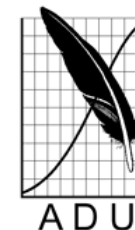


# Ornithological Observations



An electronic journal published by BirdLife South Africa and the Animal Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town



Ornithological Observations accepts papers containing faunistic information about birds. This includes descriptions of distribution, behaviour, breeding, foraging, food, movement, measurements, habitat and plumage. It will also consider for publication a variety of other interesting or relevant ornithological material: reports of projects and conferences, annotated checklists for a site or region, specialist bibliographies, and any other interesting or relevant material.

**Editor: Arnold van der Westhuizen**

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## CARRION ATTRACTION: GOSHAWKS AND OTHER BIRDS CAPTURED ON CAMERA TRAPS

**Peter G Ryan, Jessica M Shaw, Rona vd Merwe, Emily vd Merwe**

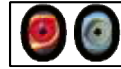
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## CARRION ATTRACTION: GOSHAWKS AND OTHER BIRDS CAPTURED ON CAMERA TRAPS

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Southern Pale Chanting Goshawks *Melierax canorus* have a catholic diet that includes carrion as well as a wide variety of mammals, birds, reptiles, frogs, insects and other invertebrates. Malan and Crowe (1996) summarise observations of them feeding on carrion, listing Spotted Eagle Owl *Bubo africanus*, Spotted Thick-knee *Burhinus capensis*, Steenbok *Raphicerus campestris*, Bat-eared Fox *Otocyon megalotis* and hares *Lepus* spp. We report how a pair of adult Southern Pale Chanting Goshawks fed on a dead Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca* in the Hantam Karoo near Calvinia in July 2012. The goose was one of 15 put out under power lines to see which scavengers removed bird carcasses from under the lines. Such data are important when estimating how many birds are actually killed after colliding with power lines from the numbers detected by researchers who check the lines at regular intervals.

Camera traps (Bushnell Trophy Camera, model 119436) were erected next to the geese carcasses to see what animals scavenged from the carcasses.

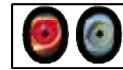
Southern Pale Chanting Goshawks visited at least two of the geese carcasses, and were the dominant scavenger at one carcass. This latter goose, deployed shortly before sunset on 3 July, was located within 200 m of a Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk nest, where a pair was sitting, probably incubating. Two adult goshawks, presumably from this nest, arrived at the carcass within 20 minutes of it being placed under the power line. They may have been

attracted to the site by a pair of Cape Crows *Corvus capensis* that arrived less than 2 minutes earlier. The goshawks remained at the carcass for 33 minutes, until it was almost dark. Throughout this period, one bird stood by while the other fed from the carcass, standing on its back and plucking the feathers before eating (Fig 1). The second bird left at 18:13, and was followed by the feeding bird at 18:15, 25 minutes after local sunset.

Later that night a Cape Fox *Vulpes chama* visited the carcass, but was apparently scared off by the camera triggering, leaving the carcass largely untouched overnight. One adult goshawk returned to the carcass at 10:50 the following morning, feeding for another 30 minutes until scared off by a domestic dog (which only sniffed the goose). Presumably the same goshawk returned at 12:58, spending a further 193 minutes at the carcass in three bouts (lasting 73, 2 and 118 minutes) until 17:31 (Fig 2). With no further nocturnal visitors, an adult goshawk again returned to the carcass on 5 July, spending 173 minutes at the carcass in two bouts (12:21 to 13:41, and 15:18 to 16:51). Its feeding rate was slower during this period, probably because it had already removed most of the meat from the carcass.

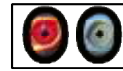
What impressed us most was the persistence of this bird; assuming it was the same individual in each case, it spent more than 7 hours at the carcass over two days. Other birds visited some of the other goose carcasses.

A pair of Verreaux's Eagles *Aquila verreauxii* virtually demolished one carcass in two short bouts within 24 hours of it being put out (Fig 3). This carcass also attracted Cape and Pied Crows *Corvus albus* and a Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk. These crows also scavenged at several other carcasses: Cape Crows visited 5 of 15 carcasses, and Pied Crows 4 carcasses, returning for up to three days. Rather surprisingly no White-necked Ravens were seen, despite their regular occurrence in the area.

