



VULTURES NAMIBIA

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AERIAL SURVEY OF BREEDING LAPPET-FACED VULTURES AND MARKING OF CHICKS IN THE NAMIB-NAUKLUFT PARK

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INTRODUCTION

The monitoring and ringing of Lappet-faced Vultures (LFV) in the Namib-Naukluft Park (NNP) started in 1991. This is the longest running project of its kind in Namibia and is supported by the Ministry Environment and Tourism (MET). It is providing an increasing amount of data, which can be used for wildlife management planning, by ornithologists and biodiversity researchers.

In 2000, an aircraft was used for the first time to survey part of the breeding area at Ganab. In 2001, an aerial survey of 15 hours was flown, which covered most of the known breeding areas. However, no ringing was done in 2001. Since 2002, there has been an aerial survey every year, followed by the ringing. In 2006, a patagial tag was fitted to one wing of each chick. The year 2007 was a fantastic year for the vultures of the NNP. A total of 84 chicks were ringed in the Park. The most ever ringed before was 52 in 2004.

During the aerial survey, occupied nests were plotted on a GPS. From the air, adult birds, chicks and even eggs are visible in the nests. However, it is impossible to differentiate between birds roosting on nests and breeding birds. Although expensive, the aerial survey is the most cost-effective way of finding the nests of breeding birds.

AERIAL SURVEY

The aircraft was a Cessna 182 hired in Windhoek and again piloted by Rob Field. Rob has donated 100 hours of his time and experience to Vultures Namibia over the past five years. Many thanks to Rob and Marianne of Zebra River Lodge for their support. This year, in an effort to improve the efficiency of the survey, we had Gisela Noci as navigator. She had the GPS connected to a laptop computer and this assisted with the navigation on the plains where there are literally hundreds of trees and few landmarks. A map was then printed showing the position of occupied nests and this helped in the planning of the ringing and finding access routes. Hartmut Kolb, Peter Bridgeford and Joe Noci were observers. Marc Dürr and Marilyn Bridgeford assisted with transporting the fuel and equipment.

Another innovation by Joe and Gisela Noci was the testing of a drone fitted with a digital camera linked to a computer. The preliminary tests were successful and the resulting videos showed vultures on a nest. If the drone can be programmed to fly over all the trees and photograph them, then it would be relatively simple to get co-ordinates for each occupied nest. Work is continuing on the drone and programmes to guide it.

RINGING 2008

Ringing in the Ganab area took place from 16 to 19 October. During the weekend, the two ringing teams were joined by sponsors from Windhoek and Walvis Bay and several other vulture friends. From Monday to Thursday, Hartmut Kolb and Marc Dürr continued with the ringing in the Saagberg/Kamberg, Tsondab and Sossusvlei area. On Friday 24 October, they were joined by another group of ringers and sponsors at Namibwater, north of Sesriem. On Saturday the last six chicks in that area were ringed. On 13 November, a day excursion to the Ganab area with the press and other vulture friends, four chicks that had been too small in October, were either ringed or tagged. On 5 and 6 December, Mark Dürr and Mark Boorman went to Escourt to tag the last two chicks for the season.

RESULTS OF THE RINGING

A total of 58 Lappet-faced Vulture chicks were ringed, the second largest number since 1991.

The Sossusvlei area was disappointing again. One chick was ringed on the plains west of the airfield at Sesriem. Although the Tsauchab River was carefully searched, no breeding birds were found.

North of Sesriem, away from the disturbance by aircraft and tourist vehicles, five chicks were found in the Sukses/Tsamsvlei area. Tsondab was another disappointing region. Six chicks were found over this very large area and last year there were nine. Few prey animals were seen here.

Saagberg/Kamberg fluctuates from year to year and only four breeding birds were found.

Ganab was a pleasant surprise and came out on top with 42 chicks.

Both the aerial survey and ringing went with almost no hitches. New sponsors joined the team and we are very grateful for their support. Some of the older sponsors once again came to our rescue and we could not have done it without them. The ever-rising costs of fuel are however causing concern for the long-term survival of the project. We are eagerly awaiting the promised funds from a well-known company in Windhoek.

LOGISTICS

The Lappet-faced Vulture breeds over a vast area in the Namib-Naukluft Park and this increases the time and costs during the aerial survey and ringing.

Aerial survey, over four days	18 hours
Transport of fuel, equipment and personnel by vehicle during the aerial survey	23 hours
Distance travelled (vehicle with the avgas Walvis/Windhoek / Walvis / Weltevrede)	1 575 km
Distance flown by aircraft for survey (without ferry distance).....	2 918 km
Avgas (No avgas available in Walvis Bay).....	4 drums
Ringing.....	12 days
Distance travelled by two ringing team vehicles (other vehicles not included).....	3586 km

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project could not continue without the support of several people and organisations. Vultures Namibia thanks the following:

- MET for allowing the survey, tagging and ringing to continue and the Wardens of the Namib-Naukluft Park.
- Pilot Rob Field, Zebra River Lodge.
- Farm Feeds of Windhoek who supplied the aircraft at a reduced rate.
- Weltevrede Guest Farm for accommodation and meals during the aerial survey.
- Nedbank for their continued support of the project over five years.
- The friends from SGA who again donated fuel for the aerial survey and helped with the ringing.
- Peter Keil and Westair Wings Charters who also donated aircraft fuel.
- Rössing Uranium joined in to help the vultures breeding on their doorstep.
- Birds of Prey of the Endangered Wildlife Trust for support and tagging equipment.
- Hartmut Kolb, Joe and Gisela Noci and Marc Dürr for assisting with the aerial survey and ringing.
- Günter and Sonja Waetzoldt for the use of a ladder and assistance with the ringing.
- Zanne and Willie Swarts and Marletta and Andre Swarts of Weltevrede for very welcome accommodation.
- Simone and Walter Swarts of Solitaire Guest Farm who assisted and provided food.
- Trio Feminale for sponsorship.
- All the vulture fanatics who helped with the ringing.
- If I have forgotten anybody, please accept my humble apologies. All the people who made the ringing fun and enjoyable **thank you**. See you there next year!



Peter Bridgeford

Vultures Namibia

YEAR	TSAUCHAB	SUKSES	TSONDAB	SAAGBERG	GANAB	TOTAL
1991	3	No ringing	12	No ringing	No ringing	15
1992	5	8	21	No ringing	No ringing	34
1993	4	5	15	3	2	29
1994	8	9	16	2	6	41
1995	6	8	6	1	8	29
1996	10	6	13	3	12	44
1997	2	2	3	0	No ringing	7
1998	7	6	7	2	14	36
1999	2	5	9	5	16	37
2000	No ringing	No ringing	0	No ringing	2	2
2001	No ringing	No ringing	No ringing	No ringing	No ringing	No ringing
2002	0	6	5	8	27	46
2003	1	10	5	3	25	44
2004	0	5	6	1	40	52
2005	1	6	4	2	23	36
2006	0	3	3	2	14	22
2007	2	7	9	7	59	84
2008	1	5	6	4	42	58
TOTAL	52	91	140	43	290	616

Table 1: Number of Lappet-faced Vulture chicks ringed in the Namib-Naukluft Park.
(In 2000 only a partial survey of Ganab and Tsondab was done. In 2001 no ringing was done).

