

New Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres* roosts in the Free State Province, South Africa.

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There have been very few recent records of active Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres* roosts from the Free State Province of South Africa. By 2004 it was believed that no regularly used roosts existed anywhere in the province and that the occasional roosts that were established were only used irregularly and by small numbers of birds (Colahan, 2004). This article provides information on four roosting sites for this species that have been identified as regularly used sites in the province since 2005. The active status of three of these sites was confirmed during an aerial survey conducted with the assistance of the Free State Department of Tourism, Environment & Economic Affairs on the 6th of June 2011.

Cape Vultures have been recorded roosting in small numbers (5-50 individuals) on the east-facing sandstone cliffs (28.509775 S; 28.669845 E) at Oldenburg in the Golden Gate Highlands National Park since 2005 (Krüger, 2007, Krüger & van der Westhuizen 2010, 2011). The use of this site was confirmed during

the aforementioned aerial survey when eight birds of varying ages were observed roosting on these cliffs from the helicopter. Bearded Vultures *Gypaetus barbatus* have also been recorded roosting at this site with Cape Vultures from time to time since 2006 (Krüger, 2006; 2007; 2008 and Krüger & van der Westhuizen, 2010; 2011).

Nelson's Kop (28.239033 S; 29.447327 E), situated north-east of the town of Harrismith, is a sandstone hill with tall south-facing cliffs where Cape Vultures were recorded roosting for the first time in 2006 and where more than 100 birds have been counted during annual visits to the site since it has been confirmed as an active roost (Krüger, 2007; Krüger & van der Westhuizen 2010, 2011).

About 25 Cape Vultures were recorded at this site during the aerial survey on the 6th of June 2011. Farmers in the area have created a feeding site and it is possible that the roost could have been established as a result of this. Bearded Vultures have

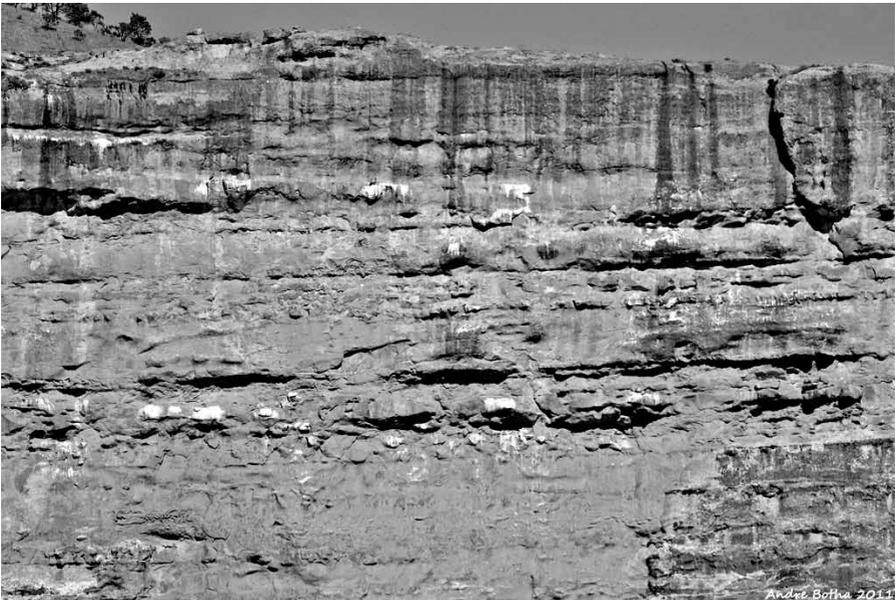
¹ Annual monitoring of this site is undertaken by volunteers Alan and Liz Akker and Caryn and Scott Davies

been recorded breeding on these cliffs since 2006 (Krüger, 2006; 2007; 2008 and Krüger & van der Westhuizen, 2010; 2011).

A third roost, Kerkenberg (28.512198 S; 29.123242 E), is situated on an isolated sandstone cliff to the south-east of Harrismith. The roost is located on the south- and east-facing cliffs of the hill. Gary Spillsbury, the owner of the Buffalo Hills Private Game Reserve on which the roost is located, confirms that Cape Vultures have been roosting at the site since 1996. Numbers at this roost have increased over the past few years, probably as a result of the establishment of a feeding site at Buffalo Hills and the fact that the feeding site at Sterkfontein Dam Nature Reserve has not been active for a number of years.

The fourth, and most recent roosting site in the Free State Province is in the Korfshoek area (28.492128 S; 28.765896 E) of the Golden Gate Highlands National Park and was first observed at 12:49PM

on the 19th of July 2011 by AB whilst travelling along the R712-route between Clarens and Harrismith. This area was previously part of the QwaQwa National Park, which was amalgamated into the Golden Gate Highlands National Park in 2008 where AB worked as an area manager and later Acting Park Warden until 1999. This north-facing cliff was not historically known as a roosting site and is likely to have been established in the two years since 2009 when the area was last visited. At least 24 Cape Vultures were seen perched on the cliff (Fig. 1 and 2) and another 46 birds were counted circling in the sky above the site. A substantial amount of whitewash was visible on the cliffs and, based on the extent thereof, the roost stretches for about 350 metres along the cliff. Due to the fact that it was not reported previously, this site was not surveyed during the aerial survey in June 2011.



Figures 1 & 2: Cape Vulture roost cliffs near Korfshoek, Free State Province

Although the number of birds using the sites represent a fraction of the global population of this species, the establishment of these roosts is still significant as it is an indication that the birds spend sufficient time in the area and apparently also find sufficient sustenance to warrant the establishment of roosts.

With the exception of Nelson's Kop, the establishment of these roosts can very likely be attributed to the establishment of feeding sites in the vicinity. It is also possible that birds may begin breeding at these sites in future if these apparently suitable conditions are sustained over time.

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