has never waned, re-ignite others’ enthusiasm and perhaps even reach some new people.

In this first issue I’m relying heavily on material provided to me by Marilyn and Peter Bridgeford, as they had an issue of *Raptors Namibia* “ready to go” and unconditionally handed this over to me to use. Other than the raptor bias, readers will also be pleased to note that the bird atlas is about to be revived and hopefully find the other information supplied in this newsletter of interest.

My plan is to produce this newsletter on a quarterly basis but, of course, if sufficient material is available, it will appear more frequently (This is a very un-subtle attempt at telling you readers to send me stuff!). Contributions, comments and other useful stuff can be sent to [nambirdnews@gmail.com](mailto:nambirdnews@gmail.com)

Happy birding!

Holger



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## Happy Birthday Namibia Bird Club!

The Namibia Bird Club celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2012. To commemorate this occasion a symposium will be held in Windhoek on 30 April and 1 May 2012 with talks by well known ornithologists. A celebratory dinner will be held on the evening of 30 April. Attendance at the symposium and dinner is free for bird club members, non-members will be charged N\$750 to attend the symposium and N\$350 to attend the dinner.



# AERIAL SURVEY OF BREEDING LAPPET-FACED VULTURES AND MARKING OF CHICKS IN THE NAMIB-NAUKLUFT PARK, OCTOBER 2011

## INTRODUCTION

The monitoring and ringing of Lappet-faced Vultures (LFV) in the Namib-Naukluft Park (NNP) started in 1991. The Ministry Environment and Tourism (MET) supports this long-term project. It is providing an increasing amount of data, which wildlife management can use for planning by ornithologists and biodiversity researchers.

In 2000, for the first time, an aerial survey of part of the breeding area at Ganab took place. In 2001, an aerial survey of 15 hours covered most of the known breeding areas. Because of the positive results of the 2001 aerial survey, the decision was made to continue using an aircraft to find the occupied nests. Since then, there has been an aerial survey every year, followed by the ringing. Patagial tags were introduced in 2006.

During the aerial survey, the co-ordinates of occupied nests are stored on a GPS. From the air, adult birds, chicks and even eggs are visible in the nests. However, it is very difficult to differentiate between birds roosting on nests and breeding birds. Although expensive, the aerial survey is the most cost-effective way of finding the nests of breeding birds scattered over hundreds of square kilometres. This also reduces off-road driving in sensitive areas.

## AERIAL SURVEY 2011

Rob Field piloted the aircraft, a Cessna 182, hired in Windhoek. Rob has donated 150 hours of his time and experience to Vultures Namibia over the past eight years. Thanks to Rob and Marianne Field for their unstinting support. Although they now live in SA, Rob flew to Namibia to assist with the survey. Hartmut Kolb took time off from his job to assist and Helen Kolb drove their support vehicle. Holger Kolberg, the MET representative brought equipment and a radio. Hanno von Ditfurth, the second observer, farming near Dordabis, travelled with Holger from Windhoek. I transported aircraft fuel from Windhoek via Walvis Bay and other equipment used for the survey.

The survey started on Monday 3 October, at the Ganab airfield in the NNP. On Wednesday morning 5 October, while the aircraft continued with the survey, the ground crew moved to Sossusvlei Lodge airfield and the survey continued from there. The last day a very strong east wind delayed the survey of the Sossus area for a few hours. The survey, including ferry time, took 21.3 hours and ended on Thursday. We all camped at Sossus Oasis campsite on Wednesday.

## RINGING 2011

After the departure of the pilot and aircraft on Thursday, we started the ringing in the Tsamsvlei area, north of Sesriem. On Friday morning, we ringed two chicks in the Sossusvlei / Sesriem area. Christelle du Toit and Karl-Heinz Oosthuizen from Sossusvlei Lodge accompanied us.

On a hot Friday afternoon, friends and sponsors met at Namibwater and enjoyed a swim in the reservoir before making camp under the camel thorn trees. On Saturday morning, we moved to Escourt, but could not find the chick in the Dieprivier. We did ring two in the Tsondeb River and camped at the mouth of the vlei. On Sunday, the vast Tsondeb Plains were crossed and another two chicks ringed. While crossing the dunes to the Saagberg / Kamberg sites, we were confronted by a very widespread grass fire. Because of the fire, only one chick ringed here. On Sunday evening, we had to abandon our campsite in the NNP because





of the fire that was still raging. We camped at Solitaire Guest Farm and on Monday, the group split up and headed for home.

