



IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial
Avian flu update
Recognition for BirdLife Botswana
More on Slaty Egret breeding
Monitoring birds during Tsetse Eradication
Botswana Tickbird now on line
Are African Lesser Flamingo populations linked?
Migratory birds decline



EDITORIAL

Thinking globally and acting locally.... Herein lies one of the strengths of the BirdLife Partnership. The international perspective enables us to see the big picture - for example, the plight of threatened birds on a global scale. The network of partners at the national level enables us to collectively address this enormous challenge on the ground locally.

For our part, we have been making steady progress with our work researching and monitoring the globally threatened birds that occur in Botswana. Over two decades ago, active members Wendy and Remi Borello initiated a rigorous, systematic Cape Vulture monitoring programme that still stands as a model today. Our Crane Working Group has developed a Species Action Plan for the Wattled Crane that serves as a blueprint for its conservation. Researcher (and BirdLife member) Graham McCulloch has been monitoring the flamingos of the Makgadikgadi wetland system. A BirdLife team, in conjunction with the Department of Wildlife and National Parks, has conducted a baseline survey of the Slaty Egret, which will soon lead to the development of an Action Plan for this species. Our own Red Data Book for birds is well underway. We are soon to embark on a programme aimed at gathering data on another globally threatened species - the Lappet-faced Vulture. These and many other activities are our contribution to BirdLife's global Species Programme, which aims to prevent the decline and extinction of bird species in the wild. Together we can and do make a difference!

Pete Hancock

BirdLife Botswana is the  partner in Botswana.
Together for birds and people

AVIAN FLU UPDATE

BirdLife Botswana recognises that bird flu is a serious threat to domestic poultry, wild birds and, potentially, even to human beings. It is our belief that it is vital to understand the facts when dealing with the issue. Unfortunately there has been a great deal of hysteria generated by irresponsible media, as illustrated below:

The collage consists of three distinct images. The top-left image is a cartoon showing a man with a worried expression reading a newspaper that says "BIRD FLU DANGEROUS". Above him, a bird is coughing into a handkerchief with a speech bubble that says "Cough! Cough!". The top-right image is a screenshot of the "THE INDEPENDENT ONLINE EDITION" website. The main headline reads "Fifa says bird flu spread may damage World Cup" with a sub-headline "By Tony Paterson in Berlin" and a date of "5 April 2006 15:27". The bottom-left image is a screenshot of the "WorldNetDaily" website. The main headline reads "OUTBREAK! Lock them up to die: Prison bird-flu plan" with a sub-headline "Government prepares for sealed-off facilities, mass graves, men left to mercy of killer disease" and a date of "Posted: January 7, 2006 5:03 p.m. Eastern".

This article is an attempt to report accurately on recent developments in the spread of the disease.

- The H5N1 strain has a high pathogenicity and causes mortality.
- It has spread from Asia to Europe, and more recently to Africa.
- The African countries where it currently occurs are Nigeria, Niger, Egypt, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Sudan, Ivory Coast and Djibouti.
- The suspected means by which it spreads are:
 - poultry trade
 - secondary poultry products *e.g.* poultry manure for fertiliser

- migrating birds
- wild bird trade
- The poultry trade is the major route by which the disease has spread
- So far, migratory birds have not been shown to spread the disease – it has not spread along migratory routes. Wild birds are victims, not vectors (carriers) of the disease.
- Avian flu has impacted negatively on bird conservation efforts, and this is especially true for globally threatened species. The Red-breasted Goose is the most seriously affected in this regard.
- Forty-two wild bird species have been affected to date – mainly scavengers and waterbirds.
- Not all large-scale bird mortalities are due to avian flu – in 2003 in South Africa, 25,000 waterbirds of 23 species died of botulism – so people should not jump to conclusions if they find dead, wild birds.
- There are about 200 cases of humans being infected with avian flu, 50% of which were fatal. All were linked to poultry except one.
- H5N1 is very inefficient at infecting people, but to be on the safe side, people should avoid handling any dead birds, whether wild or domestic.
- There are no proven cases of human-to-human transmission of the disease – a family of seven who died of avian flu in Sumatra MAY have infected each other, but it is more likely that they independently contracted it directly from the infected poultry with which they were all working.

What to do if you suspect an outbreak of avian flu in Botswana?

