

BIRDS AND PEOPLE

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BirdLife Botswana's Bird Conservation Newsletter



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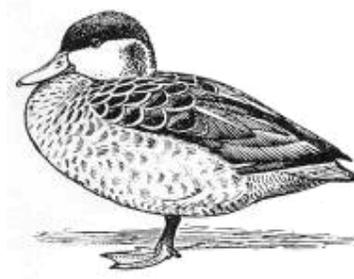
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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the first issue of BirdLife Botswana's Bird Conservation newsletter for 2008. Yes, it does look a bit different, but then 2008 is not the same as 2007 was!

During October 2007, I had the good fortune to attend the Council for Africa Partnership (CAP) meeting in Nairobi – an annual event where representatives from all the BirdLife partners in Africa meet to shape the BirdLife Africa Programme and report on progress made in their respective countries. CAP 2007 coincided with the meeting of the Global Council of BirdLife International, also held in Nairobi, so we had the opportunity to meet the representatives from the different regions where the BirdLife partnership is active – Asia, Caribbean and North America, Central and South America, Europe, Middle East and Pacific. From their unique perspective, almost all were struck by the contribution that grassroots, local communities were making to bird conservation in Africa – they highlighted this as one of the great strengths of the Africa programme and encouraged us to continue working with Site Support Groups.

This inextricable link between birds and people is indeed central to BirdLife's vision and philosophy, as encapsulated in the by-line "Working together for birds and people". A major part of BirdLife Botswana's work is devoted to promoting mutually beneficial relationships between birds and people, and thus it seems appropriate to call our newsletter "Birds and People". The participation of local citizens in our work is gathering momentum and the newsletter will in future feature more articles that showcase this aspect.

Pete Hancock



CONSERVATION BREAKTHROUGH

This newsletter is essentially about BirdLife and bird conservation initiatives in Botswana. However, the recent breakthrough by Mark Anderson, who has succeeded in creating a new Lesser Flamingo breeding site in South Africa, is such a worthwhile contribution to conservation that we have broken with tradition and included the article below, based on an e-mail from Mark. We hope that you find it interesting.

At the beginning of 2008, Lesser Flamingos started breeding for the first time at Kamfers Dam, the large, permanent wetland located just north of Kimberley, in the Northern Cape Province, South Africa. It is difficult to determine the exact number of breeding flamingos, as the island is located several hundred metres from the shoreline, but it is estimated that over 2,000 chicks have hatched.



Photo: G McCulloch

Kamfers Dam is only the fourth breeding locality for the Near Threatened Lesser Flamingo in Africa, and the sixth in the world. Lesser Flamingos breed at Etosha Pan (Namibia), Sua Pan (Botswana) and Lake Natron (Tanzania), as well as at Zinzuwadia and Purabcheria salt pans in north-western India. As all of these breeding sites are threatened by various human-induced factors, it is critically important that Lesser Flamingos now have another breeding site. This is the first time that Lesser Flamingos have successfully bred in South Africa and the first time that they have bred on an artificial island.

Although the most numerous of the world's flamingos, the Lesser Flamingo is classified as "Near Threatened" in BirdLife International's "Threatened Birds of the World, indicating that it is considered likely to qualify for a threatened category in the near future.

The Kamfers Dam flamingo breeding island project is a collaborative project of the Department of Tourism, Environment and Conservation, Ekapa Mining, Envirosec, and Kamfers Dam's landowners, Herbert and Brenda Booth. The construction of the flamingo island was proposed by Mark Anderson, the Department of Tourism, Environment and Conservation's ornithologist, who has been responsible for managing this project.

Ekapa Mining funded and constructed the Kamfers Dam flamingo island, the third of its type in the world. Soon after construction was completed in September 2006, the flamingos started using the island and even constructed nests and laid a few eggs. The island which is 250 m x 25 m in size and S-shaped, was built with 26,000 tons of calcrete, rocks and clay. A submersed pump, powered by three solar panels, provides water for four ponds on the island, and thus the wet clay that the flamingos use to construct their nest turrets.



Dr Brooks Childress, Chairman of the IUCN-SSC/Wetlands International Flamingo Specialist Group, described the construction and success of this new flamingo breeding island as the most significant flamingo conservation event internationally in many years.