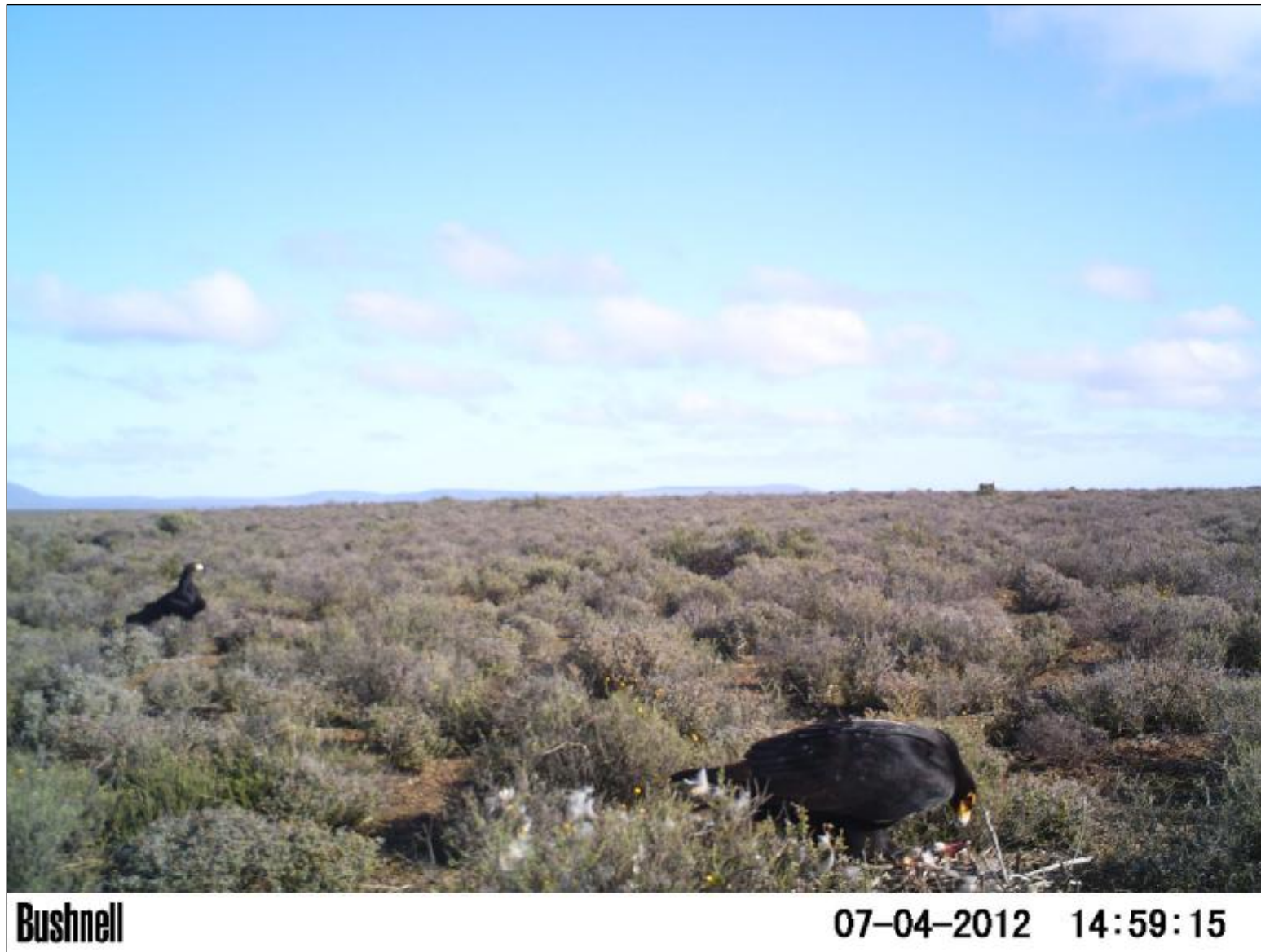


*Fig 1.* An image of the Southern Pale Chanting Goshawks feeding on the carcass at dusk on 3 July 2012 (taken with infra-red flash).



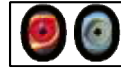


*Fig 2.* The Southern Pale Chanting Goshawk feeding on the carcass during the day on 4 July 2012.



*Fig 3.* A pair of Verreaux's Eagles feeding on a goose carcass.



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We thank Francois and Marian van der Merwe for their excellent hospitality, and for supporting research on power line collision mortality. Rob Crawford and Bruce Dyer from the Department of Environment Affairs kindly loaned the camera traps for the experiment, and Mick D'Alton and the landowners of the Nuwejaars Wetland Special Management Area provided geese carcasses.

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