



Southern Ground-Hornbill Research and Conservation Program ExCo Quarterly Report

January 2015



Breeding season report

This season saw 10 groups attempt breeding with six nests making it to the nestling stage. Of these, one failed early and five remain active. Janovsky nest suffered an early loss of their first nestling with the nest found to be empty two weeks after the chick hatched. We are happy to see the new Ntsiri nest is being used and we are getting frequent sightings of this small group of three as they provision for their growing chick.



Five chicks were harvested from the APNR this season of which three survive:

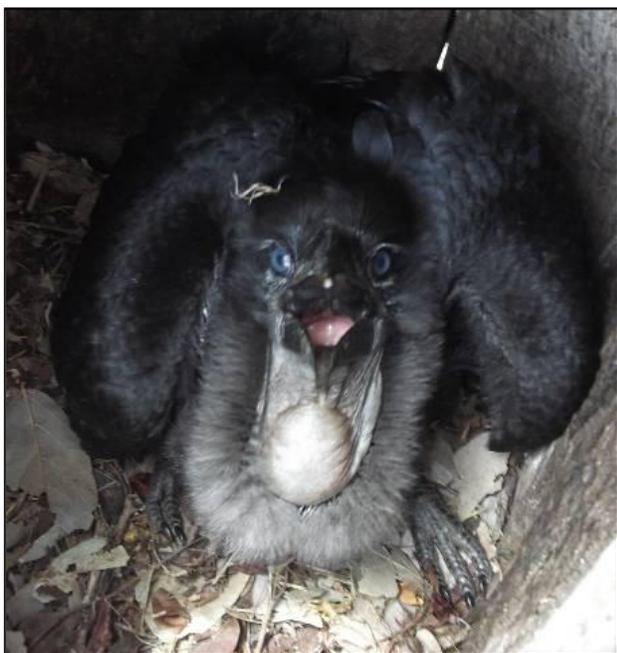
- 28 Oct 2014, Janovsky chick transported to Joburg Zoo. Died a few days later.
- 12 Nov 2014, Karan Khaya chick transported to Joburg Zoo.
- 03 Dec 2014, Addger chick transported to Joburg Zoo. Died a day later.
- 22 Dec 2014, Hull chick transported to MonteCasino Bird Gardens.
- 27 Dec 2014, Rhino Road chick transported to Loskop dam.

Deceased wild sub-adult

On Friday 21 Nov 2014, at 14:20, I was contacted by a Klaserie ranger regarding a sick Ground-Hornbill they had come across in Klaserie PNR. He described the bird as looking unwell, tired, sitting under bushes near the road. We immediately drove to the scene. We found the bird on Dover farm and this GPS loc: -24.149196 31.113969, 1.2 km NE from Janovsky group's nest. The sub-adult was unringed, identity unknown. We observed the bird briefly, it had attempted to shuffle deeper under cover when we approached. The bird showed worrying signs of weakness and an inability to walk. I approached slowly, picked it up and placed the individual in a wooden crate. I contacted Dr Bjorn Reininghaus and Lucy Kemp and the joint decision was made to get the bird to Dr Pete Rogers as soon as possible. The bird was announced dead on arrival at ProVet in Hoedspruit later that same day. Dr Rogers began the autopsy soon after. Samples were sent to Dr Emily Lane at the National Zoo in Pretoria for analysis.

Dr Lane's final diagnosis was starvation, although the reasons causing this are unclear: "The marked weight loss, liver atrophy, pancreatic changes and largely empty gastro-intestinal tract suggests that the bird had not been eating for some time, which may suggest a more long-term problem." No evidence was present for infectious or parasitic diseases. The autopsy report is available upon request.

Group updates



Addger

On a more positive note, Addger group is doing well and has increased in recent years to five individuals. Their chick is due to fledge in mid-February.

This is their fourth nesting attempt in five years. It was encouraging to recently confirm the presence of last year's chick still with the group. This immature individual has been identified as female and thus will likely disperse in the next few months.

Photo left: Addger chick of 2014/2015 season

Java

Java group remains one of the most frequently encountered, mostly thanks to the field guides who report sightings in our log books. They did not attempt breeding this year despite a fully lined nest.

The sub-adult from Ntsiri remains with this group of six birds, fulfilling the role of male helper.



Photo right: Java adult female

Acknowledgements

We thank the landowners and wardens of the APNR for their continued support and permission to work with the Ground-Hornbill groups on their properties. Special thanks to Timbavati PNR, Klaserie PNR, Tanda Tula Lodge, and Ndlopfu PNR for helping with fuel. Dow Chemicals continues its generous support of the research. Save The Elephant researchers, thank you for your sightings of SGHs in the APNR, they are always appreciated. Many APNR members and staff have been of great help, both logistically and by reporting ground-hornbill sightings. We thank one and all.

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