

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 Namibia

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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 Sauer (1973), Jensen (unpublished reports), Clinning (1978) and Brown (1985, 1986) all worked on vultures in the same area over the years.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

Acknowledgements

Firstly, to Chris Brown, who started us off on a long and interesting road and for his moral and financial support. Then Gerhard Verdoorn, who made us realise that without actively conserving, there would soon be no vultures left to ring. To former colleagues, friends, neighbours and journalists who over the years gave their time and companionship to help the vultures. The other sponsors that have not been mentioned yet: Electro Repairs, a vulture friend for many years, Nicky Signs and an avid new friend, Academia Friendly Supermarket.

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Table 1. Lappet-faced Vultures ringed in the NNP using two methods to find breeding birds.

Year	Number	Method
1991	15	Vehicle survey
1992	34	Vehicle survey
1993	29	Vehicle survey
1994	41	Vehicle survey
1995	29	Vehicle survey
1996	44	Vehicle survey
1997	7	Vehicle survey
1998	36	Vehicle survey
1999	37	Vehicle survey
2000	2	Vehicle & aerial survey (part of area)
2001	nil	Aerial survey (42 nests found)
2002	46	Aerial survey
2003	44	Aerial survey
2004	52	Aerial survey

White-backed Vulture ringing on commercial farms

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Introduction

The White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus* is the most abundant vulture in Namibia and in Africa (Mundy et al. 1992). There are no reliable figures on the population size, but there are some estimates. Simmons (in Anderson in press), gives a figure of 6,000 pairs in Namibia. Using a different method, Simmons & Brown (in press) estimate the total numbers to be between 7,830 and 15,050 birds, but probably closer to 10,000. It is classed as Near Threatened. (Simmons & Brown in press).

However, like all vultures in southern Africa, they are under pressure, the main threat being poison. It is not only in the small stock farming areas, but also in other parts of Namibia. Here the vultures are generally the innocent victims in the fight against problem animals such as lions, cheetah, leopard and spotted hyenas. (Bridgeford 2001 & Bridgeford 2002).

Creating awareness

In 2003, the Vulture Study Group Namibia initiated a project to ring White-backed Vultures on commercial farms in the Seeis, Hochfeld and Steinhausen areas. These areas were chosen after receiving information from farmers about vultures breeding on their farms. Both authors had presented talks on vulture and raptor conservation at Farmers' Union and Conservancy meetings.

The aims of the project were:

- Gather information about White-backed and other Vultures.
- Ring the chicks.
- Create awareness in the farming community of the role and importance of vultures.
- Use the ringing as a means of involving the farmers, their families and workers in a hands-on project.
- Distribute booklets, pamphlets and posters about raptor conservation.

Ringling 2003

In September 2003, over a period of seven days, a total of 26 White-backed Vulture chicks were ringed on nine farms. In addition, information for 17 nesting cards, from nests that were out of reach, eggs in nests, chicks too small to ring and one dead chick, was collected. Many of the trees used for nesting along the White Nossob River were over 16 m high and nests could not be reached. What was very encouraging was the fact that the farmers and their workers knew where the birds were nesting.

Generally the farmer and his family and some workers accompanied the ringling team while they ringed the first few birds on the farm. The chick would be brought down out of the nest so that everyone could see the ringling process and could take photographs. The reasons for ringling, threats facing vultures and general vulture biology were discussed as the ringers worked. As the farmers could not accompany the team all day, they sent one or two workers with who knew the farm and where the nests were. The workers are an important link in the recovery of dead birds, as they are the ones who spend a lot of time in the veld. The following week, Dirk and Holger Kolberg went to a farm close to Windhoek and ringed another three chicks.

Logistics and funding

NamibRand Nature Reserve supplied the vehicle and Nedbank sponsored the fuel. The farmers who accommodated and fed the team are thanked for their hospitality. Although the ringling took seven days, at least another two weeks could have been spent ringling on other farms.

Ringling 2004

The same system was followed as the previous year. In five days, in the same district, 37 White-backed and two Lappet-faced vulture chicks were ringed on six farms. Namibia Nature Foundation and Avis sponsored the vehicle, while Nedbank again supplied the fuel. Electro Repairs made the clamps to hold the long ladder.

Publicity

Dirk wrote several articles about the ringling. As a result, farmers contacted both authors to give them information about vultures on their farms. Each participating

farmer was presented with an eye-catching certificate from the VSG. Some were handed out at Conservancy or Farmers' Union meetings, which generated more publicity.

Articles pertaining to the project and vulture conservation in general, were published in four editions of AgriForum, Conservation and the Environment in Namibia 2004/4, and Roan News.

Summary

This project has been very successful in terms of creating awareness of vultures and other birds of prey and the many threats that these birds face. The co-operation and enthusiasm of the farmers has been heart warming and inspires hope. The project can be expanded to ring on more farms over a much wider area. The personal contact and involvement with the landowners, families and staff creates a source of pride and caring about "their vultures". This is corroborated by Verdoorn *et al.* (1997). "Farmers generally appreciate personal visits and usually proudly discuss their conservation successes with vultures with the VSG representative".

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