

# Namibia Bird News



No 11, December 2014

## Can't teach an old dog...

By the time you read this you will hopefully be on a well-deserved break at a destination of your choice. I am writing this from an exotic location, looking at birds I don't really know which has forced me to whip out the trusty bird book and swat up on some of our feathered fauna.

OK, I've gone high-tech and instead of using a "real" book I'm on an e-book, which is really neat, because it includes the bird calls. I can proudly state that I have identified at least three birds just on their calls. It also drives home the message that one is never too old to learn something new and apart from making one feel good it also adds value to our holiday experience. So, why don't you go out and try something new today—it's well worth it!

This issue has very much a vulture flavour, after all, September and October are "vulture months" and therefore one is allowed to indulge a bit in one's favourite bird.

Have a good holiday and festive season! Happy birding!  
Holger



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Wishing all our readers a Merry Christmas  
and a happy New Year!



# 100

This year's Lappet-faced Vulture chick ringing expedition in the Namib-Naukluft Park will be one that will be remembered for a very long time. For the first time ever we managed to ring and tag 100 chicks in one season. This tremendous effort was not without its fair share of drama though!

The first flight to look for nests had hardly taken off when I got an SMS: "Come back quickly we found poachers!" I raised the alarm at the ranger station and when we got the locality from the flying crew we raced off at breakneck speed, unfortunately to no avail because by the time we got to the butchering site the poachers were long gone. Regrettably we have no direct evidence that ties a white bakkie with a Gobabis registration number, speeding along at over 160km/h on the district road, to a tree where at least five freshly butchered oryx were lying. It's a pity the scumbags didn't roll their vehicle in their haste to get away.



After this bit of excitement we would have been very happy with business as usual but as the waypoints started accumulating after each flying session we soon realised that we were onto something special. After two days of flying we had well over a hundred points and all that remained to do now was to visit all of them.



We started off in the Tsauchab River near Sossusvlei where there were two points. These both turned out to be small, fluffy grey chicks which would have to be visited again at a later stage. Then we met up with some of our friends and sponsors and over the weekend visited the Sukses area and the Tsondab River and plains. By the end of this leg we had but 14 chicks ringed, with again a few records of eggs and small chicks. Some of us then continued on Monday in the Saagberg and Kamberg area, adding another three chicks before we took a break to buy beer, stock up on food and have a shower etc.

We reconvened at Ganab, again supported by friends and sponsors, to tackle the majority of the points between the Swakop and Kuiseb Rivers. Here we operated with two ringing teams and at the end of the weekend we were hovering

around seventy chicks ringed with still quite a few points unvisited—these we kept for a National Geographic crew who wanted to come and shoot our operations in late October.

When Charlie and Simon from NatGeo arrived we did several more chicks, mainly in the Hotsas area before taking them down to Tsondabvlei where we had omitted to visit two points earlier for some unknown reason. By now our tally had risen to 83 chicks ringed and after a lightning visit to Ganab that was pushed to 87—by now the figure 100 was not only thought of but also mentioned in despatches!



We had records of twelve chicks that were too small plus six eggs and all we needed was thirteen more to make the hundred! Surely, surely we would be able to get those thirteen?!? I checked the records again just to make sure and then invited some of my friends to join me on an unusual outing to an exotic location in early December.

Things didn't start off too well because the first alleged egg that we visited turned out to be an empty nest and every Pied Crow within 100km immediately got blamed for this. No need to panic though, we still had five more eggs and all those chicks to get there. We ringed one chick and then went to two more eggs, which turned out to still be eggs (probably medium to hard boiled by now!). Drat! This was not in the script! Suddenly that dodgy tree which both Peter and I were reluctant to climb became a real possibility.

Anyway, we continued, a few more chicks, one more "still an egg" and then it happened: a bonus bird! A nest that hadn't been spotted during the aerial survey, chick no 97, yeehaah! Tomorrow we would visit chick no 98 and then there were the two Sossusvlei birds to make up the hundred.



The next day will again be etched in my memory forever. We found the chick under the tree freshly dead. There had been really strong winds the previous day and all we could assume is that the poor chick had been blown out of the nest and died of internal injuries. Life deals you some cruel blows at times but this was a real *snotklap*—not only had we lost a precious chick but we would also not get to the magical one hundred. I don't know which hurt more.

