

Road counts of crows and raptors in Namaqualand

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I was interested to see the paper by Harebottle et al. (2003) on road counts of crows and raptors in Namaqualand in October 2003 because a year earlier, in December 2002, I completed counts on three of the same sections starting from Springbok at 08:00. The three sections were the stretches from Springbok to Steinkopf (their route C), Steinkopf to Port Nolloth (D) and Port Nolloth to Alexander Bay (E). Counts were also made the following day on the return journey (starting from Alexander Bay at 12:00) along these same stretches. My results are presented below for a comparison with data collected by Harebottle et al.

Nine species were recorded including Black Crow *Corvus capensis* and Pied Crow *C. albus*. The list was similar to that made by

Harebottle et al., except that I saw no *Gymnogenes Polyboroides typus*, but did see Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus*, Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*, Black-breasted Snake Eagle *Circaetus pectoralis* and Jackal Buzzard *Buteo rufofuscus*.

Crows were dominant in December 2002, as in October 2003. Numerous rodents were seen in December 2002, presumably Brandt's Whistling Rat, in vegetation adjacent to the road. The abundance of rats and other rodents presumably contributed to the high numbers of crows and raptors. There was a Black-headed Heron *Ardea melanocephala* feeding in the vegetation, probably on rodents.

Harebottle et al. (2003) found that routes D and E had higher densities of crows and

Table 1. Counts of crows and raptors along the roadside on five routes in Namaqualand, September 2002. First column on each route shows numbers seen on the outward journey on 4 December, and the second column for the return journey on 5 December. Figures in parentheses are numbers of birds on nests.

Species	Route C		Route D		Route E		Total	
Pied Crow	4	15	15	29	5	9	24	53
Black Crow	1	0	6	2	0	0	7	2
Subtotal Crows	5	15	21	31	5	9	31	55
Pale Chanting Goshawk	3	2 (1)	8 (2)	5	4	4	15	11
Greater Kestrel	2	14 (6)	29	28 (4)	7	8	38	50
Rock Kestrel			1	0	0	1	1	1
Unidentified Kestrel		1					0	1
Jackal Buzzard	0	2	3	0	4	1	7	3
Lanner Falcon	0	1	2	1	5	4	7	6
Black-shouldered Kite				1			0	1
Black-br. Snake Eagle			1				1	0
Sub-total raptors	5	20	44	35	20	18	69	73
Total	10	35	65	66	25	27	100	128
Distance (km)	56		96		86		238	

raptors than other routes. Their routes A and B followed the main road south from Springbok. Although I followed routes A and B on 5 December, it was mid-afternoon by then and very hot. Few birds of any species were noted.

In December 2002, there were marked differences between the numbers of some species counted on the outward and return routes. In particular Pied Crows were more numerous on 5 December than on 4 December. Generally, Black Crows were scarce by comparison with Pied Crows.

Of the raptors, Greater Kestrel was most abundant on all routes, while Rock Kestrel was scarce in December 2002. The density of 1 kestrel/4–7 km was very high. Even in the most favoured areas of Botswana there are densities of only 1 kestrel/11 km in Central Kalahari Game Reserve, and 1 kestrel/35 km in the Pitsane grasslands of southeastern Botswana (S.T. in prep.).

In Botswana, there is huge variation in abundance depending on location (Tyler 2002). Pied Crows occurred at the highest densities in more populated areas in the southeast and east, with 15–20 birds/100 km,

but in the towns of Mahalapye and Palapye there were large concentrations. Elsewhere, numbers were generally low. Cape Crow was scarce in the southeast and east (<1 bird/100 km), but more common in the drier Kalahari and in the Pitsane grasslands of extreme southeastern Botswana (2.5–10 birds/100 km). The highest densities were found in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (17 birds/100 km) and the Kalagadi Transfrontier Park (12 birds/100 km).