- Contact the Disease Control Unit in the Ministry of Health, telephone 3170585 or 3632024 (Dr Mwambona direct)
- Contact your nearest BirdLife Botswana branch (see contact details at the end of the newsletter)

RECOGNITION FOR BIRDLIFE BOTSWANA

BirdLife Botswana joined the BirdLife International partnership in 2000 as an Affiliate member – the lowest membership category and the starting point for all new members. At the recent Council for Africa Partnership meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, it was recommended that BirdLife Botswana be upgraded to a Partner Designate in recognition of the progress made in the transition from a social birdwatching club to a professional bird conservation organisation. Pula!



MORE ON SLATY EGRET BREEDING

Good late rains over the Okavango Delta this year have created ideal breeding conditions for many waterbirds – the Slaty Egret included. Several new and previously-used sites were active during late summer.

- In late March, Teko Kethogetswe from Great Explorations noticed Slaty Egrets emerging from a Tsaro Palm island between Xigera and Mombo, and immediately realised that the birds must be breeding there. This was confirmed by a closer look; some nests with eggs and others with chicks were seen. A BirdLife team visited the site shortly thereafter, with the assistance of Xigera staff and Dan Rawson of Ngami Marine who provided a boat. By this time, most chicks had fledged, so we went to a second site 5 kilometres away where Teko suspected other Slaty Egrets might also be breeding. Sure enough, nests with eggs and chicks were spread over three Palm islands, with a few Rufous-bellied Herons breeding too. One of the most interesting findings at this time was that although Slaty Egret clutch sizes ranged from 1 egg to 4, most pairs only successfully fledged two chicks – incubation starts as soon as the first egg is laid, so that the last-hatched chicks are much smaller, with the result that most of them die unless food is very abundant.
- The similarity of the Xigera/Mombo site to the Palm island in the Jao Concession where Slaty Egrets bred in 2004, prompted a visit to this locality during April, courtesy Ngamiland Adventure Safaris. One of the Palm islands had about 30 nests, mostly with chicks, of varying sizes. It is not clear why the birds did not use this site during 2005.
- Information from Dan Rawson about a Rufous-bellied Heron colony in reeds on the Boro River led to the discovery of a third Slaty Egret breeding site. About 6 to 10 pairs of Slaty Egrets were nesting among the 40 or so Rufous-bellied Herons, and although it was mid-May, most Slaty Egrets were still incubating.



Interestingly, Rufous-bellied Herons were reported breeding in this vicinity in 1989 by Richard Randall, who was then based at Xaxaba, and the birds may breed here every year when conditions are suitable – if this is the case, it is a

- very important site for Rufous-bellied Herons, being the largest-known breeding colony currently on record for the Okavango. Many thanks to Ken Oake for assistance to visit this site, and for photographing the nesting birds.
- Whilst flying over Xini Lagoon, where Slaty Egrets bred in 2004, Mark Muller and Brian Bridges saw several adult Slaty Egrets flying over the reedbeds there. Permission was obtained from DWNP to visit Xini (closed to the public due to flooding) in late May, although it was felt that the birds had probably finished nesting. Surprisingly, Mark Muller observed breeding still underway, with one Slaty Egret actually constructing a nest. On returning three days later (23/5/06), the bird was sitting on the nest, incubating! This provided an opportunity to determine the incubation period for the Slaty Egret – not yet known – and so an observation hide was erected nearby. A clutch of three eggs was produced and the first-laid egg hatched on 14/6/06, 23 (+/- 1) days after being laid. At least 30 pairs bred at this site this year, significantly more than in 2004, possibly as a result of there being no tourist access.
 - Mark Muller and Brian Bridges also located a large heronry, used by Slaty Egrets and Black Herons, when flying over the Sandibe area. In mid-June, it was estimated that there were about 30 Slaty Egrets at this site. However, since it is in a flooded *Phragmites* reedbed, it is inaccessible from the ground and a proper follow-up could not be done. It is one of the few documented breeding sites for Black Herons in the Okavango, and is vitally important for this species too. Good numbers of Purple Herons were breeding here too.

