

## First confirmed record of Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) in Malawi.

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### Introduction

The Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* (Linnaeus 1758) is listed as Endangered by the IUCN Red List due to global population and geographic range declines over the last century (BirdLife International 2021). Egyptian Vultures are a trans-continental migratory species native to Europe, Asia and Africa (Arkumarev *et al.* 2019, BirdLife International 2021; Figure 1). Africa hosts both migratory and non-migratory populations of Egyptian Vultures (Arkumarev *et al.* 2019). Wintering grounds for individuals that breed in Europe and western Asia overlap with resident African populations in the Sahel region as well as East and West Africa (Meyburg *et al.* 2004, Arkumarev *et al.* 2019, BirdLife International 2021).

In southern Africa, Egyptian Vultures are considered extinct as a breeding species (Arkumarev *et al.* 2019, BirdLife International 2021). Egyptian Vultures have historically bred in South Africa with unconfirmed reports of breeding in Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Namibia (Arkumarev *et al.* 2019). However, in the last 25 years there have only been a handful of published reports of the species in these countries, with no recent records in Angola (Arkumarev *et al.* 2019). Botswana and Mozambique also have had recent (<21 years) records for the species, although no breeding has been documented and recent sightings

are assumed to be of vagrant individuals (Arkumarev *et al.* 2019). To the authors' knowledge, there have been no historical or recent records of the species in Malawi (see Benson & Benson 1977, Newman, Johnston-Stewart & Medland 1992, Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2006, Arkumarev *et al.* 2019, BirdLife International 2021). Here we document the first known record of the species in Malawi.

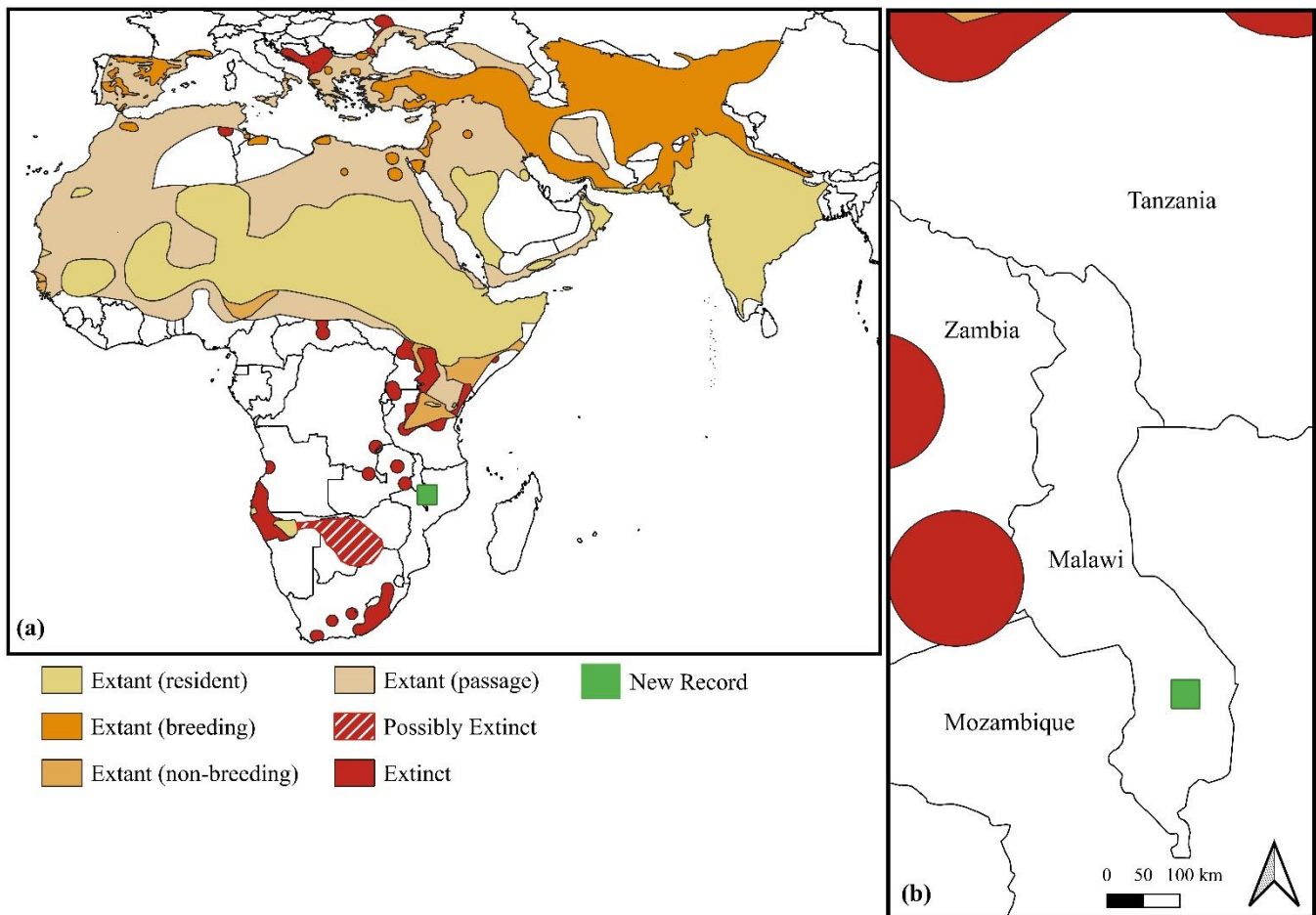
### Species occurrence record

On 5 November 2022, while undertaking vulture trapping and tagging in Liwonde National Park in Malawi's Southern Region, we encountered one immature Egyptian Vulture, estimated as a second or third calendar year bird based on plumage characteristics (Forsman 2016; Figure 2) near our trapping site (S14°58'23.6", E35°17'23.5). It was apparent that this individual had roosted in the area overnight as it was identified soon after first light (05h15). It continued to forage and roost in the area as it was spotted again on the 6 and 7 November 2022. At all sightings the individual was foraging around an old (>6 days) carcass of a male waterbuck *Kobus ellipsiprymnus*. On 7 November the individual was foraging in the area with one adult and one juvenile Palm-nut Vulture *Gypohierax angolensis*, a resident breeding species in the park. Initial confirmation of identification and age was made based on plumage and other

features such as the characteristic size, yellowish bare parts and wedge-shaped tail in flight.

Over this period, sightings of a single juvenile or immature Egyptian Vulture were also documented in Kafue National Park (4 November 2022; J. Taylor pers. comm.) and South Luangwa National Park (6 November 2022; F. Williams pers. comm.), approximately 1,020 km and 430 km away from our record in Malawi, respectively. While it isn't clear if the observations in Zambia were of the same individual, the date overlap with our records indicates at least two Egyptian Vultures were in the region in early November. Similar to other recent

observations of this species in Southern Africa, these observations occurred during the boreal winter (Arkumarev *et al.* 2019). During the boreal winter, juveniles of migratory populations travel to southern areas, including Africa, where they tend to traverse large distances and may remain for some years (Meyburg *et al.* 2004, Oppel *et al.* 2015, Arkumarev *et al.* 2019). This behaviour, coupled with the timeframe in which these observations occurred, could explain these sightings of wandering immature Egyptian Vultures in the region.



**Figure 1:** Map showing (a) the current and historical distribution of the Egyptian Vulture with (b) the location where an Egyptian Vulture was recorded in Malawi (BirdLife International, 2021).



**Figure 2:** Photographs of an Egyptian Vulture taken in Liwonde National Park, Malawi, November 2022.  
Photographs: AB.

## Acknowledgements

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