RAPTORS NAMIBIA
Working together to conserve our birds of prey!

Newsletter

#4 October — December 2011

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Tagged Lappet-faced Vulture seen in Chobe, Botswana

The marking of vultures with patagial tags to track their movements in Southern Africa, started in 2006.

The value of tags is shown by the high percentage of resightings of live birds since then. In November 2010, Wilferd Versfeld ringed and tagged a Lappet-faced Vulture chick in the Etosha National Park in Namibia.

In September 2011, Leo Hughes saw this tagged vulture (E217) feeding with a number of White-backed Vultures. This was on the Chobe River in the Chobe National Park in Botswana. The vulture had moved 958 kms in just over 10 months.

Many thanks to Leo Hughes and Pete Hancock for reporting this sighting.

Photo: Leo hughes

Lappet-faced Vulture, E217, feeding on dead cow next to the Chobe River in Botswana

Hawks to patrol shopping district

12 October 2011, REUTERS

Singapore - Businesses along Singapore's famous Orchard Road shopping street plan to deploy trained hawks to scare off thousands of birds whose droppings rain down on pedestrians' heads, a report said on Wednesday.

The Straits Times said retailers were in talks with Jurong Bird Park, whose attractions include trained birds of prey, to try a natural solution after artificial methods such as high-pitched recordings failed to drive the birds away.

Wildlife groups estimate that around 2 000 to 5 000 starlings and mynahs roost along Orchard Road in the evening, releasing droppings on pavements and parked cars and creating a din that even overpowers traffic noise.

The use of chemicals to poison the birds was ruled out by the Orchard Road Business Association (ORBA) for being too cruel.

"We are still in discussions with the relevant people and nothing has been firmed up at this stage," a spokeswoman for Wildlife Reserves Singapore, which oversees the bird park, told AFP.

ORBA officials were not available for comment.

"The idea is to scare the birds away. At the end of the day, we want the pleasant shopping experience to return to Orchard Road", Steven Goh, the executive director of ORBA, told the Straits Times. - Sapa-AFP

From Langebaan to Lesotho... and back - A Black Harrier's Travels

Rob Simmons

This species breeds only in South Africa, and is the subject of a multi-year research effort at the FitzPatrick Institute, University of Cape Town. The aims are to:

- determine breeding success and critical habitats;
- understand what limits its population; and
- determine where adults move once breeding is finished.

Unlike most raptors, adults do not return to their previous breeding spot. So, despite ringing 30-40 adults (and over 300 young) over 10 years we have virtually no data on known-age birds or where adults go.

Thus, part of the research focus has been to satellite-tag breeding adults to determine where they (i) forage during breeding and (ii) disperse once they have finished.

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The results from just five birds have opened up a new and fascinating window into the lives of birds we thought we knew something about! This blog is set up to share these exciting findings and keep interested parties (and my sponsors!) updated and informed.

To set the scene I have provided a map below of our star bird. This shows the new and unexpected route taken by a female Black Harrier named Moraea. She was caught and given a satellite tag in Langebaan (in the West Coast National Park) in November 2010. In 6 months, she has flown rapidly to Lesotho, stayed there for 2 months, visited the highest point in Southern Africa (3480m) and then made a return journey to Langebaan in July 2011.

Not impressed with the low rainfall at the West Coast Park she flew back to the Eastern Cape via Beaufort West and onto Engcobo in July. In early August, she once again turned and headed west for Aberdeen and first visited the Camdeboo Mountains on 12 August 2011. She subsequently stayed to breed, attracted by the above average rainfall that had fallen on The Ranges farm, owned by Pen and Hester Marx. Other Black Harriers were also attracted by the rains that had swollen the mouse population and she began breeding with her mate in early September in the vleis above the farm.

At present, she is hunting further and further from her nest site (with three chicks) and as of yesterday (21 November) she was hunting up to 22 km from the nest.

