

Vultures in Namibia

Holger Kolberg
Scientist
Minsitry of Environment and Tourism
holgerk@afol.com.na

Six species of vulture occur in Namibia. Two of these can be considered as extinct. The Egyptian Vulture has not been seen in thirty years and the Cape Vulture population has declined to less than a dozen birds which do not breed anymore. Hooded and White-headed Vultures are on the margin of their African distribution in Namibia and are considered rare or vagrant birds in the country. The most numerous vulture in Namibia is the White-backed Vulture and the Lappet-faced Vulture arguably has its breeding stronghold for the southern African population in the Namib desert.

Elephant poaching and “problem animal” control are the two main causes of vulture poisonings in Namibia. Poachers lace elephant carcasses with poison to stop the circling birds from giving away the location of a poached animal. This is a relatively recent phenomenon (last three or four years) but because of the large number of vultures that an elephant carcass attracts, it has a devastating effect. Farmers have been using poison to get rid of livestock predators (jackals, hyaenas, caracal etc.) for many years but thanks to an ongoing extention effort this issue has decreased to a few isolated incidents.

Some poisons are freely available in supermarkets (generic insecticides, fungicides, rat poisons etc.) whereas the sale of others is controlled by law. However, the law is not rigorously enforced and there are still large stockpiles of old poison on many farms and these are often the ones used in poisonings.

The legal framework is good but enforcement is poor due to lack of capacity and competence. Penalties are laughable and many cases are never prosecuted due to minor technicalities.