

NOTES AND REPORTS

Communal breeding in White-backed Vultures *Gyps africanus***Volker Salewski**

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On 14 January 2019, eight nests of White-backed Vultures *Gyps africanus* were discovered in a kapok tree *Ceiba pentandra* in Comoé National Park in northeastern Côte d'Ivoire (Figure 1). All nests were active with adult vultures either sitting or standing on the nests. Chicks just looking over the rim of the nest were seen in two nests. The same tree had already been visited in January 2017 and in January 2018 when two and five active nests were situated in the tree, respectively. The exact coordinates of the tree are deposited in the African Raptor Data Bank (http://www.habitainfo.com/ardb_resources/).

Vultures either breed on cliffs or in trees and the breeding habitat is usually species-specific. Cliff-breeding species often congregate with up to almost one thousand pairs in a colony in the Cape Griffon *Gyps coprotheres* in southern Africa (Mundy *et al.* 1992) or more than a hundred pairs in the Eurasian Griffon *G. fulvus* in southern Europe (Slotta-Bachmayr *et al.* 2005). In tree-breeding species, colonial breeding is unusual but found for example in White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* in Asia (Thakur 2015). White-backed Vultures are widespread in sub-Saharan Africa and nest exclusively in large trees throughout their range. Although they may breed in loose colonies there is usually only one nest per tree and two nests

per tree are rare (Mundy *et al.* 1992). Bannerman (1953) mentions that two or three nests may occur in the same tree. North (1944) described six nests in a tree from Somalia, but Mundy *et al.* (1992) doubted that all these nests were occupied. In Comoé National Park two nests in a single Kapok tree were discovered in January 2018 on two additional occasions (Salewski, unpubl. data), but the observation of eight nests in a single tree is outstanding.

The recent observation in Comoé National Park confirms that several pairs of White-backed Vultures may aggregate to breed in a single tree, although this is rare. The observation of North (1944) from Somalia may refer to a similar occasion. It is, however, not clear why the vultures aggregate to breed and how they select a certain tree. The observed aggregation is definitely not a consequence of a lack of breeding habitat. There are no data on the density of Kapok trees but they are abundant in gallery forest of the Comoé River and its tributaries as well as in isolated forests within the bush/tree savannah that dominates the park. During the three breeding seasons in which the tree was visited, the number of nests increased and it will be interesting to observe how the colony will develop in the future.

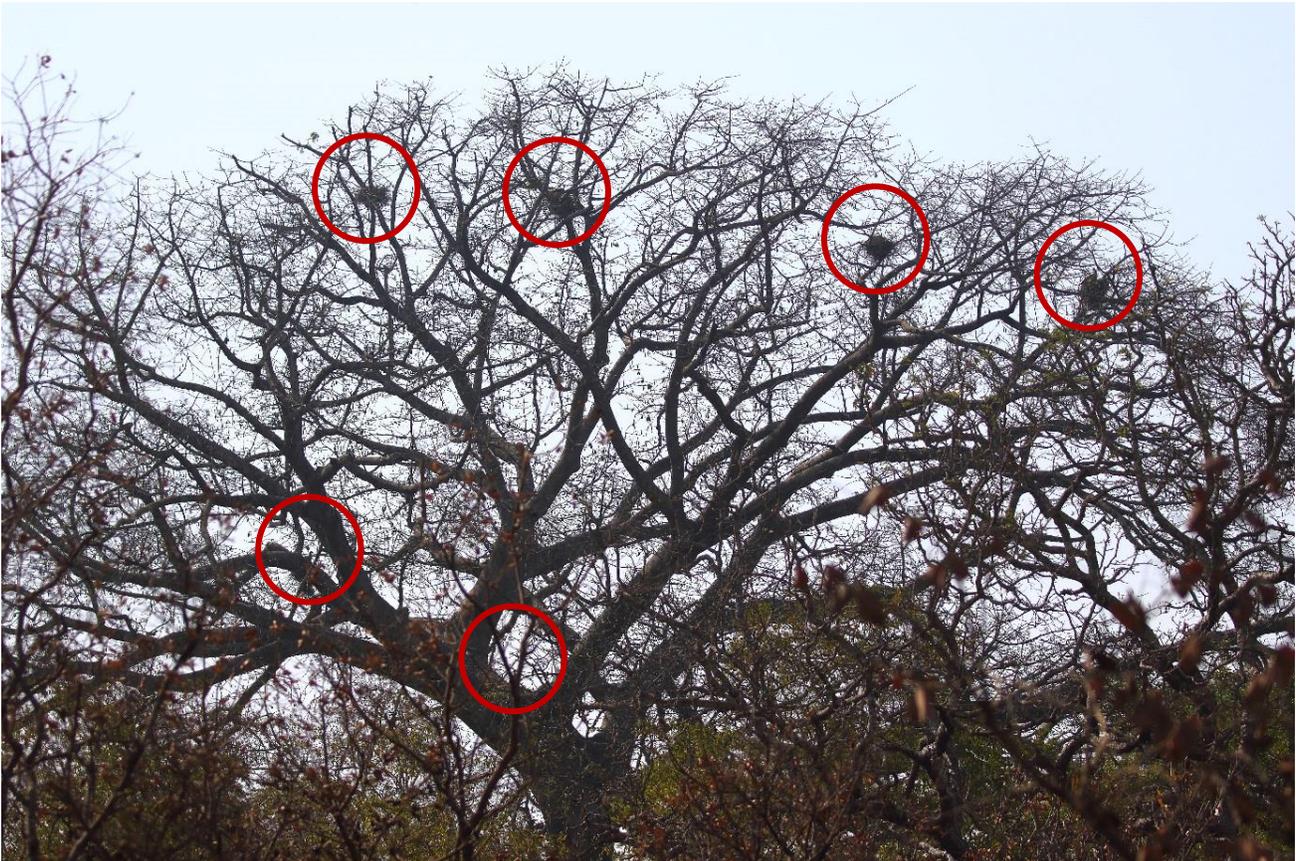


Figure 1: Kapok tree in which six (red circles) out of the eight White-backed Vulture nests that the tree hosts are visible. Comoé National Park, Côte d'Ivoire, 14 January 2019.

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