Kamfers Dam supports the most important permanent population of Lesser Flamingos in southern Africa, usually numbering in excess of 25,000 individuals, but during recent months in excess of 50,000 birds. The dam is a Natural Heritage Site and one of South Africa's Important Bird Areas.

The Lesser Flamingo does not breed annually at the five other sites in Africa and India, mainly because they are only irregularly inundated - during periods of good rainfall. They only breed infrequently at some sites, such as at Etosha Pan in Namibia. Conservationists are concerned that the most important breeding site, Lake Natron in northern Tanzania, will be severely impacted by the proposed soda ash mining developments on the shores of this ecologically important lake. The Kamfers Dam breeding event is therefore very significant as it is now another site at which the Lesser Flamingo breeds. It will thus contribute to the conservation of this threatened species, especially if they breed annually at this permanent wetland.

Mark D Anderson

DOES THE LION HUNTING BAN AFFECT BIRDS?

Earlier this year, the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) announced a ban on Lion hunting. This prompted queries by some members of BirdLife Botswana who felt that this ban might cause an increased use of poisons to kill 'problem' Lions preying on livestock, and thereby impact on vultures. This concern was grounded on evidence from the previous Lion hunting moratorium instituted in 2000, when the carcass of a cow that had been killed by Lions was laced with poison and this led to numerous vultures being poisoned incidentally.

In light of the above, BirdLife Botswana met with Mr Steven Sekhute, head of Problem Animal Control in the DWNP Gaborone office, to clarify this issue. Mr Sekhute explained that the current hunting ban applied to trophy hunting of Lions only – whereas in 2000 there was a total moratorium placed on the killing of Lions. This means that the law allowing a livestock owner to shoot any Lions threatening his cattle has not been changed, so there should be no reason for anyone to put out poison for 'problem' Lions. BirdLife Botswana is relieved that this is the case, as deliberate and incidental poisoning of vultures is emerging as a significant threat to all vultures and many other raptors in Botswana.

MIGRATING KESTRELS

In our previous newsletter, we requested information on roosting sites used by Lesser Kestrels (a globally threatened species) in Botswana. We had absolutely no response at all!

This could have been for one of three reasons:

1. No one read the newsletter and those who did were too lethargic to respond!!
2. There are no known communal roosting sites in Botswana;
3. There are no communal roosting sites in Botswana.



Photo: G Verdoorn

Personally I favour the latter option – we have very few sightings of this species in Botswana, and those that have been accumulated in our database are of small groups of birds. In Botswana, there are also no or very few stands of tall, exotic *Eucalyptus* trees, which are favoured by this species as roosting sites in South Africa. It is speculated that the kestrels transit through Botswana in small flocks (perhaps Botswana is not even on the main route) and roost wherever they happen to be at dusk; or alternatively, they

mainly overfly Botswana en route to their preferred feeding areas in South Africa. Anyone with other theories is invited to share them, so that we can provide relevant information to the Migrating Kestrel Project.

LOOK OUT FOR BLUE CRANES

During an aerial survey of Blue Cranes conducted recently by colleagues in Namibia, only three pairs were seen in Etosha where normally there are 60. It is entirely possible, given that birds easily cover vast distances, that these cranes could be in Botswana. Please report all Blue Crane sightings over the next month or two to Pete Hancock at the BirdLife Botswana office in Maun.

