

Raptors of the Skeleton Coast Park, SWA/Namibia

by

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1 INTRODUCTION

No checklist of the raptors of the Skeleton Coast Park has been published to date. Winterbottom (1966) briefly visited the Uniab delta, where only three raptors were recorded. An annotated checklist of the birds of the Skeleton Coast Park (Ryan, Cooper, Stutterheim and Loutit, 1984) contains most of the raptors recorded, although there are many recent records (1983 - February 1987) which have been recorded by the nature conservation staff of the Skeleton Coast Park. The remainder, as in the annotated checklist of the Skeleton Coast Park, were taken from bird and nest records in the possession of the Department of Agriculture and Nature Conservation.

Good rains (25 - 50mm) fell throughout the Skeleton Coast Park and neighbouring areas during March/April 1982, and again during the same months in 1984. Improvements in veld conditions and an abundance of open water was subsequently found throughout these areas. Due to the increased food, many birds moved into the area and were found breeding (Braine 1984) with Stark's Larks *Spizocorys starki*, Greybacked Finchlarks *Eremopterix verticalis* and Larklike Buntings *Fringillaria impetuani* being exceptionally common throughout this period. With this increase in smaller passerines and an abundance of rodents and reptiles, a large number of raptors also made their appearance. Because of many unusual records during and after this period it was decided to draw up a checklist of the raptors, concentrating on the Skeleton Coast Park.

