

BirdLife Botswana  
**Bird Conservation Newsletter**

No. 2

2004

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

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## EDITORIAL

BirdLife Botswana is rapidly transforming itself from a social bird-watching club to a scientifically-based, professional bird conservation agency, and the advent of this newsletter is in keeping with that trend. The newsletter picks up on the interest generated by a modest, four-page BirdLife Botswana handout entitled "BOTSWANA BIRDS CONSERVATION" that was sent out three years ago; as a result of this, we now have a substantial and growing network of field birders who contribute regular information to BirdLife Botswana's bird database, and who play a role in monitoring and conserving birds in their areas.

The primary purpose of this newsletter therefore, is to provide feedback to people in the network; the subscription fee is in the hard currency of information! Please feel free to pass your copy on to someone else who you know would like to play an active role in bird monitoring and conservation.



### About BirdLife Botswana (BLB) and BirdLife International (BLI)

BirdLife International has established an effective working framework, comprising four 'themes' or programmes, for its member organisations:

- Species Working Groups. These are groups of people who take responsibility for conserving individual bird species, usually those that are threatened (for example, the BirdLife Botswana Crane Working Group).
- Sites. The Important Bird Area (IBA) programme is concerned with the identification and protection of sites of importance for bird conservation.
- Habitats. This programme focuses on specific habitats such as wetlands, forests *etc.*
- People. BirdLife partners are essentially membership organisations, with the emphasis on the participation of citizens of the country (Botswana in our case) in birding activities.

This is the model that members of the BirdLife family subscribe to, and depending on their degree of conformity, they fit into one of three categories – Affiliate, Partner Designate, or Full Partner.

BirdLife Botswana is still an Affiliate of BirdLife International, and has a long way to go in implementing the four programmes described above, before it will become a Full Partner.

## WEB SITE AND EMAIL ADDRESS

Since the last newsletter, a major step forward for BirdLife Botswana was the development of the website.

- ◇ The website address is: [www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw](http://www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw)
- ◇ The email address is: [blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw](mailto:blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw)

The website has enabled BirdLife Botswana to fully demonstrate to members and other interested parties the extent of the work carried out by the volunteer committee and other members. It is a great resource and is designed to provide as much information as possible for anyone who visits the site. It also promotes increased involvement of members, particularly in bird conservation efforts. Please investigate the site and look for ways in which you can contribute to data collection. BirdLife Botswana has tried to make the procedures as straight forward as possible and to provide all the necessary information.

## BLB EMPLOYS PERMANENT STAFF

In the last eighteen months, BirdLife Botswana has recruited two local ornithologists to take the reins of the society and to help BLB continue in its ambition to develop a strong local membership base.



Kabelo Senyatso has been recruited to undertake an MSc in Conservation Biology at the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute at the University of Cape Town. BirdLife Botswana has sponsored his studies and has supported him along the way. He is due to complete his studies in early 2004 and will then return to Gaborone to take up his post as a full time co-ordinator for BirdLife Botswana. Kabelo will be based in the new BLB office in the Malopo Shopping Centre and is sponsored by Afritourism. You can read more about his research below - it was undertaken as part of his MSc programme.

Segowa Motsumi was recruited by BirdLife Botswana to head the BLB Crane Working Group which is based in Maun. His office is situated at Mulbridge and is kindly sponsored by Mark Muller and Brian Bridges. To read more about the BLB Crane Working Group, please see the website and the article below.

## ONGOING RESEARCH

There are several projects that BirdLife Botswana undertakes for which we always need volunteers, or which can be carried out by anyone with an interest in birds. These are outlined below and more information is available on the website.

- **Wetlands International African Waterbird Census**

In Botswana, waterbird counts are carried out at various sewage ponds, dams, pans and other waterbodies in January and July as part of Wetland International's African Waterbird Census. The counts in Botswana help Wetlands International estimate the size of the population of each species of waterbird. Another important aim of the co-ordinated counts is to identify those wetlands of particular importance for any species or those wetlands that regularly hold large numbers of a diversity of species. Please contact BLB ([blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw](mailto:blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw)) if you are interested in taking part in a count or volunteering for a particular site near you that you would like to count regularly.

