

BirdLife Botswana
Bird Conservation Newsletter

No. 6

June, 2005

www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw



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EDITORIAL

The BirdLife Species Programme focuses on conserving globally threatened bird species. This is a strategic approach since there are over 9,000 species of bird worldwide and it is obviously not possible to conserve all of them. However, interestingly, part of the Species Programme deals with 'Keeping common birds common' – it would not make sense to concentrate only on threatened species to the exclusion of all others.

The value of this approach, whereby common species are also monitored, has been borne out by work that has shown significant declines in the numbers of Barn (European) Swallows and Red-backed Shrikes – two migrant species that visit Botswana during our summer. However, the most spectacular example in recent years has been the dramatic decline of Asian vultures, from literally millions of birds to the brink of extinction in the short space of a few years. Dr Prakash of the Bombay Natural History Society first reported the rapid decline in the late 1990s, and initially there was much argument as to the cause of the drastic decline. The subsequent discovery that the deaths were as a result of inadvertent poisoning by a drug used widely in livestock to relieve fever and lameness, caused considerable surprise. This drug, Diclofenac, caused rapid kidney failure in vultures when they ate the carcasses of animals recently treated with it. It has recently been banned by the Indian Government. Fortunately it is not used by vets in Southern Africa, so it appears that our African vulture species are safe from this threat.

The point however, is that we should not take our birds for granted. We all need to be vigilant and report any perceived changes in bird numbers. Remember, an environment that's healthy for birds, is also good for us.

Pete Hancock



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

REQUEST FOR OLD BIRD FIELDGUIDES

We are looking for old bird fieldguides to use during the bird guide training (see article in newsletter #5). Any Southern African fieldguide will be suitable (Robert's/Newman's/SASOL) and greatly appreciated – and don't worry if it is a bit worn, that's what fieldguides are for!

If you do have an old fieldguide, please ring Pete Hancock (6862481) or Kabelo Senyatso (3190540) to arrange for it to be collected. Looking forward to hearing from you!

HELP MONITOR BIRDS IN BOTSWANA

BirdLife Botswana regularly conducts counts of aquatic birds throughout the country, with special attention being paid to the Chobe River system, the Okavango Delta and the Makgadikgadi Pans as some of the country's richest ecosystems for waterbirds. These counts are quite well known, and many people have participated in them regularly over the past decade.

Recently, two staff members of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Christine Skinner and Jim Glover, established some bird counting routes in the dryland areas of Botswana. These could easily form the basis for a monitoring system for some of our Kalahari bird species, if other people repeated them and sent in the results to be included in BirdLife Botswana's database. The counts are fun to do, and can add interest to a visit to an area when 'big game' is scarce. Some discipline is required however – the vehicle should travel at 15 – 25 km/hour, and birds must be positively identified (preferably using binoculars).

The routes are listed below, for easy reference, as are the species of birds to be counted – if the latter appears daunting, a selection of some of these birds could be counted, providing it is made clear to BirdLife Botswana which species were counted (otherwise it may lead to confusion between birds that are not seen, and those that are seen but not counted).



Makgadikgadi area

1. Start in the east near Jack's Camp (S20° 19.486' E25° 07.157') and travel westwards to near Tsoe (S20° 39.639' E24° 23.899') via Njuca Hills and airstrip. This route is 104 kilometres long and takes about 6 hours.
2. Along northwest shore of Sua Pan from Thabatshukudu Village (S20° 42.613' E25° 47.482') to Nata Road west of Nata via the following waypoints:
➤ S20° 37.685' E25° 49.995' ➤ S20° 21.472' E25° 53.454' ➤ S20° 15.637' E25° 57.777' ➤ S20° 10.453' E26° 00.815'. This route takes about 3 hours.

Nxai Pan National Park

3. Start at entrance gate and travel anti-clockwise around the perimeter track, via the following points:
➤ S19° 54.143' E24° 46.267' ➤ S19° 53.024' E24° 45.641' ➤ S19° 52.612' E24° 43.770' ➤ entrance. This route has good numbers of Kori Bustard, and takes about 2 hours.

Central Kalahari and environs

4. Rakops (S21° 01.879' E24° 24.262') to CKGR entrance gate (S21° 11.897' E23° 56.366'). This is a 2 hour stretch and provides a useful comparison with birds inside the reserve.
5. CKGR gate (S21° 11.897' E23° 56.366') to Deception Valley (S21° 29.823' E23° 49.539'). Allow just over 1 hour, excluding check-in at Matswere, for this transect.
6. Deception Camp (S21° 24.313' E23° 46.538') to Sunday Pan to Leopard Pan and back to Deception Camp (direct). This route takes 2½ hours.
7. Deception Pan (S21° 29.823' E23° 49.539') to Letiahau waterhole (3 hours).
8. Pipers Pan (S21° 46.692' E23° 12.482') to Phokoje Pan. This takes 1½ hours.
9. Phokoje Pan to Tau Pan (S21° 28.707' E23° 23.671') (3½ hours).
10. Tau Pan (S21° 28.707' E23° 23.671') anti-clockwise loop to San Pan and Phukwi Pan (S21° 29.913' E23° 13.539')



Note that most of these are the main tourist routes – if you are visiting CKGR you'll probably travel on some or all of these routes, even if you don't have a GPS! So don't be put off by the apparent complexity of the route descriptions.

