

FAMILIAR CHAT

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Newsletter of Birdlife Botswana
Private Bag 003 #348,
Mogoditshane,
Gaborone

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<i>Illustrations by kind permission of Kenneth Newman</i>	



Camping at Kgoro Pan

IF ANYONE CAN

Canon

CAN

Francistown Bird News

Guy Brina

We had a good look at another dead bird during at the Francistown BirdLife Botswana meeting, and once again it was master birder Nicky Bousfield who provided the roadkill. No, she didn't run the Mozambique Nightjar over with her vehicle, but she did stop and collect the recently hit specimen so we could all have a close look at the normally difficult to see nocturnal bird. It's fascinating how different many birds look when you get the chance to hold them. Birds in the hand seem much smaller as well. It is easy to understand why Nicky and many other serious birders enjoy netting and ringing birds for scientific research. It is also much nicer to release a live bird after it has been examined and ringed instead of putting it back in a cooler box as we did with the nightjar.



Ken Newman, the author and painter who sold a million books on the birds of Botswana and Southern Africa died at the end of October 2206 in Johannesburg at the age of 82. Newman's *Birds of Botswana* is a bible for many local birders and the same can be said about Newman's *Birds of Southern Africa* throughout the region. According to a Birdlife South Africa statement, Newman played a pivotal role in popularising bird-watching in South Africa through the publication of his numerous books. "His ability to capture the jizz of a bird in his illustrations have made his field guides an essential companion for so many birders. His abilities extended to painting and lecturing and his commitment to ornithology and conservation was reflected through his presidency of the SA Ornithological Society and Birdlife South

Africa." He was still serving as president of Birdlife's Sandton branch when he died.

Two Cape Vultures were preparing to migrate north for the summer but, after talking about it, they decided they were too old to fly all the way to Kenya, so they decided to take a plane. When they were about to board the aircraft, the flight attendant, noticing that each bird was carrying a dead springbok, asked, "Would you like to check those antelope through as luggage?" "No thanks," the vultures replied, "they're carrion."



Nicky Bousfield brought another bird along to our November meeting. No surprise there. What made this occasion remarkable, however, was the fact that this bird hadn't flown into a window or been run over by a car - it was, in fact, still alive and breathing. The ten, or so, day old African Hoopoe also demonstrated quite an appetite as Nicky fed it worms dipped in a sugar solution.

The weekend bird camp at Elephant Sands in November, 50 kilometres north of Nata, was quite a success. While we did get rained on Saturday evening and Sunday morning, we didn't experience anything like the downpours that hit Francistown those two days and our tents were all reasonably dry by the time we set off for home. Between the rain and extreme heat many of us didn't do a great deal of active birding, but thanks to the efforts of Jocasta, Anna and two of Anna's visiting friends from England we did manage to record 44 species for the weekend. Perhaps the most interesting, and easiest-to-spot bird on that list was a juvenile White-faced Owl that has been hanging out in the rafters of the Elephant Sands bar while it waits for a broken wing to recover. On a non-birding note, we saw

several elephant on the pans northeast of camp.

At the moment, the pans on the Elephant Sands farm are dry, but I'm told when they fill up with rain water - and that could happen very soon - there is excellent game viewing along the road that heads northwest out of camp. The management team, meanwhile, was very helpful and extremely friendly.

A pigeon was pacing up and down anxiously in the park when he saw his friend hop up on the curb. "Where have you been, I've been waiting here for hours?" The new arrival looked around him and said, "It was such a nice day, I said to myself -- what the heck, I'll walk!"

. We had a relaxed and extremely enjoyable end-of-year braai at the Fish's home. Thanks Ron and Grace for once

again letting us use your lovely garden for the event.

Nicky Bousfield has asked me to pass on a request to members and the general public. As many of you already know, Nicky is involved with netting and ringing birds so she is very interested to hear about any rings that have been found on dead birds. If anyone finds a bird or part of a bird with a numbered metal ring on its leg, or if you find just the ring itself, could you please call Nicky at 2402523. She tells me six birds that she ringed at the southern end of town have been killed by domestic cats - or I should say that is the number she knows about because the cat owners have given her a ...ring. Anyway, she puts a great deal of time and effort into her research and she would appreciate as much help as she can get.

Two vultures were in the desert eating a dead clown.

The first vulture asks the second vulture: "Does this taste funny to you?"