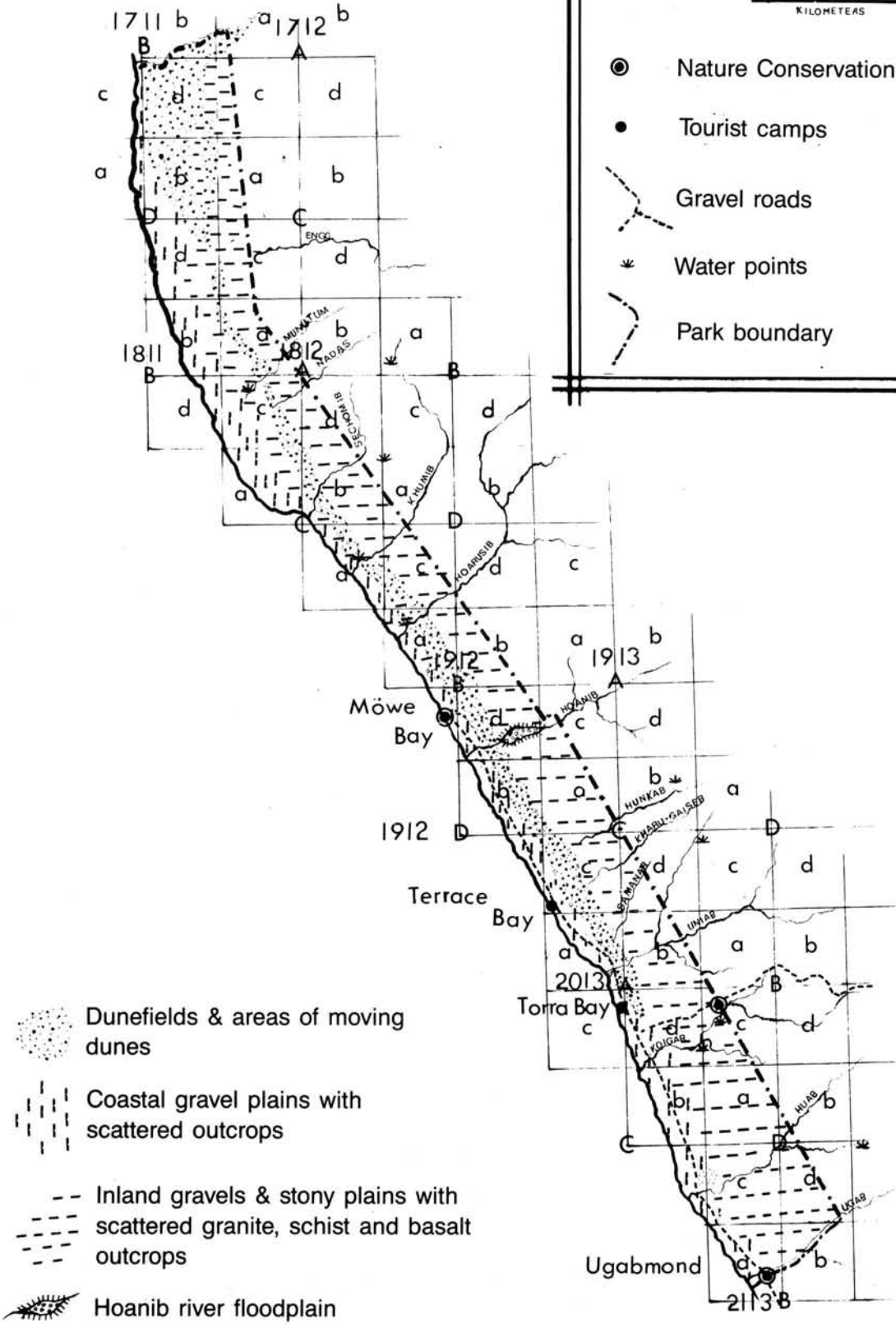
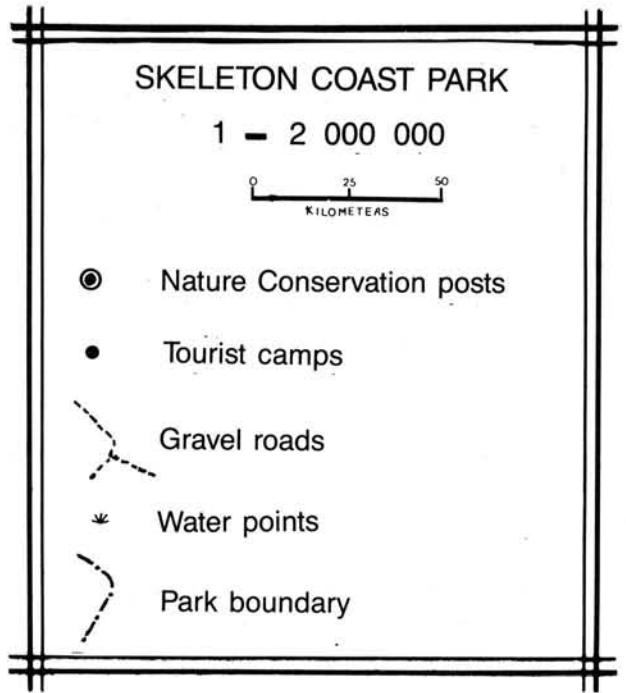
The checklist includes all the raptors recorded during this period as well as all previous records for the area. Eight records of Rednecked Falcon *Falco chiquera* have been recorded within the Skeleton Coast Park. Subsequently, four breeding pairs have been found extraliminally from 4 - 14 km east of the park boundary. Because of this and other similar occurrences some species are included if not actually recorded within the park's official boundaries.

2 STUDY AREA AND METHODS

The Skeleton Coast Park falls between the latitudes 17° 10'S and 21°10'S and longitudes 11°45'E and

ABSTRACT

An annotated checklist of all raptors recorded within the Skeleton Coast Park is given. Some extralimital species which may occasionally enter the park are also included. Sight and breeding records are listed per quarter degree square for each raptor species. A brief description of the major habitat types is given and a map of the area with quarter degree squares is included. Most sightings were recorded by nature conservation staff of the park. The remainder were taken from bird and nest cards in the possession of the Department of Agriculture and Nature Conservation. 36 species of the Order Falconiformes have been recorded in and adjacent to the Skeleton Coast Park, including four species of vultures, nine eagles, three harriers and seven *Falco* species. Five species of owls (Order Strigiformes) are listed. Of the 41 raptors recorded in the area, 18 have been found to breed in and adjacent to the Skeleton Coast Park.



