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Editorial

The trials of the Namibia Bird Club continue with it mainly being a Windhoek orientated organization. The number of articles submitted to its journal the Lanioturdus has withered to almost unacceptable levels. In 2006 only one issue of the Lanioturdus was published and here we are half way through 2007 and finally the editor has enough articles to publish what probably will be the only issue of 2007.

There is obviously an interest in birding within Namibia since there are now many subgroups specializing in aspects of birds. There is Raptors Namibia who publish an on line newsletter once a month. The Crane Working Group, Raptor Road Counts, Rare and Endangered Species Trust working on vultures, and the Wetland Bird Counts which enumerate all the wetlands twice per year.

I know that there are birders observing birds because of the rare birds which have been reported to the magazine Birds and Birding from Namibia.

Once again I appeal to all members to help the Namibia Bird Club. If you want to keep the club viable you must also do your part and try and get new members to join. We are currently down to fewer than 100 members.

Fortunately there is good news and there has been a recent increase in the number of articles submitted and hopefully this trend will continue and we could see another issue published this year.

I hope readers will note the addition to the Namibia list of Ruppell’s Vulture. There are probably more juvenile Ruppell’s Vultures visiting Namibia than we realize. Observers should keep their eyes open when watching vultures at a kill, you may be able to add a new species to your list. If you do see one of these birds please try to photograph it.
First Record of Ruppell’s Vulture for Namibia

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In September 2003 JD took some visitors out to the vulture feeding hide at the Rare and Endangered Species Trust (REST), at Uitsig Farm, No. 364, Otjiwarongo District, Namibia. Earlier in the day there had been ±350 vultures feeding at the restaurant, comprising mainly White-backed Vultures Gyps africanus, with a few Lappet-faced Vultures Torgos tracheliotus and 1 Cape Vulture Gyps coprotheres. A remaining ±100 vultures had remained and were roosting on the ground and in nearby trees.

Mixed in with the White-backed Vultures was a vulture which looked different. It had a large yellow bill and its wing covert feathers were more mottled. When JD returned to the homestead after 30 minutes with the visitors he mentioned to MD that one of the vultures looked strange and described the bird. MD had just returned from the International Species Action Planning Workshop for the Lappet-faced Vulture in Ethiopia and had seen many Ruppell’s Vultures Gyps rueppelli there and the bird which JD described to her matched the features of the species. MD and JD immediately went out to the hide with a camera but the bird had flown off.

The next day, a small amount of food was put out in order to try to re-attract the suspected Ruppell’s Griffon. MD did view the bird flying at good height almost directly above the REST vulture hide, but the camera equipment available was highly inadequate and before a picture could be taken, the bird had continued flying and did not land. Two other people interested in birds also viewed the distinctive wing pattern of the bird, although they were not vulture experts.


Although both our sightings were multiple observer sightings unfortunately we did not take a photograph nor were we able to collect a feather to confirm the identity of the bird. However the distinctive features of the bird like its massive yellow bill and wing covert flecking makes it unlikely to be confused with any other resident vultures.

Ruppell’s Vulture may be more common in southern Africa than the few sight records suggest. So far all of the records have been of adult birds which are fairly easy to identify. However based on the satellite tracking of one first-year White-backed Vulture and one first-year Cape Vulture we documented extensive movements of the young birds into neighbouring countries. We presume that young Ruppell’s Vultures also undertake extensive movements.

The difficulty of identifying the birds when they are out of range is compounded by the numerous plumages of young Gyps vultures until they reach adulthood around eight years of age. Southern African field guides do not illustrate juvenile Ruppell’s Vultures. The Birds of Africa south of the Sahara by Sinclair and Ryan 2003 illustrate both Ruppell’s and White-backed Vulture juveniles but a glance at the drawings show that there is not much difference between the birds. We believe that birders in Namibia need to look out for other Ruppell’s Vultures in the future.