Two ducks swim into a concrete wall. One of them says, "dam".

A winter pantry for Birds

Winter creates its own set of special problems for birds. As it gets colder, birds seek warmer places to roost or move north on migration for the winter, and after having plenty of food in summer the food supply decreases and weaker birds do not survive.

Providing a feeding table for the birds in your garden can help to provide food for the seed and fruit-eating birds. Rather motivate the birds to stay permanently, forage independently, and to lead normal natural lives so that you can observe them at your leisure. The maximum number of birds will be attracted to your garden if productive indigenous plants and shrubs are planted which flower into the winter or start in late winter. Unfortunately most indigenous plants are often overlooked for gardening purposes because of their generally drab appearance in the nursery container. It is best not to judge indigenous plants by their appearance at the nursery, but rather look at their function in attracting and feeding birds and their potential beauty at maturity.

In addition to the notion that indigenous plants make for an unkempt garden, there is the prevailing belief that all indigenous plants have the following requirements:-

- poor, sandy soil
- little or no fertilizer
- very little water.

Many people believe that indigenous plants will wither and die if exposed to irrigation systems, good quality soil or compost. Most plants available to the public through nursery outlets are able to survive average garden conditions, and many of them will thrive on good feeding and watering.

Red Hot poker (*Kniphofia spp*)

These plants are great sunbird attractors but can be rather untidy so are best planted where the leaves are less visible but where the tall flowers can be seen. The plants take two to three years to flower well. Older clumps should only be divided when the quality of the flowers begins to deteriorate.

Weeping Boerbean (*Schotia brachypetala*)

This well shaped tree has a rounded to fairly wide spreading crown of glossy dark green foliage that is a beautiful coppery-red in spring and suitable for the larger garden. Deep crimson waxy cup-like flowers appear in dense clusters on older branches. Rich in nectar this tree should not be planted

too close to a patio or driveway as the tree produces so much nectar that it “weeps” onto the ground below. This means that even the shortest billed birds can partake of the bounty and the trees are a hive of activity with all species of sunbirds, white eyes, black headed and African golden orioles, black collared and crested barbets, and southern masked weavers.

The nectar also attracts insects, which in turn attracts the insectivorous birds such a flycatchers, shrikes and drongos. The drongos are one of the first birds up in the morning and greeting the new day with a variety of cheerful calls are a welcome addition to the birds in the garden.



Wild pomegranate (*Burchellia bulbalina*)

Another tree which is a great bird attractor is the wild pomegranate. These trees are very attractive when in flower with sprays of reddish-orange flowers. This tree starts flowering when quite small, which is a bonus in a garden.

Coral trees (*Erythrina spp*)

Finally, species in the coral tree group can be a beautiful addition to a larger garden. The bright red flowers can brighten any garden. They come in almost every size from small bushes to huge trees and will attract sunbirds, white-eyes and other species to your garden when in flower.

"Farming" free flying birds

An environmentally friendly thatched housing estate exists 2 kms out of Francistown city center on the banks of the Tati river. This place is known as *Botshabelo* – refuge of safety and peace. At this 10 acre site a bird ringing project has been ongoing for the past 4 years. One bird ringing effort per month is attempted. The following excerpt relates to some recent results – 2/12/2006. (Co-ords 2111S – 2731E)

Brown hooded kingfishers (*Halcyon vociferans*)

On 20/11/04 four Brown hooded kingfishers were trapped simultaneously in one mist net and ringed. This was a family group- male, female and 2 newly fledged youngsters. It was just possible to identify the immatures as a probable male and the other as a likely female.

Over the intervening years partner fidelity in the case of the 2 adults and site constancy was clearly illustrated since the male has been retrapped 8 times and the female 6 times – sometimes together. After the initial 2 youngsters trapped in company of the parents, further immatures were again trapped and ringed – one on 12/2/05, one on 3/3/06 and one on 2/12/06. On one of these occasions the immature was in company of one of the original parents. It is reasonable to assume that all 5 offspring belong to the same pair, since no other Brown hooded kingfishers have been netted in this 10 acre estate (except a trespasser on 2/12/06 in passage, bearing a ring of unknown origin awaiting identification by Cape Town university data base)

Also on 2/12/06 both parent birds were once again trapped. The female had an egg well descended in the oviduct. She was swiftly processed and released. The following day she was again trapped. The egg had disappeared – presumably laid – and a further egg could be palpated beginning the descent down the oviduct To date the nest has not been located.

