

A concentration of Lappet-faced Vultures *Torgos tracheliotos* in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Tanzania and the latest Atlas map

Continent wide, vultures are in trouble (Ogada *et al.* 2016), but the large protected areas in Tanzania continue to support impressive numbers. On 12 February 2013, the four of us were birding on the track from Ndutu to the Eyasi Rift. At 3°10' S, 34°53' E we stopped to watch four Lappet-faced Vultures *Torgos tracheliotos* on a dead tree in the open woodland. The vegetation was quite dense, with acacias in leaf and the grass high, but we quickly found a few more birds in the nearby trees and by searching as best we could without leaving the road, we counted a minimum of 31 birds concentrated in an area some 100 m from the track. OTB obtained the highest single count by standing on the roof rack for a better view. We could not locate whatever they were feeding on, but there were no other vultures present, which we considered unusual, so perhaps it was a natural death of a large mammal whose body had not yet been opened up by the Lappets. Further along the track we found another 1, 4, 4 and 1 Lappets, suggesting a minimum of 41 in the immediate vicinity.

Britton (1980) gives only 10–12 seen on carcasses in the Serengeti NP. Mundy *et al.* (1992) give a count of 47 at a waterhole in the Namib Desert, 26 on a pan in the Kalahari, Botswana, 30 twice in Zimbabwe, 26 on a dead Ostrich *Struthio camelus* in Namibia, and 21 on a drowned Wildebeest *Connochaetes taurinus* in Tanzania.

The latest Atlas map for this species in Tanzania clearly confirms the importance of large protected areas and their populations of large mammals (Fig. 1). The knowledge gaps within the system of Protected Areas simply relates to the lack of fieldwork within Game Reserves that are restricted for commercial hunting and are, sadly, data-deficient.

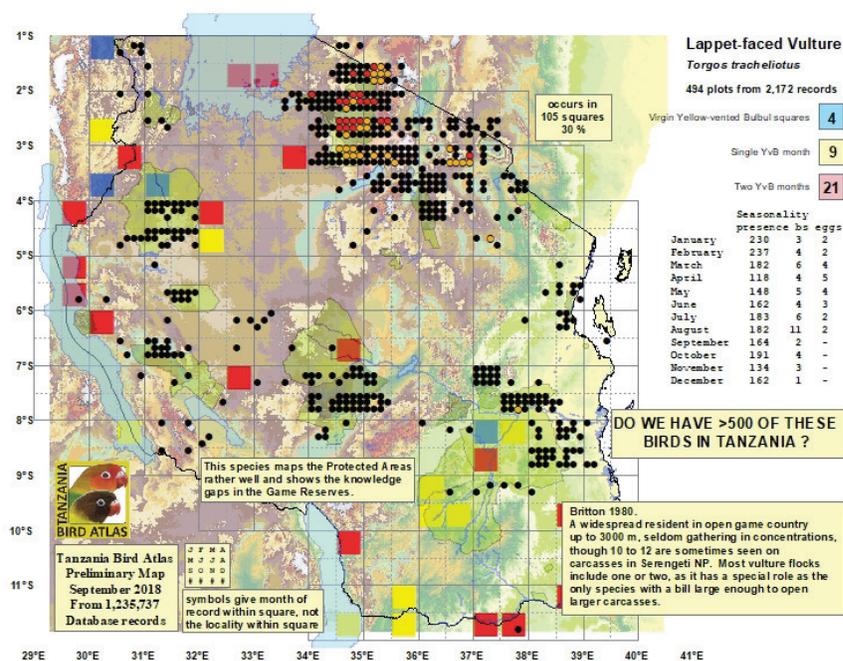


Figure 1. This map represents nearly 40 years of data collection. As yet there are no obvious signs of a population decline, perhaps because this species was always associated with the larger protected areas, which have largely remained intact.

References

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N.E. Baker and E.M. Baker†

P.O. Box 396 Iringa, Tanzania
Email: tzbirdatlas@yahoo.co.uk

N.L. Baker and O.T. Baker

P.O. Box 14268, Arusha, Tanzania

Scopus 39(1): 67–68, January 2019
Received 17 September 2018