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**International Vulture Awareness Day 5
September**

The Birds of Prey Working Group of the Endangered Wildlife Trust has been raising awareness of the plight of vultures in southern Africa for the past few years. This year, in co-operation with vulture conservation groups in other parts of the world, there will be an international effort to raise awareness over a large part of the world.

Vultures Namibia will contact the local press and English, German and Afrikaans radio services closer to the time.

Vultures & domestic stock

Peter Cunningham



It is with interest that I read about the vultures killing domestic stock. In 1999, I published a short note on this issue in *Lanioturdus* after a farmer east of Rehoboth reported vultures killing his lambs. Sheep and lambs in a camp (800m x 1000m) were observed for 4 days during December 1997 and all vultures descending into the camp were noted with the observer rushing to the scene to confirm the "kills". During the 4 observation days all the mortalities were confirmed as non-avian with vultures having descended for sheep, lambs and steenbok killed by jackal & cheetah/dogs during the preceding night. During these observations, vultures were not responsible for the mortalities. The camp with the sheep & lambs was said to be jackal proof, but on inspection proved not to be. In this instance, the vultures being conspicuous when landing at carcasses during early morning were held responsible for the mortalities.

I have also heard stories of Lappet-faced Vultures killing karakul lambs and weak ewe's attacked whilst attempting to lamb (i.e. lambs killed whilst still attached to the ewe with the posterior region of the ewe being damaged in the process resulting in the ewe having to be slaughtered) during extreme droughts in southern Namibia (Nico Strauss, Farm Velloor, pers com). I'm convinced that vultures do occasionally take lambs and some individuals may even become accustomed to preying on lambs, especially under adverse environmental conditions. This is where we could take a legal approach (with all its flaws) which maintains innocence until proven guilty. As a friend always says, 2 + 2 does not necessarily add up to 22!



Reference:

Cunningham, P.L. & Cunningham, A.I. 1999. Observations of Vultures at Domestic Stock Lamb Carcasses. *Lanioturdus* 32(2/3/4): 7-9.

Ospreys in Scotland

RSPB Scotland is pinning hopes on three osprey eggs at one of its reserves hatching and then being able to track two of the young via satellite.

An adult female called EJ has returned to Loch Garten near Aviemore to breed after spending the winter in Africa.

Her clutch should start hatching in about two weeks. If all three emerge, the two strongest will be tagged.

Last year's young - nicknamed Nethy and Deshar - were tagged but died during migration.

Staff at the reserve revealed their hopes in a blog posted on a website dedicated to Loch Garten's osprey.

Visitors are also able to see the nest and the birds on the site via a webcam. EJ mated with a male nicknamed Odin. His good record for catching fish and delivering them to the female has been a highlight for the RSPB bloggers.

Staff hope to raise £4,500 to help cover the cost of tagging any new chicks. Nethy was thought to have died earlier this year after migrating to Africa. Her brother Deshar died last October after making a "navigational error" and missed landfall in the Azore.



Who am I??



Photo: Pieter Mostert

Seen by Pieter Mostert at Okondeka, Etosha National Park, on 18/6/2009.

The following article on Black Harriers was first published in the Barking Gecko, May 2009.

Black Harriers in the Spotlight

Ann & Mike Scott, Andreas Keding & Rob Simmons

Black Harriers (*Circus maurus*) are being reported fairly regularly on NamibRand. This year a juvenile was seen at Aandstêr on 12 February and at the end of March by Andreas Keding and on Stellarine on 15 March by his wife Viktoria. We had a good view of an adult circling close to the C27 road just west of Ysterkop on 17 March and then of an adult at the edge of Zebra Pan at sunset on the 19th. Andreas had two further sightings in April, namely on Farm Dina on 2 April and then at sunset on the Aandstêr airstrip on the 7th. An adult has also been seen several times at the quarry-pit near the Sandgrouse waterhole at Keerweder by James Slade and by the Scotts on 10 May.