Kurrichane thrushes (*Turdus libonyana*)

A pair of Kurrichane thrushes both wearing rings were located at a nest site. The nest was largely made of random waste material such as scraps of rope, cloth, plastic etc. with an inner cup of woven grass on a horizontal branch of a Umbrella thorn (*Acacia tortilis*) The hen was observed breeding from about 13th October. Two chicks hatched on October 24th.

One chick disappeared after the first week – possibly prey to a Burchells coucal (*Centropus burchellii*) that was haunting the area. The second chick was removed from the nest on 1/11/06, ringed and replaced (weight 38.5 grams). It fledged on 6/11/06 and was observed sitting on a branch near the nest and being fed by the diligent parents.

On November 10th the female was sitting once again on the same nest. On the 14th, 3 beautiful pale blue eggs speckled with light brown were seen. The speckles are more concentrated at the rounded end of the egg forming a brownish halo. By Monday 27th November, three chicks appeared in the nest. These were ringed on Saturday 2nd December. There was some discrepancy in weight – 42grms, 40.5 down to 38.5 – presumably in order of hatching. It was surprising that 3 chicks of substantial size could squeeze into the tiny cup of the nest. By Tuesday 5th, the largest of the chicks had fledged and perched on a branch near the nest where the 2 siblings remained. (Observations continue at time of writing)

Dark-capped bulbuls (*Pycnonotus tricolor*)

Then there were 3 Dark-capped bulbuls, trapped as a trio, in one net on 11/11/2006. One was identified as an adult and by measurement as a probable male, the other two were clearly newly fledged youngsters with comical white gapes, downey feathers and pale yellow vents. Possibly a parent and 2 offspring? This idea was reinforced when the 3 birds were again caught simultaneously in one net on 2/12/2006. The youngsters were now almost mature and had gained a couple of grams in weight.



Yellow-bellied greenbuls (*Chlorocichla flaviventris*)

Finally – 2 Yellow-bellied greenbuls – both bearing rings, built a fragile nest in the dense portion of a tree. It was difficult to believe that

a structure so flimsy – through which the blue sky could be seen, - would support eggs. Non the less, on 19th October, 2 eggs could be seen – and remained in situ despite strong winds. Two chicks were present on November 2nd. Both parents were agitated upon approach to the nest.



The 2 chicks were ringed on 11/11/06. The parents were so fiercely protective that the chicks were hastily returned to the nest by the ringers, without being weighed. Then the chicks disappeared from the nest, only to be seen in the depth of a bush where the parents were feeding them and standing guard. They never returned to the nest but fledged from their hidden perch.

African paradise flycatchers (*Terpsiphone virdis*)

To complete the maternity ward scene – African paradise flycatchers are breeding high in a tree beyond observation – having had their first nest plundered. A pair of Grey-back camaroptera (*Camaroptera brevicaudata*) built one amazingly constructed nest of cobwebs

and leaves in amongst a bed of pink salvias, just 30cms off the ground. For reasons best known to the constructors this nest was abandoned in favour of a second identical nest placed a few feet away and in here repose 3 delicate little pale blue eggs. The Builders wear rings!

Helmeted guineafowl (*Numida maleagris*)

Resident Helmeted guineafowl had secured 4 nesting sites – and despite harassment from Slender mongooses, the earliest nest produced 6 live chicks plus 3 trampled to death by additional females using the same nest. Several died in the shell as they were about to hatch – probably the earliest hatchlings required feeding so the brooding hen abandoned the nest. Peeping was heard from one of the abandoned eggs and a live chick was successfully assisted in emerging to join the siblings.

(Oh! the joys of farming.)