KEEPING COMMON BIRDS COMMON

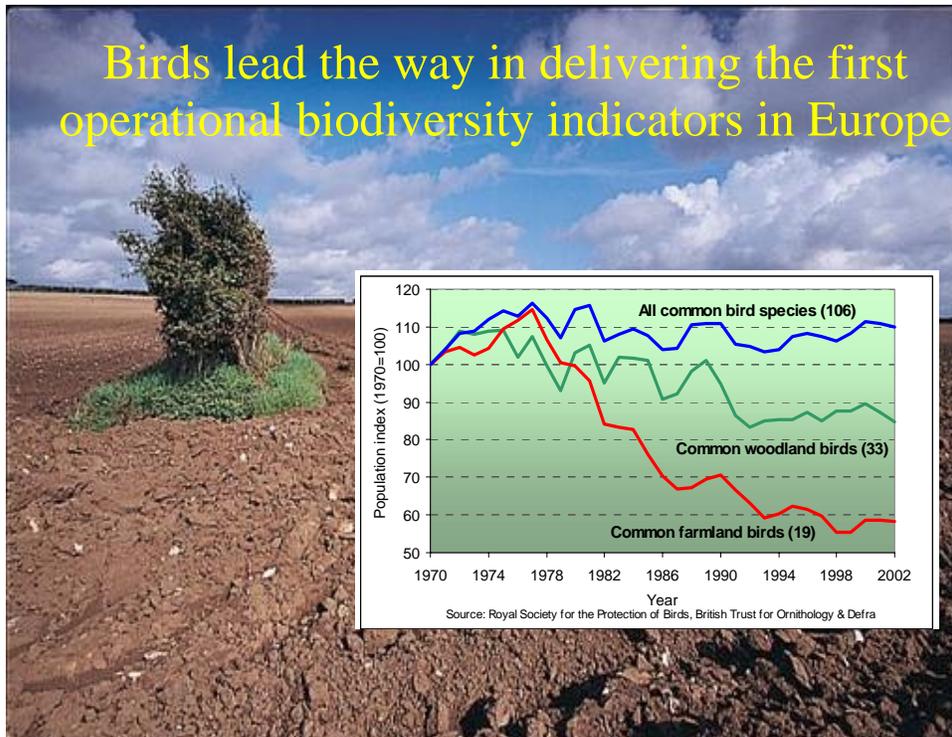
A major focus of our approach at BirdLife Botswana over the past few years has been researching and conserving globally threatened birds. This has been a conscious strategy, born of the realisation that it is not possible to conserve all of Botswana's birds throughout all areas of the country. However such an approach needs to be coupled with the monitoring of a wide range of common birds lest some of them become threatened too while our energy and attention are focussed elsewhere. At last this is possible through the advent of the Global Wild Bird Indicator project being introduced in Botswana this year.

The Wild Bird Indicator project in Botswana aims to develop a Wild Bird Index (WBI) which measures population trends of a representative suite of wild birds to act as a barometer of the general health of the environment.



Little Bee-eaters are widespread, abundant and easy to identify and are thus ideal birds for inclusion in the WBI

The methodology for producing the WBI is well developed and has been used successfully throughout Europe – what is needed is a network of volunteers, each to conduct a few point counts or short transect counts of birds twice or three times a year. The contribution from these participants is minimal, but the returns are huge. Birds are good bio-indicators, and the trends that can be obtained from the data described above are quantitative (*i.e.* based on real factual data), and can be used to report on the status of Botswana's biodiversity to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The indices developed are also clear and easy to interpret – even politicians can understand graphs such as those shown below, from the European Union's WBI!



I imagine now, that every BirdLife Partner in Africa conducts the same monitoring – and the results are pooled. We are going to have an extremely powerful tool for detecting changes in birds and biodiversity on a continent-wide scale!

BirdLife Botswana will be conducting a series of workshops later this year to inform and train people in the data collection methodology – these workshops are sponsored by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the BirdLife International Partner in the United Kingdom.



If you are interested to be part of the action, contact your nearest BirdLife office.

WHY BIRDS ARE GOOD INDICATORS

There are many good reasons:

- They are widespread, diverse, mobile and live in most habitats.
- Birds are better known than most other taxa. They are relatively easy to identify, survey and census.
- They are high up in the food chain and are sensitive to land use and climate change.
- Data are realistic and inexpensive to collect, analyse and report. Methods of survey and analysis are well established.
- Birds are popular and have resonance with the public and decision-makers alike.
- They can be very useful in raising awareness of biodiversity issues.
- They can, in some circumstances at least, faithfully reflect trends in other biodiversity.

BIRDLIFE CHECKLIST OF BIRDS OF THE WORLD

After many years of preparation, BirdLife finally released the first version of **"The BirdLife checklist of the birds of the world"** in June 2007.