What is so special and so interesting about these records? The Black Harrier is endemic to southern Africa, with the core of its population in the Western Cape and Free State provinces (Simmons & Brown 2006). Because of their reliance on mice populations which fluctuate with rainfall, harrier populations are also expected to fluctuate over time. The world population is estimated at less than 1500 birds, with a population of only <50 birds/5 pairs in Namibia, where it is classified as Endangered. In Namibia harriers make use of habitats such as desert floodplains and karoo scrub. The most northerly confirmed breeding site is near Kleinsee (19oS), in South Africa. Although there are no breeding records for the species in Namibia as yet, sightings of immature birds in the Hoanib and Uniab River floodplains by Steve Braine suggest that breeding could have occurred in both areas. Adults and immature birds have been seen by Dr. Rob Simmons just south of Grünau foraging over grasslands. This is an area that should be re-visited and checked for breeding. The recent sightings of juveniles on NamibRand are thus of particular interest.

How does one distinguish between a young Black Harrier (BH) and a young Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk (SPCG)? Morphologically they are very similar – both have long yellow legs, a white rump and barred tail, and a similar body size, manner of flying and fence perching. The differences are in the eye colour (dark in BH and pale in SPCG); the breast colour - barred and rusty brown in SPCG; and especially the back colour which is very dark in the BH, contrasting with the pale unmarked underbelly.

Dr Rob Simmons, acknowledged champion of this charismatic endemic species, has added our records to his data set and regards them as most valuable. He has used the sightings and some of our habitat photographs in talks to illustrate how useful they are for determining the unusual habitats that harriers visit. Rob reports that the first harrier in southern Africa was successfully satellite tagged on 11 October 2008. The tiny (12.5g) solar powered tag was attached to a breeding male on the West Coast. Further tagging is in the pipeline. Rob hopes that these tags will at least show us where the birds spend most of their time when not breeding.

Monitoring of Black Harrier populations in Namibia's northwestern rivers and now at NamibRand as well is considered a priority, in particular to confirm whether breeding occurs (most likely in October-November). This is best done in wetter areas, at times when small mammals are abundant. Rob also suggests investigating roost sites for pellets in winter, which could confirm that the harriers are feeding on smaller birds. Black Harriers roost at sunset about 20 minutes before true dusk. They prefer rank grass, plentiful after good rains, and several individuals (up to five, but sometimes many more) often congregate together.

For further information on Black Harriers, please contact Rob at email Rob.Simmons@uct.ac.za. Postings of Black Harriers may be viewed on the Natural World website (www.natworld.org/blackharrier).



The juvenile Black Harrier (left) may be confused with the juvenile Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk (right)

Reference:

Simmons R.E. & Brown C.J. 2006. Birds to watch in Namibia: Red, Rare and Endemic Species. Unpublished report, National Biodiversity Programme, Windhoek.

USEFUL WEBSITES

- African Raptor Network (ARN) www.africanraptors.org
- Global Raptor Information Network www.globalraptors.org
- Raptors Namibia www.nnf.org.na/RAPTORS/
- Migrating Kestrel Project www.kestreling.com
- Vulture Rescue (Asian vultures) www.vulturerescue.org
- The Peregrine Fund www.peregrinefund.org
- Dutch Montagu's Harrier Foundation www.grauwekiekendief.nl
- EWT Birds of Prey Working Group www.ewt.org.za/workgroups_overview.aspx?group=raptor&page=overview
- The Hawk Conservancy Trust www.hawk-conservancy.org
- Born to Travel Campaign www.borntotravelcampaign.com

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- PO Box 287, Simon's Town, 7995, South Africa Web: <http://www.kestreling.com>

More sightings of Red-footed Falcons



Photo: Ann Scott

Ann & Mike Scott
On 21/2/09 at 09h 30, we were traveling from Solitaire to Swakopmund on the C14. With 40 mm of rain the previous day (and a total of 140 mm at Solitaire this

season), there were many raptors around. At 14 km from Solitaire we started seeing Red-footed Falcons, about 18 in total including a road mortality (a female, see photos). What was strange that we saw no dark individuals (i.e. males).