A four year old boy enquired whether Bird Ringing meant that the birds were getting married – well! In this context it does

Contributed by Nicky Bousfield with assistance from Samuel Mutsami

World Cup 2010' development threatens millions of roosting Barn Swallows

A proposed airport development in South Africa is threatening the winter roosting sites of three million Barn Swallows that journey there after spending breeding months in countries across Europe and other parts of the world. [1] [2]

The development is being proposed by the South African government, apparently to meet the demands of hosting World Cup 2010. BirdLife International objects to the plans on the basis of the site's global importance for Barn Swallow. The site is to be designated as an Important Bird Area (IBA) based on the fact that numbers represent more than 1% of the global population of Barn Swallows. This equates to more than 8% of the European breeding population. [3]

The roost-site of the Barn Swallows, the Mount Moreland Reedbed, sits on what would be the flight-path for aircraft landing and taking off at the proposed airport extension. Conservationists from BirdLife South Africa are concerned that safety concerns for visiting aircraft will lead to the clearance of the reedbed, removing the roosting site for the swallows. [4]

"The swallows roost here in such numbers because of the lack of other suitable roosting areas around KwaZulu-Natal. The site is an island in a surrounding sea of sugar cane plantations. It's vital. If the reedbeds are cleared, it's unlikely that these Barn Swallows will find suitable roosting places elsewhere" – Neil Smith, Conservation Division, BirdLife South Africa.

The Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* undertakes one of the world's most remarkable migrations, with many individuals travelling to breed in Europe and spending the European Winter in Southern Africa. Numbers of Barn Swallows have declined across many European countries, largely as a result of pesticides and other pollutants, partly a result of intensive farming practises. [5]

In line with government procedure, the La Mercy airport development, 20 kilometres north of Durban, has had a preliminary Environmental Impact Assessment undertaken to ascertain the possible effects of the development on local wildlife. However, conservationists from BirdLife South Africa are concerned that the resulting jobs, trade and transport that will result from the airport development may tip the balance away from protecting the site's globally significant populations of swallows.

Last weekend five hundred members of local communities in KwaZulu-Natal, visited the Mount Moreland Reedbed to welcome the Barn Swallow in from their migrations, and to show support for the site's protection.

"This is one of South Africa's great wildlife spectacles" said Di Dold, Environmental Coordinator for the Wildlife & Environment Society of South Africa: KZN Region, "The swallow's arrival to these grounds is an emblem of the seasons. These are birds of the world, they depend on us all."

BirdLife South Africa is fully objecting to the development and instead, propose that the site be turned into a protected area, to ensure the Barn Swallows remain in the long-term.

"Sites like the Mount Moreland Reedbed, that are important for large aggregations of birds, are particularly vulnerable to change. Removal of one suitable area can have an enormous impact on bird numbers. For a roost this size, the effect on breeding Barn Swallows numbers would be felt throughout Europe". – Stuart Butchart, Global Species Programme Coordinator, BirdLife International.

For further details and images, please contact:

Jules Howard, Communications Officer, BirdLife International. Tel: +44 (0)1223 279809; Mobile: +44 (0)7779018332; email: jules.howard@birdlife.org

Notes:

1. Barn Swallows ringed in southern Africa have been recorded from west, central and eastern Europe. Depending on seasonal conditions, they tend to leave northern hemisphere breeding sites in October and November, for traditional roosting sites in the southern hemisphere.
2. The European breeding population of Barn Swallow is between 16 million and 36 million. Numbers have declined over recent years over many parts of Europe.
3. The site meets the criteria for an Important Bird Area because Barn Swallow roosting numbers in the reedbed represent over 1% of the global population; 190 million individuals.
4. The site is currently a small internal airport, with no dusk or night flights.



5. For up-to-date information on Barn Swallow population and distributions visit the BirdLife World Bird Database: 'www.birdlife.org/datazone'

6. BirdLife International is a global alliance of conservation organisations working in more than 100 countries who, together, are the leading authority on the status of birds, their habitats and the issues and problems affecting them. The BirdLife International partner organisation in South Africa is BirdLife South Africa.

BLB Puzzle

B I R H D L L S T I
F E B E O L T U E D
S T O R K I S N R U
W A N O A B F B G C
O R B N I N Y I E K
B U Z Z A R D R R D
K S A D A O N D D P
I E O N S H R I K E
T V A D R O N G O O
E C E L G A E P L E

BUZZARD
DRONGO
EGRET
KITE
SUNBIRD

CANARY
DUCK
HERON
SHRIKE

DOVE
EAGLE
HORNBILL
STORK

Word Search with a hidden message.

After all the words have been found the letters left reveal a hidden message.

