

CONFERENCE REPORTS

P.J. Mundy

13th Pan African Ornithological Congress (Arusha, Tanzania), October 2012

In the Programme & Abstracts book there were many presentations on vultures (or that included vultures), and a Round Table Discussion, as follows:

Akagu, R.O., Shiiwua, M., Adeleke, A. & Adole, S. - “Conservation status of Nigeria vultures”. Vultures are now rarely seen in most parts.

Allan, D.G. – “The conservation status of Africa’s vultures”. The distribution, population and threats are considered [not in the abstract].

Asamoah, A., Holbeck, L.H. & Owusu, E.H. - “Species specific bird strike risk (SSBSR) at the Kotoka International Airport (KIA)”. In Ghana. The presence of some species, including Hooded Vulture, should be reduced.

Buij, R., Croes, B.M. & Komdeur, J. – “Traditional medicine trade and vulture decline in Cameroon and Nigeria”. Feathers, heads and entire birds, mostly Hooded Vultures, were on sale in Nigeria. In Cameroon nest harvesting and poisoning were on the increase. The term ‘poaching’ is used, and drastic and urgent measures are needed.

Dabengwa, A.N., Smallie, J.J., Diamond, M. & Hoogstad, W.C. – “Predicting high risk power lines in the Magaliesburg [sic] region of South Africa to prevent vulture mortality”. Space use by a ‘collared’ Cape Griffon, mortality and other risk factors were manipulated by GIS. Overall space use and mortality were correlated to altitude.

Davies, R. & Virani, M.Z. – “Introducing a continent-wide monitoring programme for African birds of prey and their habitats”. Observations can

be entered on mobile devices with GPS, when connected to a network or the web, and sent to a central database. An online atlas is expected.

- Kendall, C. & Virani, M.Z. – “Conservation implications of vulture movement studies in East Africa”. GSM–GPS telemetry was used on three species which ranged widely. Poisoning was common. All species visited the Masai Mara National Reserve in the dry season.
- Kruger, S., Rushworth, I. & Amar, A. – “Are wind-farms a threat to southern Africa’s cliff-nesting vultures?”. Models predicted that both Bearded and Cape Vultures would be extinct in the Maluti-Drakensberg area in 75 years. Measures to mitigate the impact of wind-farms are proposed.
- Monadjem, A., Botha, A., Murn, C., Wolter, K. & Nester, W. – “Survival of the African white-backed and Cape vulture in South Africa based on resightings of tagged individuals”. Patagial tags were put on 93 white-backed vultures, and resighted during a five-year period. Adults indicated a 99.9% survival rate!
- Murn, C., Potter, L., Ronaldson, G.S., Thompson, C. & Botha, A. - “Population estimates of three vulture species in Kruger National Park, South Africa”. By aerial censuses in two sections. In both areas combined, 303 White-backed Vulture nests, 11 Lappet-faced Vulture, and 20 White-headed Vulture were counted. These results were extrapolated to the whole park.
- Ogada, D.L. – “Dropping dead: causes and consequences of vulture population declines”. Populations have all but collapsed in West Africa, and dropped dramatically in North and East Africa. Poisoning and human persecution are common factors. Without vultures there is an increased potential for disease transmission at carcasses.
- Ogada, D.L., Torchin, M.E., Kinnaird, M.F. & Ezenwa, V.O. – “Effects of vulture declines on facultative scavengers and potential implications for mammalian disease transmission”. Without vultures attending to carcasses, mammals increased their numbers, the average time spent at carcasses, and number of their contacts. Overall, mean carcass decomposition rate nearly tripled.

Otieno, P., Lalah, J., Virani, M.Z. & Owuor, P.O. – “The threat of pesticides to raptors in Kenya”. Carbofuran residues were examined, and figures from weathered tissues of white-backed vultures are given.

Pfeiffer, M., Venter, J. & Downs, C.T. – “Foraging range, breeding success, and community perceptions of the Cape vulture in the Mkambati Nature Reserve, Eastern Cape Province”. This is the Msikaba colony at 2km from the ocean . Work towards various objectives was expected to start in 2012.

Reson, E.N., Virani, M., Kendall, C., Bowerman, W. & Bridges, W. - “Assessing Maasai attitudes and perceptions towards vultures: a case study of resident Maasai around Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya”. A decline of >60% in two decades has occurred. While the Maasai seem to favour vulture conservation, their activities are detrimental to it, due to poisoning of carnivores.

Roxburgh, L. & Mzumara, T. - “Vultures in Malawi: a precipitous decline, and hope for the future?”. Area of occupancy has greatly declined, e.g. three species are absent from Kasungu and Liwonde National Parks. But numbers have increased in Majete where wildlife has been re-introduced.