The list of birds to be counted is not as formidable as it looks either – most are large, conspicuous species, and have been selected for their interest or possible conservation concern. The list appears below.

Birds to be counted:

Ostrich	Steppe Buzzard	Kori Bustard
Secretary Bird	Shikra	Red-crested Korhaan
Cape Vulture	Pale Chanting Goshawk	Northern Black Korhaan
White-backed Vulture	Dark Chanting Goshawk	Caspian Plover
Lappet-faced Vulture	Montagu's Harrier	Crowned Lapwing
Yellow-billed Kite	Pallid Harrier	Blacksmith Lapwing
Black-shouldered Kite	Lanner Falcon	Temminck's Courser
Tawny Eagle	Amur Falcon	Double-banded Courser
Steppe Eagle	Greater Kestrel	Burchell's Sandgrouse
Bateleur	Small Button Quail	Yellow-throated Sandgrouse

It does not require much imagination to predict how valuable counts along these transects will be in 10 or 15 years time! Because of declines in large birds such as Kori Bustards, and various eagles and vultures outside protected areas in neighbouring countries, the transects will provide an early warning system for these species in particular. And never underestimate the value of 'citizen science' – the contribution 'ordinary' people can make to an organised, scientific data gathering programme – send your counts to one of the BirdLife addresses at the end of the newsletter.

BIRDLIFE/SAFARI LODGE PARTNERSHIP

A large number of visitors to Botswana, although primarily in pursuit of the 'big five' are nevertheless also interested in birds – in fact, during difficult game-viewing times, it is our rich birdlife that often saves the day! Based on this knowledge, BirdLife Botswana chairperson Harold Hester hatched an idea to publicise our work among tourists by developing and distributing BirdLife brochures through the network of lodges in the country. The scheme was piloted with the support of Okavango Wilderness Safaris, and brochures were placed in every room/tent in their lodges through the tireless efforts of Map I ves, himself a keen birder and 'friend' of BirdLife Botswana. This has been very successful, with a whole host of spinoffs for BirdLife and bird conservation:



- some people have signed up as members
- information on birds is regularly submitted for inclusion in the BirdLife database
- an unexpected outcome, largely due to the efforts of Jacques 'Binoculars' van der Merwe (Camp manager at Xigera), has been the donation of several pairs of binoculars by guests - which we are now using during our bird guide training.

The brochures have been reprinted and we are looking to extend our network of partner lodges, so if there are other lodges willing to place brochures in guest information files, please contact your nearest BirdLife office (see addresses at end of newsletter).

IMPORTANT ROOSTS AND BREEDING SITES PROTECTED

The environmental impacts of tourism on the Okavango Delta are quite well documented – especially the negative impacts. However, tourism operations do of course have many positive impacts as well. This came home to a BirdLife Botswana team that conducted some counts of colonially roosting birds throughout the Delta earlier this year. The two largest roosts, in terms of the number of species and the number of birds, were those at PomPom Camp and Eagle Island Camp. The former in particular had a spectacular 6,000 birds of 19 species coming in to roost during the last 1½ hours before dark!

It is not all that surprising that these two reedbeds are so well used by birds. Their close proximity to safari lodges means that they do not get burnt, and no disturbance in the form of reed-cutting is permitted. The reedbed at PomPom, at the time of the counts, was being looked after by Okavango Wilderness Safaris who were running the camp at that time; lately the camp has changed hands and Chobe Safari Lodge has taken over the camp management – we are sure that they will continue to care for the roost as well. Eagle Island Camp and reedbed have long been under the wing of Orient Express Safaris (GameTrackers). Consequently, both reedbeds are lush and dense, and the birds roost there every night of the year.

Such reedbeds are not as abundant as might be expected. Similar, large, dense reedbeds have been searched for during the Slaty Egret project, as they are also used by this species for nesting. The two main reedbeds used historically by breeding Slaty Egrets have disappeared completely over the years due mainly to fire coupled with a general drying out of the distal ends of the Delta. In the absence of these two sites, it is currently not clear where the majority of Slaty Egrets are breeding.



