



Southern Ground-Hornbill Research and Conservation Program Quarterly Report



January 2018

Breeding season of 2017/18

A great season for the birds! With conditions being more favourable for the birds, we are pleased to report that 14 groups attempted to breed this season. Three of the nests (Thornybush, Karan Khaya and Tawane) were active by mid-September, nearly a month before the rest of the groups began to lay. Interestingly, the laying for the remaining groups peaked during a 10 day 'window' in late October. Currently there are still 11 active nests with chicks inside.

Successful groups to date: Thornybush, Karan Khaya, Tawane, von Tonder, Java, Ntsiri, Janovsky, Addger, Pitlochry, Copenhagen, Senalala

Unsuccessful groups: JeJane, Strydom, Lillydale

Interesting to note, this year marks the 100th chick fledging from an artificial nest in the APNR.

A total of three chicks were harvested this season from Java, Ntsiri and Addger. All three were taken to the hand-rearer at Loskop Dam Nature Reserve. Ntsiri and Addger chicks are alive and well while Ntsiri chick died on the way to the hand-rearing facility. The harvest was too late and in the chicks starving state, it began to eat leaves and feathers. This led to the chick dying from compaction in the stomach.



Figure 1. Rhino Road chick and JeJane groups first eggs

Groups and their New Nests

Four new artificial nests were installed this breeding season. These nests were placed for Jejane, Birmingham, Copenhagen and Charloscar groups. All four of these new nests were from the new design, however, it appears that this design might not last very long so adjustments in the field might need to be made.

Interestingly, Jejane group laid their first eggs ever in the new nest. The eggs were unfortunately unsuccessful, but it is thought that this was due to the birds being young and inexperienced (Female is 11 years old and is originally from Ntsiri). The sub-adult in Jejane group was also identified to have originated from the Copenhagen group on Klaserie.

The nest on Charloscar was put up late in the season but the group took to it quickly and lined the nest (Figure 2). However, they did not lay but it is promising for next season.

Birmingham and Copenhagen nests remain empty despite there being clear evidence of the groups finding the nests. Copenhagen group used an alternate nest (Hull) this season and it is assumed that it is the same reasoning for that of Birmingham group.



Figure 2. Charloscar female inside of new nest

Research Agreement

Unfortunately, the research agreement which was discussed at the last APNR meeting has been misplaced. I would like to approach the APNR Executive Committee regarding the possibility of signing another one. None of the details have changed apart from adding Thornybush into the agreement. If agreed upon, copies will be sent to each of the respective parties.

Research

Throughout this breeding season, recordings of vocalisations continued, and we managed to get over six hours of high quality recordings for 11 groups throughout the APNR.

The camera traps placed at Ntsiri, Karan Khaya and Addger nests (Figure 3) also rendered thousands of photos which will allow us to gain a better insight into their behaviour at the nests.

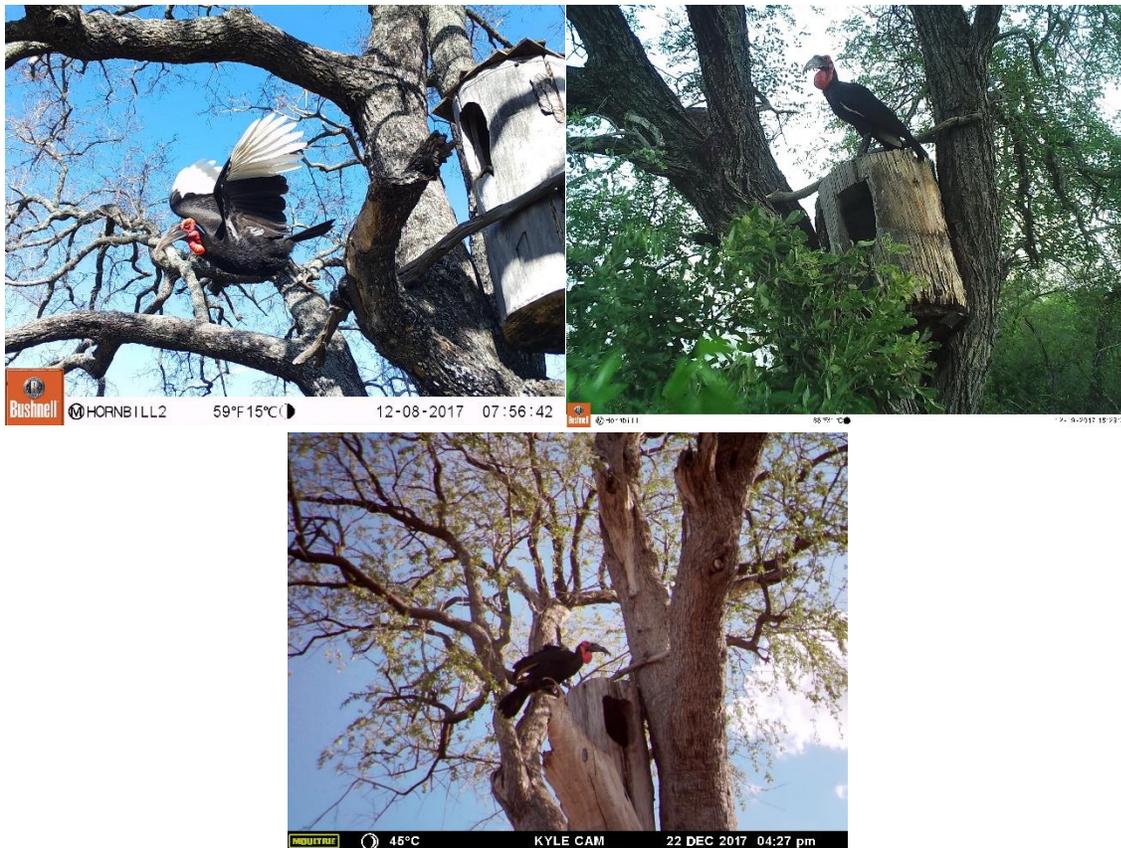


Figure 3. Ntsiri (top left), Karan Khaya (top right) and Addger (bottom)

Looking ahead, the opportunities for recordings and camera trap footage diminishes significantly outside the breeding season and the focus will be shifted towards the analysis of data.

The vocalisations recorded from the APNR birds allow us to analyse the group 'signatures', however, they do not allow us to analyse individual 'signatures'. For this reason, captive birds from various locations will be recorded.

Kate's Success

We are extremely happy to announce that Kate has completed her PhD on 'Nest boxes as a conservation tool for the Southern Ground-Hornbill *Bucorvus leadbeateri*' (Figure 4). Her hard work has materialised into an incredible thesis that will no doubt contribute towards the conservation of the ground-hornbill species. Her thesis has been included with this document.



Figure 4. Kate (far right) along with other PhD students graduating

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, Ntsiri, and Tanda Tula 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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