Progress Report – Rufford small Grant

Project Title: the state of distribution and conservation of Rùppell's Vulture in the Bandia Classified Forest, Senegal

Site: Bandia Reserve and Kopgayane Village

Image 1: Pascal Murhula in the field with a board bearing images of vultures to raise awareness in the Bandia reserve (Flavio, 2024).

This project is funded by the Rufford Foundation through the Rufford Small Grand programme, which supports incentives that have a positive impact on wildlife conservation. It aims to contribute to a better understanding of the state of vulture conservation in Senegal, and more specifically of Rüppell's vulture (*Gyps rueppelli)*. There are two main objectives:

1. To study the special distribution of Rüppell's vulture in the Bandia classified forest.
2. Evaluate the perception of local populations regarding the conservation of vultures in the vicinity of this protected area.

The project is being implemented using a rigorous methodology combining ecological approaches and social surveys, with the active involvement of local communities, the main beneficiaries of the project.

1. Activity 1/ First field mission

Objective of the mission

- To officially present the project to the village chief and other officials of the Bandia Reserve.
- Explain the project's objectives to the chief before any sampling activities.
- Carry out a rapid diagnosis of the habitat in order to choose the sampling locations and define the transects.
- Carry out the first ornithological sampling in combination with bioacoustics.

2. Preliminary results

a) Contact with the local authorities

Contact was made with the local authorities: the Kopgayane village chief and the imam expressed their support for the project, stressing its importance for the community.
A rapid assessment of the habitat made it possible to select 14 transects in each site (28 in total), taking into account ecological criteria (proximity to human settlements, presence of domestic animals, abattoirs, etc.).

b) Ornithological monitoring,

For the ornithological monitoring, a total of 889 individuals belonging to 34 bird species divided into 12 families were inventoried. Among the vultures, 3 species were inventoried *Gyps rueppelli*: 48 individuals *Necrosyrtes monachus*: 10 individuals and *Gyps africanus*: 10 individuals. Each observation was georeferenced using the BirdPlus application and verified by GPS.

Image 2: top is scavenger vultures with ox herons, this image was taken by me in the field where these species were finishing off a cow carcass near the village of Kopgayane. Below, individuals of Rüppell's vultures fighting over a feeding area towards evening in Kopgayane, photo taken by Pascal (2025).

c) Installation of acoustic sensors

Four Song Meter Mini sensors were installed at the sampling sites. The aim is to detect the presence of vultures that are difficult to observe visually, particularly when they are nesting. These sensors provide valuable bioacoustic data to complement direct observations.

Capteur de son (song metre Mini) pour enregistre les individus du vautour de Rüppell (pascal, 2024).

d) Discovery of vulture nests in Kopgayane

During the mission in December 2024, several nests were discovered. The first nest observed belonged to *Gyps rueppelli* , located on the Baobab tree. Two individuals were spotted brooding on the same tree. A total of six nests were identified in the village.

Discovery of vulture nests at Kopgayane

Evidence of presence: the white droppings visible on the trunks and branches of the baobab trees were key clues in locating the nesting sites. With the discovery of these nests, we began to get an idea of what nesting areas in the area might look like. All the waterholes around these 6 nests were geo-referenced, with a total of 8 waterholes geo-referenced to serve as an environmental tool that could influence the choice of nesting sites.

On the left is a picture of the two Rüppell's vultures nesting on the baobabs and on the right the species that are watching (pascal,2024). These first nests were discovered around December 2024, but I don't think it was the first nest, although there had been nests before we arrived in the field.