

BIRDS AND PEOPLE

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BirdLife Botswana's Bird Conservation Newsletter



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EDITORIAL

It is somehow ironic that the 5th of September was celebrated as International Vulture Awareness Day throughout the world, and yet here I sit looking at the carcass of a White-backed Vulture poisoned yesterday on the fringes of the Okavango Delta (one of over 50 vultures killed together). This is a bad time of the year for our vultures – August 2007 saw over 50 birds being poisoned in the Hainaveld, October 2008, over 50 in the Xudum Concession and now September this year, over 50 in the Xudum Concession once again.

Over 152 organisations in 44 countries recognised International Vulture Awareness Day – an encouraging response considering that it was the first year that the date has been designated for vulture awareness. These figures tell me that vultures are widely appreciated by people throughout the world – what's the problem here in Botswana? I have a feeling that as usual, we will only come to value these great birds when it is too late. Let's hope that I am proved wrong.

Pete Hancock

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



Birds and People # 23 - September, 2009

www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw

EXCITING BIRDING IN MAUN

The recent sighting of the yellow form of the Crimson-breasted Shrike near Maun by Tony Caulfield, Chris McIntyre and Andy Moore has generated a lot of interest among birders and the general public. Although it is illustrated in many of the region's fieldguides, there are very few documented records of this rare form in Botswana.



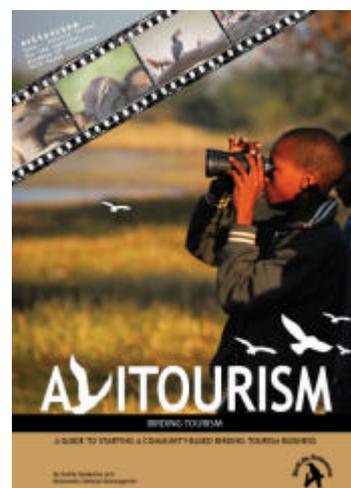
Yellow form of Crimson-breasted Shrike (left), and its normal-coloured mate (Photos: P Hancock)

It is not quite clear what causes the breast to be yellow in a small percentage of these birds; it may be genetic, or it may be food-related.

The Crimson-breasted Shrike is a territorial, resident species, so many birders have been successful in relocating this special individual. The Reeds from Letaka Safaris have in fact seen two different yellow-breasted birds simultaneously at this site, so there may be more around!

NEW AVI -TOURISM HANDBOOK AVAILABLE

Keddy Mooketsa and Boitumelo Sekhute-Batungamile are to be congratulated on the production of this practical, user-friendly guide to starting a community-based birding tourism business. This well-illustrated handbook contains information on birding tourism, and the nitty-gritty of getting involved in a tourism enterprise focused on birds. Avi-tourism links bird species, important bird sites and habitats and people in a sustainable manner, and thus contributes directly towards meeting BirdLife Botswana's objectives. This publication will pave the



way for the development of avi-tourism in Botswana, and help diversify Botswana's tourism product. To find out more, contact Keddy Mooketsa at the BirdLife Botswana office in Gaborone (contact details at end of the newsletter).

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN BIRD MONITORING

Nata Sanctuary was a hive of activity during the latter part of August as 35 community members from Trusts throughout the country gathered for a week's training in bird identification and monitoring. The workshop was organized and conducted by staff from the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) and BirdLife Botswana, and was the first of its kind involving community members in Common Bird Monitoring and Important Bird Area (IBA) Monitoring. An introduction to the Management Oriented Monitoring System (MOMS), promoted by DWNP for use in community concession areas, also formed part of the training. Some participants were from new Trusts and were able to interact with, and benefit from, other long-standing Trusts from the northern part of the country which had full-time Community Escort Guides involved in natural resources monitoring.



The theory part of the workshop was conducted in a tent provided by Nata Sanctuary (Photo: V Kootsositse)

Basic skills in bird identification are needed before anyone can participate meaningfully in bird monitoring, so logically this formed the starting point for the course. The focus for this part was on common birds (needed for Common Bird Monitoring) and 'trigger species' for each IBA (needed for IBA monitoring). This led on to sessions on Common Bird Monitoring, presented by Pete Hancock, and IBA monitoring, facilitated by Virat Kootsositse – these included both theory and field practicals so that participants would feel comfortable about initiating these activities back in their areas. The MOMS session, conducted by Malebogo Sentsho, linked very closely with the IBA monitoring, and some of the community members who have already been implementing MOMS contributed meaningfully to the discussions on integrating MOMS and IBA monitoring.