This is significant because a well-justified understanding of what we mean by a "species" and a properly documented list of which species we recognise and those we don't fundamentally underpins the work of the BirdLife Partnership. Several of our objectives relate to preventing extinctions of species, improving their status, and identifying and conserving a network of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) to safeguard suites of priority species. In a world where there is much disagreement over which bird taxa deserve species status, and hence warrant greater conservation attention and funding, it is important that BirdLife can define and justify its position.

At this stage however, the release of the checklist has been deliberately low-key because we know the checklist is still far from perfect and are keen to iron out as many 'bugs' as possible before making it more widely known. It is therefore entitled version 0, with an intention to seek review and comment, to revise it and release version 1 next spring. It can be downloaded from the



"Search species" page on the BirdLife website. See for the checklist www.birdlife.org/datazone/species/downloads/BirdLife_Checklist_Version_0.xls

The background notes explaining the purpose, scope and taxonomic/nomenclatural basis of the list are available at www.birdlife.org/datazone/species/taxonomy.html

And for those who are wondering how many bird species there are in the world, according to BirdLife, the answer is currently 9,956 but a further 155 are in the pipeline as "under review"!

For more information and/or comments, please contact science@birdlife.org

BOTSWANA TICKBIRD - WORLDBIRDS IN BOTSWANA

Birding with a purpose - support our web-based bird monitoring system.

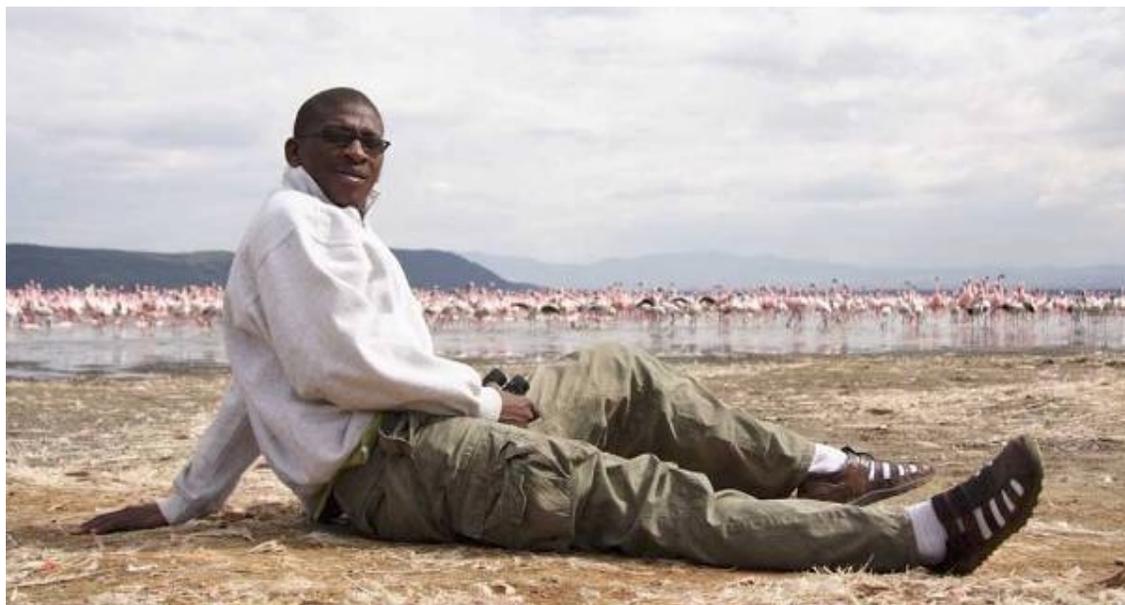
Enter your bird checklist - www.worldbirds.org/Botswana

PHOTO OF THE MONTH

Victor Horatius of Okavango Wilderness Safaris brightened up my day when he sent in the stunning photo below of a Greater Painted-snipe performing a threat display due to his close proximity. Hope you enjoy it too - thank you Victor.



MEET VIRAT



The previous issue of this newsletter featured the launch of the EU/RSPB project on **Instituting Effective Monitoring of Protected Areas** (Important Bird Areas) (see New Project Launched, page 8 of newsletter #16), but the project executant, our colleague Motshereganyi 'Virat' Kootsositse, was not introduced to our partners and readers.

