

# BIRDS AND PEOPLE

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BirdLife Botswana's Bird Conservation Newsletter



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## EDITORIAL

In this issue, you can read about the exciting, ground-breaking study of Wattled Crane movements to be undertaken by BirdLife Botswana later this year – we will be fitting six birds with satellite transmitters to track their movements throughout the region, the first time that this high-tech method has been used with this species. This study has been made possible by the generous support of three local conservation-minded businesses – Ngami Toyota, Ngamiland Adventure Safaris and CCAfrica.



Right up front, we would like to acknowledge their commitment to the conservation of this globally threatened bird, and thank them for making a substantial contribution towards our work. They have amply illustrated that bird conservation is not BirdLife Botswana's task alone, but that other people care too, and are prepared to put their shoulder to the wheel and make a difference. Le ka moso!

Pete Hancock

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



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[www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw](http://www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw)

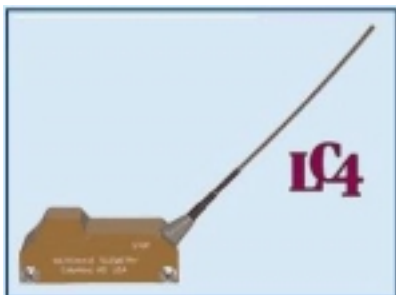
## SATELLITE TRACKING OF WATTLED CRANES IN SOUTH-CENTRAL AFRICA

In 1993, the International Crane Foundation hosted the African Crane and Wetland workshop in Maun. Crane experts from all over Africa pooled their knowledge of cranes in their countries, in an attempt to derive an estimate of their numbers - an important exercise to assess their threat status. Although the global Wattled Crane population was pegged at 15,000 birds, there was general concern that there could have been some double-counting as it was suspected that this species moves widely throughout its range. A suggestion was made that satellite transmitters be fitted to some birds to determine whether this was the case.

Photo: M Muller



Fifteen years later, we are none the wiser about regional movements of Wattled Cranes. However, we are about to find out! Thanks to the generous sponsorship of Ngami Toyota, Ngamiland Adventure Safaris and CCAfrica, we have ordered six satellite transmitters which will be put on birds from the Makgadikgadi area, the Okavango Delta and Linyanti.



105g battery powered PTT



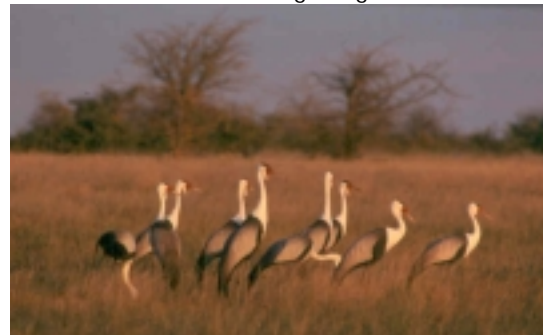
Areas where PTTs will be fitted to cranes

The rationale for targeting birds from these three areas is as follows:

- Cranes are found in the Makgadikgadi Pans area only during the summer months. As the area dries out they definitely move away - to where, we do not know;
- The Okavango Delta is the main Wattled Crane breeding area in Botswana - in biological terms, it is a 'source' area from which birds disperse. Again, we do not know to where the surplus birds move;
- The Linyanti Swamps appears to support a relict of a much larger population that has dwindled as the area has dried out over the past few decades. Are these birds sedentary, or do they move to the Kafue Flats or Okavango Delta (both areas are equidistant)?

Floater flock in the Makgadikgadi

Photo: P Hancock



What we do know from having ringed several breeding birds in the Okavango, is that these pairs are wedded to 'fixed abodes' and remain on small, prescribed areas year round. We need to fit the transmitters to young, unpaired birds that form up into 'floater' flocks that potentially move throughout south-central Africa in search of mates and greener pastures.

Fieldwork for this project will commence during November this year, when the first birds will be captured and transmitters

fitted. This is going to be an exciting project, as it will be the first time that Wattled Cranes are fitted with satellite transmitters. We don't know exactly what to expect in terms of the birds' movements - if we did, we wouldn't need to undertake the project! We may be in for some surprises, although we have covered every base in terms of preparations for the project. Updates will be featured in this newsletter, but for more frequent information on the cranes' whereabouts, check regularly on our website:

[www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw](http://www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw)

### ABOUT SATELLITE TRANSMITTERS

Satellite transmitter technology has advanced greatly in recent years and PTTs as they are referred to, are widely used to track bird movements. This is especially so with the advent of avian flu - many researchers are following the movements of migratory waterbirds to see if there is any correlation with outbreaks of the disease.

