

BirdLife Botswana  
**Bird Conservation Newsletter**

No. 4

2004

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



## IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial

Vulture Study Group Workshop

More information needed on vulture breeding

Southern African Pelican Counting Day

Disney supports Kori Bustard conservation

Setswana birdbook

Update on Slaty Egret Project

Sekgowa Motsumi joins ODMP project

Setting your GPS



## EDITORIAL - LAKE NGAMI

Lake Ngami is recognised as one of Botswana's Important Bird Area (IBA) since it meets the international criteria set out by BirdLife International. In anticipation of the Lake filling this year, BirdLife Botswana has been monitoring the build-up of bird numbers and diversity, and this has been spectacular. By the end of September, 60 species of waterbirds were present, with 17 species recorded breeding there.

The Lake is now one of the prime birding spots in Southern Africa and, more importantly, it is arguably the most significant area for the conservation of waterbirds in the region. There have been regular sightings of small numbers of the globally threatened Wattled Crane and Slaty Egret, and hundreds of Lesser Flamingoes (classified as Near Threatened). Great White Pelicans too have appeared in large numbers, with 1,300 being counted on 'Southern African Pelican Counting Day' during mid-October. The sighting of a ringed Pelican by Hayden Oake shed some light on the origin of the Pelicans - this particular individual was ringed as a fledgling in January 2004 on Dassen Island near Cape Town, 2,500 kilometres to the south! It also supported BirdLife Botswana's contention that the Lake is attracting waterbirds from all over Southern Africa.

Clearly, Lake Ngami is a priceless heritage. Its value to the conservation of Southern Africa's waterbirds far exceeds its relatively small size, and cannot be overstated.

Pete Hancock



## VULTURE STUDY GROUP WORKSHOP

Recently the Vulture Study Group (VSG) held a workshop in Kimberley, South Africa, to discuss "Vulture research and conservation priorities in southern Africa".

The programme started with a keynote address, "Vulture Conservation in the Bigger Picture", by Dr. Nick King, the new Director of the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), under whose umbrella the VSG is placed. Following that, species updates were given on the following (those that occur in Botswana are marked with \*):

- Cape Griffon Vulture \* (Uncommon generally to fairly common in east and south-east)
- African White-backed Vulture \* (Common resident)
- Lappet-faced Vulture \* (fairly common resident)
- Palm-nut Vulture \* (very, very rare vagrant)
- White-headed Vulture \* (uncommon resident)
- Hooded Vulture \* (fairly common in the north)
- Ruppell's Griffon Vulture
- Egyptian Vulture\* (very rare vagrant)
- Bearded Vulture.

The Species Updates were followed by Regional Accounts that were given by:

- Botswana
- Lesotho
- Mozambique
- Namibia, 1 north, and 2 south
- Swaziland
- Zimbabwe
- South Africa, with 9 reports - one each from the provinces.

Wendy Borello presented her data on Botswana's Cape Griffon Vulture numbers under these Regional Accounts. She also clearly pointed out in her presentation that there was zero information on the numbers and current distribution of the other vulture species occurring in Botswana and therefore the need for monitoring and research, perhaps with input from the regional VSG members.

In a later session, "An overview of vulture mortality on powerlines in southern Africa: 1996-2000", Chris van Rooyen gave his accounting, and in answering a question said that he had done quite a bit of work with the Botswana Power Corporation concerning powerline design. However, if there is, or ever was any monitoring of vulture mortality along the powerlines, BirdLife Botswana is not aware of it.

There were also guest presenters and the presentations included:

- Vulture restaurants (where food is intentionally left out for vulture to feed on)



- Historical changes in livestock stocking rates and its implications for scavenging birds
- How traditional medicine use is affecting vulture conservation
- Update on the Asian Vulture Crisis
- Andean Condor research and conservation in Venezuela.

These were very informative sessions with the first discussing the spread and effectiveness (including dependency generating) of vulture restaurants in South Africa.

The Update on the Asian Vulture Crisis by Susanne Schultz of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (BirdLife partner in the UK) of her work in India was a shock with the facts of the population crash of the Asian White-backed Vulture (AsWBV) in India and the surrounding countries. Research has narrowed the vulture population crash down to the use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs in veterinary practice. In less than 20 years the AsWBV that occurred in the millions now exists in small numbers in captive populations. Schultz was pleading to the VSG to help secure some captive, non-returnable to the wild African White-backed Vultures to be used in research to determine once and for all if the non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs are the culprits and to do the research in South Africa. If so, a way must be found to bar the drugs from use and find suitable alternatives. It all sounds like an impossible task but valiant efforts are being made to prevent the extinction of the AsWBV. It was a lesson in demonstrating that although there might be a large, healthy population of African White-backed Vultures in Botswana, things could change very quickly should the status quo change.