Naturally a project of this magnitude could not be done without qualified personnel in place, and Virat holds a BSc in Ecology and Environmental Management from the University of Botswana. He has considerable relevant experience too, as he worked for the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) as Assistant Park Manager in Moremi Game Reserve. Immediately prior to joining BirdLife Botswana, Virat was working as a Fisheries Officer in DWNP – he was the team leader of several expeditions along the Chobe River, investigating the outbreak of disease among the fish of this system. He co-authored a technical report for the Okavango Delta Fishery Frame Survey as part of the Okavango Delta Management Plan.

Recently, a review of the EU/RSPB project was undertaken for all eight participating countries, including Botswana (see article below), and it was clear that substantial progress had been made by Virat. He has maintained a close working relationship with his former colleagues in DWNP, supporting the contention that he is the right person for the job – there is a strong team in place to ensure the success of the Botswana component of this project.

PROGRESS WITH THE MONITORING OF IBAS AND PROTECTED AREAS

BirdLife Partners in Africa recently convened an inaugural meeting in Botswana to review progress in the 'Monitoring of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and Protected Areas'. The meeting marked the first step in a four-year programme – funded by the European Commission and managed by the RSPB (BirdLife Partner in the UK) – which enables governments, NGOs and local communities to work effectively together in assessing the status and protection of some of Africa's most precious birds areas.

The Gaborone meeting participants shared their experiences, achievements and knowledge gained during the project's first year. "These meetings will enhance conservation of birds and their habitats by taking stock of what has happened in the first year of project implementation" remarked Dr Julius Arinaitwe from the BirdLife Africa Partnership Secretariat.

The IBA Programme of BirdLife International is a worldwide project aimed at identifying, monitoring and protecting a network of critical sites for the world's birds. Botswana has identified a suite of IBAs, and designated more than 17% of it's land area under protection. Speaking of her experiences so far, Mrs Majophoko (Director of the Department of Wildlife and National Parks, Botswana), emphasised that governments are "increasingly realizing that successful conservation projects cannot be undertaken without NGOs".

Mrs R Mojaphoko, Director DWNP
presenting her opening address.
Photo: MV Kootsositse



The meeting also served as a sobering reminder that biodiversity resources are currently threatened by habitat loss, rampant extraction of wood, pollution and invasive species. However, Mr Mark Thill (European Commission) provided a positive message to the delegates, stating that "it is pleasing to note that BirdLife International is addressing the issues around globally threatened [bird] species."

A key outcome from the gathering was that, in the first year alone, the project made substantial progress towards ensuring effective monitoring of IBAs and protected areas in Africa. Looking forward, the participants also discussed:

- How to provide guidelines on conducting capacity assessments;
- Strategies to ensure more convergence between bird monitoring schemes;
- How to analyse monitoring forms; and,
- Ways of 'adding value' to the project.

A report detailing the outcomes of the productive Gaborone meeting will be produced in due course.

STOP PRESS

To obtain a copy of the BirdLife Botswana 2007 Important Bird Area Monitoring Report, contact your nearest BirdLife Botswana office.

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@botsnet.bw

6865618/6865272

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.



Membership Details

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

Rates

- Ordinary - P120.00
- Corporate - Minimum P2000.00
- Professional – Rangers, guides and SSG members - P60.00
- Life - P2000.00
- Students studying in Botswana - P15.00
- Schools/Clubs - [nil](#)
- SADC Region – P200.00
- Overseas (and outside SADC) – P300.00

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 6865618

Guy Brina
Private Bag F12
Francistown

or phone Guy to
collect 2412913

Geoff Williams
Private Bag K4
Kasane

or phone Geoff to
collect 6250341

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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	Maccoa Duck	Wattled Crane	Grey Crowned Crane	Lesser Flamingo
Cape Vulture	White-headed Vulture	Lappet-faced Vulture	Hooded Vulture	White-backed Vulture
Bateleur	Martial Eagle	Lesser Kestrel	European Roller	Pallid Harrier
Kori Bustard	Southern Ground Hornbill	African Skimmer	Chestnut-banded Plover	
Black-winged Pratincole				

Breeding records for these species would also be invaluable.

Please send this information to:

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

