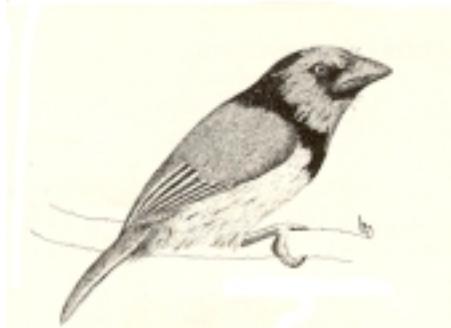




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EDITORIAL

Many of BirdLife Botswana's projects involve members of the public who collect information on birds (following strict procedures) and send it in to a central database where it is analysed scientifically. This is known as 'citizen science', the value of which cannot be over-emphasised. Take for example, the Bird Atlas of Botswana which documents the distribution of all species of birds found throughout the country – this highly-acclaimed work simply could not have been undertaken without the hundreds of birders who voluntarily contributed their sightings in an organised way.

Now we are about to embark on a similar but more ambitious project as the BirdLife partner in Botswana – we are going to participate in Worldbirds, a web-based system that provides a platform for the collection, storage and retrieval of bird observations worldwide. This information will be used for monitoring bird numbers – the basis for conservation action. The project is being developed as a global 'family' of databases, where each country has its own system linked to www.worldbirds.org. Participating birders will be able to post their bird observations directly on the web, thereby making a valuable contribution to bird monitoring and conservation on a local, national and international scale. In return, participants will be able to access useful information from the system that will enhance their birding experience – a win-win system where everyone benefits, especially the birds.

We plan to have the Botswana component up-and-running by the new year – the next newsletter will contain more information on this exciting programme.

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



OUR PATRON – MR SEDIA MODISE

It is perhaps no coincidence that the paths of Sedia Modise and BirdLife Botswana have crossed, and that Mr Modise has agreed to be our new Patron. Just as BirdLife Botswana aims to conserve birds and important bird habitats in Botswana through creating awareness and involving people, this commitment is mirrored in Mr Modise. He needs no introduction to people in the conservation field, having worked for the Department of Wildlife and National Parks since his early twenties, until his retirement as Director of that organisation in 2000. Less well known however is the fact that he headed the Conservation Education Unit in DWNP for much of his early working career, reflecting his interest in creating awareness and involving people in conservation. This aspect remains an abiding passion and he still develops teaching aids to promote conservation awareness as one of his hobbies.

During his time as Director of Wildlife, Mr Modise provided leadership in all matters related to the conservation and management of the wildlife resources in the country. Although now retired from the civil service, he currently heads up the Peace Parks Foundation in Botswana. Here his primary responsibility is to drive and co-ordinate activities associated with the planning and development of the proposed Limpopo/Shashe Transfrontier Conservation Area involving Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe. It would seem that such a challenging task would leave little time to be BirdLife Botswana's Patron, but fortunately being Patron coincides comfortably with Mr Modise's lifelong interest in birds.

In the final analysis, it is this genuine interest in wildlife, including birds that has made Mr Modise the obvious person to become our Patron.

THE GOING GETS TOUGH FOR KORI BUSTARDS IN BOTSWANA ...

The Kori Bustard *Ardeotis kori*, the world's largest bustard, is currently experiencing rapid population declines across most of its range states. In Botswana, a regional stronghold for this bird, the conservation status of the species is favourable only inside protected areas. Outside these, the main threats are thought to be habitat loss due to overgrazing, and poaching.

In responding to this, BirdLife Botswana, with financial support from the **Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund, Global Environment Facility/Small Grants Programme** and **BirdLife International**, undertook a project on Kori Bustards between June 2004 and June 2005. The aim was to investigate in-depth, the threat of poaching, specifically the following aspects:



- how prevalent poaching is in settlements bordering protected areas in central and western Botswana;
- to gain insight into the “general profile” and characteristics of Kori Bustard poachers;
- to investigate how, when and why these birds are killed; and
- to document what could be done to redress this threat.

We found that overall, Kori Bustard poaching is still widespread, and those who have eaten these birds are primarily males over 31 years of age. Snares and guns were the most common ways of killing the birds, and there are site-specific cultural norms and beliefs guiding who can use or kill this bird. Additionally, there appears to be illegal cross-border trade of this bird along the Botswana-South Africa border, a previously undocumented threat with implications for the global conservation of the bird.

We have subsequently published a report that outlines possible management strategies at national and regional levels, and will in due course also initiate several follow-up projects to specifically act on some of the recommendations. We will therefore be counting on all stakeholders, including tour operators and tourists themselves – most of whom after seeing the Kori Bustard concede it is the most magnificent bird ever! – for support in whatever way they can, be it donating binoculars or bird guides for our education programme, making a donation to our Trust Fund, becoming members of BirdLife Botswana, and so forth. If you would like to receive a copy of the report, make a contribution to our Kori Bustard conservation initiatives, or learn more about BirdLife Botswana, please contact us (see contact details at the end of the newsletter).