- Dunefields & areas of moving dunes
- Coastal gravel plains with scattered outcrops
- Inland gravels & stony plains with scattered granite, schist and basalt outcrops
- Hoanib river floodplain

14°00'E. The park is approximately 500 km in length with an average width of 35 km. The habitat types and the quarter degree squares referred to in the text are shown in Fig. 1. The dominant plant species occurring in the larger river courses are listed below:

- (i) Northern rivers: From the Sechomib river northwards. Scattered *Balanites welwitschii*, *Colophospermum mopane* and short scrub. This excludes the perennial Cunene in the far north.
- (ii) Central rivers: From the Khumib southwards to the Hoanib. Dominated by *Acacia albida*, scattered *A. erioloba*, *A. tortilis*, *Tamarix usneoides*, *Salvadora persica*, *Combretum imberbe* and scrub, with *B. welwitschii* occurring only in the Khumib river.
- (iii) Southern rivers: From the Uniab southwards to the Ugab. The Uniab and Koigab rivers are dominated by *Tamarix usneoides* and scrub, with larger species occurring further inland. The Huab and Ugab rivers contain large, dense reedbeds of *Phragmites australis* with scattered *Acacia albida*, *A. erioloba*, *Salsola* spp. and other scrub.
- (iv) Hoanib floodplain: The western section is characterised by *T. usneoides*, *Sueda plumosa*, *Salsola aphylla* with scattered *Euclea pseudobenus*, and the eastern section by scrub with scattered *A. tortilis* with *A. albida* and *A. erioloba* found on the far eastern fringe.
- (v) River mouths and Oases: Several have open water, such as the Hoanib, Hoarusib and Uniab. These are dominated by the reed *Phragmites australis* and the sedges *Juncus arabicus*, *Juncellus laevigatus* and *Scirpus dioicus*. Some wetland areas and oases have the previous species as well as *Typha latifolias* occurring.

The common and scientific names have been taken from *The Birds of Southern Africa* (Newman 1983) while the numbers follow *Roberts' Birds of South Africa* (Mclean 1985).

3 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the staff of the Skeleton Coast Park for their enthusiasm and help with the recording of information. I would also like to thank C Brown for his valuable advice and comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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5 ANNOTATED RAPTOR LIST

Roberts Nr	Species	Quarter Degree Square	
		Sight Records	Breeding Records
118	Secretary Bird <i>Sagittarius serpentarius</i> Recorded in the Hoanib river floodplain from October to January and also in May 1982 to 1986. There is a single record for the gravel plains 20 km south of Torra Bay in November 1984.	1912Bd 2013Cb 1913Ac	
120	Egyptian Vulture <i>Neophron percnopterus</i> A single immature bird was observed feeding on dead Cape Cormorants <i>Phalacrocorax capensis</i> at the Ugab river mouth in June 1982. This bird remained for two days before disappearing.	2113Ba	
123	Whitebacked Vulture <i>Gyps africanus</i> A single bird recorded feeding on an elephant carcass in association with Lappetfaced Vultures in the Hoanib river in June 1982. In April 1985 five birds were seen perched in trees at the same locality. Another bird was spotted on 16 December 1984. This bird was observed in the upper Samanab river just inside the park's boundary. Recorded extra-liminally in the upper Khumib river in January 1987 (E W Karlowa), and also found breeding extraliminally east of Sesfontein in July 1986.	1913Ac 1913Cd 1812Bc 1913Ba	1913Ba
124	Lappetfaced Vulture <i>Torgos tracheliotus</i> The only resident vulture in the area, fairly common throughout. Breeds within 16 km of the coast, in large trees of the main river courses. There was a high egg and nestling mortality during the 1983 breeding season.	1712Cc 1812Aa 1812Ab 1812Ac 1812Ad 1812Cb 1812Da 1812Cd 1812Dc 1912Ba 1912Bd 1912Bc 1912Bd 1913Ac 1913Ca 1913Cc 1913Cd 1913Cb 2013Ab 2013Ad 2013Bc 2013Da 2013Db 2013Dc 2013Dd 2113Ba 2113Bd	1712Cc 1812Aa 1812Ab 1812Ad 1812Ac 1812Cb 1812Dc 1812Ba 1912Bd 1913Aa 1913Ac 1913Ca 1913Cb 1913Cc 1913Cd 2013Aa 2013Bc 2013Db 2013Dc 2013Bd
125	Whiteheaded Vulture <i>Trigonoceps Occipitalis</i> A single bird was seen extraliminally in the upper Hoanib river valley in 1981 (P Bridgeford).	1913Ac	
126(a)	Yellowbilled Kite <i>Milvus migrans parasitus</i> Occasionally drifts into the Skeleton Coast Prk, Frequently seen extraliminally after good rainfall. A single bird was ringed and released on 21 November 1985 in the eastern Hoanib floodplain and was recovered seven months later on 15 June 1986 at the Bujumbura Airport in Burundi.	1812Dd 1912Ba 2013Bc 1912Bd	
126(b)	Black kite <i>Milvus migrans migrans</i> Recorded from the Ugab river mouth in 1978 and again in January 1984 (R Loutit pers comm.). More recently recorded in upper Ugab valley and Springbokwasser January/February 1984 (J Paterson pers. comm.).	2113Ba 2113Bb	
127	Blackshouldered Kite <i>Elanus caeruleus</i> Common in most washes and larger river courses. Very common in the Hoanib floodplain. Has been found breeding at several localities, both in the park and extra-liminally.	2113Ba 21013Bc 2013Aa 2013Ab 1913Cc 1913Cb 1912Bd 1913Ac 1913Aa 1812Ad 2013Ba	2113Ba 1912Bd 1913Ac 1913Aa 1913Cb 2013Ba 1812Ad 2013Ab 2013Bc

