

# BIRDS AND PEOPLE

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BirdLife Botswana's Bird Conservation Newsletter



## IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial

Poison!

AfWC – moving to the next level

Keeping track of globally threatened birds

AEWA award

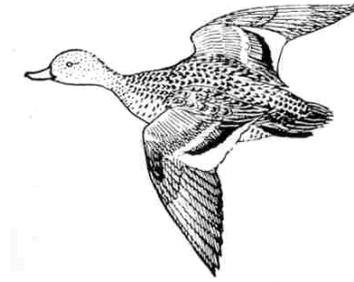
About BirdLife's IBA programme

Kestrel counting day

AEWA-AFRING training course

New bird book

Photo of the month



## EDITORIAL

In recent months, there have been two major vulture poisoning incidents in northern Botswana. During August, 50 vultures were killed in one incident in the Hainaveld, and this was followed during October by a further 50 in the Xudum concession in the Okavango Delta. The tragedy of these senseless killings is that the vultures were killed for nothing – the prime target of the poisoning was 'problem' predators, and the vultures were innocent victims of the thoughtless method adopted by the perpetrators.

These two incidents are undoubtedly just the tip of the iceberg – how many other similar incidents have taken place without being brought to BirdLife Botswana's attention? From our work, illegal poisoning of vultures is emerging as the most serious threat to this globally threatened group of birds – at this rate, the rarer species may soon disappear. Poison is freely available in hardware shops throughout the country and it is easy to poison a carcass and disappear from the scene before being detected.

What can be done to address this problem? Should BirdLife Botswana embark on an education and awareness campaign, or should we be lobbying for the banning of domestic poisons? This is not a new problem, although it is now reaching serious proportions in Botswana, and fellow conservationists must have made some inroads into addressing this insidious issue – if so, we'd like to hear from you.

Pete Hancock



## POISON!

A poisoned giraffe carcass in the Xudum concession killed over 50 vultures, mostly White-backed, during October this year. Is this just another statistic, or is it a despicable deed committed by someone with no ethics or respect for life?



Photos: B Horley

Even more tragic, amidst all the White-backed Vulture feathers, was the carcass of a Lappet-faced Vulture bearing a yellow wing tag numbered E052. This tag was affixed to the bird's wing by Wilferd Versfeld, our colleague in the Ministry of Environment and Tourism in Namibia, during September 2007, in the Etosha National Park. This vulture has travelled over 720 kilometres from its natal area only to be poisoned on the fringes of the Okavango Delta. Several hundred Lappet-faced Vultures have been wing tagged in Namibia over the past few years, but none have ever been seen in Botswana; the first one recorded here is E052, dead....

The poisoned vultures were discovered by Clinton Phillips and Brett Horley from the Okavango Guiding School while conducting field training in NG 30. We thank them for bringing this incident to our attention, and encourage other people to do likewise should they have any information on the poisoning of birds in Botswana. We are of the view that this poisoning incident and the one that took place in the Hainaveld earlier this year constitute a debilitating setback to the vultures of Botswana and that action needs to be taken to address the problem of poisoning before our vulture populations are diminished further. There is little point in waiting for more birds to be poisoned and start disappearing before our eyes. Early in the New Year, we will be developing and implementing a strategy to eliminate this problem.

## AfWC - MOVING TO THE NEXT LEVEL

The African Waterbird Counts have been running for a few decades now, and many readers of this newsletter have made a substantial contribution to our understanding of waterbird numbers across the continent by religiously counting waterbirds at selected sites throughout Botswana. These data are sent to Wetlands International where they are compiled together with information on waterbird numbers from other countries. The emphasis of these counts is on recording the maximum number of waterbirds in each country, and one of the valuable outputs has been the production of the report "Waterbird Population Estimates" (now in its 4<sup>th</sup> edition) which gives best estimates for the populations of the various species of waterbirds.