Virani, M.Z. & Botha, A. - “RTD: vultures and vulture conservation in Africa”. Aims to promote the implementation of the 1st Pan-African Vulture Summit (Kenya, April 2012). The main conservation issues are poisoning, unsustainable harvesting, and energy infrastructure.

(With thanks to Ms. Josphine Mundava, who loaned me the P & A book).

RECENT LITERATURE AND BOOK REVIEWS

RECENT LITERATURE

P. J. Mundy

BOLSHAKOV, A.O. (2008). Mut or not ? On the meaning of a vulture sign on the Hermitage statue of Amenemhat III , pp. 23-31. In: D'AURIA, S.H. (ed.), *Servant of Mut*. Brill, Leiden.

This pharaoh's statue is in the Hermitage Museum in Russia. At its feet are two inscriptions of a vulture with a flagellum. Initially taken to mean Mut, the author now proposes the ideogram to mean Nekhbet.

CARSWELL, M., POMEROY, D., REYNOLDS, J. & TUSHABE, H. (2005). *The bird atlas of Uganda*. British Ornithologists' Club / British Onithologists' Union, Oxford. ISBN 0 9522866 4 8.

By means of point records (1990s), QSD records (1980s), and potentially suitable habitat (range predictions modelled for this atlas), eight species of vultures are mapped. The Palm-nut Vulture has considerably extended its range; the Bearded Vulture has no recent sightings; the Egyptian Vulture is uncommon; and Rüppell's Griffon is rather scarce with an old breeding record in the far NW corner. The Hooded Vulture is the commonest, and is widespread, and the White-backed Vulture is also common though now confined to the game parks (14% of Uganda); both are known to breed. Most recent records for the Lappet-faced and White-headed Vultures are from national parks, and neither has recent breeding records.

CORTÉS AVIZANDA, A. (2011). In: Summary of doctoral theses in ornithology. *Ardeola* 58: 414- 415.

This is a thesis at the Universidad Autonoma de Madrid for the academic year 2010-2011. It is entitled – “The ecological and conservation effects of food resource predictability: carcasses and vertebrate communities”. Among other points , the thesis provides guidelines for the management of vulture ‘restaurants’.

(email address : ainara@ebd.csic.es)

DIES, J. I. *et al.* (2011), Observaciones de aves raras en España, 2009. *Ardeola* 58: 452-453.

An immature (“possibly 2nd year”) African White-backed Vulture was photographed in flight alongside a Eurasian Griffon at Tarifa on 7 September 2008. This is the first accepted sighting in Spain. Another 2nd year immature was found on 25 June 2009, dead after colliding with a wind turbine. The first sighting of the species in the “western Palaearctic” was an adult on 14 October 2006 at the south-west corner of Portugal.

(email: jdies@hotmail.com)

GOLDISH, M. (2009). *California condors. Saved by captive breeding.* (America’s animal comebacks). Bearport Publishing, New York. 32pp. ISBN 978-1-59716-741-3.

Accurate account of the trials and tribulations of the bird from long back to now, written for children. In colour, with a photograph on every page. Sanford Wilbur was the consultant.

HOOPEs, L.L. (1997). *Condor magic*. The Benefactory, Fairfield (CT). 32pp. ISBN 1-882728-96-3.

Briefly written in poem form, and with somewhat impressionistic paintings by P.C. Stone. From the pristine, through 1987, to the first releases in 1991. Co-sponsored by the Humane Society of the United States, L.A. Zoo and The Peregrine Fund.

MARGALIDA, A. & GARCIA, D. (2011). Intraspecific nest usurpation in the bearded vulture *Gypaetus barbatus* in Catalonia (NE Spain). *Ardeola* 58: 303-308.

Three cases are reported in the Catalonian Pyrenees. All usurping birds were adults. Usurped pairs had a higher breeding productivity than did the usurping pairs.

(email: antoni.margalida@iee.unibe.ch)

MUTISO, M.N. (2010). *The vultures of Africa: a colouring book*. Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association, Kempton (Pennsylvania, U.S.A). 36 pp.

Intended for children to read something about 11 species, including a “fun fact” for each. My copy includes an insert of already coloured diagrams. Each species has a map of Africa and a list of countries where it occurs. Altogether a cute book (though not without its mistakes).

(email: info@hawkmountain.org)

OBERPRIELER, U. & CILLIÉ, B. (2009). *The raptor guide of southern Africa*. Game Parks Publishing, Pretoria. 304 pp. ISBN 978-0-6204-3223-8.

