

Rednecked Falcons nesting in palm trees in Namibia

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In most of Africa, the Rednecked Falcon *Falco chircuera* is closely associated with *Borassus* palms and related tree species (Brown 1970, Brown et al. 1987, Osborne 1981 & 1984, Cade 1982). In SWA/Namibia, however, all previous breeding records for this falcon (n = 21) were in tree species other than palms, and mainly in the discarded nests of other birds (Table 1).

Since 1984, Rednecked Falcons have been regularly seen in the vicinity of a group of Makalani palm trees *Hyphaene benguelensis* at Kameseb, a seasonal pan in the Halali area of the Etosha National Park. The birds' activities have been centered around one of these trees, as indicated by the whitewash on the tree trunk. On October 3 1986, the tree was investigated and four downy nestlings were found. They were situated in the natural hollow at the base of one of the lower dead fronds, against the trunk and some 11 m above the ground. No nesting material was present but the remains of some prey were found, including a Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* and a Cape Glossy Starling *Lamprolornis nitens*.

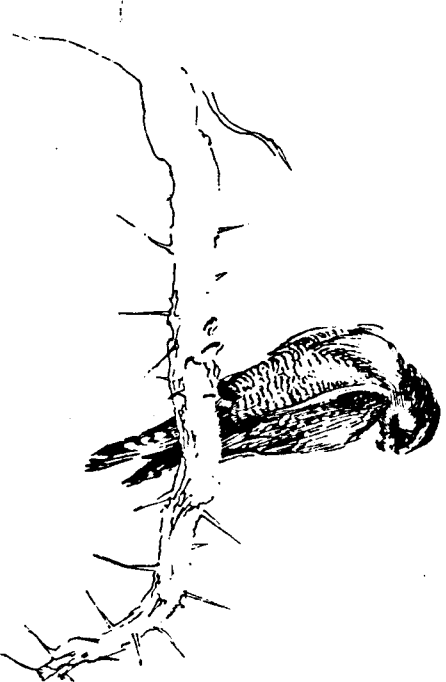
Rednecked Falcons have been regularly seen at Makalani Palms in three other localities in Etosha National Park, and it is likely that they breed in these palms too. Makalani Palms are particularly prevalent in areas of the Grootfontein district and in Ovamboland. It is anticipated that in those areas of SWA/Namibia in which palms trees occur, there will also be nesting Rednecked Falcons in greater numbers than previously thought.

Table 1. Nesting habitat, nesting sites and breeding dates for 21 breeding pairs of Rednecked Falcons in SWA/Namibia.

HABITAT	NEST - TREE SPECIES	ORIGIN OF NEST
Open grassy plains with isolated trees	<i>Acacia</i> spp. unspecified 281 <i>A. arborescens</i> 281 <i>A. ruficarpa</i> 61 <i>A. laurifolia</i> 111	Black Crow 201 Pied Crow 51 old raptor nest 51 Crow spp. 101
Dry river washes through gravel plains	<i>Aloe dichotoma</i> 61 <i>Balanites aegyptiaca</i> 171 <i>Condalia imberbe</i> 61	accumulation of twigs in tree fork 51 unknown 251
EGG - LAYING MONTHS		
July		61
August		501
September		331
October		111

In SWA/Namibia, Rednecked Falcons favour open areas with isolated, large and full-canopied trees in which they can conceal themselves and from which they can ambush prey. Such trees are often near water on the edge of pans or in river washes. In the absence of palm trees, large *Acacia* trees are favoured for nesting. The mean height of nests in trees other than palms (n = 19) was 4.7 m (SD = 2.0 m; range 2-9 m). Old crow nests were most frequently used, and contrary to the statement by Brown et al. (1982) that only live *Borassus* palm fronds are used, the fronds used by the Etosha birds were brown and dead, and had started to loosen from the trunk. Egg-laying months in SWA/Namibia are, however, in accord with those given by Maclean (1985), with 50% of all clutches being laid in August.

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