OK, so it was dodgy tree or point no 30 in the Escourt dunes to make up the century. At home I checked on the latter again—we had tried to get to it from the west but couldn't get across the last dune - and discovered that there is a track not 500m to the east of the nest (Google Earth is a wonderful thing, isn't it!). Follow the track to check where it comes from. Aha, Gondwana's Namib Desert Lodge. Since this was on the way to dodgy tree, Peter and I decided to quickly pop in and ask if we couldn't use their track to get near our nest. No problem and the friendly young warden lady even offered to accompany us! So off we went and after a few minor scenic detours we were at a point on the track where the GPS pointed 90 degrees to the left and proclaimed: "468m to target". There was a small dune in the way and after crossing that we were confronted by the park boundary fence which was quickly turned into a minor obstacle with the aid of Peter's Chinese fencing pliers. Now all we had to hope was that there was still a chick in the nest, after all this was early December and most chicks would have fledged by now.

There was much rejoicing when the GoPro (yes, we are high-tech now!) showed a big black chick in the nest but this turned into frantic activity when the chick decided to leave the nest when the ladder was put up! Fortunately it didn't fly too far and both Peter and I would have given Usain a go for his money with the turn of speed we suddenly developed. After measuring the wing we found the chick to be 115 days old, about a week away from fledging. Perfect timing!

We now could travel to Sossusvlei in peace, knowing that the two chicks there would bring us to the century. On Friday 5 December 2014 at 12 o'clock we ringed the 100th chick for the season in the Namib-Naukluft Park. Words cannot express how we felt at that moment but I can tell you that the bottle of Namibia's finest which I cracked a short time later tasted like none before!



## The crowd-map for re-sightings of marked vultures

Liz Komen

NARREC

A priority for endangered species suggested by the IUCN is monitoring. The use of information communication technologies (ICT) to encourage and facilitate reporting by citizens and expand data collection has proved useful in a number of environmental studies. The vulture re-sightings crowd-map is an example of an ICT interactive platform, a tool for recording re-sightings of marked leg-ringed or wing-tagged endangered vulture species.

By August 2014, three hundred and sixty six re-sighting records of tagged vultures were recorded on the vulture re-sightings crowd-map, <https://vulturesresightings.crowdmap.com>. It is not a definitive list though, other and older re-sightings are not included in the data of Namibia's Ministry of Environment and Tourism and other contributors to the crowd-map.

### Locations of re-sightings 1990 to August 2014

Place where marked birds have been re-sighted	Number of re-sightings 1990 to August 2014
NARREC	202
Namib-Naukluft Park and NamibRand NR	61
Etosha National Park	46
Elsewhere in Namibia	45
Outside of Namibia	7
REST (Rare and Endangered Species Trust)	5

The very first recovery included in the MET records was a dead Lappet-faced Vulture from Farm Saffier Maltahöhe, Namibia on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1990. This bird was 176 km from its natal site and was 2 years and 8 months old. In 2003 Peter Bridgeford reported the first live bird re-sighted, a Lappet-faced Vulture, 3 years and 5 months old at Namibrand, 267 km from its natal site.

### Individual vultures re-sighted

Type of ID	Total number of re-sightings	Actual number of individual birds
Wing tags	275	151
Canadian leg-rings	42	11
Colour Rings	40	38
Metal Rings only	9	9
TOTAL	366	209
There are a number of unidentifiable vultures seen with faded tags.		

### Re-sightings per species of marked birds

Species	Number of re-sightings
White-backed Vulture	253
Lappet-faced Vulture	111
Cape Vulture	2

At NARREC the most frequent marked vulture visitor, re-sighted 29 times, has been L107, a White-backed Vulture first seen on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2013 and last seen on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2014. This bird was ringed as a nestling 161km from NARREC on farm Okozongutu on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2010 by Holger Kolberg.

### Number of re-sightings of identifiable individuals

Number of times seen	Number of individual birds	% of re-sightings	The actual individuals
Seen 1x	165 birds	77.5	check the crowd-map
Seen 2x	31 birds	14.6	check the crowd-map
Seen 3x	6 birds	2.8	Check the crowd-map
Seen 4x	1	0.5	L192
Seen 6x	2	0.9	N092; N123
Seen 7x	1	0.5	L102
Seen 8x	2	0.9	N031; L244
Seen 10x	1	0.5	N105
Seen 13x	1	0.5	L313
Seen 14x	1	0.5	L224
Seen 16x	1	0.5	L55
Seen 29x	1	0.5	L107
		100.00%	

On the crowd-map a variety of information is given for each re-sighting and report. Once the report is verified and the initial ringing information is added, the age of the bird and distance from natal site can be

calculated.