These counts are also useful within country as a tool for monitoring trends in the numbers of select waterbird species, or waterbirds in certain areas. In order to improve their usefulness in this regard, counters should please take note of, and apply, the simple guidelines below as from the upcoming January 2009 counts:

**Standardise your count by having a fixed route and time of day**

Please send a map showing the standard route you follow to the BirdLife Botswana office in Maun, for incorporation in the Monitoring Protocol handbook which documents all our monitoring activities. You can most easily do this if you have a GPS – save your track as a MapSource file and e-mail it (MapSource software comes with your Garmin and enables you to download information from your GPS to your computer). If you don't have a GPS, you can go into Google Earth (already available through Botswana Tickbird if you are a user, or free off the internet) and trace your precise route on the satellite image and send that. Finally, if this is too difficult or time consuming, contact the Maun office for assistance.

The time of day you conduct your count can significantly influence your results – an early morning count will differ from one conducted at midday or in the afternoon. Most people are probably already doing their counts starting early in the morning – please indicate your start and end time on the form and try to stick as closely as possible to it in the future.



**For long-term monitoring, a long-term commitment is needed.**

The best monitoring datasets are those that have been conducted uninterrupted for the longest time period. Please try to commit yourself to a few manageable sites for a long period rather than many for a short while. If you are unable to continue with any of your sites, please let us know in advance so that we can try to arrange for someone else to take over.

With a bit of extra effort to systematise the waterbird counts, we will double the usefulness of the data – please do your best to assist in this regard. And – don't forget – enjoy the counts! We appreciate your contribution and want you to know that the data you have been collecting are useful and being used.

### **KEEPING TRACK OF GLOBALLY THREATENED BIRDS**

#### **First Lappet-faced Vultures tagged in Botswana**

A BirdLife Botswana team spent several days during early November marking Lappet-faced Vulture nestlings with wing tags in order to be able to follow their dispersal and survival after fledging. This is the first time Lappet-faced Vultures have been marked in Botswana, and in future years the number of tagged birds will be increased. The team was led by Nicky Bousfield, a qualified bird ringer with many years of experience handling birds, and she was ably assisted by O Samuel, T Chimbunde and S Tjitemisa. This work was conducted under Research Permit EWT 8/36/411 (36) and the Department of Wildlife and National Parks is thanked for their support and assistance.

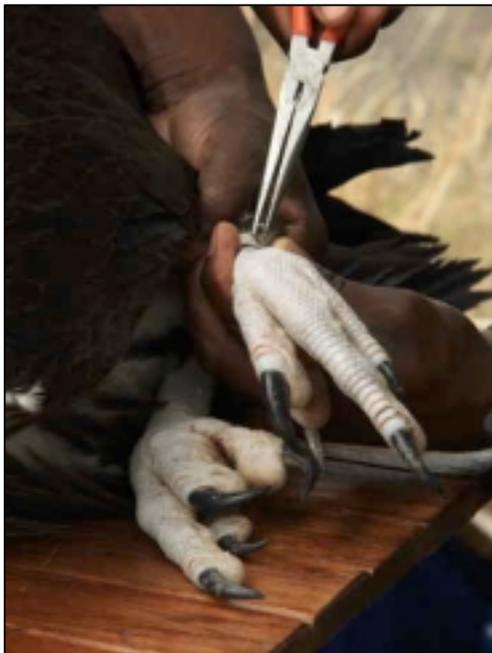


Step 1. Retrieving a chick from the nest



### Step 2. Measuring and weighing

Photos: P Hancock



### Step 3. Fitting aluminium ring and patagial (wing) tag

Five chicks were tagged, the first in the Matsiloje area of eastern Botswana, and the remaining four in the Makgadikgadi. The tags, affixed to the patagia on both wings, are yellow and numbered from D001 to D005. Chicks were returned to their nests after being marked, but would have fledged by now. The whole operation went off very smoothly, and a lot was learnt for future tagging exercises.