Satellite tracking is expensive, as each transmitter costs in the region of US\$3,900.00. In addition, each time the bird's position is downloaded via satellite and relayed to the researcher, additional expenses are incurred, and over time accumulates into a major cost. Then there is the cost of capturing each bird ... The type of information accruing from the transmitters, which give the precise GPS location of the bird, could not however be obtained by any other means.

When choosing the type of transmitters to be used and the download regime, costs need to be optimised against information required, and the battery life of the transmitter. The more frequently the bird's position is downloaded, the greater the costs and the shorter the battery life (or the larger the battery pack needs to be).



The solar-powered PTT depicted here appeared to be the solution to these trade-offs - it is light, as the battery only needs to be small due to the fact that it is constantly being recharged. It also has a five year lifespan, as opposed to two years for the other variety. However, cranes preen their long feathers over the solar panels, making this option unviable. Consequently we have settled for the 105g battery-powered PTT, which will give us one download daily for two years.



## BIRDLIFE AND THE CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY (CBD)

Birds are an important component of biodiversity, and the conservation efforts undertaken by the BirdLife Partnership are an important contribution to biodiversity conservation. BirdLife partners are also making a unique and important input to the Convention on Biological Diversity through their bird monitoring efforts.

BirdLife Botswana, along with other partners, is using the BirdLife Global Monitoring Framework for monitoring IBAs. This framework is based on the State-Pressure-Response model, which can be more easily understood as State (of the environment) -Threats (to the biodiversity) - Conservation Action (taken to address the threats).



Important Bird Areas like Lake Ngami are key biodiversity areas (Photo: K Oake)

Each of these parameters is scored annually to give an overall rating for the IBA, and the trend from one year to the next is a direct indication of whether the biodiversity status of the area is increasing, remaining the same or decreasing. Thus, through BirdLife Botswana's efforts, the Botswana Government has objective, semi-quantitative information that can be

used when reporting to the CBD on the status of biodiversity in the country.

The most recent Conference of Parties to the CBD was held in Germany from 19<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> May. The BirdLife Africa Partnership Secretariat organised a side-event at the Conference, to present some of the work done by BirdLife partners towards conserving biodiversity. Mooketsi Mfolwe from the Maun Office of BirdLife Botswana made a presentation on the work he has been doing with three communities associated with IBAs. This project has been reported on in previous issues of this newsletter, but in short, it is aimed at alleviating poverty in these communities, while at the same time conserving biodiversity - done rather ingeniously through promoting avi-tourism. This has the potential to generate income and give a real value to the birds and other biodiversity that leads to active conservation.



Mooketsi Mfolwe giving his presentation

Mooketsi's presentation was well received, and a modified version is available on our website for those interested [www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw](http://www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw) - check under NEWS.



## PHOTO OF THE MONTH

Denham's Bustard, one of Botswana's birds of conservation concern, has been seen on several occasions earlier this year at Nxai Pan. It is noticeably smaller than the Kori, lacks a crest and has a conspicuous rufous patch on the back of the neck, as shown below.



Photo: P Hancock

This bird is a Category B rarity and anyone seeing it should submit a record to the BirdLife Botswana Records Committee.

## LOOK OUT FOR TAGGED BOOTED EAGLES

Dear researchers

We have got to know that some of you have observed a booted eagle with an antennae protruding from its back. We have been tagging booted eagles in Spain for several years now in the region of Madrid, with either satellite or local range radio transmitters. The satellite transmitters are from Microwave Telemetry and have their antennae in such a configuration that it protrudes perpendicular to the back of the bird.

The radio frequency local range transmitters are either white or green and have their antennae more or less parallel to the back of the bird. Most important is that we have been also ringing some of the birds with metal and color rings, the latter in order to be able to identify the birds while on flight.

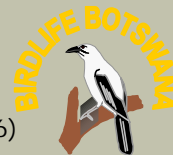
Regarding the birds (2) we tracked by satellite, they flew for wintering to Mauritania and Niger, respectively, and we observed them both back in Spain for the breeding season although the transmitters ceased emission.

