

Records of tree-nesting Rüppell's Vultures in Senegal.

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The breeding distribution of Rüppell's Vulture *Gyps rueppelli* ranges from Senegal in the west of Africa to Tanzania and Ethiopia in the east. Populations of Rüppell's Vulture are in decline throughout their range, estimated at around 30,000 individuals in total (Botha *et al.* 2017). Since 2015 it has been considered Critically Endangered by the IUCN, with poisoning being one of the main threats as with other vulture species in Africa (Ogada *et al.* 2016). In this context, the discovery of breeding cases in Senegal, in tall trees in the middle of sparse forests, is particularly noteworthy.

Until recently, Rüppell's Vultures were thought to nest exclusively on rock faces, at least in East Africa, where they can gather in colonies of several hundred individuals (Houston 1976). In their seminal work on African vultures, Mundy *et al.* (1992) questioned old records of tree-nesting Rüppell's Vultures in West Africa, arguing confusion with African White-backed Vulture nests. Yet, Rondeau *et al.* (2006) reported seeing four Rüppell's Vulture nests in large trees in southern Niger. Rondeau *et al.* (2006) cites previous studies reporting tree-nesting Rüppell's Vultures in eastern Senegal, in the Saloum region and in The Gambia. In this note, we report occasional sightings of Rüppell's Vultures nesting in large trees in north-western Senegal, posing the possibility that the nesting range of this vulture may be more widespread than previously estimated.

On 16 March 2022, during one of JMD's daily outings in the bush, he discovered by chance a nest in a large tree with an adult Rüppell's Vulture and a

chick of at least two or three months old, on the outskirts of the track leading from Mékhé to Baba Garage (14.90°N, 16.57°W; c. 100 km east of Dakar). Following this discovery, a systematic survey was carried out until 20 April 2022 in the same type of biotope, resulting in the discovery of a total of nine nests, most of them isolated, but with a relative concentration around the village of Copcacane near the Bandia Wildlife Reserve (14.53°N, long 16.99°W; c. 50 km east of Dakar), with five nests over a two-kilometre stretch. The northernmost nest was located near Kébémér (15.25°N, 16.55°W) and the southernmost near Yayeme (14.11°N, 16.70°W). The nests were always located in a forest of tall trees, with a preference for large baobabs (*Adansonia* spp.). Moreover, the sites chosen were never far from villages of the Peul people, who tend to be livestock breeders, where the probability of finding food is potentially relatively high.

In 2023 the survey was repeated and a delay of around one month to the onset of breeding was observed. Of the breeding sites used the previous year, all were active in April, except for one, which was abandoned. Ten active nests were found in 2023.

Following discussions with the Spanish and Moroccan GPS ringing and telemetry programs, it turned out that none of the tracked individuals remained in the same region as where the nests were discovered, and that all went further south, to the edge of the Gambian and Casamance forests. During three days prospecting in these areas,

informed by the satellite tracking data, no nests were detected. However, the forests were very dense which reduced detectability and added logistical complications.

Given the vastness of these areas, and the difficulty of surveying them, other breeding sites

may also exist in northern and western Senegal. We encourage further systematic prospective surveys in those regions of Senegal, as well as in adjacent countries, to map the size and extent of the regional population in West Africa.

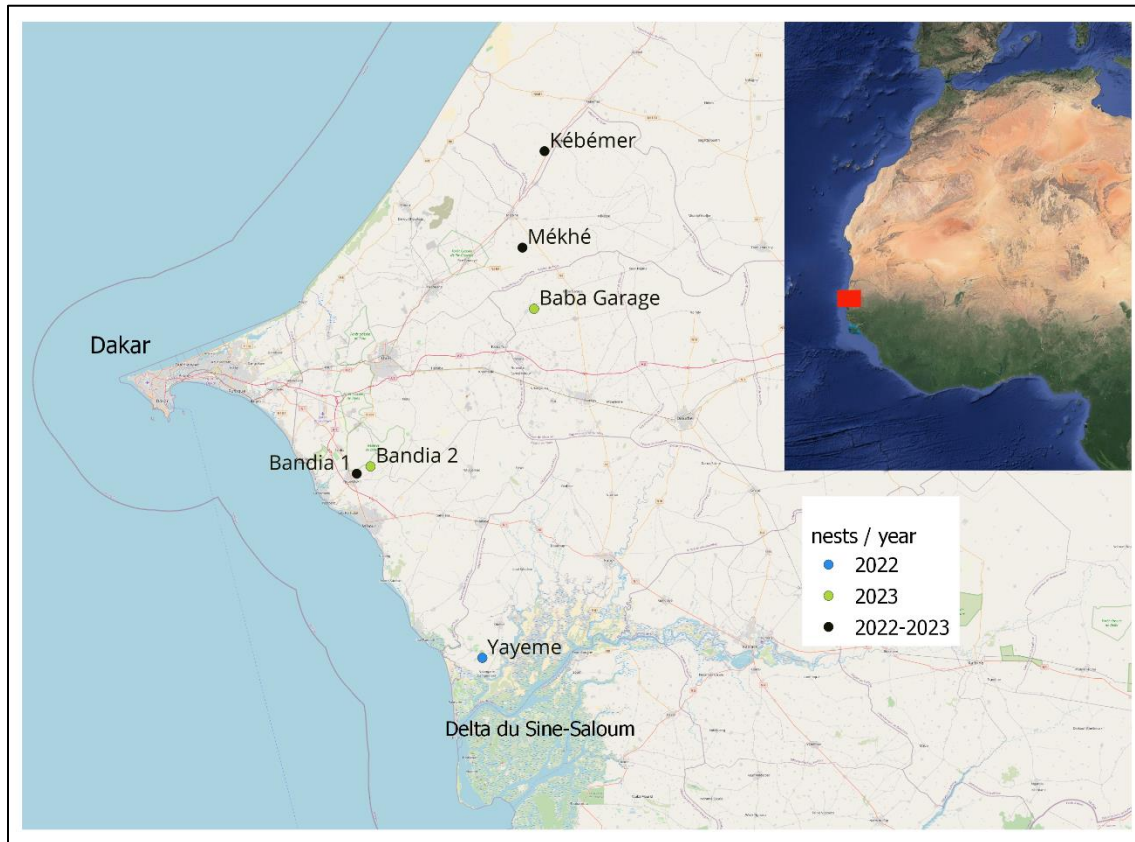


Figure 1: Map of the region of Senegal where nests of Rüppell’s Vultures were discovered in 2022-2023.



Figure 2: Rüppell's Vulture nest, with an adult and a chick, on top of a baobab tree, March 2022. Photo: JMD.



Figure 3: Picture of a baobab tree with a Rüppell's Vulture nest in Senegal. Taken in April 2023. Photo: JMD.

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