Now the interesting part starts! These birds could turn up anywhere in Southern Africa! Anyone sighting a wing tagged Lappet-faced Vulture should please record the date, tag number and precise locality of the bird *i.e.* GPS co-ords. This information should then be sent to Pete Hancock at the BirdLife Botswana office in Maun (PO Box 1529, Maun, e-mail: [birdlifemaun@botsnet.bw](mailto:birdlifemaun@botsnet.bw)). Your help will be greatly appreciated.

### **First Kori Bustards tagged and fitted with satellite transmitters in Botswana**

As part of a PhD project on the Ecology and Conservation of the Kori Bustard in Botswana, Kabelo Senyatso recently fitted four adult Koris with satellite transmitters and wing tagged another four in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. These individually marked birds will help elucidate Kori Bustard movements, dispersal and habitat use – important components of the project.

It is one thing to plan a satellite tracking project, but quite another to execute it, especially when it is the first time such an activity has been undertaken in the country. For example, how do you catch a Kori Bustard – the heaviest flying bird in the world – so that you can fit the transmitter?

Fortunately Tim and Laurel Osborne, Kori researchers from Namibia, kindly agreed to share their expertise. They have caught over 100 Koris by driving them into carefully set nets, and have fitted a significant number with radio transmitters. Together with Kabelo Senyatso, they formed the core of the capture team, and were assisted by a local BirdLife Botswana contingent.



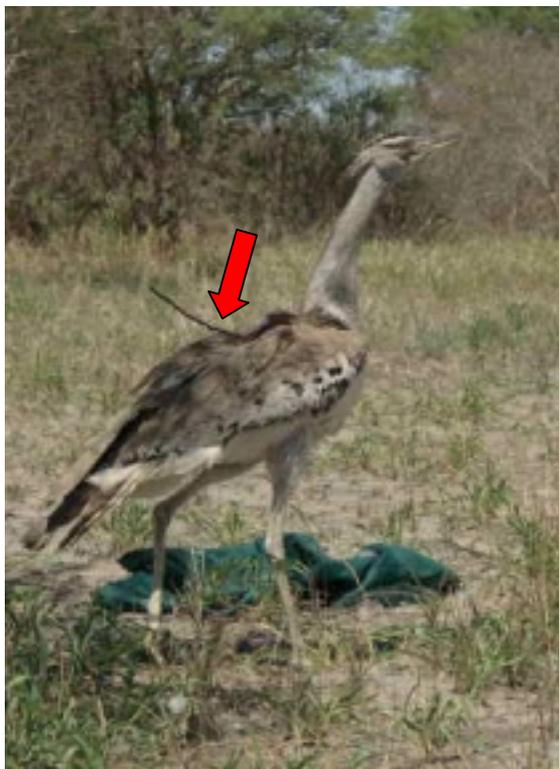
[Driving two Kori Bustards towards pre-set nets](#)

Once the bird had been caught, the team had to work quietly and quickly to take the necessary measurements and fit the transmitter and tag, since Kori

Bustards are quite susceptible to capture myopathy (stress). The bird was then immediately released (see photos below)



The Kori Bustards are all fitted with yellow patagial tags on the left wing, and the numbers range from D006 to D013. These birds were all caught in the greater Deception Valley area, but are likely to move to other areas too, so resightings noting date, wing tag number and precise GPS co-ordinates will be greatly appreciated, especially from professional guides conducting mobile safaris in the area. Satellite transmitters were deployed on four of the eight birds - they are small and rather inconspicuous, and only the short antenna protrudes beyond the feathers (see arrow below).



The birds that have been fitted with satellite transmitters will of course provide a wealth of data, even if they are not regularly seen. The transmitters are programmed to give each bird's precise location once a day (they are GPS transmitters, accurate to within 15 metres), and this information is obtained from the comfort of one's office, via e-mail!