Stan Searles of the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo in the USA gave an interesting account of his involvement in the reintroduction of the Andean Condor in Venezuela where it had been locally extinct for 50 years or so. He highlighted the necessary involvement of community, getting “buy-in” to the project and then achieving national support through public relations and marketing.

The afternoon of the second day was a vulture conservation and research priority planning workshop that was facilitated by Yolán Friedmann of EWT. Unfortunately, at the end of the session it was announced that the new management of the Endangered Wildlife Trust wanted the VSG to amalgamate with the Raptor Study Group (from which the VSG separated 20 years ago). EWT advised that obtaining funding for single species conservation and research was increasingly difficult and that funding was now being directed at biodiversity and habitat conservation that includes several species of birds and other animals rather than for a single species. The very successful Crane Working Group was cited as one that could possibly not be funded as a single species project in the future.

In the meantime BirdLife Botswana aims to join the VSG as it presently is, and become an active member as much can be learned about research in the region through this network.



A way must be found for BLB to be more actively sharing the Cape Griffon Vulture research and monitoring that is carried out by the Borellos and DWNP, as well as being in the forefront of the Lappet-faced Vulture research apparently being undertaken by the Goodwins - especially in light of the Lappet-faced Vulture information now being sought from the BLB poster "Birds of Concern".

Botswana participants at the VSG workshop were:

- Doreen and Bob McColaugh, BLB
- Kabelo Senyatso, BLB
- Zee Mphofu, BLB Kasane
- Wendy and Remi Borello, VSG and privately
- Swallows Kwambala, DWNP, Mannyelanong.

Doreen McColaugh

### **MORE INFORMATION NEEDED ON VULTURE BREEDING**

Vultures as a group are threatened worldwide, and those species found in Botswana are also cause for concern. They occupy a specialised niche right at the top of the food chain, and are thus very vulnerable to changes in the ecosystem. For this reason, it is vital to monitor their numbers and breeding success, and BirdLife Botswana is committed to doing this. However, apart from the Cape Vulture, little is known about the population dynamics of those species occurring in Botswana. There are very few nesting records, even for the widespread and abundant White-backed Vulture. In the case of the Lappet-faced Vulture, recently classified as globally threatened, there are insufficient breeding records to enable us to plot key areas on a map to determine conservation priorities - the same applies to the White-headed and Hooded Vultures.

To rectify this deficiency, we are looking for assistance from professional guides and others, to send in breeding observations for all vultures, including the following information:

<b>Species</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Locality (preferably with GPS co-ords *)</b>	<b>Any other info</b>
----------------	-------------	---	-----------------------

Please send details to Wendy Borello at [borello@sharps.co.bw](mailto:borello@sharps.co.bw) and Kabelo Senyatso ([blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw](mailto:blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw)) or Pete Hancock ([pete@info.bw](mailto:pete@info.bw)).

\* See article on 'Setting your GPS' in this newsletter.



## SOUTHERN AFRICAN PELICAN COUNTING DAY

BirdLife Botswana co-ordinated a count of Great White Pelicans in northern Botswana on the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2004. The count was organised as part of a Southern African Pelican Count being undertaken by the Avian Demography Unit at the University of Cape Town, and coincided with counts in Mocambique, Namibia and South Africa. The results are of a preliminary nature, since not all known Pelican habitats could be covered; however since this will be a bi-annual event, BirdLife Botswana intends to improve on the accuracy and reliability of the counts in the future. If you would like to participate, please contact Pete Hancock.

The numbers of birds seen at each locality is shown in the table below. Places where no pelicans were seen are also noted.

Locality	Numbers seen
Lake Ngami	1292
Nata Sanctuary	214
Nxamasere	0
Boro north of Xaxaba	0
NG25 (Jao) S19.30828 E22.45828	150
King's Pool Airstrip (Linyanti) S18.44642 E23.68916	22
Where Kwando becomes Linyanti	30
Zibalianja	2
Okavango River (panhandle)	0
Duba	0
Chobe River (Puku Flats opposite Chobe Savanna Lodge)	50

This count could not have been undertaken without the involvement of all concerned. Many people contributed their own time, but special thanks are due to those who provided their own vehicles and boats for the survey.

Ken and Mel Oake  
Charl Badenhorst  
Peter-Paul Kluit  
Ian Clark

Grant Reed and Trudi Waggott  
Benson Siyawareva  
Darren Pietersen  
Paul De Thierry

**Important Bird Areas are Key Biodiversity Areas**



## DISNEY WILDLIFE CONSERVATION FUND SUPPORTS KORI BUSTARD CONSERVATION IN BOTSWANA

Botswana is the stronghold for the Kori Bustard in Southern Africa, but very little is known about its conservation status in the country. Our limited information on this bird suggests that it is rapidly declining, but the causes of the decline are unknown - although often attributed to rangeland overgrazing in unprotected areas and poaching. However, to reverse the population decline, it is important to establish the potential threats and their relative importance, and based on these, compile a recovery strategy *i.e.* a Kori Bustard National Species Action Plan.

