

Project Update: December 2014

The first sampling replicate was completed on 19th November 2014, which yielded some promising preliminary data. I was accompanied by both my supervisor, Dr Rhonda Millikin and Mr Eugene Furhi of Savannah Environmental, to ensure proper conduct. Three sites (T1, T2 and T3) were established, one of which (T1) had to be relocated on my second visit due to unfavourable topography. I spent a day and half at each site, due to time constraints. The sampling regime at each site stretched from midday on the first day to sunset on the second day. Weather conditions and disruptive livestock, along with location inefficiencies, were the source of somewhat inconsistent radar and visual observations.

Regardless of these inconsistencies, Cape vultures were observed on most sunny days at T2 and T3. Other priority species such as blue crane, grey crowned crane and Denham's bustard were also recorded.

Visual observations were conducted from 14:00 to 16:00 on the first day, and from 09:00 to 11:00 and 14:00 to 16:00 on the second day at every site. Upon review, this sampling regime was adjusted for subsequent sampling replicates.

My second outing stretched from 3rd to 20th December 2014, during which time I spent 4 days at each site. Radar observations were scheduled to run from midday on Day 1 throughout the night until sunset on Day 2. On Day 3 and 4, radar monitoring was scheduled to run from sunrise to sunset. The visual observation regime was adapted in such a way, as to include most hours of sunlight across four days. On Day 1 visual observations were conducted from 14:00 to 16:00, whereas on Day 2 they included the hours between 08:00 and 10:00, and 16:00 and 18:00. On Day 3 observations were made from 06:00 to 08:00 and 12:00 to 14:00, and from 10:00 to 12:00 on Day 4.

T3 yielded some valuable data, as Cape vultures were observed within the radar's range on several occasions. Vultures were also observed at T2, but generally outside of the radar's scope. Inaccuracies in acoustic recordings were brought about by microphone displacement through livestock at T2 and T1. T1 yielded no vulture sightings, mainly due to unfavourable weather conditions. Also, the data sheets for the visual observations were altered and adopted a GIS-based approach to improve the accuracy of the observations.

The second replicate also yielded sightings of priority species such as Martial and Verreaux's Eagle, as well as Secretary bird. The next two replicates will be completed in February 2015. The sequence of site visits is randomised to ensure unbiased data collection.

Furthermore, the contents of my study were disseminated at this year's WINDaba (3rd to 5th November 2014), a conference and exhibition, hosted by the South African Wind Energy Association (SAWEA) in partnership with the Global Wind Energy Council (GWEC). These contents were presented by Dr Rhonda Millikin.