

Another case of communal breeding in the White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus*

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Salewski (2019), mentioned the finding of a colony of White-backed Vultures (*Gyps africanus*) with eight active nests on a single very large introduced Kapok tree (*Ceiba pentandra*) in Côte d'Ivoire. It is a rare record, and more than two nests on a single tree have only been observed on several occasions before that (North 1944; Bannerman 1953). The record of North (1944) is notable, as he estimated 400 to 500 nests on trees along the banks of Juba river in Somalia, with most of the pairs having chicks in October and most nesting trees having “one nest..., often two; maximum six seen only once”. These records prompted us to publish our anecdotal observation of a tree with three active nests of White-backed Vultures.

On 12 December 2009, during a survey for wintering Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* (Arkumarev *et al.* 2014), while driving between Awash and Bordode, Afar region, Ethiopia, we recorded a large acacia tree (*Acacia sp.*), which had three nests of White-backed Vultures on the top of its crown (Figure 1 and 2). The tree was at about 400 meters from the asphalt road and the nests were situated at 12-15 meters from the ground. The highest nest, located at the

very top had one adult and a fully grown juvenile ready for fledging. The second nest (below and in front of the former) had an adult laying in the nest (possibly incubating), while the third nest on the right side of the tree had a vulture laying inside, but it was not clear if it was an adult or a juvenile. Another adult was staying between nests one and two.

The White-backed Vulture is known for its preference for breeding on large and tall trees along rivers, and in lower density in savannahs (Houston 1976). In Ethiopia, the species is associated mostly with acacia savannah, but its population is in decline (Ash & Atkins 2009). Given that recently, illegal use of poisons against mammalian carnivores has been reported to be widely used in Afar, Somali and Oromia regions of Ethiopia and in the capital Addis Ababa (Abebe, 2013; Mengistu *et al.* 2023), the populations of White-backed and other vultures might be in decline in the wider region (Buechley *et al.* 2021). More research is needed to identify the main breeding strongholds of the species and monitor the trends of its population.



Figure 1: The tree with three active nests of White-backed Vultures (left).



Figure 2: General view of the area with the White-backed vulture nesting tree in a red circle.

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