Visit our website www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw for the answer

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Birdlife Botswana
Gaborone Calendar of events for 2007

Date	Activity	Person leading
Feb 4	Walk	Metsemothlabe river
Feb 17	National meeting	Gaborone
Feb 20	Talk – Eagles in Botswana	Mpho
Mar 4	Walk	Ramankga Hills
Mar 10,11	Quarterly Camp	Jwaneng
Mar 20	Committee meeting	
Mar 20	Talk	Mark Henningson / K Senyatso
Apr 1	Walk	Kopong Hills
Apr 10	Committee meeting	
Apr 17	Talk	I Draycott
May 6	Walk	Boatle
May 15	Committee meeting	
May 19	AGM	Kgale Siding
Jun 3	Walk	Mogobane
Jun 9,10	Quarterly Camp	Bing's Farm – Tuli block – bird count
Jun 17	Committee meeting	
Jun 17	7:30pm Quiz	Goldsworthy's
Jul 1	Walk	Gabane
Jul 17	Committee meeting	
Jul 17	Talk	H Hester
Aug 5	Walk	Manyane
Aug 21	Committee meeting	
Aug 21	Talk	
Sep 2	Walk	Ramotswa
Sep 8	Annual dinner	
Sep 18	Committee meeting – no talk	
Oct 7	Walk	Modipane
Oct 16	Committee meeting	
Oct 16	Talk	
Oct 20, 21	Quarterly Camp	
Nov 4	Little Birding Day	
Nov 20	Committee meeting	
Nov 20	Talk	
Nov 24	Birding Big Day	
Dec 2	Walk	Mokolodi
Dec 11	Committee meeting	

1. Gaborone Bird walks start at 06:30 October to April and 08:00 May to September. Meet at the museum.
2. All Gaborone talks take place at the Botswana Accountancy College at 19:30.
3. Francistown Branch will hold their meetings on the second Thursday of each month, meetings will take place at the Supa-Ngwao Museum. The museum is located at the corner of the first turn to the left as you travel from the Bulawayo roundabout towards the light industrial area.

Birdlife Botswana

Maun membership activities 2007

Date	Activity	Person leading
17/1/07	Film – Flying Devils	K Oake
20 & 21/1/07	African Waterbird Counts – Thamalakane and Boteti Rivers	T Maiphetho
27/1/07	African Waterbird Counts – Lake Ngami	P Hancock
3 & 4/2/07	African Waterbird Counts - Moremi	P Hancock
14/2/07	Film – March of the Penguins	P Hancock
17 & 18/2/07	Field outing to Makgadikgadi – Kwaraga campsite	P Hancock
14/3/07	Films – Year of the Flamebird Kingfisher	P Hancock
18/3/07	Field outing to Kukale Pan	T Maiphetho
11/4/07	Talk – monitoring birds during the tsetse eradication in Linyanti	P Hancock
14 & 15/4/07	Field outing to Etsha – NG 24	P Hancock
9/5/07	Films – For Birds and People Tswapong	K Oake
12 & 13/5/07	Field outing to D'Kar Game Farm	P Hancock
13/6/07	Film – The Weaver's Tale	K Oake
16 & 17/6/07	Field outing to Deception Valley	P Hancock
4/7/07	Film – Talons: the story of a Crowned Eagle	K Oake
7 & 8/7/07	African Waterbird Counts – Thamalakane and Boteti Rivers	T Maiphetho
16/7/07	African Waterbird Counts – Lake Ngami	P Hancock
23 & 24/7/07	African Waterbird Counts - Moremi	P Hancock
15/8/07	Film – Okavango Magic	P Hancock
18 & 19/8/07	Field outing – venue to be announced	P Hancock
12/9/07	Film – Birds and their ways	P Hancock
15 & 16/9/07	Field outing to Nxai Pan	P Hancock
10/10/07	Bird quiz	P Hancock
13 & 14/10/07	Field outing – venue to be announced	P Hancock
14/11/07	Film – Flying Devils	K Oake
20/11/07	Birding Big Day	
12/12/07	Film – Amazing behaviour of birds of the Kruger National park	P Hancock

Evening activities (talks, films *etc.*) are held at Maun Lodge starting at 19h00 unless otherwise indicated.

Field outings on weekends commence from the parking area outside Ngami Toyota. Exact details for outings (*e.g.* time of departure) are announced at the evening meeting prior to the field outing.

Additional activities may be scheduled depending on demand.

Contact P Hancock/T Maiphetho for further information – 6865618.

Birdlife Botswana
Kasane Calendar of events 2007

We plan to meet on either the last Saturday or Sunday of the month.

Date	Event	Remarks
	To be advised – check the website www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw	