

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

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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

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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

Raptor Issues Within Conservancies

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IRDNC (Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation) is a Namibia NGO and Trust which pioneered community-based natural resource management in Namibia. This approach has proved successful and has resulted in wildlife recoveries and changed attitudes in many communal areas. More than 7 million km² - 9.5% of Namibia - are now under communal conservancy status. This figure is likely to double when all emerging conservancies are registered. IRDNC works with more than 40 of the registered and emerging communal area conservancies in Kunene and Caprivi.

When I started working in the communal areas in 1966, mainly in the north-west, particularly Kaokoland, there were many raptor nests. Today it's very different, and some raptors are not seen any more. During planning sessions for 17 conservancies in the Kunene Region we talked about raptors: which can be identified, which cause problems to people. Many species were listed. Some of them were reported to kill lambs, goat kids and chickens. We also asked how communities dealt with these problems. They told us that the birds are shot or poisoned; or the nests are found and the chicks destroyed. The overall attitude is that raptors are more of a problem than an asset, although vultures are not generally regarded as a threat as they show the people where cattle have died. Many raptors have therefore disappeared from the area.

How much raptor work has been done in the north-west communal areas? We need to work with conservancy staff, training, monitoring and looking for raptor nests. Raptor conservationists are welcome to come and talk at quarterly conservancy planning meetings. In this way we can link raptor conservation initiatives to conservancies. The training course with Save the Rhino Trust rangers needs to be followed up. We needed a mechanism to link in with these huge, previously unorganized areas, and to integrate raptor conservation ethics with the local communities. The social and institutional foundation to do this is in place in conservancies. All we now need is to obtain grass-roots buy-in for raptor conservation and technical input and ongoing support for ourselves.

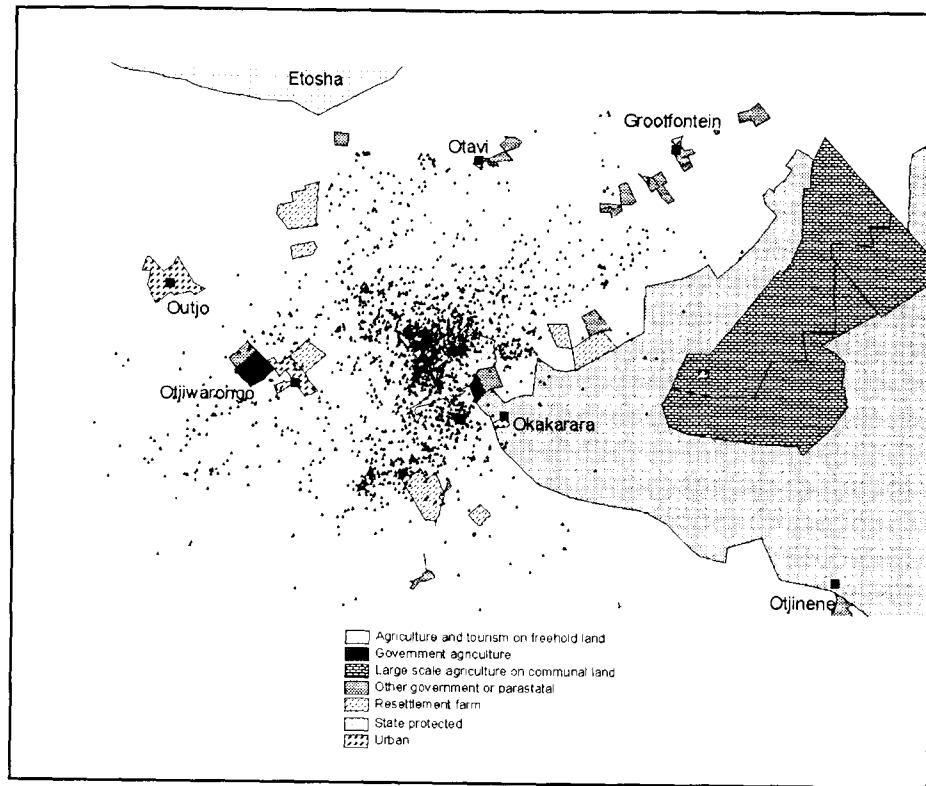


Figure 3. Places at which the five adults were recorded in relation to land uses. Each small black dot represents a record of a vulture.

In conclusion, a substantial volume of information has been collected from these five birds. The data have also demonstrated the existence of a tree-nesting population of Cape Vultures in Namibia. It can be argued that each reported locality is at least equivalent to a re-sighting, recapture or recovery of a ringed bird, and these five birds have provided over 7,300 such reports. This is a much greater return on effort than that achieved from all the ringing and colour-marking of vultures over many decades in the whole of southern Africa. Although satellite transmitters are expensive, we urge that more effort be made to track and study other birds using this technique.