To start the ball rolling in that direction, the Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund has awarded BirdLife Botswana a grant to investigate the threat and extent of poaching. Through this funding, BirdLife Botswana will:

- 1) Investigate and document threats facing Kori Bustards (in particular the extent of poaching and what could be done to reduce it);
- 2) Develop 'Site Support Groups' - comprising community groups and other stakeholders with an interest in wildlife conservation - to promote community participation and sustainable use of Botswana's avifauna, including piloting activities to address poaching of Kori Bustards (and other birds);
- 3) Set up a monitoring scheme/information-sharing network to collect and collate abundance and distribution data for Kori Bustards and other threatened birds;
- 4) Initiate an environmental awareness programme on the conservation of Kori Bustards and all other natural resources within our environment; and
- 5) Use the information to develop the Chapter on Kori Bustards in the *Red Data Book on Birds of Botswana* (in development), as well as draw a recovery strategy *i.e.* a Kori Bustard National Species Action Plan.

### How can you help?

Records of sightings of Kori Bustards should be submitted to BirdLife Botswana. Along with the observer's name and address, sighting records should include the following:

- Date and time of observation
- Location of sighting (GPS co-ordinates if possible \*)
- Number of individuals
- *If possible* age (*e.g.* either juvenile or adult)

\* See article on 'Setting your GPS' in this newsletter.

Additionally, please forward information on what you have seen or think are the key threats to Kori Bustards in Botswana, how they can be addressed, and how BirdLife



Botswana can contribute towards that process. All information will be treated with confidentiality, if the sender so wishes.

An initial analysis of information received since Bird Conservation Newsletter No. 1 will be in the next edition of Babbler (Number 45).

Send all information to BirdLife Botswana, Private Bag 003, Suite 348, Mogoditshane, Botswana. Tel +267 3710050, E-mail: [blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw](mailto:blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw)

Kabelo Senyatso

## **GERMAN EMBASSY SUPPORTS BIRDS AND TOURISM IN BOTSWANA ... BUT MORE HELP NEEDED**

Bird conservation and the tourism sector in Botswana received a major boost on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2004 when the local German Embassy presented a grant of P18,786.00 to BirdLife Botswana to enable it publish a *Beginners Guide to the Common Birds of Botswana*, which will be in both Setswana and English.

It is our belief that while the tourism sector has experienced tremendous growth over the years, some opportunities within the industry such as bird-tourism, remain under-utilised, due to the lack of an introductory, simple and cheap bird field guide or identification booklet that can be used by the ordinary non-expert Mbotswana.

### **What we hope the booklet will achieve**

- Through this publication, BirdLife Botswana hopes to provide local citizens, particularly the youth, with a simple bird publication so as to increase their awareness of the conservation status of birds in Botswana – copies will be distributed to all public libraries free of charge.
- We also hope that the publication will contribute to the growth of the tourism sector by providing a booklet that will avail bird-information to tour operators, guides and local communities involved in community-based development or conservation projects.
- Our other objective is to use the book to promote the protection of threatened birds, their key habitats and other biodiversity-rich sites in Botswana.
- And lastly, to make accessible to local citizens bird-related literature in Setswana - hopefully a motivation for them to participate more in bird and overall environmental conservation projects and programmes in Botswana.

In addition to advancing the objectives of BirdLife Botswana, which are to save threatened birds, protect key sites and habitats for birds and other biological



resources, as well as empowering, mobilising and expanding the number of people caring for birds and the environment, the publication will assist Botswana to conserve its natural resources and meet commitments to international agreements and national targets, such as an educated and informed nation by the year 2016 and other goals in our National Development Plans. As such, the assistance of the German Embassy is a gesture that all those concerned about our natural heritage should be grateful for.

However, we need your help:

The grant from the German Embassy has enabled us to cover the costs of the initial phase of the project. The next phase is the printing of the booklet, for which we have not secured enough funding. As such, we are appealing for financial support (no matter how small!) from those who can assist us make this project a reality. Our aspiration is to hand copies to all public libraries by mid-2005. If you want to make a donation, place an order or know more about the *Beginners Guide to the Common Birds of Botswana* booklet project, please contact BirdLife Botswana's Conservation Officer, Mr. Kabelo Senyatso, at Tel: +267 371 0050 or +267 72168229, or email: [blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw](mailto:blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw)