**January, 2004 counts now underway - contact BirdLife Botswana to participate**

- **Birds of concern**

There are approximately 14 IUCN Red Data bird species in Botswana (see Babbler Vol. 37). All of these species are of conservation interest in Botswana. There are also many 'birds of concern' in Botswana for which there is insufficient data available on their populations to determine their current population status. In order to generate



more data, the following 13 species have been selected for collection of records and can usually be identified by most casual observers. All sight records are needed by BirdLife Botswana to determine the current status of these species and to note any change in abundance or distribution.

The information needed is:

- ✓ Species name
  - ✓ Date/time of observation
  - ✓ Location of sighting (GPS co-ordinates preferable)
  - ✓ Number of individuals
- And if possible:
- ✓ Age (juvenile, immature, adult)
  - ✓ Sex

Birds of concern	
Slaty Egret	Grey Crowned Crane
White-backed Night Heron	Pel's Fishing Owl
White-headed Vulture	Kori Bustard
Lappet-faced Vulture	Southern Ground Hornbill
Long-crested Eagle	African Skimmer
Martial Eagle	Rosy-throated Longclaw
Wattled Crane	

Sight records of other species are also of interest, especially breeding record information.

### Nest records

In order to gain a better understanding of the breeding behaviour of birds in Botswana, BLB has for many years been collecting nest records. Data are compiled and published in the *Babbler*. Visit the website to download a nest record sheet that can be completed and posted or emailed to BLB.

### PUBLICATIONS

The **Babbler** is an international journal that has been published by BLB biannually since 1980. It reports on scientific data and information collected on birds in Botswana. The **Familiar Chat** is the quarterly newsletter of BirdLife Botswana. It contains articles and interesting features by BLB members as well as the calendar for the next quarter and committee member details. The **Bird Conservation Newsletter** is published at intervals by BLB and contains information of conservation interest only and is distributed to members and relevant organisations and companies.



## BLB CRANE WORKING GROUP UPDATE



During August, 2003, the third annual aerial survey of Wattled Cranes in the Okavango Delta was carried out by the Crane Working Group, with the support of the Department of Wildlife and National Parks. This survey was funded by the **African Wildlife Foundation**, whose financial assistance is gratefully acknowledged. The complete aerial survey report can be downloaded as a pdf file from the BirdLife Botswana website ([www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw](http://www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw)) and from the International Crane Foundation website ([www.savingcranes.org](http://www.savingcranes.org)).

After three years of active research into the population dynamics of Wattled Cranes, we now have a better understanding of issues that affect their conservation. Some interesting facts are as follows:

- The global population of Wattled Cranes is between 7,000 and 8,000 birds – only half of what Urban estimated in 1993
- The Okavango Delta has the largest single population remaining – approximately 1,400 in total
- The Okavango Wattled Crane population appears to be stable, and is concentrated along the Jao/Boro floodplain, most of which is outside the protection of Moremi Game Reserve
- The breeding success is low, but this appears to be normal since the Wattled Crane is a long-lived species and a pair only needs to produce two chicks to replace themselves during their lifetime, for the population to remain stable
- The most significant threats to Wattled Cranes in the Okavango are likely to be those that alter the hydrology and natural functioning of the Delta, as these can have a widespread negative impact on the whole population

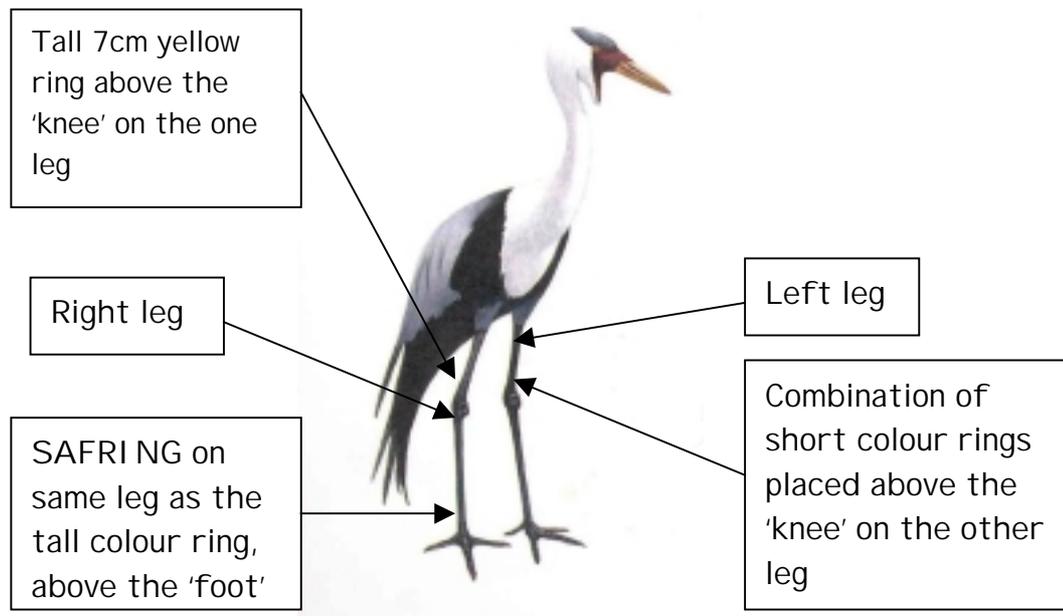
Research on Wattled Cranes will still continue, but the emphasis will shift more to conservation action in the future. The Crane Working Group has developed a Wattled Crane Action Plan to guide its activities over the next five years (read more about this in the next issue of the newsletter).