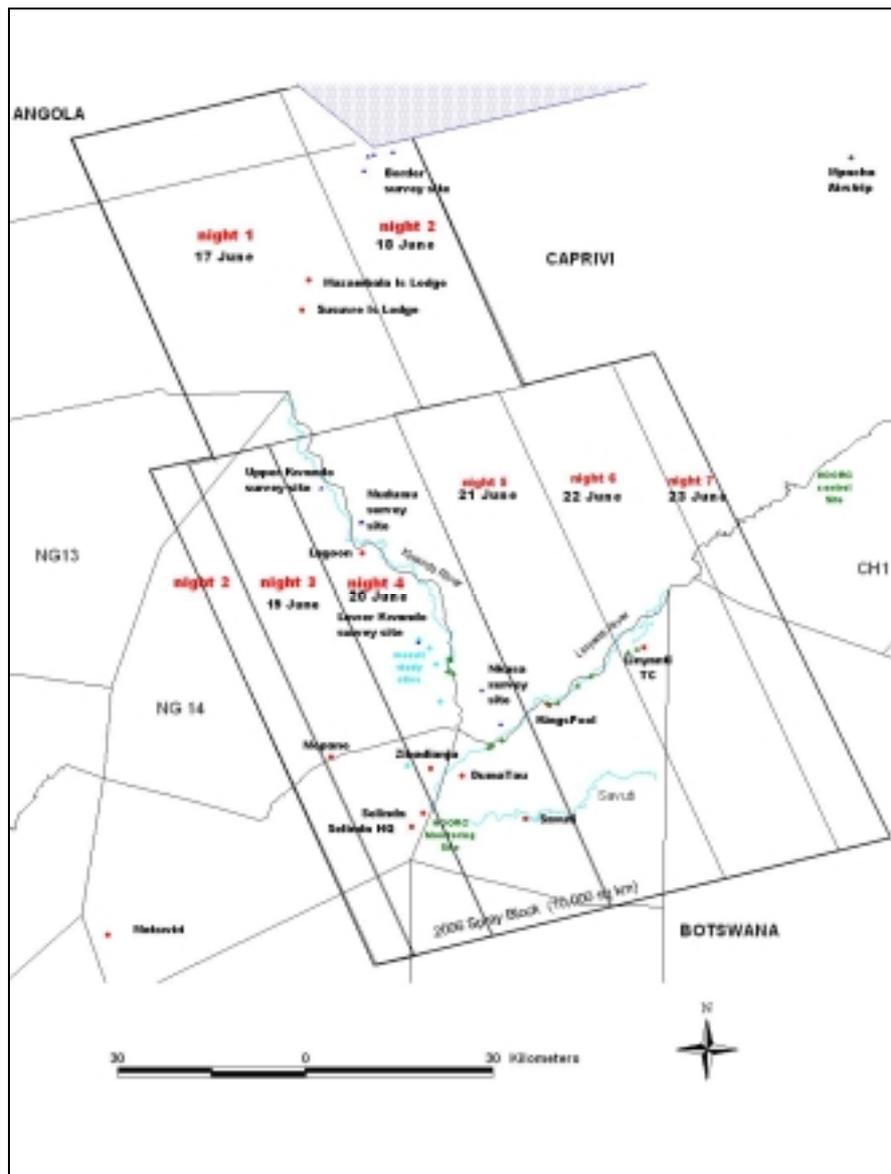
An added bonus from our search for Slaty Egret breeding sites has been the discovery of a large 'new' heronry on the headwaters of the Mogogelo River in Moremi. About 200 Great Egrets, numerous Black-crowned Night-Herons and Purple Herons as well as Reed Cormorants and African Darters used this site earlier this year - most interestingly, 13 Goliath Herons also nested here, and this is probably the largest breeding aggregation recorded for this species. By late May, Sacred Ibis and Spoonbills had started breeding too. Fortunately the site, a large *Phragmites* reedbed, is in Moremi and is inaccessible.

MONITORING BIRDS DURING TSETSE ERADICATION

The aerial spraying programme to eradicate tsetse flies from northern Botswana, the Caprivi and southern Angola and Zambia started on 28th May 2006. The aim of the project is to eradicate tsetse flies from this area (10,000 km²), by sequential aerial spraying of the synthetic pyrethroid, Deltamethrin. This is the same pesticide and procedure that was followed during 2001 and 2002 when the whole Okavango Delta was sprayed. The Harry Oppenheimer Okavango Research Centre (HOORC) has been contracted to monitor the impact of the spraying on non-target species, with BirdLife Botswana studying the effect of the spray on birds. We are pleased to be part of the

team since the Linyanti Swamp/Chobe River is an Important Bird Area with several globally threatened birds, some biome-restricted species and large numbers of congregatory waterbirds.