I take this book to be the 2nd (and improved) edition of the *Raptor identification guide* (2002) by the same authors, though it is not stated as such. (Noticed in *Vulture News*, 2003, 49: 74). Nine species are included, first as a group (p. 35), then species by species (pp. 54-71), key points to

distinguish them from confusing species (pp. 218-223), in flight from underneath (paintings) (pp. 274-275), and selected photographs of birds in flight (pp. 286-288, 23 photos). In this last section, incidentally, the “Cape Vulture dirty adult” and “Cape Vulture adult” (p. 287) are a juvenile Cape and an adult White-backed Vulture respectively. These aside, quite a feast of a treatment. The main section has no less than 39 photos, all well printed and in good colour, and better than the darker photos in the 1st edition, and a different set. However this new text is almost identical to that in the previous edition.

(email: info@gameparkspublishing.co.za)

PORTER, R.F. & QUIROZ, D. (2010). Social behaviour of the Egyptian Vulture. *British Birds* 103: 61-64.

Two ‘new’ behaviours are described. One was of a group of 14 birds (including 12 adults) in a small grassy clearing; “some form of lek”. The second was a dominant adult standing on the legs of a submissive adult that was lying on the ground on its back with wings outstretched. Includes five coloured photographs.

(email: rfporter@talktalk.net)

SEGUIN, J-F., TORRE, J. & BRETAGNOLLE, V. (2010). Distribution, population size and breeding parameters in the insular population of Bearded Vultures *Gypaetus barbatus* of Corsica over 28 years. *Bird Study* 57: 361-368.

Has remained stable at 10 pairs (including one or two polyandrous trios), and an estimated 25 birds in all. But breeding parameters have declined, now to only 0.1 young /pair/year.

(email: gypaete.parc@wanadoo.fr)

TE VELDE, H. (2008). The goddess Mut and the vulture, pp. 242-245. In: D'AURIA, S.H. (ed.), *Servant of Mut*. Brill, Leiden.

The Graeco-Roman view that there were only female vultures originates from Egypt. The vulture was the symbol of motherhood and femininity, and came to mean both mother and goddess.

BOOK REVIEWS

P.J. Mundy

WILBUR, S.R. (2004). *Condor tales. What I learned in twelve years with the big birds*. Symbios, Gresham (USA). 400pp. ISBN 0-9651263-3-1. \$19.

This is a (very) personal account of the condor saga from “early days” to the “aftermath”. That is, from prehistoric times to about 1985. Wilbur became the FWS condor biologist in November 1969 and left the programme abruptly as the result of the “coup” in early March 1980, though already in 1979 he had been re-assigned as the (“undercover”) condor coordinator. So the book is based very much on quotes from his field notes, telephone conversations, government files and accounts of meetings. The quotes are in italics and therefore easy to see within any chapter. These are the ‘evidence’ if you like.

The style imparts a raciness to the story, a blow-by-blow rendition, and an immediacy that gives it a lived-through feel. And of course it was lived through. Interspersed among the quotes are his own texts of actions, thoughts and opinions which link up the quotes into stand-alone chapters. All in all it makes for an absorbing read, and where one can barely put the book down. Nevertheless, at the same time, all these details can be tricky to keep placed in the right order, and I found myself reading certain sections twice or more in an effort to keep everything in line.

Note that the condor saga is full of “socio-political” commentary, and endless days of hearings, so that on occasions the saga seem more like a debacle, or perhaps a circus, with everyone going around in circles amidst much noise! Everybody down to the vicar and his dog are confident (and arrogant?) enough to voice an opinion and call for their preferred action. Carl Koford the scientist and Ian McMillan the rancher are two such, and Wilbur frequently deals with their comments.

Wilbur has shaped his book into 50 chapters, all rather short except for chapter 46 The Takeover (“This is going to be a long chapter”). The dramatis personae, even rogues’ gallery, are very many, and they come and go on each page according to their importance in the journey. Koford, McMillan brothers, John Borneman, Dean Carrier, Ray Erickson, David Marshall, Fred Sibley, Bill Sweeney, and of course John Ogden and Noel Snyder are all numerously mentioned. Indeed, Wilbur states right at the beginning (p. 11) that he decided to write *Condor Tales* after being asked to review Noel and Helen Snyder’s *The California Condor* (his review is in *Condor*, 2002, 104: 222-226) and being more than “disappointed” by that book.

I thought that three of Wilbur’s highlights in his 12 year period with the big bird were doing the supplementary feeding programme (chapters 27 and 28), getting the recovery plan developed (chs 35-37), and organising the First International Symposium on the Vultures (March 1979 at Santa Barbara) (ch. 43). Several of us from southern Africa attended that great squawk-in, and among many others there I met Carl Koford himself. (See John Ledger’s article in *Vulture News*, 1979, no.1). It was very interesting to read Wilbur’s thoughts and activities on these and all other programmes with the condor.