On Friday 14 October, Holger and Claire spent the day ringing in the Mirabib area. That evening, we met a new group of volunteers at the Ganab VIP campsite. It was encouraging to have some enthusiastic children in the group. On Saturday morning, Holger led half the group to the Tinkas area and I led the others south to the Kriesrus area. We all spent the day ringing and returned to the campsite. On Sunday, we finished ringing by lunchtime and then most people headed for home. This year there were considerably less chicks than in 2010. On Monday morning, Sandra, Mark and I ringed the last chick at Tumas View on the

**way to Walvis Bay. Holger, Claire and Warden Jose Kaumba from Ganab ringed another chick at Albert's Koppies.**

For the first time since 1991, honeybees were found at four nests with chicks. We assume they were after moisture as they clustered around and over the eyes of the smaller vulture chicks. They also went into the open beaks seeking moisture. We found the larger, feathered chicks had their heads under their wings to escape the bees.

## RESULTS OF THE RINGING

A total of 45 Lappet-faced Vulture chicks were ringed, as opposed to 86 last year.

One vulture chick was found in the Tsauchab River and another was closer to Sesriem. Vultures breeding in the Sossusvlei area remain low, probably because of disturbance by the high volume of tourist vehicles, sightseeing aircraft, hot-air balloons and now even helicopters.

North of Sesriem, we found three chicks in the Sukses/Tsamsvlei area. This number is down in comparison to previous years.

The Tsondab area had 10 breeding records in 2009 and 2010, but we only found four this year. One chick not found with the aerial survey but seen by the ground crew was not ringed.

Between Saagberg and Kamberg, we ringed five chicks in 2010, but only one this year. However, because of the grass fire, we did not visit all the points found during the aerial survey.

Ganab was disappointing with 35 chicks ringed. In 2010, we ringed 64 chicks, but then in 2009, only 23.

However, I am not too concerned about the lower number of chicks this year. There are other factors at work that we do not understand, such as weather conditions, availability of food and possible disturbance by prospecting/mining.

Both the aerial survey and ringing went with almost no hitches. New sponsors joined the team and we are very grateful for their support. Some of the past sponsors once again came to our rescue and we could not have done it without them.

## LOGISTICS AND COSTS

The Lappet-faced Vulture breeds over a vast area in the Namib-Naukluft Park and this increases the time and costs during the aerial survey and ringing.

Aerial survey, over four days.....	20.3 hours
Ringing .....	7 days
<b>Distance flown by aircraft for survey (without ferry distance).....</b>	<b>3 218 km</b>
Distance travelled by Vultures Namibia vehicle: aerial survey & ringing.....	±2 500 km
Hire of aircraft.....	\$16,400
Avgas 4 drums .....	N\$15,077
<b>Insurance on hire plane.....</b>	<b>N\$470</b>
<b>Travel costs for pilot, ringing &amp; aerial survey Vultures Namibia 4x4.....</b>	<b>\$10,119</b>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project could not continue without the support of several people and organisations. Vultures Namibia thanks the following:

- MET for allowing the survey, tagging and ringing to continue.
- Control Warden Manie le Roux for enthusiastic support of the project.
- Deputy Director Kenneth Uiseb, MET Scientific Services for support.
- Holger Kolberg for assisting with the aerial survey and ringing.
- Pilot Rob Field of Port Alfred Panorama Guest House.
- The friends from SGA, who helped with the survey, ringing and provided excellent meals.
- Jannes Brandt, Johan van der Hoven, Sandra Gush, Matti & Petro Kimberg and WestAir Wings Charters for donations.
- Francois Retief of Retief Sales Promotions for the very long extension ladder.
- Birds of Prey Program of the Endangered Wildlife Trust, for support and tagging equipment.
- Sandra Dantu & Mark Boorman who organised the popular Gala Dinner in aid of vulture conservation.
- Hilke and Hanno von Ditzfurth who assisted with the aerial survey, ringing and again donated meat.
- Hartmut Kolb was observer, navigator and ringer.
- Namibia Nature Foundation looked after our finances.
- All the vulture friends who helped with the ringing and shared our campfires.
- If I have forgotten anybody, please accept my humble apologies. All the people who made the ringing fun and enjoyable, thank you. See you there next year!

Peter Bridgeford

Vultures Namibia



Port Alfred  
PANORAMA  
Guest House



Rössing Uranium  
Limited



Table 1: Number of Lappet-faced Vulture chicks ringed in the Namib-Naukluft Park.

(In 2000 only a partial survey of Ganab and Tsondab. In 2001: no ringing).