Thanks to Natural Research (UK), Hawk Mountain Trust (USA) and all the Black Harrier correspondents (especially Pen and Hester Marx, Kate Webster and Cat Simmons) for prising open this particular window into the life of one of Africa's rarest endemic breeding birds.

This is Moraea's track, from February to November 2011. Starting in Langebaan in February, she flew (pink line) 1200 km to Sani Pass in 6 days. Returning slowly (blue line) via Engcobo and Somerset East to Langebaan in July 2011 she immediately turned back to Beaufort West and flew on to Engcobo (red line) in August. From Engcobo she flew back (green line) to Aberdeen to settle in the Camdeboo Mountains to breed in September – November. A total journey of 5800km

Total numbers of *Birds of Prey* ringed in Namibia - 2011

Compiled by Holger Kolberg

Species	No
Lappet-faced Vulture	120
Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk	87
White-backed Vulture	87
Pearl-spotted Owlet	21
Rock Kestrel	16
Augur Buzzard	12
Black-shouldered Kite	10
African Scops-Owl	7
Spotted Eagle-Owl	6
Greater Kestrel	5
Lanner Falcon	5
Shikra	4
African Hawk Eagle	3
Black-chested Snake-Eagle	3
Dark Chanting-Goshawk	3
Jackal Buzzard	3
Tawny Eagle	3
Barn Owl	2
Gabar Goshawk	2
Little Sparrowhawk	2
Yellow-billed Kite	2
African Barred Owlet	1
Brown Snake-Eagle	1
Peregrine Falcon	1
Pygmy Falcon	1
Red-necked Falcon	1

Vêr in die ou Kalahari and other interesting places

Peter Bridgeford

On 19 September 2011, Holger Kolberg and I undertook a vulture-ringing trip into the "old Kalahari". We left Windhoek the morning in his Mean Green Machine and arrived at our destination, the farm *Masbieker*, just before five o'clock. It was a long trip and the song, *Vêr in die ou Kalahari*, was appropriate. The owner, Marnus van Zyl, was not present bur arranged for his foreman to take us to his hunting farm *Buitepos*, on the border with Botswana, south-east of the metropolis of Aranos. He kindly let us use the facilities of his empty hunting lodge for the next two days. Around the braai fire, we partook of some resuscitation medicine and prime Namibian mutton to gather strength for the next day's ringing.

Dawid Olivier arrived early the next morning to guide us around the farm. Before lunch, we had ringed the four White-backed Vultures breeding on *Buitepos*. Our next stop was to see Bampie Meyer on the neighbouring farm *Genesis*. Unfortunately, he was busy with his sheep and could not spare the time to look for nests. However, in true Kalahari tradition, we first had coffee, rusks and a chat before he started work. Our next call was some distance away on the

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farm *Geluk* of Gideon Koegellenberg. As he could not accompany us due to ill health, he sent Tommy Koper to guide us around and over the dunes. We did manage to ring one White-backed Vulture to show Tommy what, how and why. Two other chicks were too small to even ring. So back to our own private hunting camp for more resuscitation medicine and food.

Photo: Peter Bridgeford

Tommy Koper holding the White-backed Vulture chick

The next morning we headed north. Our next port of call on the way to Aranos had to be abandoned as the owner was away. We arrived in time for lunch at Holger's friend, Friedrich Nauhaus, on the farm *Natabsaub*. Although we investigated many nests, we only found one occupied nest containing an egg. We spent a delightful evening on the farm. – True Namibian hospitality.

On Thursday morning, our first stop was close to Gobabis, on the farm *Neuhof*. Kallie Nel, a vet from Gobabis was waiting for us. He was on crutches, but accompanied us all over the hunting farm looking for breeding vultures and raptors. We were a bit early in the vulture breeding season and found two White-backed Vultures, both still incubating eggs. After a welcome cold drink on the shady verandah and a long chat to Kallie, we headed back to Windhoek.