Wilbur regrets that the condor programme, through its recovery plan, the first of its kind in the FWS Office of Endangered Species, did not become the “flagship” of that initiative. There was too much of a “war” going on among the protagonists. He finishes by likening the condor programme to the American space programme! – it’s lost the nation’s interest. He thinks that not all condors should have been captured and put in captivity; this is his only viewpoint that I disagreed with, rather thinking that a desperate situation (near-extinction of the California Condor, North America’s largest bird) needed a desperate response, in for a penny in for a pound sort of thing. Wilbur also has some interesting

comments on the issue of lead bullets, fragments in carcasses, and deer as a food source.

This is a good read, and an important book. There are many home truths contained here, and the author in places wears his heart on his sleeve, exposing his own emotions. Get it and give yourself an inside understanding of the saga which is now a success story!

K. WOLFRAM & B. BOEMANS (2012). *Der kleine Geier mit der grossen Angst und den vielen wilden Freunden*. epubli GmbH, Berlin. 36pp. ISBN 978-3-8442-3974-4.

This little book is in horizontal A5 size, and hardback. The front cover has cartoon-style drawings of the four species of European vulture with the “small” Cinereous Vulture (here called Mönchsgeier) and the other three as “friends”. The back cover has photos and very short accounts of the two authors, and a long piece explaining the reason for making such a book. It is a book for children, with a story on Europe’s vultures but based on a young Cinereous.

“The small vulture with the big fear and the many wild friends”. The small Cinereous Vulture is fearful of everything, even of noise. An adult arrives and tells him a long story of travels with the other species, ending up in Egypt (“land of the Pharaohs”) instead of Spain. Interspersed with the story are a page and photos of each of the four species, “What is a Monk / Griffon / Bearded / Pharaoh’s Chicken?”, together with a cartoon-style drawing of the species with its characteristics. Here the Egyptian Vulture is simply “Klein, aber Fein” (small, but fine). I smiled at how sex or reproduction was introduced in ch. 3, after the arrival of a girl Griffon, but certainly not between the young hero and heroine of course!

The drawings, in full colour, are marvellous, stylised but stylish, all done by the senior author. And because both authors are vulture fans then various facts are interwoven into the story. Though I did remain puzzled and curious about the size of the Angst in Cinereous Vultures, the large red lips pinned to the Egyptian Vulture’s head, and the little pictures of our hero and heroine tied to the udder of the dead cow. To balance, there is a full-page drawing of vultures on a dead elephant (p.28) – “Relatives in Africa”. Here there are even oxpeckers on a zebra and impala, and a Marabou Stork! Never mind, it’s a lovely and fun little book. Katja Wolfram tells me that there are translations in process into other European languages including English. I trust that the drawings will remain the same.

(I thank my friend Dr Klaus Leuschner for reading the book to me in translation. He too thought it was lovely, and ideal for his grandchildren).

VAN DOOREN, T. (2011). *Vulture*. Reaktion Books, London. 192 pp. ISBN 978 1 86189 806 7.

Smaller than A5, this title is one of a new “animal series”. It has four chapters, about 30 pages of reference material, and a picture on most of the pages it seems, pictures from 1531 to modern times. This is certainly a very unusual book on vultures, aimed at exploring human cultures and vultures, and differences among the vulture clan (both old and new worlds). Many of the photos surprised and intrigued me, such as Prometheus on p. 72; the author includes Kevin Carter’s photo (p. 87) with much discussion of it; and a 1900 postcard of a “Bombay” dakhma. Just as three examples.

The chapter headings are: 1. An unnatural history of scavenging; 2. Vultures circling: eating people; 3. Otherworldly vultures; 4. Vulture futures. These indicate what I mean by unusual. In the last chapter, the author dwells on the diclofenac saga, and Bearded Vultures in the Alps; and finishes on International Vulture Awareness Day. Altogether a very interesting read, and nicely written too. If you are wondering why did God create ugly vultures, here is a book that directs you to an answer – probably. If you are an evolutionist, this is still a fascinating book. I recommend it to all vulture workers and lovers, for their enlightenment – vultures are not *just* vultures. (Meantime, the vultures on p. 18 are White-backed Vultures, on p. 36 they are Cinereous Vultures, on p. 132 also White-backed Vultures, on p. 138 certainly not “Indian white-backed vulture”, but what is it? (and where is the sun?), and on pp. 146 and 149 they are African Bearded in a text on the Alps).
