

Road-killed frogs add another item to the food list of the Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus* in The Gambia.

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During late morning on 28 October 2021 EB drove towards 15 Hooded Vultures *Necrosyrtes monachus* that were standing on the eight-metre-wide paved road near the Wassu Stone Circles (13°41'59.0"N, 14°53'06.8"W) on the north bank road in Central River Region (CRR) in The Gambia. Uncharacteristically the vultures were not clustered around an animal carcass lying on the highway, instead they were scattered over a broad area. No *Gyps* vulture species which are frequent in CRR were in attendance. The annual rains (June-October) were concluding with the last rainfall recorded in this part of the country on 25 October (EB, personal observation). Both sides of the road around the area of the sighting were seasonally marshy and verdant. On closer approach to the vulture gathering, through the window of the slow-moving vehicle EB saw at least one of the vultures holding a small, flattened animal with prominent jutting limbs that it had just picked up from the tarmac. With passengers to consider, EB continued driving and did not stop to investigate the incident any further. The following evening at 19h45 on the return journey through Wassu and in total darkness numerous unidentified frogs (*Rana* sp.) were active in the road as seen in the headlights of the car. Many frog casualties were evident. Based on these observations it is reasonably assumed that it was the dead frogs that had attracted the Hooded Vultures to the road the previous day, and that the animal that the Hooded Vulture was seen holding in its bill was

a squashed frog.

CRB regularly monitored stretches of road on both sides of the river in Upper River Region (URR) and CRR including the Wassu stretch, on mornings of October to February throughout the 1990s and into the early 2000s, and collected road-killed nightjars (Barlow & Gale 1999). An incident of this nature involving frogs and Hooded Vultures was never witnessed. Vultures were on no occasion observed scavenging on nightjar casualties (or other bird species e.g. owls and thick-knees), either fully intact or 'pancaked' showing exposed flesh, circumstances which frequently occurred. To the best of our knowledge this is the first report of Hooded Vultures scavenging on road-killed frogs anywhere in the species' wide afro-tropical range. This food source is not mentioned in the major reference literature e.g. (Brown *et al.* 1982, Mundy *et al.* 1992, Del Hoyo *et al.* 1994, Clark & Davies 2018). Other unusual food items utilised by Hooded Vultures in The Gambia have been reported and include the fruit of the African oil-palm *Elaeis guineensis* (Barlow 2004), West African Fiddler-crabs *Afruca tangeri* and an abundance of marine carrion (Barlow *et al.* 2022). Boiled rice, live arthropods, liquid blood and other unusual items are discussed in Barlow *et al.* (in prep.). Fresh owl pellets are also recently cited as a food item based on an observation made in Kenya in 1977 (Mikkola & Barlow 2021). Based on observations made on 28 and 29 October 2021 in CRR north of the river

in The Gambia, road-killed frogs are added to the dietary list of the remarkably opportunistic Critically Endangered Hooded Vulture. We acknowledge that any further encounters merit a fuller investigation.

References

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