Kabelo Senyatso

CALLING ALL BIRD PHOTOGRAPHERS

Our book – A Beginner’s Guide to Birds of Botswana – is close to being finalised. We are however still short of good, clear identification photos for some birds. A list of these birds appears overleaf, and we are appealing to bird photographers to donate the one-off use of their photos for this worthwhile publication.

If you are able to assist, please contact either Pete Hancock or Kabelo Senyatso at the telephone numbers at the end of this newsletter. We look forward to hearing from you by the 10th of October. Thank you!



List of birds for which photographs are requested.

Red-billed Quelea	Natal Spurfowl (Natal Francolin)
Namaqua Dove	Harlequin Quail
Crested Francolin	Red-crested Korhaan
Meyer's Parrot	Wattled Crane
Bradfield's Hornbill	Southern Carmine Bee-eater (Carmine Bee-eater)
Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird (Yellow-fronted Tinker Barbet)	African Skimer
White-browed Robin-Chat (Heuglin's Robin)	Golden Weaver
Ashy Flycatcher (Blue-grey Flycatcher)	White-backed Mousebird
Red-headed Weaver	African Harrier-Hawk (Gymnogene)
Black-winged Stilt	African Red-eyed Bulbul (Red-eyed Bulbul)
Lappet-faced Vulture	Groundscraper Thrush
Namaqua Sandgrouse	White-throated Robin-Chat (White-throated Robin)
Scaly-feathered Finch	Arrow-marked Babbler
Lanner Falcon	Bateleur
Short-toed Rock-Thrush	Marico Flycatcher
Mocking Cliff-Chat (Mocking Chat)	White-browed Sparrow-Weaver
Bar-throated Apalis	Marico Sunbird
Freckled Nightjar	Jameson's Firefinch
Short-clawed Lark	

RECENT WATERBIRD COUNTS

In July and early August 2005, volunteers were again busy counting waterbirds at a range of sites throughout Botswana. This effort was for the African Waterbird Census co-ordinated by Wetlands International. In many African countries, volunteers count birds at wetlands every January and July and the combined results help WI develop population estimates for waterbirds. We count everything - herons and egrets, storks, ibises, cranes, flamingos, ducks and geese, waders, gulls and terns and raptors that depend on wetlands.

Coverage in Botswana is quite good with major dams and sewage ponds visited in the east and southeast. Further north Nata Delta is a regular and important count site and sometimes counts are made too at pans surrounding the Makgadikgadi Pans such as Mea Pan and Rysana Pan. The Chobe River and floodplain comprise a very important site, particularly in those years when the Zambezi backs up and fills the Chobe floodplain in July. The Okavango Delta is obviously impossible to cover well but for many years, birds along a long section of the Okavango River, above and below Shakawe, have been counted by Elaine Pryce and various helpers. Waterbirds are also regularly counted along tracks in Moremi Game Reserve and along the Thamalakane and Boteti Rivers, at Maun sewage ponds and at Lake Ngami when it has water. Other



sites in the Okavango Delta are covered opportunistically.

As co-ordinator of the counts in Botswana, I am always delighted to hear from anyone who could count birds each January and July at any site within the Delta, however small – for example a lagoon, an ephemeral pan or any stretch of a river. To wet your appetite, I note below some of the highlights of the recent winter counts when in Botswana as a whole, over 29,500 waterbirds were counted.

In the southeast eight dams (with Bokaa Dam the most important site) and four sewage ponds yielded over 5,000 birds among which were 181 Great Crested Grebes, over 500 flamingos (both species), 86 South African Shelduck, 66 Maccoa Duck and a single Fulvous Duck.

In the east counts at Letsibogo and Shashe Dams and a small sewage pond complex at Serowe turned up over 3,000 waterbirds. Of particular note were 25 Pink-backed Pelicans, some breeding at Letsibogo, 514 White-breasted Cormorants and 15 White-fronted Plovers.

Nata Delta was almost dry at the time of the count in early August so very few flamingos or pelicans were noted. However, along the shore within telescope view were at least 277 Chestnut-banded Plovers and pools in the Nata River produced some uncommon waders including Curlew, Grey Plover, Sanderling and the first record for Botswana of a Lesser Sand Plover. Two days later another visit produced two Greater Sand Plovers, another first for Botswana!

A count along the Chobe River from near Kasane to Ngoma Bridge was disappointing compared with very high counts made in 2003 and 2004 but nonetheless over 3,000 birds of 43 species were counted. No species was present in large numbers but there were almost 1,200 White-faced Duck as well as 21 African Skimmers and two White-crowned Lapwings.