Roberts Nr	Species	Quarter Degree Square	
		Sight Records	Breeding Records
131	<p>Black Eagle <i>Aquila verreauxi</i></p> <p>A single immature seen extralimitally in the Ugab valley in January 1982 and a pair of adults seen 20 km from the coast in the Ugab river in December 1983. Also seen 11 km west of Springbokwasser, and in the Hoanib floodplain in January 1984. An inaccessible but occupied nest found extralimitally on farm Goedgenoeg in July 1984 (R Braby pers. comm.). A pair successfully raised an eaglet in September 1986 in the Ganamub river west of Sesfontein.</p>	1912Bd 2013Bd 2013Ad 2014Cb 1913Ab 1913Ac	2014Cb 1913Ab
132	<p>Tawny Eagle <i>Aquila rapax</i></p> <p>One record within the Skeleton Coast Park boundary in October 1985. Found breeding extralimitally in the upper Ganamub river in June 1983.</p>	2013Bd 1913Ab 1913Aa 1812Dd 1813Cc	1913Ab
136	<p>Booted Eagle <i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i></p> <p>Observed regularly in the Hoanib floodplain. Also common extralimitally in northern Damaraland and Kaokoland. Two immature birds were seen in the Hoanib floodplain in January 1984.</p>	1712Cc 1812Ab 1812Da 1812Dd 1913Ab 1913Ac 1912Bd 1913Ca 1912Bd 1913Ca 1913Cb 1913Cc 1913Cd 2013Bc 2013Bb 2013Ab	
137	<p>African Hawk Eagle <i>Hieraaetus fasciatus</i></p> <p>Resident within the Skeleton Coast Park. Found breeding extralimitally in the Gomatum and Hoanib rivers in June/July 1985 and 1986.</p>	1913Ac 1913Ad 1913Ab 1812Ad 1912Bd 1813Cc 1812Da 1913Aa 1913Ba	1913Ad 1813Cc
140	<p>Martial Eagle <i>Polemaetus billicosus</i></p> <p>An immature arrived at the Ugabmond camp in July 1982 after strong east winds. Another immature was seen frequently in the Hoanib river in 1983 but his was outside the Skeleton Coast Park boundary. Extralimitally it is rarely seen. Two breeding pairs have been observed in the upper Khumib river and extralimitally in the Hoanib river. At the latter locality an eaglet was fledged in December 1984 and 1986.</p>	2113Ba 1913Ac 1913Aa 1913Ad 1912Bd 1812Da 1812Bc	1812Da 1913Ac
142	<p>Brown Snake Eagle <i>Circaetus cinereus</i></p> <p>A single sub-adult was seen west of the dunefield on the south bank of the Uniab river in December 1984. Also recorded extralimitally in Sesfontein area and the eastern Hoanib floodplain in March 1985.</p>	1913Ac 1913Ba 2013Aa	
143	<p>Blackbreasted Snake Eagle <i>Circaetus gallicus</i></p> <p>Fairly common. Seen frequently in the Hunkab and Kharugaiseb rives. Has been found breeding both within the park and extralimitally.</p>	2013Ab 1913Cc 1913Cd 1913Ca 1913Cb 1913Ac 1812Ad 1812Da 2013Bc 1812Ac 1912Bc 1912Bd	2013Bc 1812Ad 1812Cd 1812Ac 1913Ab
146	<p>Bateleur <i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i></p> <p>No records for the Skeleton Coast Park. Rare. Seen extralimitally at Sesfontein in Damaraland.</p>	1913Ba 1913Ac	
148	<p>African Fish Eagle <i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i></p> <p>Recorded from the Cunene river where it possibly breeds. A single sub-adult seen in the Khumib river, 37 km from the coast in May 1985.</p>	1712Aa 1812Da	