On 27/3/09 at 10h00 we saw a few more groups of these birds near Kalkfeld, also perching on telephone wires; no definite patterns in group composition this time:
East of Kalkfeld: Four dark birds (males) + one light (female or sub-adult?)

West of Kalkfeld: One male + one female + two others; two males



Photo: Ann Scott

Old (new) use for vulture bones

Mark Boorman found the next interesting snippet (abridged) on <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/8117915.stm>

'Oldest musical instrument' found

Pallab Ghosh, Science correspondent, BBC News
Scientists in Germany have published details of flutes dating back to the time that modern humans began colonising Europe, 35,000 years ago. The flutes are the oldest musical instruments found to date.

The team from Tubingen University have published details of three flutes found in the Hohle Fels cavern in southwest Germany.



The most well-preserved of the flutes is made from a vulture's wing bone, measuring 20cm long with five finger holes and two "V"-shaped notches on one end of the instrument into which the researchers assume the player blew. The archaeologists also found fragments of two other flutes carved from ivory that they believe was taken from the tusks of mammoths.

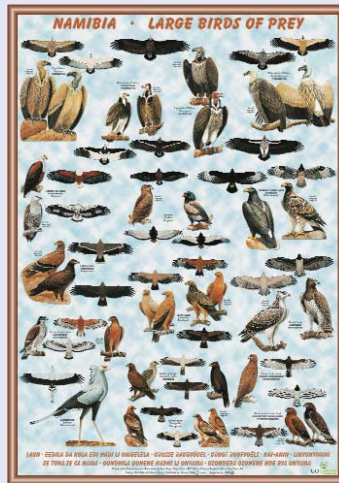
The find brings the total number of flutes discovered from this era to eight, four made from mammoth ivory and four made from bird bones.

"These flutes provide yet more evidence of the sophistication of the people that lived at that time and the probable behavioural and cognitive gulf between them and Neanderthals," he said.

News Flashes



- ▶ On 13/5/09 while in Namibia, Mike Goldsworthy of Botswana saw a colour-ringed Lappet-faced Vulture. It had only two rings on its left leg, possibly a bird from the Rare and Endangered Species Trust in Otjiwarongo or it lost one of its original three rings fitted in the Namib or Etosha.
- ▶ I saw 15 lappets around a springbok carcass including right wing Yellow tag F009 on 7th April opposite Brandberg on the Uis – Henties Road (this bird was ringed and tagged at Hotsas in October 2006). The tagged bird soon flew off but the others remained within 200m of the road. No other rings or tags seen. *Kevin Roberts*
- ▶ During May we saw a number of vultures flying and bathing in the Hoanib River close to Puros, northern Namibia. No rings or tags were seen. *Günther Waetzhold.*
- ▶ I saw two Lappet-faced Vultures at the dry Satanskop Pan, NamibRand Nature Reserve Namibia. Both birds were sitting on the ground and then took off after some five minutes heading for Satanskop. The one bird had a tag on its right wing, numbered V053 or V059. The last digit was covered by feathers and was not clearly visible. *Albi Brückner*
V053 was ringed and tagged on the Tsondab plains and V059 at Tsamsvlei in the Namib, both in October 2008.
- ▶ On 28/10/08 we spotted a secretary bird in the Sperrgebiet, on the eastern border opposite farm Witputz Wes. On 07/01/09 we saw 3 vultures perched on some quiver trees on farm Bloemhof SW of Usakos. We could not get near enough to make a positive id, but judging by their size, they probably were lappet-faced vultures. *Herta Kolberg*
- ▶ I saw the following tagged Lappet-faced Vultures. 19 March, 18:20 about 6km east of the turnoff to Hotsas on the main Swakop-Windhoek road, one individual on a tree, couldn't read tag as bird flew away when approached. 26 May 12:10 at Hotsas one individual amongst a group of six, too far away to read tag. *Hilke Riemer*
- ▶ Enquiries about recently published posters:
The Owls of Namibia and Namibia – Large Birds of prey *Liz Komen liz@narrec.net*
Namibia's Threatened birds *Ann Scott ecoserve@iway.na*



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