Our approach is to concentrate on monitoring globally threatened birds and those that previous research shows may be affected by the spraying. It has already been established that there is no significant toxicological risk to birds given the low recorded exposure levels and low avian toxicity of Deltamethrin. The secondary effects from insect knockdown may however impact on aerial insectivores.



The location of the spray block in the Kwando/Linyanti area

Consequently we are monitoring:

1. The globally threatened Slaty Egret – it feeds on small fish and aquatic invertebrates that are affected by the insecticide.

2. The globally threatened Lappet-faced Vulture – it breeds during the winter months when the spraying is taking place and may be disturbed off its nest by low-flying aircraft.
3. The Little Bee-eater – it feeds on flying insects some of which are affected by the Deltamethrin.
4. Arnot's Chat is a biome-restricted species that was affected by tsetse spraying in Zimbabwe (using a different insecticide) – it is insectivorous and may be affected by changes in its food supply.



We have already established baseline data for these species before the spraying commenced, both in the spray block and in a control area at Khwai. The local knowledge of professional guides in the Linyanti concession proved invaluable in choosing monitoring sites, and BirdLife Botswana is grateful to Okavango Wilderness Safaris staff for enabling us to initiate the monitoring before the spraying commenced. We will continue monitoring these birds during the spraying and after the spraying has been completed. Our findings will be published together with those of the HOORC team by the end of this year.

BOTSWANA TICKBIRD NOW ON LINE

Regular readers of this newsletter will remember that earlier this year, BirdLife Botswana was in the process of setting up the Botswana component of Worldbirds, a web-based bird monitoring system. This is an interactive system with benefits to contributors as well as capturing information on birds in Botswana. It is now operative on a trial basis, so do have a look at www.worldbirds.org/Botswana and let us have some feedback. What we are specifically looking for are comments on whether the system is easily accessible, are there any errors in the information presented *etc.* This will enable us to make final improvements before formally launching the system later this year.

ARE AFRICAN LESSER FLAMINGO POPULATIONS LINKED?

Africa's Lesser Flamingos occur in three distinct geographical groups, the main population group being in the Rift Valley of East Africa (2.5 – 4.0 million birds primarily on the alkaline lakes of Kenya and Tanzania) and smaller population groups in southern Africa (100,000 individuals primarily in Namibia, Botswana and South Africa) and in western Africa (6,000 individuals primarily in Mauritania, Senegal and Guinea Bisseau).

Historically these different groups have been thought to be genetically isolated, due to the great distances between them, the apparent lack of stopover places and the flight speed of Lesser Flamingos (50 – 60 km/hr). Recently, however, based on several unexplained large increases in the southern African breeding population when environmental conditions were favourable, it has been hypothesised that at least some interchange between the southern and East African populations takes place.



To date this has not been documented, and it has also never been shown that the smaller western African population has any connection with the other two populations.

In 1962, the Kenyan ornithologist Leslie Brown, along with Alan Root, the wildlife film-maker, and several members of the east African Natural History Society took advantage of an unusual breeding event at Lake Magadi in Kenya to round up and ring 8,000 juvenile Lesser Flamingos. The rings were obtained from the British Museum and the records now reside with the British Trust for Ornithology. In a recent review of the recovery records from this ringing effort, Dr Brooks Childress discovered that one of the Lesser Flamingos ringed by the Brown-Root group on 30 October, 1962 was recovered in Western Sahara on 28 September, 1997 near Laayoune, probably along the shore of "Flamingo lake", a small, little-known and officially unnamed lake amongst the sand dunes near Laayoune that frequently holds large numbers of flamingos. The direct distance between Lake Magadi and Laayoune is 6,197 kilometres - how or when this Lesser Flamingo got from one to the other is completely unknown. However, it seems to be the first record of an interchange between the East African and western African populations. (Information from African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) Newsletter).

MIGRATORY BIRDS DECLINE

It is somewhat ironic and disappointing just after World Migratory Bird Day to report that migratory birds generally are undergoing long-term population declines. This is the finding of a recently published study by a team of scientists from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the BirdLife European Division.

