



Southern Ground-Hornbill Research and Conservation Programme Quarterly Report



Breeding Season of 2016/2017

This year's breeding season got off to a good start with 14 groups attempting to breed. Of these 14 groups, Caroline and Johnniesdale groups attempted twice with Caroline successfully hatching one egg on the second attempt. Ten nests are still active with the majority of them located on Timbavati. Interestingly, Hermansburg nest has been active for the first time and the chick is doing well.

Egg laying and hatching peaked as expected in October and December, respectively. The only exceptions were that of Thornybush and Karan Khaya which laid and hatched far earlier than the rest of the groups.

A total of 4 chicks were harvested this season from a possible seven, considering that Vlak group only produced one egg while two other groups were recorded as only hatching a single chick. The hand-rearing facility is currently undergoing an upgrade and they could only take a certain number of chicks. All of the harvested chicks went to Loskop Dam where they are doing well.

All of the first-hatched chicks are still alive and the first ringing occurred on the 27th January. We will continue to monitor the progress of nestlings in all remaining nests with the last nestling to be ringed on 23rd March.



Figure 1. Karan Khaya harvested chick (left) and chicks at hand rearing facility(right)

Status of Nests

Following the destruction of both Giraffe and Lornay nests, two new artificial nests have been placed in nearby areas. It is an unfortunate event to lose two natural nests in one year as this is one of the major issues that ground-hornbills face as a species. However, these two new nests should allow these two groups to successfully breed for the next few years. The Giraffe nest was accepted and lined by the group within the first ten days, while the Lornay nest was visited and had a single drop of leaves within the first month.

The nest located on Jejane was removed as it was in an unideal location and a new nest will be put up within the coming months. Along with this, more nests will be put up in other locations around the reserves as a failsafe for nests that are experiencing degradation and weathering.

The project area has extended into Thornybush and a new natural nest has been found. Little is known about this group but the nest seems to be productive as the nestling is expected to fledge within the next few days.



Figure 2. Giraffe (left) and Lornay (right) artificial nests sites



Figure 3. New Thornybush nest site and first Thornybush chick recorded

Research

Vocalisations – There has been some focus on the vocalisations of these birds during this breeding season so far. Very little is known about their calls and how they communicate. It has proven to be a difficult task to get recordings of these birds performing their early morning duet, but the results so far have proven very interesting. It appears every group has its own signature call when performing their morning duet. However, this is just speculation at the moment but all the recordings have been sent to a specialist to confirm if this is in fact the case. I will be attaching the recordings of two different groups to the email that this report will be sent in.



Figure 4. Max (temporary assistant) recording the Hermansburg/von Tonder group

Nest Activity – Along with the vocalisations, we have been trying to get footage of nestling activity and group behaviour at the nests. To do this, we will be installing camera traps near the nests. These cameras must be set-up during the non-breeding season so that it does not lead to the group abandoning the nest because of a strange ‘intruder’. They are very inquisitive birds and notice any change that occurs around the nest during the breeding season. From the footage, we should be able to get an idea of group dynamics, nestling behaviour and be able to find identify individuals based on physical characteristics.



Figure 5. Java female leaving the nest (left) and the nestling sleeping at the nest entrance(right)

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Contact the Project:

Kyle-Mark Middleton, APNR Ground-Hornbill Project.

Email: nghututu@gmail.com

Cell: 071 325 8956