



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 long running project 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 scattered over hundreds of square kilometres.

AERIAL SURVEY 2009

The aircraft was a Cessna 182 hired in Windhoek and again piloted by Rob Field. Rob has donated 110 hours of his time and experience to Vultures Namibia over the past six years. Rob and Marianne Field, previously of Zebra River Lodge, are thanked for their unstinting support. Although they now live in SA, they have indicated that Rob will pilot the plane again in 2010. Swakop Uranium paid for the hire of the aircraft. Swakop Uranium and WestAir Wings Charters sponsored the aircraft fuel. Both companies are thanked for their support.

To improve the efficiency of the survey, we again had Gisela Noci as navigator. She had the GPS connected to a laptop computer and this assisted with the navigation on the vast plains where there are literally hundreds of trees and few landmarks. William Turner assisted with the navigation. Hartmut Kolb, Joe Noci and Peter Bridgeford were observers. Holger Kolberg and Peter Bridgeford assisted with transporting the fuel and equipment used for the survey.

The survey started on Monday 28 September at the Ganab airfield in the Namib-Naukluft Park. On Wednesday morning 30 September, while the aircraft continued with the survey, the ground crew moved to Weltevrede Guest farm and completed the survey from there. The survey was completed on Wednesday afternoon (a total of 19 hours, including ferry time). Maps were then printed showing the position of occupied nests and this helped in the planning of the ringing and finding access routes.

RINGING 2009

After the departure of the pilot and aircraft on Thursday morning, the rest of the team moved to Sossusvlei to start ringing. One chick, too small to ring, was found in the Tsauchab River. Another was closer to Sesriem. This is the first time in three years that there has been more than one chick in the Sossusvlei area. The next nests were in the vicinity of Tsamsvlei and that kept the team busy until the late afternoon. Other ringers and sponsors from SGA were met at Namibwater and on Friday the group moved to Escourt and the Tsondab River. The next day the vast Tsondab Plains were crossed and chicks found and ringed, then across the dunes to the Saagberg/Kamberg sites. On Sunday morning the last nests were checked and at lunch time the Windhoek contingent left for home.

Ringing in the Ganab area took place from 9 to 11 October. Everyone met at the campsite on Friday evening. During the weekend, the two ringing teams completed their tasks and most people left for home. With the new, very long extension ladder donated by Retief Sales Promotions, no nest was too high.

RESULTS OF THE RINGING

A total of 35 Lappet-faced Vulture chicks were ringed, as opposed to 58 last year. We found eight chicks too small to ring and five eggs. The small chicks and eggs will be visited again early in January.

The Sossusvlei area, surprisingly, had two active nests.

North of Sesriem, five chicks were found in the Sukses/Tsamsvlei area. One nest was not visited as it is far into the dunes and difficult to reach.

The Tsondab area had 11 breeding records, the highest for over 10 years. Here eight chicks were ringed: two too small and one egg. More prey animals seen here than last year.

Between Saagberg and Kamberg, only one chick ringed, one nest not reached by vehicle and one egg. This is down from previous years.

Ganab had no surprises and here 20 chicks were ringed, with five too small and two eggs.

Although the number of chicks ringed is less than the previous two years, it is not abnormally low. See table 1. Note that these figures will change after the final ringing in January 2010.

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.

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 three days	19 hours
Distance flown by aircraft for survey (without ferry distance)	2 666 km
Distance travelled by Vultures Namibia vehicle with the avgas, Walvis/Windhoek/Walvis/Ganab/Weltevrede, ringing in the north and south, back to Walvis).....	2574 km
Hire costs of aircraft paid by Swakop Uranium.....	\$14 000,00
Avgas (not available in Walvis Bay)	4 drums
Avgas Paid by Swakop Uranium and WestAir Wings Charters	N\$10 256,00
Ringing.....	7 days
Travel costs paid by Swakop Uranium for aerial survey and ringing	N\$5 000,00

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.
- MET Scientific Services and especially Deputy Director Kenneth Uiseb for support.
- Pilot Rob Field of Port Alfred Panorama Guest House.
- Weltevrede Guest Farm for assisting the aerial survey.
- Nedbank's Go Green Fund for their continued support.
- The friends from SGA, who again made a donation, helped with the ringing and provided excellent meals.
- Francois Retief of Retief Sales Promotions for the new, very long extension ladder.
- Westair Wings Charters and Peter Keil who also donated aircraft fuel.
- Swakop Uranium who sponsored the aircraft hire, avgas and travel costs.
- Birds of Prey Working Group of the Endangered Wildlife Trust, for support and tagging equipment.
- Hartmut Kolb, Joe and Gisela Noci, Holger Kolberg and William Turner for assisting with the aerial survey and ringing.
- Simone and Walter Swarts, and Hilke and Hanno von Ditzfurth, who assisted and provided food.
- 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
2009	1	5	8	1	20	35
TOTAL	53	96	148	44	310	651

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).



Solitaire Guest Farm