We did not ring many vultures, but we had made contact with farmers in an area we had not been to before. Spreading the vulture conservation word is the first step in making people aware of the many dangers faced by vultures and opening the eyes of the people living on the land where vultures scavenge and breed. Thanks for a great trip Holger!

On Friday morning, Dirk Heinrich and I picked up the long, long ladder from Holger and headed for the farm *Monte Christo*, not far from Windhoek, in the hi-lux. We drove along a smelly river, effluent from the Gammans Sewerage Farm until we found the Fish-eagle nest. It was in a huge ana tree. With the aid of three farm workers, we manhandled the 16 metre ladder to the correct position, tied it to the hi-lux and heaved away. Slowly the ladder crept upwards. We had to anchor it on two sides to prevent a slight breeze from blowing it over. At its full extension, it still did not reach the nest. We needed another two metres of ladder. It was a very frustrated Dirk who had to concede defeat. Live to fight another day.

On Saturday morning, Marilyn and I drove to near Dordabis and met Hilke, Hanno and baby Helge von Ditfurth at the turn-off to their farm *Rietfontein*. Holger and Claire Kolberg arrived at about the same time and we went to the farm *Binsenheim* of Walter Romeis. We left our bakkie there and drove with Hilke and Hanno in the combi. Some very rocky and bumpy roads, but we ringed two Lappet-faced Vultures and a Tawny Eagle. The eagle took off on its maiden flight when it saw Holger climbing up the ladder (possibly the green hat?). A scramble though and over the thorn bushes followed to retrieve it from under a buffalo thorn. It was a hot day and after all that exertion, we retired to the verandah at *Rietfontein* to rehydrate our parched bodies. That evening we dined on the biggest steaks I had seen for a long time (and I have been around for a long time).

On Sunday, we all set off for Smalhoek, the family farm of Helmut and Iris Stehn, some way from *Rietfontein*. Thanks to Hilke, they were expecting us and after a cup of coffee, we went looking for vultures. We were joined by people from the neighbouring farm to see what we were doing. We ringed six White-backed Vultures and also found one egg. After a lovely lunch on the cool verandah, we took leave of the Stehns and Marilyn, Claire and I headed for Windhoek. Holger stayed over at *Rietfontein* to continue ringing.

On Monday, 26 September, Holger, Hilke and Hanno plus baby Helge went to the farms *Garib* and *Autabib* and ringed four and two White-backed Vultures respectively and a Lappet-faced Vulture on both farms. On Tuesday, the Four H's were at it again, this time on the farm *Rainhof* were they managed to ring three White-backed Vultures. Thanks to Hilke who arranged the ringing on the farms in their area. Without Hilke and Hanno's help, it would not have happened.

On the Sunday before our trip to the Kalahari, Holger and Claire went to the farm *Frauenstein* with the Namibia Bird Club. A successful and enjoyable Club outing attended by; Neil Thomson, Gudrun Middendorff, Dieter Ludwig, Dawid van der Merwe, Richard Niddrie, Christiane Maluche, Wilfried Hähner, Ushi Kirchner and Nacho Aransay. They ringed five White-backed Vultures.

Thanks to all those strange vulture people who helped with ringing and promoting vulture conservation and made it fun at the same time. A special word of thanks to Holger for all his contributions, organising permits and greasing the wheels that keep us all ringing and doing what we enjoy. To all the landowners who allowed us onto their farms and who do so much to protect vultures and raptors, thank you.

Photo: Peter Bridgeford

Ringing on Farm *Binsenheim* with Helge von Ditfurth carefully inspecting the chick while Walter Romeis takes a photograph

East wind hammers vulture counters

Peter Bridgeford

On 3 October 2011, the Vultures Namibia monitoring team met at Ganab for the annual vulture survey in the Namib-Naukluft Park. Pilot Rob Field flew from Port Elizabeth to Windhoek where he picked up our trusty Cessna 182, V5-JOG, with a new engine. He landed at Ganab International to be welcomed by Holger Kolberg, CEO of Ganab International. Accompanying him was Hanno von Ditfurth, Learner Observer and Master Chef, all the way from his farm near Dordabis. From Swakopmund, Hartmut Kolb, Senior Observer and Navigator, accompanied by Helen. They were already waiting. From Walvis Bay, Refuelling Vehicle Driver, Peter Bridgeford.