The final day of the workshop was devoted to sharing experiences and lessons learnt in managing Trusts and their activities, for the benefit of the newer Trusts that BirdLife Botswana is engaging with. Boitumelo Sekhute-Batungamile introduced BirdLife Botswana's PSPA project - centred on promoting community involvement in birding tourism in the Makgadikgadi area – and this provided the necessary background to show where the new community organizations fitted in. Resource persons from Government, primarily DWNP, assisted to facilitate and guide discussions to ensure that the framework provided by the CBNRM Policy was clear, so that all Trusts operate within the parameters set by the Policy.

The highlight of the workshop was the evident willingness of community members to engage in bird monitoring in their areas. Without exception, communities were enthusiastic to become active partners with DWNP and BirdLife Botswana in collecting data which could contribute to the management of their areas, and help meet the Botswana Government's obligation to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The workshop was made possible firstly by the Nata Sanctuary Trust, which provided the venue, but also by funding from three donor agencies which are supporting BirdLife Botswana projects *viz.* Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (Common Bird Monitoring), European Union (IBA/PA monitoring) and GEF-UNDP (the PSPA project) – they are all thanked for their contribution towards making the workshop a success – this was truly a team effort.



BOTSWANA TICKBIRD - WORLDBIRDS IN BOTSWANA

Support our web-based bird monitoring system.

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

RINGED/TAGGED BIRDS

Partly in response to the article on migratory birds and the hazards they face while on migration (see Newsletter #22), people have reported two dead, ringed White Storks recovered in Botswana. Details are as follows:

White Stork 1 bearing ring number PRAHA B 33487: Ringed at Bor in Tachov (Czech Republic) on 7/6/2008 by Paisker Milos. Recovered at Xobe, Ngamiland on 31/8/2009 by B Batsile and L Motlakola from the Department of Wildlife and National Parks. This bird has moved a minimum of 7838 kilometres in 450 days between ringing and recovery, and appears to have died a 'natural' death.

Photo: [J Bestelink/S Paul](#)



White Stork 2 recovered at Letlhakane by Wildlife Officer O Kgotla – the origins of this bird have not been precisely traced – all we know so far is that it was ringed in Poland.

Lappet-faced Vulture tagged D001.



This bird was tagged on the nest by Nicky Bousfield in eastern Botswana during November 2008, and was recovered dead (cause of death unknown) by Jack Greef at Mabalingwe in Limpopo Province, South Africa on 18/7/09. It had moved 352 kilometres during the 9 months.

Photo: [N Bousfield](#)

VULTURE MASSACRE

A radio message from Grant Reed of Lataka Safaris, to his brother Brent in Maun, brought the appalling news that poachers operating in the Xudum Concession had poisoned two giraffe carcasses and that this had resulted in **the death of over 50 globally threatened vultures**. I caught up with Grant shortly thereafter, and he confirmed that 50 White-backed and four Hooded Vultures, as well as two Yellow-billed Kites were among the avian scavengers that had been killed. "We were out on a foot patrol in the area when we noticed a column of vultures spiralling in the sky. On closer investigation, we found the remains of two giraffes that had been killed illegally by a group of five poachers and indiscriminately laced with poison. It was a depressing, nauseating scene with dead and dying vultures around the carcasses" he said. "It appears as though the poachers are deliberately aiming to eliminate every vulture in the area, since the birds are quickly alerting the concessionaires to the occurrence of their poaching activities" he surmised.



Some of the poisoned vultures, White-backed (left) and Hooded (below) Photo: G Reed



The DWNP Anti-poaching Unit investigated the crime, and although the poachers had left the scene, sufficient evidence was obtained to identify some of the perpetrators. They had left an empty poison container, and thanks to Drs Tico McNutt and Peter Apps of the Botswana Predator Conservation Project, the poison was identified as Carbofuran a highly toxic agricultural insecticide meant for use on non-food crops, and not registered for use on animals. The giraffe carcasses and dead vultures were all burnt at the site to prevent further poisoning of other unwary scavengers.



