

Black Eagle Project Roodekrans

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From my Perch

It's taken a while to get the BEPR golf shirts, but now that we have them I sincerely hope that you like the colour! ☺ It wasn't easy to choose a colour from a limited range, due to yearend stock unavailability, having to obtain sizes that are all available in the same colour weren't available too unless we were prepared to wait for new stock to arrive in February 2014! Thanks to Ernest Porter who offered to collect the shirts who was also requested to pose in one – enjoy!

Season's Greetings

On behalf of the BEPR committee, thank you for your valued voluntary service during 2013. We extend our best wishes to you and your family over the festive season. We wish you peace, happiness and a prosperous New Year.

Home Range (Territory)

Going back 75 odd years when Black eagles were first seen skirting the ridges of Little Falls, it is difficult to grasp that there was not one dwelling against the slopes or on top of Nortcliff Hill, Little Falls Ridge, Roodekrans Ridge all the way through Kings Kloof along Blougat Ridge on the outskirts of Krugersdorp North, a total extent of approx. 30km of ridge line. During the early years, the eagles' home range may have been about 15-20km², which in today's terms would include Little Falls Ridge behind Clearwater Mall about 10km southeast and Kings Kloof about 8-10km northwest of their current nest site.

During the early 1990's, it became evident that the eagles were struggling to find suitable prey and in 1997 I took a six month sabbatical from the project and executed my own ridge walk that commenced from the furthest south-eastern portion of Little Falls Ridge (CR Swart Drive) to where the ridge ends at the Krugersdorp Aerodrome on the outskirts of Krugersdorp Game Reserve. Walking only over weekends and public holidays, I criss-crossed the entire 30km ridge system in search of and making notes of prey availability and its variables. Sadly, Rock hyrax (dassie) was not common at all, which under more ideal circumstances should make up at least 90% of a Black eagles' prey base...I found 5 small colonies that averaged 10-15 individuals. I discussed hyrax densities with the late Yvonne Geldenhuys previous co-owner of Laurentia Rose Farm whose property also incorporates the magnificent and unspoiled hilly countryside of Kings Kloof, approx. 700 ha in extent. She mentioned that this kloof was "littered" with hyrax in the 1960's and 1970's but for some reason (expected dassie flu) numbers decreased drastically.

In 1993, the first of a series of problems arose in that the eagles were hunting free range chicken at Zwartkop Hill that is 12km north and inland from the nest site and chicken were also taken from smallholdings in Honeydew A.H. about 5km west of the nest. Because of the increased possibility of being shot by irate land owners, after extensive consultation with raptor specialists, it was decided to artificially supplement the eagles' diet with domestic rabbit carcasses whenever the need arose. Proving to be very successful, it reduced the influx of chicken and however unhappy with the artificial supplementation program in that the eagles may become lazy hunters and dependent on the freebie hand-outs, it was decided to conduct an extensive research operation.

Teresa Moore and I decided to leave the BEPR during September 1999 and we established our own project named Raptors Research in November. In January 2000, we commenced with our work to determine the eagles' home range extent. After countless visits to hundreds of landowners, after 3 years we identified a pattern of home range extent and ultimately concluded that their range was almost **150-200 km²** in extent! During our seven-year research period, we embarked upon a Rock hyrax capture and reintroduction program specifically aimed to naturally supplement the eagles' diet with live prey and to also reconstruct self-sustainable populations that saw the birth of the "Hyrax Operation Project". With the assistance of Dennis Dry and many volunteers, we managed to successfully capture approx. 750 hyraxes during the winter months from April to September, over weekends and public holidays. At predetermined reintroduction sites, used 10 localities within 6 different sites of which 3 sites are yet self-sustainable today. The last hyraxes were reintroduced during August 2008.

Nessi will be 84 & 85 days old over the weekend or 11 weeks and I'm almost certain he will fledge soon as extensive wing exercises have been noted!

Eagle greetings...

Bo van der Lecq
BEPR & RCP



NESSI at 72-74 days old – Photos by Garth Heydenrych