We look forward to the results of this project, and expect to uncover a great deal of interesting information about this charismatic icon of the Kalahari grasslands and shrubland. Special thanks to **Debswana** and **Botswana Ash** for sponsoring these first four units.

Contact Kabelo Senyatso for further details: [blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw](mailto:blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw)



## 2008 AEWA AWARD

At the recent African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement meeting in Madagascar, Mark Anderson of BirdLife South Africa was recognised for his major contribution to the conservation of the globally threatened Lesser Flamingo through establishing the fourth breeding colony in Africa, at Kamfers Dam near Kimberly in South Africa (see Birds and People newsletter #17 for an account of this ground-breaking project). This is thoroughly deserved, particularly in the light of the difficult circumstances in which he has been working, and BirdLife Botswana joins with other conservationists in applauding Mark for the great work he has done – congratulations!

## ABOUT BIRDLIFE'S IMPORTANT BIRD AREA PROGRAMME

- The function of the Important Bird Area Programme is to identify, protect and manage a network of sites that are important for the long-term conservation of the world's birds.
- The IBA Programme is global in scale and more than 10,000 IBAs have already been identified worldwide using standard internationally recognised criteria for selection
- IBAs are selected because they hold bird species that are threatened with extinction, have highly restricted distributions, or are characteristic of particular biomes. Sites holding exceptionally large numbers of congregatory birds also qualify.
- This network may be considered as a minimum set of sites critical for the long-term viability of wild bird populations, across the range of those bird species for which a sites-based approach is appropriate.
- The programme aims to guide the implementation of national policies and strategies which support conservation and sustainable development. This includes advocating the links between biodiversity conservation and people's livelihoods, and providing support to communities for sustainable environmental management.

## KESTREL COUNTING DAY

Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> January will be Kestrel Counting Day in Southern Africa. If you know of any roosts used by Lesser Kestrels, Red-footed Falcons and/or Amur Falcons, please contact Pete Hancock (address at end of newsletter) to get details about the count. Botswana data will contribute directly to the Migrating Kestrel Project run by Anthony van Zyl of the Endangered Wildlife Trust, and will form part of the Southern African monitoring programme for Lesser Kestrels in particular.



Lesser Kestrel



Photo: W Tarboton

Red-footed Falcon



Photo: Unknown

Amur Falcon



Photo: W Tarboton

The Red-footed and Amur falcons are very similar, as shown above (males illustrated); the females of all three species are also alike in appearance, although they differ from the males. Care needs to be taken to identify the birds correctly. (There is an interesting article on Lesser Kestrels in the November issue of *Africa: Birds and Birding* for readers who need more information. Also, check [www.kestreling.com](http://www.kestreling.com) - the Migrating Kestrel Project website).

### DID YOU KNOW?

There are 587 bird species on the official Botswana birdlist.

### AEWA-AFRING TRAINING COURSE

*Edwin Olatotse from Tachila Nature Reserve and Verukua Tjitemisa from Bosele Lake Ngami Trust attended the 4<sup>th</sup> African Waterbird Ringing Course which was held in Zambia from the 26<sup>th</sup> October to the 7<sup>th</sup> of November 2008. We are grateful to the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) for funding the training, and to AFRING and especially Doug Harebottle for including participants from Botswana on the course. Below is Edwin's account of the experience (Photos by Edwin Olatotse).*

On arrival in Zambia, we travelled to Fringilla Lodge where we stayed for the first week learning the theoretical and practical aspects of waterbird ringing. We then proceeded to Blue Lagoon National Park where we spent the following six days in the field doing wader and duck ringing. It was a rewarding occasion, sharing skills and experience with different people from all parts of Africa and beyond. The facilitators of the programme included Dr Magdalena Remisiewick

(Poland), Doug Harebottle (South Africa), Lizanne Roxburgh (Zambia), Chris Wood (Zambia) and Yahkat Barshem (Nigeria).