Roberts Nr	Species	Quarter Degree Square	
		Sight Records	Breeding Records
149	Steppe Buzzard <i>Buteo buteo</i> Recorded in the Hoarusib river in November 1983. Seen commonly in December 1984 to January 1987 at several localities within the park.	1912Ba 2013Dc 2013Bc 2013Ab 1912Bd 1913Ac	
152	Jackal Buzzard <i>Buteo rufofuscus</i> First recorded by H Biggs (pers. comm.) in November 1978 at the Springbokwasser turnoff from Torra Bay. Recently recorded in May 1984 on the dunes in the Uniab river and irregularly in the Hoanib floodplain from July 1983 to December 1986. These include dark and pale breasted forms with diagnostic wing patterns. Most northern locality was an adult mortality on the beach west of Sarusas mine in April 1984.	2013Ad 2013Ab 1912Bd 1913Ac 1812Cd	
153	Augur Buzzard <i>Buteo augur</i> Common in the Hoanib floodplain. Frequently seen in the Hoarusib river and further south to the Ugab river. Breeds within the Skeleton Coast Park.	2113Ba 2113Bb 2013Dc 2013Dd 2013Dd 2013Aa 2013Ab 1913Cc 1913Dc 1913Ca 1812Cb	2013Dc 1912Bd
154	Lizard Buzzard <i>Kaupifalco monogrammicus</i> A single bird was observed several times in Hoanib river east of the floodplain in early August 1985.	1913Ac	
157	Little Sparrowhawk <i>Accipiter minullus</i> Two birds with white rumps recorded at Saltzputz in the Ugab river valley. They may have been confused with Gabar Goshawk (J Meyer pers. comm.). Found breeding in the Hoanib river east of the park boundary in February 1987 (Braine 1987).	2113Bb 1913Ad	1913Ad
161	Gabar Goshawk <i>Micronisus gabar</i> Seen once in the Ugab and Koigab rivers, and in October 1983 in the Hoarusib river. Seen commonly in the Hoanib river and an immature recorded in the Hoanib floodplain in February 1985. Found breeding extralimitally in the Ganamub and Hoanib rivers.	1812Dc 2013Bc 2113Bb 1913Ac 1912Bd 1913Ad	1913Ab 1913Ad
162	Pale Chanting Goshawk <i>Melierax canorus</i> Common in most river systems from the Ugab in the south to the Engo in the north. Breeding has been found in the Hoanib floodplain, the Ugab, Uniab and Khumib rivers in October/November. Newly fledged birds have been observed in the Engo, Khumib, Uniab rivers from 1983 to 1986.	2113Bd 2113Ba 2013Ab 2013Aa 1912Bd 1711Bd 1812Aa 1812Cb 1812Da 1913Ac 1913Dc 2013Bc 2013Ad 1712Cc 1913Aa 1913Cb	1912Bd 2113Bb 1812Cd 2013Ab
165	African Marsh Harrier <i>Circus ranivorus</i> Observed hunting over vegetated hummocks at the Huab river mouth in November 1984. Seen again west of the dunefield in the Uniab river in early March 1985 (J Paterson pers. comm.).	2013Cd 2013Aa	
167	Pallid Harrier <i>Circus macrourus</i> Two sightings of an individual male in the eastern Hoanib floodplain in early January 1985, and again in January 1986 at the same locality.	1912Bd	