After a pow-wow under the nearest camel thorn tree, it was decided to fly before the heat of the day made flying uncomfortable. While the airborne group surveyed the Tinkas area, the ground crew moved to the luxurious Ganab VIP campsite, off-loaded the vehicles and set up camp. Holger, as fitting for a CEO, had radio contact with the plane. We refuelled after the first flight and then headed for camp and a lengthy lunch. At 16:00, the survey crew took off again.

On Tuesday morning, a long flight and another two hours later the afternoon ended the Ganab survey. On Wednesday morning, the flying team left early to start the Saagberg/Tsondab section. The ground crew packed up and the three vehicles headed for Sesriem for the next section of the survey. This year we did not use the airfield at Weltevrede Guest Farm as the runway was over-grown with grass and they were still waiting for the arrival of the road-grader to clear it. Sossusvlei Lodge, next to Sesriem, at the entrance to the Namib-Naukluft Park, allowed us to use their runway. By the time the refuelling vehicle arrived at 13:00, the intrepid survey team had just landed. We camped at the Sossus-Oasis campsite and after another long lunch, the afternoon flight completed the Sukses/Tsams area. That evening the team dined in style under the stars at the Sossusvlei Lodge and enjoyed the many meat dishes and mounds of dessert,

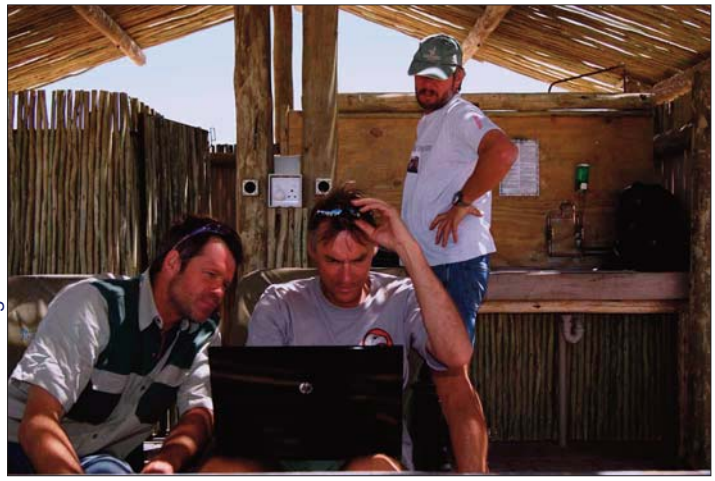

Photo: Peter Bridgeford

The team discuss the data before continuing with the aerial survey in the Namib

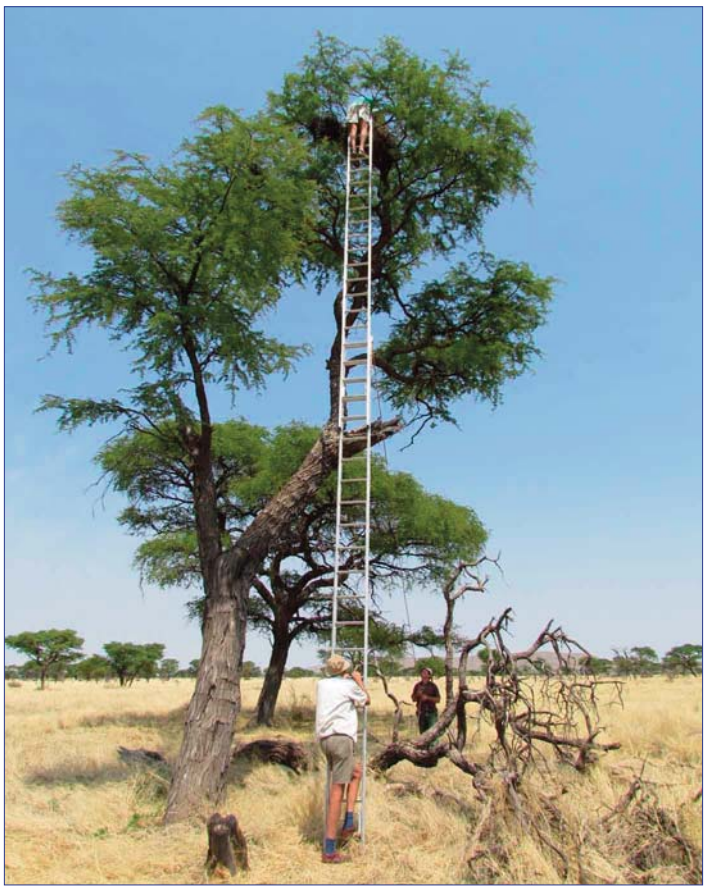

Photo: Claire Kolberg

Holger climbing to get the vulture chick

not forgetting the cold beer. Little did we know that the balmy evening was a prelude to the 'mother' of all east winds later that night. As we all slept in our bedrolls on the ground, gravel and sand peppered us all night long. It was long night and we were all up early. Hartmut managed to boil water and we all had a cuppa. We drove to the airfield in trepidation, expecting to find our plane blown into one of the buildings, as there were no tie-down facilities. However, our savvy pilot had faced the plane into the wind and it had not moved. The rigid windsock appeared to be glued in the horizontal position. The whole crew waited impatiently on the veranda of the Sossus Oasis Shop, the only sheltered place with shade, for the wind to lessen. Eventually, at about 11:00, the wind decreased slightly and the plane took off. We anxiously waited for their safe return and about 12:30, Rob skilfully landed, despite the wind. They told us that on the way to Sossus, with the wind behind them, they reached 321 kph. Into the wind, the plane was slow and they had good sightings and found three possible occupied nests. After refuelling and lunch, Rob took off and headed back to Windhoek. Another successful vulture survey completed.

On behalf of Vultures Namibia, I would like to thank the whole crew for their dedication and commitment to the vulture project. They are all volunteers and received no remuneration of any kind. They all took time off from their jobs to help the cause of vulture conservation. All I can say is THANK YOU!

Ringing in the Namib

Peter Bridgeford

After the departure of our pilot, Rob Field and aircraft on Thursday 6 October 2011, Holger, Hartmut, Helen, Hanno and I 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.

Photo: Claire Kolberg

Warden Jose Kaumba, of Ganab, watching Holger Kolberg ring & tag a Lappet-faced Vulture chick

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. From SGA, we had Gerhard & Elsbeth Swart and Willem Boshoff. Sophia and Kobus van Zyl from Windhoek joined us again. Peter & Harald Keil from WestAir and Peter's brother from Johannesburg. Also from Windhoek were Sandra Gush, Kim & Adino Tré and their friends Johan Rissik & Keith Dreyer. Jannes Brandt and his friend Christo Aldrich from Pretoria joined us again. With them from Windhoek were Rein van Veen and Daneel van der Walt. Martin Wood and Bill Beer came all the way from Gauteng. Hilke and Helge arrived from the farm at Dordabis, much to Hanno's delight. On Saturday morning, we moved to Escourt, but could not find the chick in the Dieprivier. We did ring two in the Tsondab River and camped at the mouth of the vlei under the huge ana trees. On Sunday, we crossed the vast Tsondab Plains and ringed another two chicks. 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 was ringed here. On Sunday evening, we had to abandon our grassy campsite in the NNP because of the fire that was still raging. Thanks to Simone and Walter Swart, we camped at Solitaire Guest Farm and all enjoyed a hot shower. On Monday, we said our goodbyes and the group split up and headed for home. Although we did not ring as many chicks as the previous year (only 10), it was an enjoyable weekend in good company in one of the magical places in the Namib Desert.

