



RUDI VAN AARDE (6)

puffed daddy

The stately Kori Bustard *Ardeotis kori* is one of the most recognisable inhabitants of Africa's savannas and deserts. As is characteristic of bustards, the species is polygynous and strongly sexually dimorphic; on average, males weigh more than twice as much as females. Kori Bustard males engage in elaborate breeding displays intended to make themselves irresistibly attractive to females within earshot of their booming display calls,



but these displays are rarely witnessed by humans on account of the species' retiring nature.

This sequence of images of a mating pair was captured in Zimbabwe's Hwange National Park in September 2019. A vocalising male with inflated throat and neck feathers puffed out, erect crest and periodically fanned and raised tail feathers attracted the attention of a nearby female, who approached him from about half a kilometre away. The male's efforts and the female's interest culminated in a very brief copulation. Immediately afterwards, the male wandered off and resumed displaying, evidently reckoning that the day's opportunities were far from over.

Often touted as being the world's heaviest flying bird, the Kori Bustard's claim to this title is in fact rather tenuous. Males of the southern African subspecies average 12.4 kilograms and females less than half that, so their average mass is well below that of the Andean Condor and the larger pelican and swan species. What is true, however, is that at 19.2 kilograms the heaviest male Kori Bustard on record appears to have been exceeded only by one exceptionally hefty 23-kilogram male Mute Swan, but it was thought to have been incapable of getting airborne.

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