## TRACKING WATTLED CRANES

During November, members of the Department of Wildlife and National Parks, together with the BLB Crane Working Group, caught and ringed three adult Wattled Cranes in the Okavango. This was part of a pilot project to determine whether Wattled Cranes could be caught in this area, as it is our intention to put satellite transmitters on some cranes in the near future to track their movements throughout the region. First however, we had to be certain that we could catch the birds!



The cranes were caught with the assistance of Mark Muller and Brian Bridges, who made available their microlight, catching nets, vehicles and other items of equipment for the exercise. We had decided earlier that we should get maximum benefit from the exercise, apart from just catching the birds and releasing them! Consequently Kevin McCann from the South African Crane Working Group was also on hand to assist us to take blood samples for genetic analysis, and to be used in sexing the birds. He also provided the rings – a broad yellow ring above the ‘knee’ of each bird signifies that the bird was ringed in the Okavango, while another narrow coloured ring on the other leg helps with field identification of the individual. A conventional aluminium SAFRING was placed lower down the leg, above the ‘foot’ (see illustration). **People working anywhere in the Delta are encouraged to keep a lookout for these birds, and to report any sightings** (date, ring colours/combinations and GPS coordinates in UTM and Cape datum) to Sekgowa Motsumi (telephone 6865618 or e-mail [cranegroup@dynabyte.bw](mailto:cranegroup@dynabyte.bw)) or Kenosi Nkape (telephone 6860835 or e-mail [ken@mighty.co.za](mailto:ken@mighty.co.za)).



The exercise has already yielded valuable information:

- Cranes **can** be caught; this makes the satellite tracking project a feasibility
- Crane chicks are easily seen from the microlight – by using a microlight later in the year, we will be able to record adult:chick ratios, a good measure of breeding success
- One crane was seen on a nest with two eggs on 23/11/03 – this is the latest breeding record for the season. Most pairs are incubating eggs during August, and have well-developed chicks by November



- The breeding pairs are very sedentary on their territories, and all ringed birds were resighted at the capture site within a day or two. This confirms that Wattled Crane pairs, like other crane species, have specific 'addresses' and it will be interesting to see whether the pairs return to the same nesting area year after year. It will be a simple matter to check this out using the microlight, as the coloured rings are clearly visible from the air.

The Crane Working Group is now seeking funding for a regional satellite tracking project – the aim is to put transmitters on several cranes in the major wetlands of south-central Africa in order to determine to what extent the Wattled Cranes move throughout the region.

This pilot crane capture project was financed by Mark Muller and Brian Bridges who also took care of the logistics. The Crane Working Group would like to acknowledge their commitment and assistance. This epitomises the spirit of the Working Group – caring individuals taking responsibility for conserving bird species.

## TOWARDS A RED DATA BOOK FOR BOTSWANA BIRDS

Some years ago, Stephanie Tyler and Wendy Borello initiated the process of developing a Red Data Book for Botswana birds. This project has been continued by Kabelo Senyatso, a Motswana student studying at the Percy FitzPatrick Institute at the University of Cape Town, and is now taking shape.

Kabelo has been consulting with people to generate a comprehensive list of species for potential inclusion, and this culminated in a workshop in Gaborone in October. A broad spectrum of people was represented at the workshop, from relevant government departments, NGOs and the private sector, and BirdLife Botswana is grateful for their active participation. A tentative Red Data List was produced, and the species that were highlighted as possible candidates appear overleaf. Those appearing in **bold** type are already listed in "Threatened Birds of the World".