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. The Snyman and Jandrell families came from Windhoek, accompanied by their friend Calvyn Nolte. It was encouraging to have some enthusiastic children in the group, as well as Mark Boorman and Sandra Dantu, Peter and Annegrette Sander, Cronje Grane, Dawid van der Merwe, Uschi Kirchner and Christiane Maluce. From Gobabeb came Viv Ward and Inge Henschell with four students.

On Saturday morning, Sue Roux, Martin and Guido joined the group. 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. Marcia and Mark Stanton joined us on Sunday morning. 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, we found honeybees 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. Some chicks had marks on the bare skin around the eyes and on the head that could have been caused by bee stings. We found the larger, feathered chicks had their heads under their wings to escape the bees.

In the Ganab area, we ringed 35 Lappet-faced Vulture chicks, as opposed to 64 last year.

However, I am not too concerned about the lower number of chicks this year. The numbers fluctuate from year to year.

A special word of thanks to our sponsors. Also to friends who helped with the ringing and publicise the plight of vultures in Namibia. Figures from the report on the aerial survey and ringing show that it is a costly business and without our sponsors, this essential task would not have been possible.

'Truce' benefits bird neighbours

By Ella Davies, Reporter, BBC Nature

Photo: Daniel Montero

Lesser Kestrel

Lesser kestrels in Italy have formed a 'truce' with their jackdaw neighbours to save energy, a study has revealed. Researchers found that birds nesting in a mixed colony patrolled for predators less often than those living in single species sites did. The unlikely co-operation happened despite the birds' conflicting diets as jackdaws can prey on kestrel eggs. Scientists suggest this could have important implications for the future of the birds of prey. Up to 20,000 pairs of lesser kestrels are currently thought to exist in Europe and North Africa.

According to BirdLife International, a partnership of conservation organisations, the species suffered rapid declines after the 1950s but they have been recovering in the last three generations. The sociable raptors roost together in trees and abandoned buildings, preying on small mammals and sometimes other birds.

Mixed roosts

Scientists from the University of Palermo, Italy and the University of Manitoba, Canada noticed the seemingly unusual mixed roosts of kestrels and jackdaws in rural buildings surrounded by cereal crops.

"Jackdaws are opportunist foragers and as such they may be potential predators of kestrel eggs", explained Daniela Campobello whose study, conducted with colleagues Maurizio Sara and James F Hare, was published in the journal *Behavioral Ecology.* "The fact that lesser kestrels tolerated them as 'neighbours' triggered us to suspect that it must have been some kind of advantage."

By observing the birds and recording their calling behaviour in response to predator threats, the researchers discovered that both species benefited from the mixed 'neighbourhood'. Results indicated reduced anti-predator patrols for both species as well as a reduced response by kestrels to threats and less nest attendance by jackdaws, saving them energy.

Ms Campobello theorised that the jackdaws benefited from having 'pugnacious' neighbours: the kestrels deterred other species that might prey on the jackdaws. This relationship has been described for other species as the 'predator protection phenomenon' but the corresponding role of the kestrels in this instance added a further layer of complexity.

Enemy agreement

"Overall, we would say that there is a reciprocal advantage, where each species' presence allows an optimisation of vigilance and defence efforts," Ms Campobello told BBC Nature. "These two species, potential enemies, found a truce agreement to look after their own interests."

However, they also found that the jackdaws made more alarm calls when nesting in colonies with kestrels than when they nested alone. Ms Campobello questioned whether this was the "price paid by jackdaws to lesser kestrels to be allowed to benefit from enhanced colony vigilance?" The researchers are now investigating the reproductive success of both species to understand how the colony structure could influence the kestrels' future survival. "Our findings strongly indicate that to improve the conservation status of the lesser kestrels we need not only study this species but also the possible advantages accrued in their interaction with other species," said Ms Campobello.