### Interesting distance records

Species	Re-sightings	Ringing date and locality	Kilometers flown from ringing site	Time elapsed since ringing date
Cape Vulture C131	Seen in the Namib, Namibia on 12 Dec 2012 . by Holger Kolberg	12 July 2011 South Africa	1405 km	1 years 0 months 6 days
White-backed Vulture T060	Seen in Bwabwata, Namibia on 3 August 2013 by Koos Verwey	08 October 2012 OFS South Africa	1244 km	0 years 9 months 27 days
Cape Vulture C204	Seen at. NARREC on 7 May 2014 by Liz Komen	28 December 2012 Blouberg South Africa	1243 km	0 years 9 months 0 days
White-backed Vulture W229	Seen at NARREC on 20 June 2013 by Liz Komen	14 October 2012 Kimberley South Africa	1040 km	0 years 8 months 6 days

To date a colour ringed White-backed Vulture is the oldest bird re-sighted and reported on the crowdmap. This 10 year old bird was ringed by Peter Bridgeford on Farm Okapaue West on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2004. It was previously seen by Ann and Mike Scott at Palmwag on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2005, as a 10 month old juvenile. It has now been seen at NARREC seven times between 12<sup>th</sup> July 2013 and 9<sup>th</sup> September 2014, 399km from its natal site.

At NARREC's feeding station, over a 3 year period, there have been more than 150 feeding events. During each event, between one thousand five hundred and three thousand photo images are captured. Within a total of around 250 000 photo images, lies great potential for demographic research on both White-backed and Lappet-faced Vulture populations, the two vulture species that frequent the feeding site. Using these images, other research opportunities on scavenging species, like Tawny Eagle, Marabou Stork and selected scavenging mammals, could also provide interesting and new information.





## Bird Atlas Update

The end of the year is upon us and we again made some commendable progress with the atlas. Considering that we are but a mere handful of local atlasers who are supplemented by the odd visitor from elsewhere we have not done badly at all. Many thanks to all who have contributed!

I once again want to remind atlasers that you can edit your cards on the SABAP website. Please try and do it yourself first but if you do have problems I will gladly help you, just send me a mail.

We are hoping to arrange some exciting atlasing outings in the next year so keep watching this space.

Keep atlasing!

Holger Kolberg

Regional Atlas Coordinator for Namibia



### **As it stands...**

**669 pentads atlased**

**6.31% coverage**

**107 active observers**

**2082 cards submitted**

# Calendar of Events

- 11 January 2015:** Namibia Bird Club morning walk at Avis Dam.
- 24 and 25 January 2015:** Inland wetland bird counts.
- 2 February 2015:** World Wetland Day.
- 7 and 8 February 2015:** Coastal wetland bird counts.
- 22 February 2015:** Namibia Bird Club outing to Farm Haris.
- 8 March 2015:** Namibia Bird Club morning walk at Avis Dam.
- 11 March 2015:** Namibia Bird Club annual general meeting.
- 20 March 2015:** World Sparrow Day (serious! Check Wikipedia).
- 22 March 2015:** World Water Day.
- 26 March 2015:** Namibia Bird Club outing to Farm Teufelsbach.
- 3 to 6 April 2015:** Namibia Bird Club Easter weekend outing.
- 12 April 2015:** Namibia Bird Club morning walk at Gammams water works.
- 22 April 2015:** Earth Day.
- 25 April 2015:** World Penguin Day.
- 26 April 2015:** Namibia Bird Club outing to Farm Wildbad.
- 1 to 4 May 2015:** Namibian Ringers' Get-together.
- 4 May 2015:** International Respect for Chickens Day (Yes!).
- 9 and 10 May 2015:** World Migratory Bird Day.
- 10 May 2015:** Namibia Bird Club morning walk at Avis Dam.
- 22 May 2015:** World Biodiversity Day.
- 23 to 25 May 2015:** Namibia Bird Club long-weekend outing.
- 1 to 9 June 2015:** Meeting of the contracting parties to the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention) in Punta del Este, Uruguay.
- 5 June 2015:** World Environment Day.
- 8 June 2015:** World Oceans Day.
- 9 June 2015:** Donald Duck Day.
- 14 June 2015:** Namibia Bird Club morning walk at Gammams water works.
- 28 June 2015:** Namibia Bird Club outing to Farm Finkenstein.
- 12 July 2015:** Namibia Bird Club morning walk at Avis Dam.
- 10 August 2015:** Namibia Bird Club morning walk at Gammams water works.
- 5 September 2015:** International Vulture Awareness Day.