Roberts Nr	Species	Quarter Degree Square	
		Sight Records	Breeding Records
168	<p>Black Harrier <i>Circus maurus</i></p> <p>Commonly seen in the Hoanib floodplain from 1982 to 1986. An immature bird was seen at Ausis waterhole in late December 1983. Has been observed hunting rodents in the scrub of the Hoanib floodplain and regularly observed being robbed of its prey by Pied Crows <i>Corvus albus</i>. Steyn (1982) reports that occurrences in arid areas may have been linked with good rainfall. Observations in the Skeleton Coast Park seem to substantiate this. Two Black Harriers were seen in the Uniab river in May 1984, after good rain in March/April of that year. Seen commonly in Samanab and Uniab dunefield from September to December 1984 and January to March 1985/86. Most northern locality found was at Sarusas West fountain on September 1985.</p>	1912Bd 1913Ac 2013Ab 2013Aa 1913Cb 1812Dd 1812Cd	
170	<p>Osprey <i>Pandion haliaetus</i></p> <p>First recorded from just north of Torra Bay in December 1982 and in the Uniab delta in January 1983. A single bird was subsequently observed at the Hoanib river mouth and remained in the area from January to August 1983. Two different birds were seen within a kilometer of each other at Bosluis Bay and another at the Hoanib river mouth in early January 1984. Steyn (1982) does not mention any records for the SWA/Namibia coastline and I would presume that these are the first records for the coastal area. (A single Osprey was seen at Sandwich Harbour in March 1983). A single bird was seen perched on a dry tree east of the Hoanib floodplain in February 1985. Has been seen commonly since 1982 from November to April from Torra Bay to the Cunene river.</p>	2013Aa 2013Ac 1912Bd 1912Dd 1711Bc 1811Bd 1812Cd 1812Ba 1913Ac	
171	<p>Peregrine Falcon</p> <p>(a) <i>Falco peregrinus minor</i></p> <p>Recorded at various localities and found breeding within the park's boundaries in the Ugab river valley in October 1984. Possibly also breeds extraliminally in the Hoanib river valley west of Sesfontein where a single pair was observed pursuing Palewinged Starlings <i>Onychognathus nabeouroup</i> during the breeding period in 1986. Excellent sites for breeding are found in the Hoanib river and further observations in the area may confirm breeding here.</p>	211Bb 1913Ab 2114Aa 2013Bc 1913Ac 1912Bd	2113Bd
171	<p>(b) <i>Falco peregrinus calidus</i></p> <p>Recorded at several localities both inland and along the coast between November and June. A single bird was found feeding on a freshly killed Grey Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i> at the Hoanib mouth, and has also been observed pursuing Common Terns at the Cunene river estuary.</p>	2013Bd 1711Bd 2013Ba 2013Bc 1913Ac 1912Bd 1912Bc 1811Bd 1912Ba 2013Ac 1912Dd 2013Aa 1711Dd	
172	<p>Lanner Falcon <i>Falco biarmicus</i></p> <p>Found fairly commonly throughout the area. A single breeding pair successfully raised four young at Ausis waterhole in September 1983. Possibly breeds at other localities within the Skeleton Coast Park.</p>	2113Ba 2013Bc 2013Bd 2013Aa 1913Ca 1913Cb 1913Cc 1912Bd 1812Ad 1711Bd 1812Cd 1913Cd	1912Bd
173	<p>Hobby Falcon <i>Falco subbuteo</i></p> <p>Not previously recorded for the Skeleton Coast Park before the high rainfall in 1982. Seen commonly since April 1982. Has frequently been seen preying on Larklike Buntings <i>Fringillaria impetuani</i>, Greybacked Finch Larks <i>Eremopterix verticalis</i> and Namaqua Sandgrouse <i>Pterocles namaqua</i> around the waterholes and fountains in the area.</p>	1912Bd 1912Bc 2013Ad 2013Da 2113Bd 2013Bc 2013Bd 2013Aa 1913Cc 1913Cd 1913Cb 1712Cb 1912Db 1711Bd	

