

OBITUARY

André François Boshoff (1945-2016)

SOME PERSONAL MEMORIES OF ANDRE BOSHOFF

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We lament the unexpected and untimely death of Dr André François Boshoff (1945-2016) and pay tribute to him.

An only child, André spent most of his childhood in very remote areas of southern Africa due to his magistrate father's various postings. Such locations, for example coastal Transkei and the Caprivi Strip, instilled in him from birth a great love of wildlife and wild areas. This influenced him when becoming a scholar and culminated in his making important contributions to animal ecology, ornithology and in various other biological fields.

André and WB became lifelong friends when their paths crossed in the Geography Department of Bedford College, University of London, well over 40 years ago. He was yet to become a renowned biologist/ecologist and Cape Vulture expert, but in the meantime André was completing a PhD in



Biogeochemistry, and then became a Research Officer. Before returning to South Africa permanently in 1973, he also worked for six months as a geobotanist in Texas.

During those first years of André's scientific career, he made an important contribution to botanical exploration in southern Africa. In addition to collecting about 1,500 plant specimens in Namibia and Botswana between 1968 and 1971 and in South Africa (1974, and from 1975), significantly he also discovered several new grass species. They are housed in the

National Herbarium in Pretoria and at Stellenbosch.

In 1974 André was awarded a BSc (honours) postgraduate degree in Wildlife Management at the University of Pretoria (Eugène Marais Chair of Wildlife Management). It was during this period that he developed a greater interest in birds, especially in their conservation.

Upon moving to the southern Cape in 1975 and working for the Cape Department of Nature and Environmental Conservation (CDNEC) André's interest in birds of prey increased, as did his interest in aspects of historical distributions. By September 1975 André was making nest observations at the Cape Vulture colony at Potberg, Bredasdorp. He was actively involved with the 1976 CDNEC project and he sent out over 30,000 questionnaires to farmers and forestry field stations all over the Cape in connection with twelve different bird of prey species. A great deal of information about occurrence of the twelve species and their relationship to farming activities—both positive and negative—was collected and interpreted by André in 1977. André later said that this project had been instrumental in cementing his

passion for raptors and specifically the Cape Vulture.

From 1977 diurnal raptors and vultures became André's speciality. From the CDNEC project data and innumerable other sources, all available information regarding the past, present and status of the Cape Vulture in the Cape Province was assembled, assessed and interpreted by André and Carl Vernon by 1979. The resulting publications and reports also included conservation priorities and problems.

In 1980 André published in *Vulture News* for the first time, co-authoring an article with Carl Vernon. In 1981 he collated and updated information on two Cape Vulture colonies in the south-western Cape Province. Later in 1981 André and Carl published the distribution of known active Cape Vulture breeding and roost sites in the Cape Province. In 1982 WB was André's co-author in his fourth article published in *Vulture News*. WB has him to thank for initiating her into raptor road counts and instigating a passion for raptors! And, needless to say, André was the first person to introduce her to vultures—and to *Vulture News*.

PM thinks he first met André in the mid-1970s, perhaps in that basement bar in Braamfontein that PM and

John Ledger used to frequent at the time. Or was it in Pretoria after the birds of prey conference at the museum in 1977? Anyway, what a nice, smiling, well-mannered and -modulated fellow he was. And trustworthy too, that was a big vibe that he put out, trustworthy with other people's data and opinions. That seems to have been important back in those days. PM met up with André sporadically over the next decade or so, though never specifically worked with him. But André became a VSG representative in the Cape, and a very serious one at that.

Eventually, in 1991/1992 PM and his Johannesburg friends asked André to be the reader for their forthcoming book "The vultures of Africa", probably working through Russel Friedman, one of the book's publishers. A better choice could probably not have been made. He took on the role very professionally, and also gave lots of comments and observations. However, PM doesn't remember him making a comment about the lack of references in the text, which had been cited as a "fatal flaw" – rather PM and his co-authors had put a list of references for each chapter at the end of the book, in order to make the text more easily readable for farmers and bird

watchers. André was ok about that method. His reading of the book for PM was deemed "friendly and sympathetic"; it is to be emphasised that André was altogether clean of negativity and prejudices.

PM had occasion, some years later, to be again indebted to André during the writing of "Francois Levillant and the birds of Africa" – Levillant had made two long journeys in what was to become the Cape Province, one eastwards to the Great Fish River in 1782, and the second northwards to the Orange River in 1783. About two centuries later (!) André had done "excellent work on the raptors of the Western, Eastern and Northern Cape". PM remembers particularly fondly reading André's several articles on the history, distribution, and status of the Cape's raptors, in comparison to what could be gleaned from Levillant's travels. What a treasure chest there was in those papers.

In later years, André joined the Centre for African Conservation Ecology at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth, linking up with Graham Kerley there. His activities broadened considerably, and PM thinks especially of two outputs, one on the Baviaanskloof and the other on the historical incidence of

mammals in the Eastern Cape (2007). This latter was a revision of Jack Skead's earlier edition (1987). But André still had time for the Cape Vulture (aka Cape Griffon), among other things helping to produce a workshop on vultures in Kimberley (1997) and being the lead editor of the *Proceedings* (with Mark Anderson and WB), and another (2006) in Harrismith (with Mark Anderson), and also sundry papers.

One topic that should be mentioned is that André was the first person in southern Africa to do a radio-tracking study on the Cape Vulture (1984); he did this with his then student Alistair Robertson, and a colleague Peter Norton. Both Alistair and Peter were graduates of

Witwatersrand University and members of the university's Mountain Club. They had ringed many Cape Vulture nestlings in the early years of the VSG's efforts at that. And again with Alistair, André was the first person to produce a "Conservation plan" for a colony of Cape Vultures (1985), in this case Potberg in the south-western Cape.

All in all, André has made a considerable contribution to vulture conservation in his own quiet and non-melodramatic manner. He has touched the lives of very many people, and his friends, colleagues and students will sorely miss him. We offer our heartfelt condolences to his family in this time of immense loss and sadness.
