

Papers: Bird Groups

Raptor conservation in the Northern Cape Province, South Africa

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The semi-arid Northern Cape is the largest and most sparsely populated province in South Africa. Many different habitat types provide for the requirements of a number of raptor species. These include the Asbestos and Langberge mountains, the Kalahari, the Nama-Karoo and the Orange River and its associated habitats.

Fifty-one different species have been recorded, of which 35 are resident, 21 are common, and eight species are listed in the *The Eskom Red Data Book of Birds of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland* (Barnes, K.N. (ed.) 2000). In general, habitat degradation is limited to the areas immediately adjacent to the perennial rivers, and raptors are still commonly encountered in many areas.

One of the main economic activities is sheep farming, and the properties are generally very large (>5000 ha). Conflict with small-stock farming, however, results in some birds being inadvertently or directly persecuted each year. Some raptors are killed by poisons and gin-traps, where the target species is usually the black-backed jackal. Two farmer questionnaire postal surveys (1976 and 1992) indicated a decrease in range and abundance of certain scavenging species, such as the Tawny Eagle. The more recent survey also indicated that most stock mortalities occurred in the mountainous areas, with the Black Eagle being the apparent culprit.

In the Northern Cape there are both positive and negative anthropogenic effects on

raptors. For example, 14 species have been recorded breeding on man-made structures, while individual birds from 18 species have been drowned in farm reservoirs.

Through the activities of the Raptor Conservation Group (RCG), the Northern Cape Nature Conservation Service and the Northern Cape Raptor Conservation Forum, various threats are being addressed. Two RCG projects are making an important contribution to raptor conservation in the Northern Cape. Francois Taljaard coordinates the Platberg-Karoo Raptor Project and Abrie Maritz coordinates the Kalahari Raptor Project.

Raptor conservation activities include: monitoring of raptor breeding populations, road censuses, farmer extension, establishment of raptor conservancies, rehabilitation of injured raptors, issuing of certificates to land-owners who are breeding raptors on their properties, presentation of the annual Gariep Raptor Conservationist Award, production and distribution of raptor pamphlets and booklets, modification of farm reservoirs to prevent raptor drownings, modification of powerlines to prevent electrocutions, and establishment of 'vulture restaurants'.

Eskom deserves special mention for its efforts to modify raptor-unfriendly powerlines to prevent electrocutions. Through all of these efforts, the status of many raptor species is improving and species such as the Tawny Eagle, Bateleur and Lappetfaced Vulture are becoming increasingly common.