<b>Slaty Egret</b>	Rock Pratincole	Short-clawed Lark
<b>Cape Vulture</b>	African Finfoot	Red-backed Shrike
<b>Wattled Crane</b>	Bateleur	Olive-tree Warbler
<b>Lesser Flamingo</b>	Maccoa Duck	<b>Denham's Bustard</b>
Greater Flamingo	Swamp Nightjar	Rosy-throated Longclaw
Kori Bustard	Black-necked Grebe	White-backed Night Heron
<b>African Skimmer</b>	Black Stork	Eurasian Bittern
Southern Ground Hornbill	White-backed Duck	Hooded Vulture
Lesser Kestrel	Montagu's Harrier	White-headed Vulture



<b>Corn Crake</b> <b>Pallid Harrier</b> <b>Black-winged Pratincole</b> Great Snipe Great Crested Grebe Great White Pelican Pink-backed Pelican Grey Crowned Crane	African Marsh-harrier Martial Eagle Northern Black Korhaan Yellow-throated Sandgrouse Namaqua Sandgrouse Double-banded Sandgrouse Burchell's Sandgrouse Yellow-bellied Greenbul	<b>Lappet-faced Vulture</b> Western Banded Snake-eagle Long-crested Eagle Red-chested Flufftail Three-banded Courser Black Coucal Pel's Fishing-owl
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One of the features of the list is that there are many species about which people were concerned, but a distinct lack of concrete data on which to base an objective assessment of their status. This highlights the role that interested birdwatchers can play – even small-scale studies or monitoring can improve our information base, provided they are scientifically sound. This is an ideal opportunity for professional guides, game scouts and others working in the field to make a valuable contribution. In addition, a Red Data List is not meant to be cast in stone – it is a dynamic document which can and should be added to (or better still, subtracted from!) in the light of available knowledge. The report can be obtained from Kabelo Senyatso, and any communication on the Red Data List should be directed to him at [blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw](mailto:blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw).

**This workshop was funded by:**


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And  
Department of Biological Sciences, University of Botswana.



## SOUTHERN GROUND HORNBILL STUDIES



*The Southern Ground Hornbill is a Red Data species in South Africa where its numbers and range have shrunk to the extent that it is now virtually extinct outside of protected areas. Nevertheless, many people believe that large populations of this unique species exist elsewhere in the region, and that, for this reason, there is no cause for undue concern. But do we really know much about the status of the Southern Ground Hornbill in Botswana?*

As a contribution towards rectifying this situation, Kevin Torrens started collecting information on the species in Maun, where it is seemingly abundant. This sparked the involvement of Gametrackers guides Onx Manga and Joe Bayei in the study – they are based at Khwai on the northern border of Moremi, where Southern Ground Hornbills



live under natural conditions. Thus was born the idea of making a comparison between Ground Hornbills in the 'semi-urban' area of Maun with those living in protected areas of Botswana, and seeing how these related to the populations in South Africa.

This project benefited from the assistance of many organisations and people:

- RSPB for donating three Garmin GPSs for the project
- Okavango Research Centre, especially Thoralf Meyer and Cornelis vanderPost, for assistance with setting up the Geographical Information System for analysing the Southern Ground Hornbill data
- All those people who contributed Southern Ground Hornbill data, but especially Kevin Torrens, Onx Manga, Joe Bayei, Hannelore Bendsen, Brian Rode, Peter Moutloatse, Stephanie Tyler, and colleagues from the Botswana Wild Dog Project, and Okavango Helicopters.

Some interesting findings of the project to date are as follows:

- The Ground Hornbills in Maun and Khwai have a high breeding success at present, with every group having juvenile and immature birds. This is in stark contrast to the findings of Alan Kemp's baseline study conducted in the Kruger National Park, where on average groups raised only one chick to maturity every nine or ten years
- The home ranges of Ground Hornbills in Maun and Khwai are all less than 10 square kilometres. This is much less than the home ranges of approximately 100 square kilometres described for Ground Hornbills in Kruger Park by Kemp.

Thus it appears that Southern Ground Hornbills in the Okavango Delta are faring much better than those in South Africa.

It is our intention to broaden the scope of this project, by accumulating and analysing observations of known groups of Southern Ground Hornbills from throughout Botswana. If you have a group in your area, please send in regular observations noting date, group composition and GPS co-ordinates (UTM and Cape datum). These should be sent to Pete Hancock ([pete@info.bw](mailto:pete@info.bw)).