In the Okavango Delta during five weeks of fieldwork a tally of 28,000 waterbirds of 81 different species was made at a range of sites from the Panhandle, in Moremi Game Reserve, at Lake Ngami to along the Boro, Khwai, Maunachira, Thamalakane and Boteti Rivers.

Top sites in the Okavango Delta, July/August 2005

Site	No. of waterbirds	No. of species
Boteti River (confluence to below Chanoga)	4018	54
Mohembo-Seronga along floodplain	2500	34



Okavango River Mohembo to below Shakawe Lodge	2162	45
Lake Ngami*	1800	23
Okavango River I koga to 20 km below Seronga	1482	29
Boro River from buffalo fence to Gunn's Camp	1323	36
Thamalakane River - Island Safari to Boteti/Nhabe divide	1258	21

Perhaps of surprise to some is the very great importance of the Boteti River despite it being outside the 'main delta area'. Not only does it support large numbers of birds but also a very high diversity. During July 'old water' was still present for long stretches and in pools so species such as Lesser Jacana were still present and Painted Snipe frequent at muddy edges to pools. By contrast, new water in the Thamalakane River meant low numbers of just a few species. Although only 1,800 birds were counted at Lake Ngami in late July, some 12 days later when the lake had dramatically expanded a count was made of 4,837 birds of 33 species.

Squaccos were the most numerous egret (over 800) but 70 Slaty Egrets were noted although over 1,100 were found at three roosts. Overall, duck numbers were few in the Delta during the winter with the most numerous species being Red-billed Teal (over 2,000) and Spur-winged Goose. Only one Fulvous Duck and 15 White-backed Ducks were seen. Presumably these ducks are further north, perhaps in Zambia or the Congo Basin, at this time. Of note were 68 Cape Teal, one on a nest with 8 eggs, at Maun sewage ponds. Open-billed Storks were the most abundant species with approximately 3,000 counted and in third place after Red-billed Teal, was Blacksmith Lapwing (2,730 birds). Almost 1,400 African Jacanas were noted compared to 126 Lesser Jacanas. Some 71 African Skimmers were seen, most on a sandbank near Mohembo.

I would like especially to thank Dan Rawson of Waterways for making his boat at Xakanaxa available for some of the counts, at no cost to BirdLife. Also, thanks to all the volunteers who helped with the counts in the winter of 2005, in particular Chris Brewster (Chobe River, Letsibogo Dam and Bokaa Dam), Wendy & Remi Borello, Harold Hester and Mike and Daphne Goldsworthy, Kabelo Senyatso *et al.* (sites in the south east), Guy Brina, Nicky Bousfield, Peter D'Arcy and other BirdLife Botswana members in Francistown (Shashe Dam), Richard Hearn (Nata Delta), Elaine Pryce, Mark Muller & Ali Flatt, Brian & Doline Bridges, Pete Hancock, Richard Hearn, Zee Mpofu, April Reside, Glen Stephen, Roger Hawker, Hannelore Bendsen, Simon Allen *et al.* (various sites in the Okavango).



If you can help increase our coverage of sites anywhere in the Okavango, Linyanti and Chobe wetlands or indeed anywhere in Botswana do please contact me. Counting birds can be great fun and very rewarding and helps enormously in estimating population sizes.

Stephanie Tyler
steph_tyler2001@hotmail.com

INTERNATIONAL BIRD NEWS

The recent issue of BirdLife International's magazine, World Birdwatch, had an interesting article on changes to the Red List for 2005. Some species are no longer threatened due to successful conservation action, and have been removed from the list, while new ones have been added. I imagine my surprise to find that the EUROPEAN ROLLER has declined in Europe to the extent that it is now classified as **NEAR-THREATENED**.

This bird migrates regularly to Southern Africa, and the Bird Atlas of Botswana, which covered the period 1980 to 1990, records it as a 'sparse to uncommon' migrant even then. This is a bird to keep an eye on.

RECORDS OF BREEDING BIRDS

We are in the process of computerising all the old nest record cards in order to make the information more accessible. The Nest Record Card Scheme was previously maintained by Neville Brickell, a member of BirdLife Botswana who has since left the country. Not only did he file and analyse the cards, but it seems he encouraged people to submit their records of breeding birds too - there is a huge dearth of records since his departure. Anyone who has bird breeding records is requested to submit them to Pete Hancock at the BirdLife Office in Maun for inclusion in the database.

Many thanks to Duncan Butchart for allowing us to use his bird sketches in the newsletter.



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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
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The following details are required:

I/We/Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms: _____

wish to become members of BirdLife Botswana

Address: _____

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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'

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or phone Pete to
collect 6862481

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