

Kalahari Raptor Route

The Kalahari Raptor Route brochure aims to attract bird-watchers to the Kalahari, thus providing much-needed revenue to this dry part of South Africa and ultimately the initiative will contribute towards the conservation of the region's raptors.

No long ago there were few large raptors on farmland in the southern Kalahari, that is outside the famous Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, regarded by many as one of Africa's raptor meccas. The eagles and vultures in particular had fallen victim to the farmers' guns, gin traps and poison. Twelve years ago, raptor numbers were dwindling in this region of South Africa's Northern Cape Province; that is until Abrie Maritz, a sheep farmer from Olifantshoek, stepped into the picture.

For the past decade, under the auspices of the Endangered Wildlife Trust's Raptor Conservation Group and with generous financial and logistic support from SA Eagle Insurance Company and the Mazda Wildlife Fund, Abrie has coordinated the Kalahari Raptor Project. His work has involved farmer extension, resolving wildlife-livestock conflicts, and research, especially the monitoring of breeding raptors and the ringing of nestlings. His commendable contribution has resulted in raptors returning in their droves to these Kalahari farming areas, and this desert environment is now home to at least 50 pairs of Lappet-faced Vultures, eight pairs of Bateleurs and a multitude of other birds of prey. As a result, the Kalahari has become an important destination for bird-watchers who want to observe raptors, especially some of the scarcer species, such as the Martial Eagle, Red-necked Falcon, and Pygmy Falcon.

With the Kalahari now becoming one of Africa's finest raptor-watching areas, it was decided to produce a guide, the "Kalahari Raptor Route", for use by bird-watchers and other eco-tourists. With financial support from the Northern Cape Tourism Authority, Kalahari Tourism, The Green Kalahari and the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform, Environment & Conservation, this initiative recently reached fruition. A beautiful A2 map, with illustrations by Maggie Newman, depicts the 13 routes, while the reverse side provides useful information about these routes, what birds can be seen, general information about the Kalahari and its raptors, a raptor checklist, and even a section on safety hints for travellers.

This brochure is a useful resource for travellers who venture into the Kalahari and as more and more bird-watchers flock to the region, they will naturally contribute to the locally economy. Ultimately this will promote the conservation of the region's raptors, ensuring that the Bateleur continues to soar and tumble in the Kalahari sky.....

Copies of the brochure can be obtained from the Northern Cape Tourism Authority (Tel. 053-8331434; Fax: 053-8312937; Private Bag X5017, Kimberley 8300; e-mail: tourism@northerncape.org.za), Kalahari Tourism (Kuruman; Tel. 053-7121001/2/3/4) or The Green Kalahari (Upington; Tel. 053-3372826).