Kabelo Senyatso

## UPDATE ON SLATY EGRET PROJECT

Gathering baseline information on the Slaty Egret remains one of BirdLife Botswana's top priorities. We urgently need reports of sightings of this species from people based in the field – the information required is quite simple and can be gathered incidentally:

**Date**                      **No. of individuals**                      **Locality (preferably with GPS co-ords \*)**

We are also looking for breeding records. Slaty Egrets nest in *Phragmites* reedbeds (and sometimes Gomoti Water Figs or flooded Acacias) and the breeding 'season' is recorded as April to June in the Okavango. However, Grant Atkinson has reported Slaty Egrets breeding in a Phoenix palm island in the Jao Concession, and Mark Muller observed a small breeding colony in Moremi during September this year! These observations are both quite unexpected, and reflect how little we know about the species despite it being a near endemic with most of the global population in the Okavango Delta. It is not even possible to map their core feeding and breeding areas, or to predict threats, or make any recommendations for the conservation of the species!

We would like to commend Boyce Kaore from Sandibe for taking the initiative and starting a project on Slaty Egrets in his area. With more people like Boyce we would



have a far better understanding of this 'Okavango Special'. Look out for an article from Boyce in the future reporting on his findings.

\* See article on 'Setting your GPS' in this newsletter.

## **SEKGOWA MOTSUMI JOINS OKAVANGO DELTA MANAGEMENT PLAN PROJECT**

BirdLife Botswana's Crane Working Group Co-ordinator, Sekgowa Motsumi, resigned during August this year to join the Okavango Delta Management Plan project as Information Officer. While we will miss him as the driving force in crane research and conservation, we know that he will continue to make a contribution to bird conservation in the country. The Okavango Delta Management Plan will be central to the proper management and protection of this well-known RAMSAR site which is also an IBA, and Sekgowa will be playing a vital role in facilitating the development of this plan. We wish him well in his new post.

## **SETTING YOUR GPS**

BirdLife Botswana is maintaining a database of sightings of all 'Birds of Concern' in the country (see Newsletter # 2 for a list of 'Birds of Concern'). The database is a Geographical Information System (GIS) which enables the distribution of the birds to be plotted relative to maps showing a variety of features *e.g.* vegetation, infrastructure, land use *etc.* The co-ordinates of each sighting are essential if the information is to be incorporated in this database. Obviously it is convenient to determine the co-ordinates using a Global Positioning System (GPS) device, if you are fortunate to have one. If not, it is easy enough to read the co-ordinates off a map of the area, preferably the 1:50,000 map which will enable the co-ordinates to be determined with some accuracy.

However, if you have a GPS, there are a few important points to note. You must indicate to us which datum you are using, and which position format. Preferably, use WGS84 rather than Cape datum, and use decimal degrees rather than degrees, minutes and seconds. You can set your GPS accordingly by going into the SETUP menu, choosing NAVIGATIONAL SYSTEM, and then pressing ENTER when the cursor is on the datum or position format setting. Thereafter, simply scroll up or down until you reach WGS84 for the datum, and dd.ddddd *i.e.* decimal degrees, for the position format. If you need some assistance, feel free to contact Pete Hancock at 6862481.



## COUNTING WATERBIRDS IN AN IMPORTANT BIRD AREA: THE CHOBE RIVER

The Chobe River was identified as an Important Bird Area (IBA) because of its large waterbird populations by Tyler and Bishop (1998) who provided some crude estimates of population sizes of some species. To refine these estimates, volunteers carried out counts from a vehicle along the whole of the Chobe River from just west of Kasane up to Ngoma Bridge in January 2003, in July and August 2003 and again in August 2004. These three counts have shown the very great importance of the Chobe River and its floodplain for birds and have provided useful data on the numbers of some species using the area. Species whose numbers (at times) exceed 0.5% of the regional or global population now include Great White Pelican, Slaty Egret, Yellow-billed Stork, African Spoonbill, Fulvous Duck, White-faced Duck, Spur-winged Goose, Black-winged Stilt, Collared Pratincole and Whiskered Tern. In July 2003 the count of 1,730 Southern Pochard was also significant. A full report of these counts appears in Babbler # 45, and is well worth reading.

### CONTACT ADDRESSES

BirdLife Botswana  
Private Bag 003  
Suite 348  
Mogoditshane, Gaborone  
[blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw](mailto:blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw)  
Tel: 3710050  
Fax: 371 0058 (Attn: BirdLife Botswana)  
Physical address: Office 49A,  
Molapo Crossing Mall  
(We share an office with Afritourism)

BirdLife Botswana  
PO Box 20463  
Maun  
[cranegroup@dynabyte.bw](mailto:cranegroup@dynabyte.bw)  
6862481  
6862481  
Mulbridge Transport  
off the Francistown Road  
(Our office is sponsored by Mulbridge)



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

This newsletter appears three times 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)