Pale Chanting Goshawks occurred at a density of 1 bird/15 km on average. This approaches the high densities found in Botswana in Kalagadi Transfrontier Park and in Central Kalahari Game Reserve where particularly high densities of 1 bird/12 km and 1 bird/10 km, respectively, were found (Tyler in prep.).

Harebottle D.M., Oschadleus H.D. & Ford M.A. 2003. Road counts of crows and other raptors in Namaqualand, North Cape. *Bird Numbers* 12(2): 17–20.

Tyler S.J. 2002. Crows in Botswana – their distribution and abundance. *Babbler* 41: 23–31.



Secret tools of the common crow

Publications by members of the ADU December 2003–June 2004

Books

- Boycott, R. & Parker, V. 2003.** *Birds of the Malolotja Nature Reserve, Swaziland*. Bright Continent Guide 3. Avian Demography Unit & Conservation Trust of Swaziland, Cape Town & Mbabane.
- Crawford R.J.M., Duncombe Rae C.M., Nel D.C. & Cooper J. 2004.** *Influence of climate on seabirds at sub-antarctic Marion Island, Southern Ocean*. XXVII ATCM/1P076. Cape Town.
- Cooper, J. [2004].** *Environmental management during the construction of a new base facility at subantarctic Marion Island. Phase one, 2003*. XXVII ATCM/1P077. Cape Town.
- Du Toit M., Underhill L.G. & Crawford R.J.M. 2004.** *African Penguin populations in the Western Cape, 1992–2003*. Avian Demography Unit, Cape Town.
- Kuyper S. & Williams A.J. (eds). 2004.** *Proceedings of the Penguin Workshop following the sinking of the Treasure in June 2000*. Avian Demography Unit, Cape Town.
- Minter L.R., Burger M., Harrison J.A., Braack H.H., Bishop P.J. & Kloepper D. (eds). 2004.** *Atlas and Red Data book of the frogs of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland*. SI/MAB Series no. 9. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Chapters in books

- In:** Minter L.R., Burger M., Harrison J.A., Braack H.H., Bishop P.J. & Kloepper D. (eds). 2004. *Atlas and Red Data book of the frogs of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland*. SI/MAB Series no. 9. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.:
- Alexander G.J., Harrison J.A., Fairbanks D.H. & Navarro R.A.** Biogeography of the frogs of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland. Pp. 31–47.
- Harrison J.A.** *Breviceps acutirostris*, *Breviceps montanus*, *Breviceps rosei*. Pp. 170–171, 183–184, 188–189.
- Harrison J.A. & Minter L.R.** *Breviceps gibbosus*. Pp. 177–180.
- Minter L.R., Harrison J.A., Burger M. & Braack H.H.** Introduction. Pp. 1–10.

Research papers

- Cooper J. 2004.** Past, present and future. (letter to the Editor). *Bunting* 49(7): 11–12.
- Cooper J. 2004.** South Africa joins the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels. www.environment.gov.za
- Cooper J. & Ryan R.G. 2004.** ACAP-funded geo-location loggers recovered from Marion albatrosses after a year at sea. *ACAP News* 4. (www.acap.aq).
- Cuthbert R., Ryan P.G., Cooper J. & Hilton G. 2003.** Demography and population trends of the Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross. *Condor* 105: 439–452.
- Cuthbert R., Sommer E., Ryan P. Cooper J. & Hilton G. 2004.** Demography and conservation of the Tristan Albatross *Diomedea [exulans] dabbenena*. *Biological Conservation* 117: 471–481.
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- Whittington P.A. 2003.** Survival and movements of African Penguins, especially after oiling. (thesis abstract). *Australasian Seabird Bulletin* 41: 24–25.