The mortal remains of over 50 poisoned vultures going up in flames. Photo: G Reed

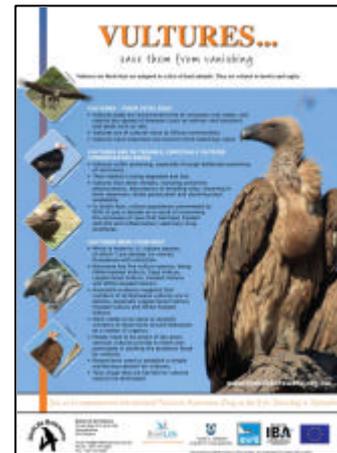
BirdLife Botswana regards the deliberate and incidental poisoning of globally threatened vultures as an extremely serious issue. Poisoning throughout Africa has decimated vulture populations in most countries where they occur, and until recently Botswana has escaped this scourge; now however it looks as though we too will be faced by increasing environmental destruction caused by the misuse of agricultural chemicals. Such drastic impacts on birds and other wildlife call for drastic action to be taken by concerned individuals and organisations.

From bad to worse

Independence long weekend at the end of September was marred by news of a further 31 vultures being poisoned in the Kwedi Concession (NG 22/23). This particular incident had occurred some time previously, and the vultures were all in various stages of decomposition. Most disturbing was the information that these vultures had also been deliberately poisoned in the same manner as those in the Xudum area – a giraffe had been poached and the carcass poisoned, giving the impression that the same group of poachers, or a well-organised syndicate, was responsible. It goes without saying that since this is the peak vulture breeding season, there were probably far more than 31 vultures actually killed in this incident, as each pair would have been supporting a large but unfledged chick on the nest.

VULTURE AWARENESS

Partly in response to the above incident, and partly as an outcome of International Vulture Awareness Day, BirdLife Botswana has produced a vulture awareness poster highlighting the plight of these important, but globally threatened birds. The poster was displayed at World Tourism Day in Ghanzi towards the end of September, as this is one of the main vulture poisoning areas in the country. This is just the start of BirdLife Botswana's efforts to address the issue of indiscriminate poisoning of vultures and other scavengers.



The poster was sponsored by the Jensen Foundation through the *Wildlife Clubs of Africa* project and the *EU/RSPB Important Bird Areas* project.

BIRDLIFE SHOP

There is a variety of clothing, inscribed tumblers and glasses, badges (cloth and metal), three different 2010 calendars, various books and publications and several other items of interest in the BirdLife Shop in Gaborone. Members and guests should take the time to browse around the shop which is in the Craft Centre in Nakedi Street, Broadhurst.

Postscript: We have just received four magnificent framed etchings of four spectacular birds which are for sale in the shop!

PHOTO OF THE MONTH: Road sign outside Maun



Is this an indictment!? We don't have an official national bird, but we do have an 'unofficial' one!

STOP PRESS

Remember November is Common Bird Monitoring month! If you would like to participate in counting birds along a fixed transect in your area, check the website for details (www.birdlifebotswana.org – then click on the picture of the Little Bee-eaters to take you directly to Common Bird Monitoring).

Alternatively, for first-hand information, contact one of the following:

- ? Harold Hester at the BirdLife office in Gaborone (3190541)
- ? Lucas Matthys at DWNP Ghanzi (6596323)
- ? Zee Mpofo at DWNP in Maun (6860275) or Pete Hancock at BirdLife Maun
- ? Mothusi Jenamiso at DWNP Kasane (6250486) or Pete Laver at BirdLife Kasane
- ? Edwin Mudongo at DWNP Tshabong (6540201)

CONTACT ADDRESSES

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Plot 1069 KO

(the old TEBA complex near St Joseph's College)

BirdLife Botswana

PO Box 1529

Maun

birdlifemaun@botsnet.bw

6865618/6865272

6860525

Old HOORC site

off new tarred Disaneng road

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

BIRDLIFE BOTSWANA MISSION

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

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

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 e.g. 1923C4 | Area e.g. NG 19 | Locality e.g. 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, PO Box 1529, Maun, BOTSWANA. Alternatively, please e-mail us at birdlifemaun@botsnet.bw