The first four days were spent on the theoretical aspects of bird ringing - this was done to prepare us for the fieldwork. Since we were trainees, it was imperative to know all the requirements for bird ringers before starting ringing.



#### Theoretical lectures by Doug Harebottle

During the theory we were taught the methods used for capturing birds, namely mist nets, walk-in-traps, cannon nets, zap nets, Bal-chatri, clap traps, torch trapping and nestling ringing. We concentrated on using two methods, namely mist nets and walk-in-traps. Mist nets are nets which differ in length, height, mesh size and strand thickness. They are deployed vertically to interrupt the flight of birds, while walk-in-traps are mainly used to catch ground feeding birds.



#### Practical demonstration by Magda Remisiewick on setting nets and traps

The instructors first demonstrated step-by-step how to set the nets in preparation to catch a bird, and then it was our chance to show what we had learned.

Before one can extract a bird out of the net, he/she must critically assess the situation first. We were taught not to rush and pull birds out of the net - careful assessment is critical as it helps you figure out how best you can remove the bird from the net without causing harm or stressing it. Once a bird has been caught in the net, it is essential to determine from which side it entered the net. Smaller birds are normally entangled badly, like the Hottentot Teal shown below, so they need to be very carefully removed.

Verukua collecting biometric data



Lizanne showing the standard ringer's grip



The obvious reason for ringing birds is to mark individuals so that they can be recognized if they are encountered again later on, either as re-traps, re-sightings or recoveries. From these records, knowledge about migration, dispersal, survival rates and longevity is obtained.



Edwin ringing a jacana



Verukua ringing a lapwing

We also learnt how to record moult in the birds we handled. To do this, we assessed the flight feathers on the outer part of the wing - called the primaries. Secondary feathers are the flight feathers attached to the ulna. We also looked at the coverts which are at the base of each feather. There is a code used for feathers in various stages when recording such information.



Keeping good records of the data collected



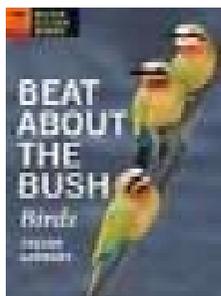
Edwin assessing moult

One of the most important things we learnt is that ringing birds will have no purpose unless accurate records are carefully kept and updated after each ringing session. These records will ultimately be used for conserving birds.

All in all, it was an interesting and busy two weeks, and both Verukua and I would like to express our gratitude to the organisers and BirdLife Botswana for inviting us, and to our colleagues on the course for their co-operation and camaraderie.

Edwin Olatotse

## NEW BIRD BOOK



Trevor Carnaby is well-known in Botswana for his work with the safari company Abercrombie and Kent where he has been responsible for guide training - more recently he has become virtually a household name due to the success of his book 'Beat about the Bush'. Now a follow-on publication in the series, dealing exclusively with birds, is available. Like its precursor, this volume is thoroughly researched, well written and highly informative - a must for anyone interested in our birds.

### 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)



## PHOTO OF THE MONTH



This incredible shot of a Martial Eagle on a Kori Bustard was taken by professional guide Kenneth Liwena at Savuti during October this year. He writes "I was on my way to the airstrip to pick up guests when I saw the Martial Eagle perched on a tree and a Kori Bustard trying to get past a herd of elephants to drink at the nearby waterhole. On my return from the airstrip, the eagle was feeding on the freshly killed Kori",

## CONTACT ADDRESSES

BirdLife Botswana  
Private Bag 003  
Suite 348  
Mogoditshane  
[blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw](mailto: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 1529  
Maun  
[birdlifemaun@botsnet.bw](mailto:birdlifemaun@botsnet.bw)

6865618/6865272  
6860525  
Ngami Toyota  
off the Maun/Sehithwa Road

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



## 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 1529  
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

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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 <b>(your name)</b>	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 1529, Maun, BOTSWANA. Alternatively, please e-mail us at [birdlifemaun@botsnet.bw](mailto:birdlifemaun@botsnet.bw)