The study shows that migratory bird species flying between the continents of Africa and Europe suffered sustained and often severe population declines in the last 30 years. The research also compared migrant and resident birds with similar characteristics, and it was evident that trends of inter-continental migrants were significantly more negative than those of short-distance migrants or residents. This negative trend appeared to be largely, although not entirely, due to declines in species wintering in dry, open habitats in Africa. (Information from African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) Newsroom)

CONTACT ADDRESSES

BirdLife Botswana
Private Bag 003
Suite 348
Mogoditshane
blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw

Tel: 3190540
Fax: 3190540
Physical address:
Unit C1
Kgale Siding
Plot 1069 KO
(the old TEBA complex near St Joseph's College)

BirdLife Botswana
PO Box 20463
Maun

birdlifemaun@ngami.co.za

6865618/6860252
6860525
Ngami Toyota
off the Maun/Sehithwa Road

Visit our website <http://www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw/>

BIRDLIFE BOTSWANA MISSION

BirdLife Botswana aims to conserve birds and important bird habitats, by creating awareness, carrying out research and promoting beneficial relationships between birds and people.

This newsletter appears quarterly. If you would like to contribute an article on your field observations or bird conservation project, please send it to birdlifemaun@ngami.co.za



Membership Details

Membership is due in *January of each year*, as the subscription runs from January to December.

Rates

- Resident - entitles you to both Babbler issues and the quarterly Familiar Chat (per family): P120.00
- Corporate - (4 families): P2000
- Professional – rangers and guides (Babbler and Familiar chat): P60.00
- Bona fide students: P15.00
- Life - P2000
- Schools/Clubs - nil
- SADC Region - P150
- Overseas (and outside SADC) – P200

The following details are required:

I/We/Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms: _____

wish to become members of BirdLife Botswana

Address: _____

Home/Cell Phone: _____

Work phone: _____

Email (PRINT please): _____

I acknowledge that my family dependents, invitees and I take part in the BirdLife Botswana organised events entirely at our own risk. I, in my personal capacity and as representative of my spouse, children, dependents, and invitees hereby keep BirdLife Botswana, its committee, members and agents indemnified and hold them harmless against all loss, injury, or damage to person or property from any cause (including negligence) arising as a result of our participation in events organised by BirdLife Botswana.

Signed _____

Date: _____

Please make your cheque payable to 'BirdLife Botswana'

Please return this form with your subscription to one of the addresses given below:

The Secretary (membership)
BirdLife Botswana
P/Bag 003
Suite 348
Mogoditshane
Botswana

Pete Hancock
PO Box 20463
Maun

or phone Pete to
collect 6860252

Guy Brina
Private Bag F12
Francistown

or phone Guy to
collect 2412913

Trish Williams
Private Bag K4
Kasane

or phone Trish to
collect 6250341

OFFICIAL USE

Card _____ Data base _____



Birds of Concern Reporting Sheet

BirdLife Botswana is very interested in collecting information on Birds of Concern – they are species that are either globally or nationally threatened. **Please use the format below when submitting sightings to make computerisation of the data easier.**

Note that the co-ordinates of each sighting are essential – it is convenient to get these from a GPS but of course they can be read off any good map. If you have a GPS, please set the datum to WGS 84 and the position format to decimal degrees. If you use any other datum/format, please just let us know what it is. Information in **bold** in the table below is the most important, if you cannot collect it all.

| Species (see list below) | GPS co-ords | | Quarter degree square <i>e.g.</i> 1923C4 | Area <i>e.g.</i> NG 19 | Locality <i>e.g.</i> 2 km west of Machaba | Date | Time | # of birds | Ad. M | Ad. F | Ad. ? | # of Imm. | Observer (your name) | Comments |
|-----------------------------|-------------|---|---|------------------------------|--|------|------|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|---------------------------------|----------|
| | S | E | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

The species that we are interested in are the following:

| | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Slaty Egret | White-backed Night-Heron | Wattled Crane | Grey Crowned Crane | Lesser Flamingo |
| Cape Vulture | White-headed Vulture | Lappet-faced Vulture | Hooded Vulture | Pallid Harrier |
| Bateleur | Martial Eagle | Long-crested Eagle | Lesser Kestrel | Pel's Fishing-Owl |
| Kori Bustard | Southern Ground Hornbill | African Skimmer | Rosy-throated Longclaw | |
| Black-winged Pratincole | | | | |

Breeding records for these species would also be invaluable.

Please send this information to:

[BirdLife Botswana](http://birdlife.org/botswana), PO Box 20463, Maun, BOTSWANA. Alternatively, please e-mail us at birdlifemaun@ngami.co.za