	TSAUCHAB	SUKSES	TSONDAB	SAAGBERG	GANAB	TOTAL
1991	3	No ringing	12	No ringing	No ringing	15
1992	5	8	21	No ringing	No ringing	34
1993	4	5	15	3	2	29
1994	8	9	16	2	6	41
1995	6	8	6	1	8	29
1996	10	6	13	3	12	44
1997	2	2	3	0	No ringing	7
1998	7	6	7	2	14	36
1999	2	5	9	5	16	37
2000	No ringing	No ringing	0	No ringing	2	2
2001	No ringing	No ringing	No ringing	No ringing	No ringing	No ringing
2002	0	6	5	8	27	46
2003	1	10	5	3	25	44
2004	0	5	6	1	40	52
2005	1	6	4	2	23	36
2006	0	3	3	2	14	22
2007	1	8	9	7	61	86
2008	1	5	6	4	42	58
2009	2	6	10	1	23	42
2010	4	3	10	5	64	86
2011	2	3	4	1	35	45
TOTAL	59	104	164	50	414	791



## Celebrate World Migratory Bird Day 2012 with us!

On their epic journeys spanning thousands of kilometres, migratory birds connect the continents, cultures and people along their migration routes. World Migratory Bird Day 2012 and this year's theme ***Migratory birds and people - together through time*** aim to highlight this incredible relationship between migratory birds and people.

Humanity's fascination with migratory birds is evident in the symbolism throughout history in many ancient cultural legends. For example, in Egypt the ancient falcon-headed god Horus and in Peru the Nazca line monuments are

testaments to migratory birds' strong influences on past cultures. Also, many groups and cultures continue to rely economically on migratory birds for their livelihoods, for example through subsistence and the growing global eco-tourism industry. Further, the phenomenon of bird migration is crucial to the web of life, as migrating birds act as indicators of biodiversity, ecosystem health and climate change. Migratory birds also provide essential ecological benefits and services, such as pollination, to the ecosystems we rely on to survive.

Considering the cultural, social, historic, economic and spiritual connections we have with birds, it becomes clear that migratory birds and people are inseparably connected in many different ways and on many different levels. However, many human activities including excessive land use and unsustainable hunting, as well as the impacts of climate change, fishing by-catch and pollution now gravely threaten migratory bird populations around the world.

### What is World Migratory Bird Day?

World Migratory Bird Day is a global, annual awareness campaign to promote the conservation of migratory birds and their habitats worldwide. It is organized by the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) – two international wildlife treaties administered by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

World Migratory Bird Day strives towards preserving the cultural ties we have with migratory birds and the vital economic and environmental benefits they sustain. It is important to ensure these cultural, economic and environmental bonds are conserved for future generations.

Join others around the world and take part in World Migratory Bird Day on 12 – 13 May 2012 by organizing bird-watching events, educational programmes, lectures, art exhibitions and other public

Please share your activities with us and others around the world by registering your event on the WMBD website: [www.worldmigratorybirdday.org](http://www.worldmigratorybirdday.org)



## A blast from the past!

I stumbled across the following snippet of information whilst compiling references for the bibliography of Namibian ornithology. The article is titled “Note on the two flamingoes of South Africa”, written by Charles John Andersson and was published in 1865 in the first issue of *Ibis*. Andersson describes the two species of flamingo and then goes on to say:

*“The Flamingoes are invariably well-conditioned, and frequently enormously fat; their chief food consists of small Crustacea, sea-animalcula, sea-grass, &c. They are good eating, more especially the young birds; but, having a rather strong fishy flavour, they require to be well cooked and spiced; they ought also to be cleansed of all fatty matter, and perhaps eat best when served up in pies or curries.”*

Flamingo curry anyone?!

## Nesting associations between weavers and birds of prey

*H. Dieter Oschadleus, Animal Demography Unit, University of Cape Town*

Weavers are often very adaptable species, and many have been found to build their nests on or near the nests of birds of prey. Peter Steyn, in “Birds of Prey of southern Africa”, for example, mentions Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver nests associated with White-backed Vulture and Bateleur nests. A search through the literature reveals several weaver species (e.g. Cape Weaver, Red-headed Weaver, Village Weaver and Spectacled Weaver) have nested near the nests of a variety of birds of prey including: Wahlberg’s Eagle, African Hawk-Eagle, Palm-nut Vulture, White-backed Vulture, Jackal Buzzard and White-faced Owl. Although this has not been tested, the general thought is that the weavers derive protection by nesting near raptor nests. Occasionally the reverse occurs, where raptors (particularly owls) build their nests on top of old buffalo weaver or Sociable Weaver nests; and Pygmy Falcons seek out weaver nests to breed in.