Conference presentations, posters and abstracts

A. At the *Waterbirds around the World* – Global Flyways Conference, Edinburgh, UK, 3–8 April 2004:

- Cooper J.** Migration patterns and conservation of albatrosses and petrels of the Southern Ocean. Abstracts p. 3.
- Griffin J., Whittington P.A., Bartlett P., Crawford R.J.M., Klages N., Randall R.M. & Wolfaardt A.C.** Patterns of movement of African Penguins *Spheniscus demersus* in South Africa and Namibia. Abstracts p. 181. (poster).
- Harebottle D.M. & Underhill L.G.** The Arctic connection: monitoring coastal waders in South Africa – a case study. Abstracts p. 185. (poster).
- Harebottle D.M., Navarro R.A., Underhill L.G. & Waltner M.** Trends in numbers of waders (Charadrii) at Langebaan Lagoon, South Africa, 1975–2004. Abstracts p. 184. (poster)
- Harrison, J.A.** A pilot analysis of recovery data for African-Eurasian waterbirds.
- Mukherjee A. & Wilske B.** Importance of wetlands for conservation of bird life in the dry lands of western India. Abstracts p. 239. (poster).
- Mukherjee A., Wilske B. & Borad C.K.** Important Bird Area: Western India. Abstracts p. 240. (poster).
- Oschadleus H.D.** Waterbird migration atlas of southern Africa. Abstracts p. 95.
- Oschadleus H.D.** 55 Years of ringing data – past, present and future activities in SAFRING. Abstracts p. 96.
- Oschadleus H.D. & Brooks M.** Cape Gannet *Morus capensis* movements in Africa. Abstracts p. 250 (poster).

B. Other meetings & conferences:

- Oschadleus H.D.** (presented by M. Anderson). **2004.** Raptor ringing in southern Africa. Raptor CG Workshop, Gariiep Dam, 23 March 2004.
- Mukherjee A., Williams T. & Underhill L.G.** **2004.** Stork stalking at the tail-end of the range: Black Storks in the Western Cape province of South Africa. Fourth International Black Stork Conference, Davod, Hungary, 15–20 April 2004. Abstract. Section 1: 24. (poster).
- Mullers R.H.E., Navarro R.A., Underhill L.G. & Visser G.H.** **2004.** How important is the timing of breeding in Cape Gannets (*Morus capensis*). Seabird Conference, Aberdeen, UK. April.
- Underhill L.G. & Crawford R.J.M.** **2004.** Seabirds as indicators of the health of the Benguela ecosystem. Quantitative Ecosystem Indications for Fisheries Management: International Symposium, Paris, France.

ADU publications

- De Villiers M.S., Calf K.M., Dyer B.M., Harebottle D.M., Mecenero S., Oschadleus H.D., Ward V.L., Peter H.-U., Amlacher J., Fache R., Gorschewski A., Heinze E., Jung L., Kahles A., Merbold L., Müller R., Nordt A., Schultz K. & Sternkopf V.** **2003.** The Institute of Ecology (Friedrich-Schiller University, Jena) and the Avian Demography Unit (University of Cape Town) collaborative research project, 20 September–9 October 2003. ADU Research Project no. 53. Avian Demography Unit, Cape Town.
- Harebottle D.M.** **2003.** Coordinated Waterbird Counts (CWAC) Newsletter 22, June 2003.
- Harebottle D.M.** **2003.** Coordinated Waterbird Counts (CWAC) Newsletter 23, December 2003.
- Harebottle D.M., Oschadleus H.D. & Ford M.A.** **2003.** Road counts of crows and other raptors in Namaqualand, Northern Cape. Bird Numbers 12(2): 17–20.
- Harrison J.A.** **2003.** Development of Arabella Golf Estate, Phase 2: assessment of impacts on vertebrate fauna. ADU Research Report no. 54. Avian Demography Unit, Cape Town.
- Mukherjee A., Hofmeyr J.H. & Underhill L.G.** **2003.** Breeding success of White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* in the Western Cape, South Africa. Bird Numbers 12(2): 33–35.
- Oschadleus D.** **2003.** Editorial. Afring News 32: 41.
- Oschadleus H.D.** **2003.** Cape Weaver population on Robben Island. Bird Numbers 12(2): 27–30.
- Parsons N.J. & Underhill L.G.** **2003.** African Black Oystercatchers *Haematopus moquini* at the Koeberg Nuclear Power Station in the 2002/03 breeding season. ADU Research Report 55. Report to Eskom Koeberg Nuclear Power Station.
- Young, D.** **2003.** Coordinated Avifaunal Roadcounts Newsletter 15.
- Ward V.L.** **2003.** Use of anthropogenic structure as a nest site by Cape Siskin *Pseudochloroptila totta*. Bird Numbers 12(2): 38.

