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24<sup>th</sup> August, 2015

Dear BirdLife Botswana supporter,

### Kasane Project

I would like to bring you up to date with our project in Kasane. The feasibility study is proceeding well.

A conceptual layout of our 45 hectare site on the banks of the Chobe River was presented to us this week and it looks very exciting. We have managed to hire an enthusiastic, experienced fund-raiser in the UK, Ms Kelly Hague, and that is a big step forward. An eminent scientist, virtual museum designer and leading exponent of interactive experience centres around the world, Professor Michael Bruton has indicated that he is keen to join our team and his experience, expertise and knowledge will give us a huge boost and advantage. Ms Megan Stewart, the bird whisperer, whose falcons are causing havoc among Pandamatenga quelea, is waiting in the wings to show us her skills.

The name we have chosen for the project is *Nature Chobe* with the by-line “*Interacting with Wildlife Wonders*”. We have now engaged a Gaborone-based architect, Mr. Stuart Stanley and we are A for away. You have probably guessed correctly that our major challenge is a lack of funds to drive the project. With a hard copy conceptual layout now available, we are ready to try to recruit sponsors from among businesses and supporters locally even though there are still some gaps in our planning. We need funds to close these gaps. We will soon be distributing a donor’s form so if you would like to contribute in cash or kind to our project, which is in the process of being registered as a legal entity, please contact me directly.

Planning so far has been of the researching and thinking variety. There will be an amphitheatre to provide two bird demonstrations a day. We will undertake captive breeding of White-backed Vultures and will have an educational centre for children, in which we will use a great variety of interactive games and experiences. Our plans for the Celebration of Nature Walk are coming together very nicely. This Walk will lead the visitor to a number of hides and nearly twenty different biomes. There will be a number of virtual museums incorporating the latest techniques involving interactive displays. These will cover the spectrum of nature presented to us in Botswana and the KAZA Trans-Frontier Conservation Area. Everywhere there will

be an interaction between visitor and museum to promote a learning experience and there will be so much to learn.

If you want to know more about bird migration or the sex life of a dragonfly or the flowering of different acacia and plant species or the number of unique fish species in the Zambezi, or the calls of different frogs and toads, or threats to our environment, you will need to visit our site to learn from nature. Whether it is a display describing the formation of the earth and particularly Botswana, or others describing the night sky, birds, an aquarium, flora, fauna, entomology, geology, elephants, herbivores, carnivores and conservation issues we face, we are designing it such that every visitor, whoever he or she may be, will leave the area determined to make their world a better place. We are not planning a boring conventional museum, but rather a dynamic, stimulating, interactive learning experience which will equip visitors with a greater understanding and appreciation of nature at its finest.

We know that what we are taking on here is extremely ambitious. But we are all being driven by an underlying concern. Botswana is rich in wildlife. We love and appreciate what we have around us and the incredible experiences this nature offers. We appreciate the necessity of protecting what we have. But if we are to be successful in conserving this for the future, we need the children of Botswana to become involved and to become as passionate about the environment as we are. We need more local people to understand how important our wildlife is; having international researchers come to work here and international tourists showing how much they value our wildlife, will help raise the level of importance being placed on conserving – not just our elephants and rhinos – but our birds, frogs, fish, plants, insects and ecosystems. The centre will also demonstrate practical conservation measures which can take place, such as the breeding of White-backed Vultures or using falconry as a way to resolve problems for farmers, such as those caused by Red-billed Quelea. We have ambitious plans and hopes for *Nature Chobe* – it is not just about a building – it is about passion, excitement and getting people involved in protecting our nature and theirs into the future.

This letter is being forwarded to all of those who have indicated an interest in our project. I am hoping this list will grow and we can generate much excitement. You will have noticed on the letterhead the BirdLife Botswana logo and that of our project represented by an African Skimmer flying over the Chobe River. Also, if you can contribute any skill, donations in kind or funds which we could use, that would be greatly appreciated.

If you do not wish to receive any progress letters in the future, please drop me a line. We are planning on sending out regular newsletters outlining our progress. We are busy designing a website which will hopefully provide more information to those seeking it.

Yours faithfully

Harold Hester  
Project Leader