

Raptors drowning in farm reservoirs in southern Africa

In the arid areas of southern Africa, the drowning of raptors in small reservoirs on farms is a significant cause of mortality. Due to the apparent negative effect of this on raptor populations, we collated all available reports on these accidents. These data were then examined for spatial and temporal patterns of drownings, the species involved, and likely impact on raptor populations.

Records of 322 raptors of 29 species which drowned during 163 separate incidents were collated. Whitebacked *Gyps africanus* and Cape Vultures *Gyps coprotheres* (58% of the total), and Martial *Polemaetus bellicosus* and Black Eagles *Aquila verreauxii* (13%), were the species most frequently recovered from reservoirs. There are few records of small raptors (<300 g) succumbing in this manner.

The majority of incidents occur in the arid western parts of southern Africa, particularly the Northern Cape (63% of the total), where a limited availability of natural surface water suggests a greater dependency on reservoir water.

The impact of this mortality factor on raptor populations is difficult to determine. However, despite biases, we estimated that at least 8% of the Martial Eagles in the southern Kalahari succumb in farm reservoirs.

There are several possible explanations as to why raptors drown. The simplest is that these birds enter the reservoir to drink or bathe and if it is not full are then unable to climb up the structure's steep sides.

There have been 12 recorded vulture mass drowning events, involving as many as 38 birds at one time. The reason for these mass drownings is probably different to the

individual drowning of other raptors, with the “intimate lifestyle” hypothesis being the most plausible.

There are simple, cheap and effective solutions to prevent the drowning of raptors and these are being advocated with success in the Northern Cape Province, South Africa.

Please send details of drowned raptors to Mark Anderson (see datasheet; [link](#)).