- Ward V.L., Oschadleus H.D., Symes C.T. & Brown M. 2004.** Review of ringing and biometry of Forest Canaries *Serinus scotops*. Afring News 32: 65–68.
- Wortel N.M.E., Venter A.D. & Underhill L.G. 2003.** African Black Oystercatchers *Haematopus moquini* at Dyer Island, Western Cape, South Africa: Population trends, 1997–2003, and breeding productivity, summer 2002/03. ADU Research Report 56. Report to Western Cape Nature Conservation Board.

Works of a popular nature

- Burger M. & Harrison J.A. 2004.** Southern African Frog Atlas Project completed! Froglog 62: 1–2.
- Cooper J. 2004.** Are the mice killing the albatrosses of Gough? Africa – Birds & Birding 9(1): 46–50.
- Griffin J. 2004.** Robben Islands feral cats – victims or villains? Animal Talk. January.
- Harebottle D.M. & Gibbs D.G. 2004.** Colour-ringed waterbirds in the south-western Cape. Promerops 258: 9–10.
- Oschadleus D. 2004.** Cape Weaver roadside colonies in the SW Cape. Promerops 257: 18.
- Underhill L.G. 2004.** How long does it take to fly from Robben Island to the Waterfront? Indaba Inyoni: Newsletter of BirdLife South Africa 7(2): 26–27.

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Anyone who is not an active participant in ADU projects, but would like to be on the *Bird Numbers* mailing list, should send R30 per annum to cover printing and postage.

Chirps from the past

*This passage is from the charming **Warriors, warthogs and wisdom** by Lyall Watson, about his childhood in Africa. (1997, Larousse, London). The artist was Keith West.*

One day [. . .] Jabula and I came back with a stork we had found lying out in the bush. It was a fully grown saddlebill stork, a beautiful bird with a bright red beak, like the ones we sometimes saw flying high overhead. But this one was grounded. It was clearly not well and wasn't flying anywhere at all. It couldn't even stand on its own feet without falling over. Ouma looked at its dark eyes and felt all over the great bird's body, which was longer by far than her own. "There's nothing broken," she decided. "Maybe it was something he ate. I'll have to give this matter careful thought."

Jabula was pessimistic, remembering a cow that had died the day after developing the same problem. But Ouma was more hopeful and soon came to one of her remarkable conclusions.

She got up suddenly, went indoors and came out with an old pair of my grandfather's trousers.

"These will do the trick," she announced and instructed Jabula and me on how to hold the stork while she guided the bird's long dangling legs into the trousers. We had to cut the seat of the pants out to make room for the stork's tail, but otherwise it was a perfect fit and looked surprisingly good.

"There is something very appealing," said Ouma, "about a stork in pinstripe trousers."

It wasn't clear to me yet why we were paying so much attention to the bird's appearance.

But I was relying on Ouma's ingenuity, and of course she didn't let me down. After running a clothes line through the belt loops on either side of the trousers, she showed us how to fasten the rope ends to two shady trees in the garden so that the stork was suspended between them, with its feet just touching the ground.

