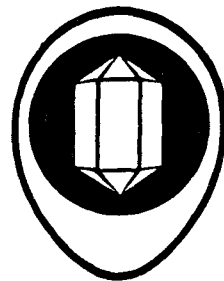


Lanioturdus torquatus
Drosselwürger

MITTEILUNGEN

ORNITHOLOGISCHE ARBEITSGRUPPE



SCHRIFTLÉITUNG: POSTFACH 67, WINDHOEK, S.W.A.

Nr. 8

16. Jahrgang

November 1980

A PLACE FOR VULTURES

Driving to the Magaliesberg Symposium in the early morning one could not help but notice the mountain's white-washed cliffs where the Cape vultures nest. By looking carefully one could even see the giant birds catching the thermals and riding clear of the cliffs.

And while all the serious delegates sat discussing the serious business of what to do with the Magaliesberg these magnificent birds spread their wings and went out on their food patrols with ironic indifference.

Although little time was devoted to wildlife during the Symposium, and although all the big mammals are now extinct in the region, the Cape vulture still makes its presence felt as it has done in the mountain range for years.

At an early meeting on the Magaliesberg organised by the Magaliesberg Protection Association Dr. John Ledger of the Vulture Study Group recounted some interesting facts about these birds.

For instance they are capable of flying at 40 km an hour and use the wind and thermals rather than their muscles. Their food patrol extends for a 100 km. radius around the colony. When scavenging a carcass these birds swallow 1½ kg of soft meat in two minutes.

There are thought to be about 8 000 individuals in the country and the two largest colonies in the Magaliesberg are at Skeepoort - which is just above Hartebeespoort Dam - and at Roberts Farm, some 30 km from Rustenberg.

Dr. Ledger believes that the Cape vulture has a place in the Magaliesberg of today. It is still useful as a scavenger, it is an aesthetic survivor from a former age; and it has an educative role to play in the lives of the people of the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging complex.

But, up to 25 per cent of these birds suffer from a deficiency of calcium, because there are no longer the small chips of bone lying around in the veld after the hyenas have crunched up a carcass. These small chips of bone were picked up and regurgitated to the chicks. To overcome this deficiency vulture restaurants have been established where the birds can come and feed on carcasses. This, says Dr. Ledger, is helping the chicks.

"Tutwa", May/June 1980

16. Flusseeeschwalbe	230 Paare	39. Bachstelze	1 Paar
17. Küstenseeschwalbe	50 "	40. Star	12 "
18. Hohltaube	2 "	41. Grünling	1 "
19. Ringeltaube	30 "	42. Birkenzeisig	4 "
20. Turteltaube	1 "	43. Hänfling	25 "
21. Kuckuck	1 "	44. Buchfink	4 "
22. Feldlerche	20 "	45. Rohrammer	5 "
23. Rauchschwalbe	15 "	46. Haussperling	20 "

So hoffnungsvoll die diesjährige Brutperiode auch anlief, brachte sie doch nicht den erwarteten Erfolg. Bei den Gelegen und den noch nicht flüggen Jungvögeln gab es enorme Verluste. In den Tagen vom 20. bis zum 30. Juni gab es wiederholt Sturmfluten mit Hochwasserständen bis zu 82 cm über mittleres Hochwasser. Dabei wurden die vor dem Deich ungeschützt liegenden Brutgebiete mehrmals fast vollständig überflutet. Alle noch nicht geschlüpften Gelege der Bodenbrüter wurden weggespült. Die noch nicht flüggen Jungvögel ertranken, oder gingen an Unterkühlung nach Einnässen ein. Besonders bei den Seeschwalben, den Rotschenkeln und den Austernfischern gab es starke Ausfälle. Weniger betroffen wurden die Lachmöwen, deren Junge schon weitgehend flügge waren und sich fliegend beim Steigen der Flut in Sicherheit bringen konnten.

Bei den Lachmöwen wurden noch mindestens 2500 Jungvögel flügge. Bei ihnen wäre eine Reduzierung für die übrigen Arten nur von Vorteil gewesen.

Hoffen wir, dass 1981 ein erfolgreicheres Brutjahr wird, das alle diesjährigen Verluste wieder ausgleichen wird.

HOODED VULTURE (R 110) IN THE OKAVANGO

In Ostrich Vol. 46 No. 1 Peter Mundy briefly describes the close association between the Hooded Vulture and man in Nigeria. I found a like, but less developed, association in the Okavango. During May, June and July 1979 I visited many of the islands of the Central Okavango Delta west of Chief's Island. Many are used as regular campsites by parties on wilderness and other trips and the locals on hunting and fishing trips. Touring party guides normally fish and the catch is gutted on the islands, and scraps like pieces of cooked mealie meal are discarded around the campsite. Frequently on leaving the islands several Hooded Vultures were seen arriving at the campsite to feed off the fish entrails and other scraps. Once on arriving at a more popular campsite immediately after it had been vacated by a touring party, three Hooded Vultures were disturbed and these birds waited for several hours in trees nearby before departing. Next morning vultures were again seen in the vicinity and once we left the island they descended to the campsite.

Generally Hooded Vultures in the Okavango are very wary and do not allow close approach. It was therefore interesting to note on a visit to a large settlement on an island near Xaxaba Safari Camp two Hooded Vultures that showed little fear of humans. Perched in a tall tree on the perimeter of the village these two birds, both with full crops, were unconcerned by the close approach of my party (we could not go right up to the tree) and the waving of arms in the attempt to frighten the birds. No Hooded Vultures seen in the unsettled areas would allow so close an approach. Obviously at the village the vultures were accustomed to humans. I suspect that human faeces formed the greater part of their diet as the village scraps would be eaten by the dogs and one wonders how long the island will remain habitable without an efficient sewage system, albeit feathered.

(W. Fraser)

(Witwatersrand Bird Club News 110/September 1980)