Vultures, Learning To Love Them

HARTBEESPOORT, South Africa,
Donna Bryson Associated Press
Published: Sunday 11 December 2011

Many people associate vultures with death and decay. However, a couple of conservationists in South Africa are trying to show the public what they love and admire about these birds in order to try to save them. "No one's going to try to save a species if they don't love them," said Kerri Wolter.

Wolter and partner Walter Neser run the Vulture Programme, where visitors can see the birds as they do - as loyal mates, devoted parents and resourceful foragers, as well as spectacular fliers. Visitors to the Vulture Programme, a 25-acre plot with spectacular views of the Magaliesberg Mountains near Johannesburg, can observe the birds feeding at "vulture restaurants" where they dine on carrion. Visitors can get close to a Cape Vulture-breeding colony located on an artificial cliff made from mesh, concrete and paint.

The Cape Vulture, with a 2,6 m wingspan, creamy feathers and golden eyes, is Southern Africa's only native vulture. South Africa has the largest population of these breeding vultures, about 2,400 pairs. However, as their habitats are threatened by human encroachment, the species is listed as *vulnerable*. Neighbouring Namibia, where the bird is listed as *critically endangered*, is believed to have only about a dozen wild breeding pairs left.

This time of the year, visitors to the Vulture Programme premises can watch the birds feeding and see young vultures on the verge of flight. During spring, in September and October, visitors may glimpse a pair of adult birds incubating an egg. While the scene looks natural, it is the result of painstaking human intervention.

Protecting the eggs

Wolter and Neser remove the egg from adult pair and replace it with a wooden dummy soon after laying. This is to ensure as many successful hatchings as possible. The birds mate for life.

The real egg spends most of the 54-day incubation period in a kitchen in an old farmhouse near the large-bird enclosures.

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When the chick is ready to hatch, signalled by the sound of tapping from within the egg, Wolter takes over the role of hen. She spends hours tapping and pulling at the broken shell with surgical clamps and uses a syringe to dampen the feathers of the emerging chick with a solution resembling a mother bird's saliva.

In the wild, when over-eager parents hatch their chicks too fast, the chicks can die of shock.

Once Wolter's chicks are hatched and deemed strong enough, they are returned to their parents. The dummy egg is removed and the chick, under what looks like half an egg, is replaced in the nest. The sound of its tapping stimulates the parents' instincts.

"They, theoretically, hatch it again," Wolter said.

"They don't recognise it as their own chick if they don't hatch it," said Neser. He has scars on his ankles, souvenirs of bites, after his frequent visits to the breeding enclosure.

Both parents share in nest building, hatching and feeding of their young.

The conservationists must strike a delicate balance. If they wait too long to place the chick back with its real parents, it may become too imprinted on humans to be released into the wild. If they move too soon, the chick may be too weak to survive the first few critical days with its parents.

Clumsy parents, seeking to shelter chicks between their feet, sometimes crush them. Some parents don't 'buy' the elaborate charade of wooden eggs and half shell, and kill chicks they see as outsiders.

Still, a successful artificial hatching seems easy compared to the larger challenges faced by vultures.

Poisoning predators

The conservationists' long-term goal is to re-establish a viable breeding colony of these vultures in Namibia. One of the biggest threats to vultures is the incidental poisoning by stock farmers. This is the result of the continual struggle against mammalian predators such as jackals that attack domestic stock.

A common method is to leave a poisoned horse carcass out for jackals. Vultures swoop down on the carcass. One poisoned horse "can wipe out an entire colony," Neser said.

Members of vulture colonies fly together, watching the ground but also watching one another. If one swoops for food, others follow. "They have this pretty cool network going for locating food," Neser said.

Alternatively, bringing stock into enclosures at night, when most predators strike, is expensive and labour intensive.

