This issue of *Lanioturdus* is devoted to the raptor workshop which was held at Waterberg Plateau Park from 18-19 February 2005. The workshop was organized by the Namibian Nature Foundation and was open to all who were interested in raptors.

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Welcome and introduction

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Namibia's vultures, other diurnal raptors and owls are increasingly under threat from factors such as disturbance, particularly at breeding sites; the misuse of poisons and pesticides; electrocution and collisions with overhead lines; habitat degradation; persecution; illegal harvesting; and drowning in reservoirs.

Much work has been done on raptors in Namibia in the past. People have come and gone, however, resulting in a lull in activity which is now picking up again. By collaborating in a close-knit group rather than in isolation we will be able to achieve more, encouraging one another and pooling our resources in effective, coordinated synergies. There is also a need for new actions, which will be incorporated into existing programmes/initiatives where possible, with a focus on increasing public involvement.

This is why the time is right for our workshop on birds of prey at Waterberg Plateau Park on 18-19 February 2005. We are privileged to welcome a healthy mix of "old-time" raptor enthusiasts here who bring years of experience to the table, and a new cohort of young conservationists who will carry the flag into the future. One of our main outcomes will be to develop an action plan for these threatened birds (see the plan below).

Status of vultures in Nambia

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Introduction

Vulture research in Namibia started in the 1960's in the Namib Desert Park, now part of the Namib-Naukluft Park (NNP). Sauer (1973), Jensen (unpublished reports), Clinning (1978) and Brown (1985, 1986) all worked on vultures in the same area over the years. The present project of ringing Lappet-faced Vultures

Publicity

The vultures and their plight have received good coverage in the English, German and Afrikaans newspapers during the past three years. In 2003, in conjunction with Nedbank, the press was taken for a day's outing to ring Lappet-faced Vulture chicks. It was very successful and generated a lot of publicity.

The White-backed Vulture project was well publicised by Dirk Heinrich, who was one of the organisers and ringers.

There have been articles on vulture conservation and the activities of the VSG in AgriForum, the official magazine of the Namibia Agricultural Union.

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Taxonomy of African raptors with emphasis on Namibian species

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The taxonomy of African raptors has been under review since the advent of advanced techniques using mitochondrial cytochrome b sequences to determine the relationships of various raptors. The mitochondrial cytochrome b is obtained by drawing a small sample of blood from the bird and by using comparative techniques it is possible to test the molecular phylogeny when various related raptors diverged from parent stock.

The Falconiformes order is based on phylogenetic characters like hooked bill, binocular vision, and raptorial talons (claws). They are diurnal and all but one (Palmnut Vulture) are carnivorous. There are 290 species and 93 are found in Africa. The order is often placed between Ciconiiformes (storks) and Anserformes (ducks) because of similar characters. Voous (1973), prior to any DNA research, had suggested that the order is actually three with new world vultures in one, hawks, eagles, old world vultures and secretarybird in another and falcons and caracaras in a third. Subsequent studies have shown that the new world vultures are indeed closely related to the storks and resemble old world vultures due to convergent evolution. Falcons are also closer to owls than the rest of the raptors.

The results we are reporting are preliminary, based on limited samples from various raptors when we have been able to collect data. The molecular phylogeny is an ongoing study and we are still trying to collect DNA samples from a wide range of raptorial birds.

Of interest to Namibian biologists are birds which are conspecifics or species pairs. These are birds like the Black-breasted Snake Eagle *Circaetus pectoralis* and the Short-toed Snake Eagle *C. gallicus* as well as Bonelli's Hawk Eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus* and African Hawk Eagle *H. spilogaster*. Both these species pairs were treated as single species in Brown and Amadon (1968).

Our results indicate both the hawk eagles are closely related, but are good species; however they are close enough to other members of the genus *Aquila* to be included within the genus. Similarly the two snake eagles are closely related, but are good species. Surprisingly, the closest African raptor to the snake eagles is the Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus*.

Our findings show that the African White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus* is actually a closely related to the Cape Griffon *G. coprotheres*. Traditionally the African White-backed Vulture has been thought to be a species pair with the Indian White-backed Vulture G. *bengalensis* and the African form was previously classified as *G. bengalensis* in Brown and Amadon (1968) and McLachlan and Liversidge (1978). The Indian and African species are quite distantly related.

The African and Madagascar Fish Eagles *Haliaeetus voifcer* and *H. voifceriodes* are more closely related to the Black and Yellow-billed Kites *Milvus migrans* and *M. aegyptius* than to other raptors.

Although our work is only preliminary we have found interesting results. However, we are still in need of samples from many raptors. Most of the birds we need are found in central Africa from places like Congo but there are species resident in Namibia also. We need samples from Augur Buzzard, southern African breeding Booted Eagle, Ayres' Hawk Eagle, Crowned Eagle, Cuckoo Hawk, all the snake eagles, Bat Hawk, Gabar Goshawk and others. Persons interested in contributing to our project should contact Tim Osborne. This is a long term study and we expect it will be years before we manage to collect all the samples we need for the full analysis.

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Monitoring and ringing Lappet-faced Vultures in the Namib 1991-2004

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Introduction

The project to ring and monitor Lappet-faced Vultures Torgos tracheliotos in the Namib-Naukluft Park (NNP) is now entering its 15th year. It is the longest running project of its kind in Namibia. A total of 416 vulture chicks have been ringed to date. Another 71 breeding attempts have been recorded.

The project started while PB was employed by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) in the NNP. With the encouragement of ornithologist Chris Brown, the first ringing took place in the Tsauchab River, east of Sossusvlei where three chicks were ringed. The Tsondab River was more productive and another 12 birds were marked. All birds were fitted with a metal and five colour rings.

In 2000, after PB left MET, the project almost foundered, and only a small area of Ganab and Tsondab was searched for breeding birds. The Vulture Study Group (VSG) in co-operation with MET, then took over management of the project.

Study area and methods

The study area in the NNP is described in detail in Bridgeford (2003). Finding the occupied nests, literally meant driving from tree to tree, a time consuming and tiring task. A nest in a good condition, with other signs on the ground, such