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 Sauer (1973), Jensen (unpublished reports), Clinning (1978) and Brown (1985, 1986) all worked on vultures in the same area over the years.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
The capture and attachment of satellite- and radio-telemetry equipment on vultures in the Waterberg area

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The breeding population of Cape Griffon Vultures Gyps coprotheres on the cliffs of the Waterberg Plateau has declined from an estimated 500 in 1939 to only 11 birds in 2004, and the species is now considered critically endangered in Namibia. In 2002, the Rare and Endangered Species Trust (REST) initiated a supplementary feeding scheme on the farm Uitsig, as part of a project to obtain and fit satellite-telemetry equipment onto some of the remaining birds. REST has designed and developed a large capture aviary. Eighteen more Cape Griffon Vultures are held in an aviary alongside the main capture aviary. Initially these birds are being used as lure birds but plans are being made for their release in November 2005. Food is placed out regularly and some 500 scavenging birds feed at the site per week. These include up to five Cape Griffon Vultures, large numbers of African White-backed Vultures Gyps africanus, up to 52 Lappet-faced Vultures Torgos tracheliotos, one Hooded Vulture Necrosyrtes monachus and several Marabou Storks Leptoptilos crumeniferus.

In 11 captures, 778 birds of four species have been ringed (Table 1). All vultures handled were documented photographically, while a full set of mensural and other data and sex estimations were done for large samples. Detailed methods and results of the capture and fitting of satellite- and radio-telemetry equipment onto Cape Griffon Vultures, African White-backed Vultures and Lappet-faced Vultures during the first three captures in 2004 have previously been documented (Diekmann et al. 2004).

REST is now the first organization in the world to fit satellite “collars” or PTT harnesses onto Cape Griffon Vultures. Radio-telemetry devices have been fitted to a further five African White-backed Vultures in the area. REST is also the first in the world to develop a capture aviary and mechanism of this nature and the first in Africa to catch and process such large numbers of free-flying old-world vultures in one operation for extensive sampling. No losses were sustained, and marked birds returned to the restaurant and into the capture aviary almost immediately after the captures.

The preliminary results of the satellite tagging study on Cape Griffon Vultures are presented elsewhere in this journal (Mendelsohn et al. 2005) and are being used for conservation management. Of interest is the fact that an adult male Cape Griffon Vulture (Skybanker) is breeding with an African White-backed Vultures in a tree. In 2004 they produced a chick that was apparently preyped upon by an eagle. A yearling that showed characteristics of both vulture species is being investigated genetically. The methods for continuing with the ringing programme are now being investigated in collaboration with the Bird of Prey Working Group of the Endangered Wildlife Trust, South Africa. Some of the new rings are being tested on captive birds at REST.

Acknowledgements
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References
Table 1. Number of vultures and storks captured at REST.

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<th>Date</th>
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<th>Lappet-faced Vulture</th>
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* includes one hybrid

RAPTORS NAMIBIA
Action Plan

RAPTORS UNDER PRESSURE

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. The Raptors Namibia Action Plan was developed by a group of raptor enthusiasts at a Birds of Prey workshop at Waterberg Plateau Park on 18-19 February 2005, facilitated by Dr Chris Brown of Namibia Nature Foundation. Several of these actions are already being implemented, but will benefit by increased co-ordination; new actions will be incorporated into existing programmes/initiatives where possible, with a focus on increasing public involvement. The six-point plan identifies the following priorities:

1. **Promote co-ordination and communication**
   1.1 Appoint working group coordinators
   1.2 Develop a raptor working group with sub-groups for projects
   1.3 Promote coordination and communication for all projects below (see also 3)

2. **Obtain information/data**
   2.1 Assess/determine needs for further information
   2.2 Aerial surveys
   - Co-ordinate where possible
   2.3 Ringing programmes
   - Reassess rationale/objectives and continue with ringing programmes
   - Increase effort to obtain ring resightings/recoveries
   - Increase public involvement in programmes (see also 4)

2.4 Satellite/radio tracking programmes
   - Continue with tracking programme for Cape Vultures
   - Expand the programme to other targetted species/areas

2.5 Avifaunal database
   - Update existing database
   - Provide internet access to database
   - Determine procedures for entry of information by participants

2.6 Raptor Roadcounts
   - Reinstall the programme
   - Popularise the roadcounts
   - Determine data needs to determine status and population trends; identify focal species

2.7 Further research programmes
   - Traditional beliefs and knowledge of raptor

2.8 Analyse data and provide feedback (see 3)

3. **Promote awareness and education**
   3.1 Target relevant audiences, working through existing initiatives where possible
   - Commercial and communal farming areas/conservancies
   - Roadcount participants, MET/MAWRD, bird/nature clubs