

Record of Rüppell's Griffon Gyps rueppellii in southern KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

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Rüppell's Griffon *Gyps rueppellii* is considered to be a rare vagrant to southern Africa (Hockey *et al.* 2005) and the first record for this species for the region is from Wabai Hill (20° 04'S 29°37'E), Zimbabwe in November 1990 (Mundy 1995) with at least two more records from that country in the 1990's (Mundy, 1998). The species was first recorded in South Africa at the Blouberg Nature Reserve near Vivo in Limpopo in June 1994 (Snyman *et al.* 1994) where it was believed to be breeding after having paired with a Cape Griffon *Gyps coprotheres* in 1999 (Snyman). The

species was recently up-listed to "Endangered" on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (BirdLife International, 2012).

The authors visited part of the Mzimkulu (Oribi Flats) Cape Griffon colony on the morning of the 9th of August 2012 to observe bird activity and assess the progress of breeding at nests visible on the cliff face from a ledge opposite the colony from about 09:30am to 12:30pm. Weather conditions were rather unsettled with a fresh wind blowing from the southwest as a substantial cold front was approaching.

The lift provided by the steady wind resulted in considerable numbers of vultures regularly leaving the cliffs to soar and glide above and in front of the colony.

At approximately 11.20am a bird with a pale tip to the bill and generally dark, scaled plumage was observed in a group of birds taking off and circling in front of the colony for approximately 25 minutes before returning to perch on the cliff. More detailed observations seemed to confirm that the bird was probably a sub-adult Rüppell's Griffon and several

photographs (Figures 1,2 & 3) were taken to confirm the identification of the bird. These images were later sent to Dr Munir Virani from The Peregrine Fund in Kenya who confirmed that the bird was indeed a Rüppell's Griffon. Volunteers involved in the monitoring of the colony returned with the second author on the 11th of August 2012 and confirmed that the bird was still present.

This record is the first for this species from KwaZulu-Natal province and one of the southernmost records for the species overall.



Figure 1. Sub-adult Rüppell's Griffon gliding past the cliff at Oribi Flats.



Figure. 2. Sub-adult Rüppell's Griffon clearly showing pale bill and scaled pattern on wing coverts.



Figure 3. Rüppell's Griffon perched on a ledge in the middle of the breeding cliff at Oriibi Flats.

REFERENCES

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