In case you require or get further information about the birds, please, let us know.

Best Regards  
On behalf of FICAS  
Federico Cebollada

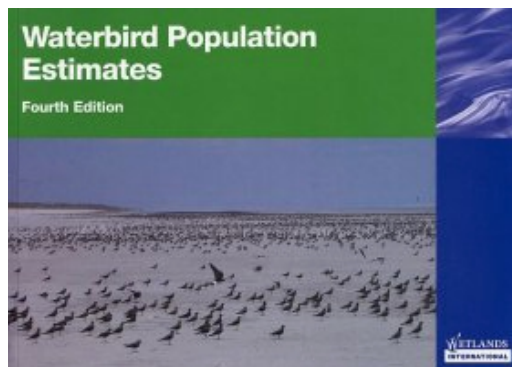


BirdLife Botswana acknowledges the support of the Office of the President and the Department of Wildlife and National Parks for our research and conservation work - conducted under cover of Research Permit EWT 8/36/411 (36)



## WATERBIRD POPULATION ESTIMATES

Most regular readers of this newsletter will know by now that one of the criteria for an area to qualify as an Important Bird Area is that it should support significant populations of congregatory waterbirds – specifically they should support numbers in excess of 0,5% of the global population of individual species. Many people may have wondered what the waterbird population estimates are, and how they are derived. If you are one of them, go to the Wetlands International website [www.wetlands.org](http://www.wetlands.org) and download (for free) in spreadsheet form, the fourth edition of WATERBIRD POPULATION ESTIMATES.



In addition to the spreadsheet which includes all the data published in tables in the book, some introductory notes are provided. This is quite a useful source of information, and you may be surprised at how small and fragile some of the waterbird populations are.

### 2007 IBA MONITORING REPORT

As the previous newsletter was being distributed, so too were copies of our IBA Monitoring Report for 2007. This report, sponsored by Ngami Toyota, has proved very popular, and is currently being reprinted – it contains detailed information on the status of the 'trigger'

bird species in three Important Bird Areas in northern Botswana, as well as a list of current threats and the conservation action being taken to address them. This is in accordance with the BirdLife global monitoring framework which provides an objective, semi-quantitative system for scoring the status of each IBA.



The reprinted copies will be available shortly, at a cost of P120.00 each (including postage) – please contact your nearest BirdLife Botswana office.

### THE MYSTERY OF THE MARABOUS

The Marabou Stork is a common bird in Botswana and sometimes aggregations of several thousand can be seen at specific localities (cf. 3,000 seen at Tale Pan in 2004). The strange thing about the bird is that there are very few breeding sites in Southern Africa – the heronries at Gadikwe and Gcobega are considered by Peter Steyn in his book 'Nesting Birds' to be the largest breeding sites in Southern Africa, yet less than 50 pairs nest here. There is another breeding site in Swaziland (30 pairs) but only



smaller sites in Zimbabwe and South Africa. Could these birds produce enough chicks to account for the total Southern African population – which amounts to thousands of individuals?



Marabou Stork and chick at Gcobega  
(Photo: H Bendsen)

Professor Ara Monadjem has been tagging Marabou Storks at the breeding site in Swaziland, and some of them have been resighted in the Tuli Block near Tuli Safari Lodge, by professional guide Meier Morija. Like the *Gyps* vultures, these birds travel vast distances, and it is quite likely that Southern Africa may be a 'sink' for this species, with many birds hatched in East and Central Africa making their way southwards to forage in Botswana. Marabou Storks are very opportunistic and capitalise on outbreaks of locusts or corn crickets, and large flocks of queleas, and may be quite nomadic.

It is well worthwhile keeping a lookout for wing-tagged Marabous – if you happen to see one, note the tag colour and number and, if possible, take a photograph.

**This information should be sent to your nearest BirdLife Botswana office.**



## WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY

BirdLife Botswana celebrated World Migratory Bird Day on the 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2008 at the Gaborone Game Reserve. The event was attended by children and teachers from ten Environmental Clubs in and around Gaborone, from both primary and secondary schools. The theme for the 2008 celebrations was Migratory Birds - Ambassadors for Biodiversity.