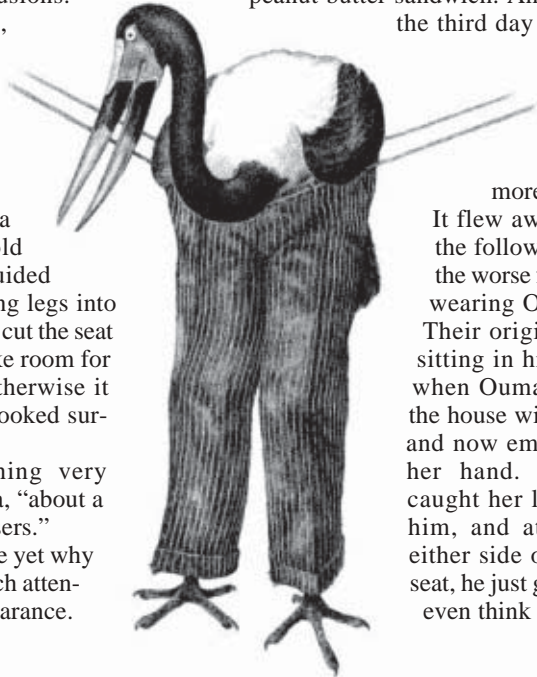
The best-dressed bird in the world perked up immediately.

"There's nothing like new clothes, said Ouma, "to make one feel better."

And it seemed to work. From the moment we stepped back to give the stork room to move, the elegant bird began, for the first time, to look round with some interest. By that evening, it was drinking water from a bucket. The next day it ate three frogs and a peanut butter sandwich. And by the end of

the third day in fancy dress, our stork was flapping its big black wings and looking far more as it should.

It flew away to the north the following week, none the worse for wear, nor for wearing Oupa's trousers. Their original owner was sitting in his special chair when Ouma came back to the house with the modified and now empty garment in her hand. But when he caught her looking hard at him, and at the posts on either side of his verandah seat, he just growled: "Don't even think about it!"



Birds in Culture

Chicken

Few bird couples are as different from each other as the hen and her mate, the proud cock. He struts through the barnyard as lord of the roost. He regally sounds his clarion at dawn to awaken everyone. In contrast to the rooster's majestic bearing, the earthy hen hustles through the yard followed by a brood of peeping chicks. Sitting on a nest or busily scratching for insects and seeds, she is the image of domestic toil.

From earliest times, many cultures have associated the cock with the sun. Not only does he announce the start of day, but his gleaming red crest appears to be a reflection of the sun's intense brightness. The ancient Greeks and Romans thus identified the cock with many of their solar gods. The Japanese believed that the cock's singing lured their sun goddess out from hiding. Even today roosters parade in front of Japan's great Shinto temples to remind people of this remarkable feat. In China when a man died, a cock was placed on top of his coffin as a symbol of his voyage beyond the sun.

For the Christians, however, the cock is a bird of augury, associated with Saint Peter's denial of Christ when, in warning, the cock crowed three times at dawn. According to another popular belief, the cock is the symbol of resurrection. It is said that one of the soldiers guarding Christ's tomb loudly denied that Christ would rise from the grave, declaring it was as unlikely as "the cock rising out of a boiling pot". No sooner

had he uttered these words than the cock sprang from the pot. Metal and wooden roosters have since been placed on church steeples as a symbol of the resurrection.

As early as 1500 BC, in India, roosters were trained to fight each other for sport. Down to this day, in several countries, many enjoy cockfighting despite laws against this cruel practice. So common was this spectacle during the eighteenth century that satirist William Hogarth portrayed cockfighting in engravings and included cockshying (throwing rocks at roosters) as one of *The Four Stages of Cruelty*.

Unlike her spouse, the hen has always had a more mundane image. She represents maternity, fertility, and domesticity. If a hen cackles loudly, many believe this means the owner's wife has too much authority, whence the common expression henpecked husband. When a red hen crows, some interpret this as a sign of fire; when a black hen crows, this is thought to indicate a theft. A white hen is seen as good luck. Perhaps the hen's greatest renown comes from her place in children's literature, especially as the wise red hen who planted, raised, and harvested the wheat in order to make bread while the cat, pig, and duck sat lazily by.



From: *The illustrated bird* (edited by M. Oster, Tree Communications, New York, 1978.)