As far as breeding sites for colonially nesting birds are concerned, the same applies. Two of the best-protected bird breeding sites are in the Kanana and Xigera concessions, and Ker and Downey and Great Explorations (the concessionaires) have shown a serious commitment to protecting these sites. They are not right in front of the camps as in the previous examples of the roost sites, but nevertheless special care is taken to ensure that these sites are not disturbed. We believe in giving credit where credit is due - there are probably other similar examples from elsewhere in the Delta, where safari operators and community Trusts have taken responsibility for caring for these special sites of great importance for birds, and if so, we'd like to hear about them.



The heronry at Gadikwe is one of the major breeding sites for storks.

Breeding and roosting sites used by herons, egrets and other colonial species (storks, darters, cormorants, ibises *etc.*) in the Okavango Delta need to be identified and mapped so that they can be included in the planning process for the Okavango Delta Management Plan.

BIRDLIFE BOTSWANA DATABASE GROWS

Many people have contributed information to the BirdLife Botswana database over the years. Until recently however, BirdLife Botswana had no full-time employees to manage this database, and so data entry fell behind. Happily this situation has been rectified, and although there is still a slight backlog, work is progressing well. Without doubt, BirdLife Botswana already has the most comprehensive database on birds in the country, and people who have contributed information and want to access it should contact Pete Hancock. Special thanks to Paul Sheller for ongoing assistance with database management.



The nest record scheme is in a separate database, and is being computerised as well. This is being undertaken by Chris Brewster, who is contactable through the BirdLife office in Gaborone.

We are also in the process of getting the computerised Botswana Bird Atlas information set up in our database, with the help of the Avian Demography Unit at Cape Town University, co-ordinators of the Southern African Bird Atlas project. This will enable us to update the bird distribution maps as additional information becomes available, and as bird distributions change (as they certainly have - witness the growing Speckled Pigeon population in Maun since the Rural Administration Centre was constructed, inadvertently providing suitable breeding sites).

The BirdLife databases will make a major contribution to bird monitoring throughout the country.

SETSWANA BIRD NAMES

Work on BirdLife Botswana's Beginners Guide to Birds, in Setswana, is progressing well, but has temporarily been held up by the apparent lack of Setswana names for some of the species. We have consulted Des Cole's book, Setswana - Animals and Plants, and have got most of the names we need. However, those that are still missing are the following:

Marabou Stork	Slaty Egret	African Skimmer
Pied Avocet	Whiskered Tern	Black-winged Stilt
Black-headed Oriole	Burchell's Coucal	Bar-throated Apalis

These names are proving really difficult to get. If you happen to know one or more, please contact Kabelo Senyatso at the BirdLife Office in Gaborone soonest (contact details at the end of the newsletter). Those of you who are guiding, and know these birds - we are relying on you!

CAPE VULTURE ON TOUR IN ANGOLA AND BOTSWANA

"A young Cape Vulture, captured and fitted with a PTT satellite-tracking device in the Waterberg area of Namibia in February 2005, has been on an interesting tour. Much of its time has been spent in Etosha National Park in northern Namibia, but recently it went about 400 kilometres into Angola, did a quick U-turn, headed south and then east to the western part of the Okavango Delta. It's been in the Okavango for the past two weeks. Let's see where the wind blows it next!"



This information is from a note by Maria Diekmann and John Mendelsohn – submitted to Raptors Namibia, Newsletter # 4, June 2005. The Botswana Bird Atlas notes that Cape Vultures are occasionally seen around the Okavango, being mainly dispersing young birds. However, one would naturally assume that these are birds that have fledged from Mannyelanong or the Tswapong Hills, but the Waterberg colony is probably much closer, although across the border in Namibia. This highlights the mobility of birds – birds without borders – and that we need to work together in the region to conserve our threatened species.

CONTACT ADDRESSES

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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 pete@info.bw



Membership Details

Membership is due in *January of* each year, as the subscription runs from January to December.

Rates

- Resident - entitles you to both Babbler issues and the quarterly Familiar Chat (per family): P120.00
- Corporate - (4 families): P5000
- Professional - Rangers, guides and students (Babbler and Familiar chat): P60.00
- Life - P2000
- Schools/Clubs - nil
- SADC Region - P150
- Overseas (and outside SADC) – P200

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
Gaborone, Botswana

Pete Hancock
PO Box 20463
Maun

or phone Pete to
collect 6862481

Guy Brina
Private Bag F12
Francistown

or phone Guy to
collect 2412913

OFFICIAL USE

Card _____ Data base _____



Reporting Birds of Concern

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	Southern Ground Hornbill	African Skimmer	Rosy-throated Longclaw	
Black-winged Pratincole				

Breeding records for these species would also be invaluable.

Please send this information to:

BirdLife Botswana, PO Box 20463, Maun, BOTSWANA. Alternatively please e-mail us at pete@info.bw