Roberts Nr	Species	Quarter Degree Square	
		Sight Records	Breeding Records
174	African Hobby Falcon <i>Falco cuvieri</i> Only two birds recorded, both extraliminally, south of Sesfontein in May 1982. Both birds were seen perched on large <i>Acacia tortilis</i> trees.	1913Ba 1913Bd	
178	Rednecked Falcon <i>Falco chiquera</i> Seen frequently in the Hoanib floodplain in 1984 to 1986. A single bird was recorded at Möwe Bay in July 1982, another at Springbokwasser in early January 1984. Four pairs were found breeding extraliminally in July/August 1983/84.	1912Bc 2013Bc 1912Bd 1812Ad 1913Aa 2013Ab	1913Aa 1812Ad 1812Cb
181	Rock Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> Very common in the Hoanib river and Hoanib floodplain. Has been found breeding at two localities, but possibly breeds at other localities within the Skeleton Coast Park. Found breeding extraliminally in July 1984.	1812Cd 1812Da 1812Cb 1812Ac 1812Dc 1812Da 1912Ba 1912Bd 1912Bc 1912Bd 1913Ac 1913Ca 1913Cc 1913Cd 2013Aa 2013Ab 2013Ad 2013Bc 2013Cd 2013Dc 2113Ba 2113Bb	1912Ba 2013Dc 1812Ad
182	Greater Kestrel <i>Falco rupicoloides</i> Fairly common. Found breeding within the Skeleton Coast Park in 1983 and 1984, also extraliminally in 1984.	2013Dd 1912Bd 1912Bd 1811Cd 1812Ad 2013Bc 2013Ab 2013Bd 2013Aa 2013Ba 1812Cb 1812Ad 1812Dc 1912Bd 1913Ca	1812Ad 2013Bd 1812Cb
392	Barn Owl <i>Tyto alba</i> Fairly common in most rocky areas and river courses. Found breeding extraliminally in July 1983.	1913Cb 1913Cc 2013Bc 2013Ad 2113Bd 1812Ad	1812Ad
395	Marsh Owl <i>Asio capenses</i> Found in most river systems from the Ugab river in the south to the Cunene in the north. Seen extraliminally with young in the Obob river and found breeding in the Ugab river in March 1983 and again in the Uniab delta in May 1987.	1913Aa 1912Bd 2013Aa 1913Cc 1711Bd 2013Bc	2113Ba 1913Cd 2013Aa
397	Whitefaced Owl <i>Otus leucotis</i> Recorded from the Hoanib river on the eastern section of the Hoanib floodplain, also extraliminally in the Ganamub, Gomatum and Hoarusib rivers. Found breeding extraliminally in the Hoanib east of Sesfontein in November 1986.	1912Bd 1913Ac 1812Dd 1813Cc 1913Ab 1913Ad	1913Ba
398	Pearlspotted Owl <i>Glaucidium perlatum</i> Fairly common in the Hoanib river. Has been heard calling in the Ugab river valley and extraliminally in Damaraland. Found along the Hoarusib river but not yet recorded within the park. Also found breeding within the park's boundary.	1912Bd 1913Ac 1812Dd 1913Ab 1913Ad 1913Ba	1913Ac
401	Spotted Eagle Owl <i>Bubo africanus</i> Recorded from the Skeleton Coast Park irregularly. Nowhere common. Found breeding on the park boundary in the Engo river in November 1986.	2113Ba 1812Ab 2013Bc 2113Bb 1912Bd	1712Cc