PHOWN (Photos of Weaver Nests, <http://weavers.adu.org.za/phown.php>) is a citizen science project, aimed at collecting data on the variation in colony sizes in weavers, breeding distribution and range changes in weavers and other breeding information about weavers. It also provides a great tool for other uses, in this case, looking at the extent to which weavers and birds of prey nest in close association. PHOWN already has two records of weaver nests near raptor nests – Cape Weavers nesting in same tree as a Yellow-billed Kite ([http://weavers.adu.org.za/phown\\_vm.php?vm=208](http://weavers.adu.org.za/phown_vm.php?vm=208)) and Sakalava Weaver nests associated with the nest of a Madagascar Buzzard ([http://weavers.adu.org.za/phown\\_vm.php?vm=1489](http://weavers.adu.org.za/phown_vm.php?vm=1489)).

Anyone can take part in PHOWN, by registering your name and email. Then take digital photos whenever you find a weaver nest or colony, record the date, number of nests, species (if known), gps coordinates, and submit the data online. If the nest locality of a particular bird of prey (associated with weaver nests) needs to be kept confidential, let me know.



# News from Gondwana Cañon Park



Although Hadeda Ibis are known to occur along the lower Orange and lower Fish rivers (they first arrived in Oranjemund just about 10 years ago, probably lured over time by the encroaching grain fields of modern mankind with the attendant rise in tasty bugs, worms and suchlike) we have no record of them seen at GCP. However there is now one daily resident at Park HQ, moving between the lawns and along the dry rivers at Hologo since the last week in November.

A download from Dassiespoort camera trap of

October and November's images revealed the presence of up to 25 Lappet-faced Vultures at the waterhole during a period of a week at the end of October. This is very encouraging news for the park, as it may even indicate that fewer poisons are being used by farmers in the area.



Thanks to Sue and Trygve Cooper for reporting these sightings and to Chris Brown for drawing our attention to this.

## Snapped in Waterberg Plateau Park

The photo below was captured on a camera trap set up in Waterberg Plateau Park. Thanks to Manie le Roux for sending it in.



## The Atlas is Back!

When the Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP) 2 kicked off in South Africa some five years ago, many Namibian birders were chomping at the bit to get going here as well. However, due to various constraints, most notably a funding issue, it took until now to finally launch atlassing in Namibia.

Over the weekend of 10 and 11 March 2012 Professor Les Underhill and Michael Brooks from the Animal Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town visited us to give an introduction to bird atlassing. After a very entertaining introduction to the theory of atlassing on Friday evening by Les, two practical sessions were held on Saturday and Sunday morning where hands-on experience was gained.



**Prof Underhill explaining the workings of the bird atlas.**

SABAP 2 uses pentads as the basis for its maps. These are areas 5 minutes in latitude by 5 minutes in longitude (roughly 9 by 8 kilometres) and atlassers should cover all the different habitats in the pentad. A minimum of two hours of intensive atlassing should be done in the pentad but incidental records may be added for a period of up to five days. A pentad may only be atlassed once every five days.

In order to participate in the atlas, birders will have to get an ADU number. This will then allow them to log onto either the SABAP 2 website or the Namibian EIS, the Environmental Information Service, which will have a portal set up for data entry.



**Prof Underhill giving instructions to prospective bird atlassers.**

Further atlassing “lessons” are planned to coincide with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the Namibia Bird Club where Arnold van der Westhuizen will hold a series of workshops on atlassing.

For more information please contact Holger  
[holgerk@mweb.com.na](mailto:holgerk@mweb.com.na)

## From the Bird Ringing Community...

A Red Bishop that was ringed by Holger Kolberg on 17 February 2008 was killed by a cat on a plot at Nu-buamis on 23 February 2012. The time between the date ringed and date of death is 1467 days (or just over four years!) and the bird had travelled an estimated distance of 11km.

Sandra Dantu and Mark Boorman rehabilitated a Hartlaub's Gull in Swakopmund and released it on 10 March 2006 at the Swakopmund Sewage Works. The bird was re-sighted by Mark at the Mile 4 Saltworks on 6 March 2012, apparently getting frisky with a member of the opposite sex (of gull that is)!

Even more impressive is another Hartlaub's Gull that Sandra and Mark raised from a small chick and released at the sewage works on 2 April 2000. Mark reports seeing the bird again on 10 January 2012 at Mile 4! Cool record!