The objectives of the event were:

- to explain migratory bird species found in Botswana
- to raise awareness and highlight the need to conserve migratory birds and their habitat and
- to promote an interest, knowledge and awareness of birds in Botswana.

Ms Keddy Mooketsa, BirdLife Botswana project officer gave a brief history of World Migratory Bird Day. The WMBD was started in 2006 by the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) and is celebrated annually on the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> May by BirdLife International Partners. Initiation of this day was influenced by migratory birds receiving negative media coverage as a result of the false belief that they were the main cause for the spread of avian influenza around the world. It is a global awareness-raising campaign day, highlighting the need for the protection of migratory birds and their habitats.

Bird species migrate from Botswana to North Africa and beyond in autumn and make a return trip in spring. Species include Yellow-billed Kite (Segodi), European Bee-eater (Morokapula), Barn Swallow (Peolwane), and Abdim's Stork (Makololwane) to mention a few. BirdLife



Botswana hopes that, through this event, children will be aware of the epic movement of these birds and the hazards they face on the journey. These include the danger of colliding with power lines, hunting en-route, harsh climatic conditions and habitat destruction caused by human activities.



Teachers and pupils listening attentively to their guide (Photos: K Mooketsa)

Students were then taken for a bird walk in the Gaborone Game Reserve by two of the organization's bird watchers, Harold Hester (chairman) and Chris Brewster. They were given lessons on bird identification and introduced to different bird species. The event was closed by Harold Hester, who thanked students and teachers for having shown an interest in celebrating the World Migratory Bird Day and encouraged them to become BirdLife Botswana members so that they could benefit from environmental education programmes.



Closing of the event by Harold Hester

## SHORT-CLAWED LARK SURVEY

The Short-clawed Lark is endemic to Southern Africa, with two isolated populations:

- a large population in the arid savannas of south-eastern Botswana, extending into the North-West and northern Cape provinces of South Africa,
- a smaller eastern population largely restricted to the Polokwane plateau, Limpopo province in South Africa.

There are an estimated 10,000+ pairs in south-eastern Botswana and ca 500-5000 birds in South Africa. In 1992 Marc Herremans (then Ornithologist with the Department of Wildlife and National Parks) did a survey of the population in south-eastern Botswana and suggested a favourable conservation status for the species. Since then there has been no follow-up monitoring and so it is unknown whether or not their numbers have changed. However, Derek Engelbrecht and co-workers observed a dramatic reduction in their numbers in neighbouring South Africa and have proposed that the species be upgraded in status from Least Concern to Near Threatened, as defined by the IUCN Red Listing criteria..

In light of the above, Keddy Mooketsa and Chris Brewster have repeated Herremans' survey, using the same methodology (transects) and visiting the same areas, to determine the current population estimate in Botswana and whether the range of the species has contracted or expanded.

Data analysis and write-up of the work are still underway, but preliminary conclusions are that while the area of



suitable habitat has decreased, the number of pairs has actually increased from 1992-1993 to 2007-2008. More details of the survey results will be provided in a future edition of this newsletter.

### **BOTSWANA TICKBIRD - WORLDBIRDS IN BOTSWANA**

Support our web-based bird monitoring system.

**Enter your bird checklist - [www.worldbirds.org/Botswana](http://www.worldbirds.org/Botswana)**

### **STOP PRESS**

The BirdLife Botswana office in Maun has established a Business Unit to secure its financial base. Ms Lilian Costa, a project development consultant, has been assigned the task of raising funds from international donors and by developing and selling quality branded products, as well as improving the financial control and administrative procedures for the organisation. Mr Thato Yanaro is currently an Administrative Assistant and Business Unit Trainee working together with Lilian - he has a diverse background and the potential to become a valuable asset to the BirdLife Botswana Maun Branch.

### **CONTACT ADDRESSES**

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Tel: 3190540  
Fax: 3190540  
Physical address:

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Kgale Siding  
Plot 1069 KO  
(the old TEBA complex near St Joseph's College)

BirdLife Botswana  
PO Box 20463  
Maun

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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

### OFFICIAL USE

Card issued? \_\_\_\_\_

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	Denham's Bustard	African Skimmer	Southern Ground Hornbill	Rosy-throated Longclaw
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](mailto:birdlifemaun@botsnet.bw)