### **Interesting facts about Southern Ground Hornbills**

- The Southern Ground Hornbill is the largest of the 58 hornbill species found worldwide, and nests in holes like other hornbills (although it does not seal the nest entrance like its relatives).
- The adult males and females can be distinguished by the presence of a variable amount of blue on the throat-pouch of the female, just below the base of the



beak. The first-year juvenile bird has a yellowish/khaki throat-pouch, and this turns through orange to red over the next four years as the bird matures.

- Ground Hornbill groups apparently comprise the dominant male and female and the juveniles/immatures from the previous year's breeding, as well as other (apparently related) mature males. Rather unusually, it is believed that the female birds are expelled from the group on reaching maturity – it is not clear how she finds a mate and establishes a new territory.
- Southern Ground Hornbills are co-operative breeders, with all members of the group assisting the dominant pair to raise their chick.
- Southern Ground Hornbills lay two eggs early in summer (apparently triggered by the onset of the rains) but only one chick is raised annually. The first-hatched chick is already three times the size of its sibling by the time it hatches, and it is believed that the latter soon starves to death in the face of competition for food. More research is required on this aspect.

### **The South African Southern Ground Hornbill Project**

There is a very interesting Southern Ground Hornbill research and conservation project ongoing in South Africa at present. All aspects of the birds' breeding biology are being investigated with the aim of increasing natural productivity in the wild. Complementary to this, groups are being re-established (by raising the second-hatched chicks) in protected areas where the birds formerly occurred. It is well-worth visiting their excellent website [www.groundhornbill.org.za](http://www.groundhornbill.org.za) for further information.

## **IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS OF BOTSWANA**

BirdLife International has developed a set of objective criteria for the identification of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) worldwide. The criteria are as follows:

An area will qualify as an IBA if –

- ⇒ it holds a significant number of globally or nationally threatened species
- ⇒ it holds a significant number of restricted-range or biome-restricted species
- ⇒ it holds on a regular basis more than 1% or 0,5% of the global or biogeographic population of a congregatory waterbird species.



Based on these criteria, Botswana has 12 IBAs, as listed below:

Site #	Name	Site #	Name
B001	Chobe National Park	B007	Mannyelanong Hill
B002	Linyaanti Swamps/Chobe River	B008	Tswapong Hills
B003	Okavango Delta	B009	Bokaa Dam
B004	Lake Ngami	B010	Phakalane Sewage Lagoons
B005	Makgadikgadi Pans	B011	Southeast Botswana
B006	Central Kalahari	B012	Gemsbok National Park

This list of IBAs was published with full descriptions of each site and reasons why it was included as an IBA, as a chapter 'Important Bird Areas of Botswana' by Stephanie Tyler and Dave Bishop, in 'The Important Bird Areas of Southern Africa' edited by Keith Barnes and published by BirdLife South Africa.

Of course, identification of the IBAs is only the first step - Site Support Groups (SSGs) need to be established to monitor these areas and lobby for their protection, and BirdLife Botswana is in the process of starting this.

This newsletter will initially appear twice annually. If you would like to contribute an article on your field observations or bird conservation project, please send it to [pete@info.bw](mailto:pete@info.bw)

## CONTACT ADDRESSES

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BirdLife Botswana Crane Working Group  
PO Box 1529  
Maun  
[cranegroup@dynabyte.bw](mailto:cranegroup@dynabyte.bw)



## Membership Details

Membership is due in *January* of each year. Please make sure you *pay your membership on time*.

### Rates

Resident - entitles you to both Babbler issues and the quarterly Familiar Chat (per family): P100.00

Resident - reduced - Familiar Chat (per individual): P25.00

Corporate - (4 families): P1000

Professional - Rangers, guides and students (Babbler and Familiar chat): P60.00

Life - P2000

Schools/Clubs - nil

SADC Region - P120

Overseas (and outside SADC) - P160

The following details are required:

I /We Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms

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wish to become members of BirdLife Botswana

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Home/Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Work phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Skills to offer (book keeping, product sales *etc.*): \_\_\_\_\_

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: \_\_\_\_\_

Year of first joining: \_\_\_\_\_

Payment by cheque (payable to 'BirdLife Botswana') or cash in Pula, US\$ or GB£ and please return this form with your subscription to the address given above

OFFICIAL USE

Card \_\_\_\_\_ Data base \_\_\_\_\_