"At the moment, it is not safe to reintroduce vultures into Namibia," Wolter said.

They plan to start slowly, reintroducing vultures into a Namibian nature reserve, though they realise it will be difficult to keep the birds from ranging far in search of food and perhaps finding poisoned offerings.

Photo: Associated Press

In this photo, researcher Walter Neser squats down with Cape Vultures in their enclosure

"They can easily travel 300 kilometres to feed and come back in the same day," Neser said.

Vultures can fly into Namibia from South Africa. Poisoning is not as widespread in South Africa, but this country is more crowded and developed, creating other problems for the birds. Some South Africans believe the birds are clairvoyant and kill them to use their body parts as talisman.

Good Samaritans regularly bring vultures that have crashed into power lines and damaged their wings, to Wolter and Neser. Those that can be rehabilitated are released back into the wild.

In addition to welcoming visitors to their conservancy, Wolter and Neser travel regularly to schools to talk about their birds. They stress that though they might not be cute and cuddly, vultures are nature's safety and health agents. The birds clean up carcasses before they attract flies, feral dogs, rats and mice, and thereby check the spread of diseases like anthrax.

The Vulture Programme also offers paraglider trips for about $400 that allow researchers and the occasional special guest a chance to fly with the vultures.

Neser says shaking human prejudice isn't easy, and the future for vultures is "not really a very pretty or optimistic picture".

Wolter steps in: "The idea is to try and make a difference for as long as you can and not give up."

EFFECTIVE WAYS TO SOLVE YOUR RAT PROBLEMS!

A new environmentally and "owl friendly" rat trap is available in the African Bird of Prey Sanctuary shop. The Rat Zapper uses no toxic chemicals and leaves no mess behind; the trap humanly electrocutes the rat.

Also available at the Sanctuary shop are owl boxes. There are two box types' available, Barn Owl and Spotted Eagle Owl boxes. They offer the correct nesting environment for these natural "rat traps" and once installed in your garden, watch the rat numbers diminish as these effective predators get to work. (http://www.africanraptor.co.za/cms/)

Websites of interest

http://www.vultures-namibia.com
http://www.orusovo.com/narrec/
http://www.restafrica.org/
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http://www.capebirdclub.org.za/Western%20cape%20Raptor%20Research%20Programme.html
http://www.kestreling.com
owlshouse.yolasite.com

A vulture boards an airplane, carrying two dead raccoons. The stewardess looks at him and says, 'I'm sorry, sir, only one carrion allowed per passenger.' Unknown

Photo: Claire Kolberg

Cronje Grane ringing in the Namib-Naukluft Park

Photo: Claire Kolberg

When the ladder is too short — use the railings on the back of the vehicle!

Newsflashes

- 18/11/2011 Over the course of this year, there has been a sharp increase in Kenya of the illegal collection of owl eggs for use in witchcraft. Of course, many of you will know that collection of owls, chicks, eggs is not a new phenomenon, but what is new is the scale of this illicit trade and its primary focus on eggs. .....
  Darcy Ogada, Raptor Working Group of Nature Kenya
- A camera trap located on Ongava Game Ranch, took two pictures of a White-backed Vulture with yellow tag R173 at 13:00 on 15/06/2011. Approximately 15m away was the carcass of a newly dead gemsbok.....*Rob Thomson*
- On 7/02/2011, the remains of a Verreauxs' (Black) Eagle were found at Moltekeblick (South: 22.650842 East 17.179394). The bird appears to have been electrocuted on the pole structure. .....
  John Mendelsohn in NamPower/ Namibia Nature Foundation Strategic Partnership newsletter #7
- A fresh carcass of a Spotted Eagle-owl was found near Aranos, on Farm *Wandervogel*, on the Nossob 33KV Ret. line. It was apparently electrocuted on a transformer. .....
  AC van Zyl in NamPower/Namibia Nature Foundation Strategic Partnership newsletter #7

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