Frederic Siepmann from Swakopmund reported a tagged Lappet-faced Vulture, tag number E225, feeding on a carcass at Chudop waterhole in Etosha National Park. The bird was ringed as a chick by Wilferd Versfeld on 27 September 2011 east of Namutoni.

## Calendar of Events

**6 – 9 April 2012 Easter Weekend:** Namibia Bird Club outing to farm Kachenab near Maltahöhe, contact Gudrun gudrunm@iway.na

**30 April & 1 May 2012:** 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Namibia Bird Club at Arebbusch Lodge, Windhoek, contact Gudrun gudrunm@iway.na or Holger holgerk@mweb.com.na

**3 -5 May 2012:** Namibian Ringers' Get-together at Farm Wiese, near Windhoek, contact Ursula photographer@mweb.com.na

**12 & 13 May 2012:** World Migratory Bird Day, Namibia Bird Club outing to Monte Christo on 13 May

**22 – 24 May 2012:** EWT Birds of Prey Programme AGM at De Hoop Nature Reserve, South Africa

**10 June 2012:** Namibia Bird Club outing to Gammams Sewage Works

**8 July 2012:** Namibia Bird Club outing to Avis Dam

**21 & 22 July 2012:** Walvis Bay Wetland Bird Count

**18 August 2012:** tentative date for the Vulture Dinner in Swakopmund

**14 – 21 October 2012:** Pan-African Ornithological Congress in Arusha, Tanzania

## A new book on southern African birds

A new comprehensive photographic guide on the nocturnal birds of southern Africa has just been published, and is now available.

***Nocturnal Birds of Southern Africa*** brings the largely unseen world of night birds to the reader in the pages of this photographic guide, the first to cover the full spectrum of the owls, nightjars, night herons, thick-knees, coursers, the Bat Hawk and many other species in detail. This full-colour hardcover book has over 300 pages and is richly illustrated with 370 high-quality photographs, most of which have not previously been published, by the author and several leading photographers. It is a hardcover, medium-sized book measuring 216 by 267 by 22.5 mm.

Introductory chapters discuss nocturnal birds in general terms in the southern African context, and in the species accounts, clear, easily readable text and photographs cover all important aspects of typical adults, nests, eggs or nestlings, juveniles and the habitat of the species, including identification.

Large, clear distribution maps show the global distribution of each species, and basic species facts and information can be gleaned at a glance from succinct information at the end of each chapter.

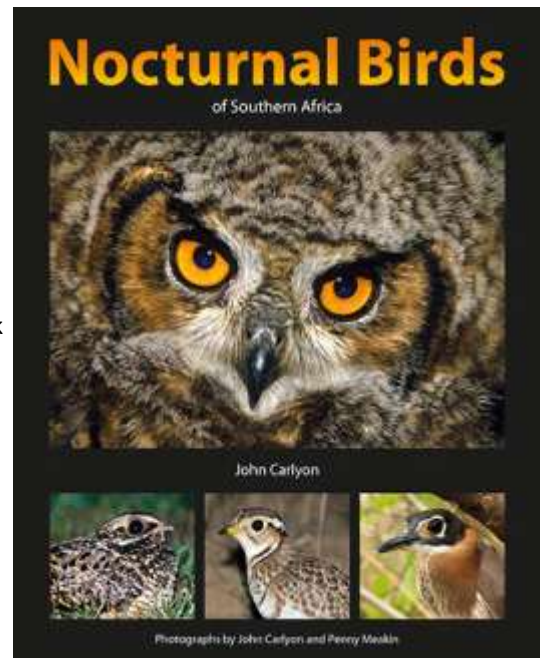
A new approach to the field identification of nightjars together with a unique set of images sheds fresh light on this difficult family of nocturnal birds.

The author, John Carlyon, and Penny Meakin, who illustrated the book, were responsible for most of the photography in this highly attractive publication.

**John Carlyon** is a practising veterinarian who has had a lifelong interest in ornithology, with nocturnal birds being a particular passion. Many of his articles and photographs have appeared in a variety of publications over the years.

**Penny Meakin**, a well-known artist and illustrator, contributed extensively to field work and photography, and illustrated the book.

The book is available in Windhoek at the Book Den.



## You are not a real Namibian Birder...

... if you do not have the following sites bookmarked on your web browser.

Namibia Bird Club <http://www.namibiabirdclub.org/>

BirdLife Data Zone <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/home>

Avibase <http://avibase.bsc-eoc.org/>

Searchable Ornithological Research Archive <http://elibrary.unm.edu/sora/>