

# Familiar Chat

March 2008

newsletter of BirdLife Botswana



A Longbilled Crombec feeding its ever demanding baby

Hi Birdlife Members,

The new year has continued to bring wonderful rain and with it a population explosion of seemingly everything. Of course that means a great breeding season for birds and indeed this summer has meant countless hours watching the comings and goings in the garden. The berries and caterpillars on the Grewia bushes, the clear vantage point from the half dead *Peltophorum africanum* and our small pond have been constant favourites for the birds and hence brought great birding to our doorstep.

My camera record reveals that in an hour a pair of Crombecs brought at least 6 insects to their nestling, including a moth, a spider, a caterpillar and several grubs. The Diderick Cuckoos continue to harass the Weavers and we see a Sparrow feeding a large and persistent Diderick baby! The Hoopoes have taken to our lawn, the thrushes are back and I don't think I've ever seen so many Marico Sunbirds. Everyone in the bird world seems to have babies and to be terribly busy. Anyway, I hope you have all enjoyed this birding summer as much as I have.

Please **renew your membership** if you haven't already done so (it runs from Jan to Dec each year). A form is available on page 13. Remember too that, as ever, I greatly welcome contributions or suggestions. This is your newsletter and needs to reflect your birding interests, observations and ideas as well as being informative on Birdlife matters!

Eugenie Skelton – editor  
[skelton@home.co.bw](mailto:skelton@home.co.bw).

## Contents

	Page
<i>BLB &amp; DWNP Training workshops</i>	2
<i>Lesser Flamingo Breed at Kamfers Dam</i>	3
<i>Recent extracts from the BBC Website</i>	5
<i>Branch news</i>	8
<i>For All Eternity</i>	9
<i>Growing Your Nest egg</i>	9
<i>Committee</i>	10
<i>Regional Events</i>	11
<i>Membership Form</i>	13



Odd Hoopoe behaviour. Displaying or just sunning?

IF ANYONE CAN

**Canon**

CAN

## BLB & DWNP Train Wildlife Staff & Community

Birdlife Botswana and the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) research division recently embarked on a first ever exercise on training local community and wildlife parks division staff on how to use the global monitoring framework for biodiversity monitoring using birds as indicators species in our protected areas that overlap important bird areas.. The framework to be instituted uses the *\*state, pressure and response* model. (*\*state* means 'the situation of the bird habitat or the bird population in that area'; *pressure* refers to 'threats to the habitat or birds'; *response* means 'what are authorities doing to address these').

The workshops were divided into four sections. The first was held in Kasane on the 28th January with at least 20 participants from the Chobe National Park, Chobe Enclave Community Trust and Kalepa. The second, with 22 participants, was held in Maun on the 30th January covering Makgadikgadi and the Okavango Delta. The third, with 15 participants, was at Lonetree Camp covering the Central Kalahari Game Reserve and Kalahari Transfrontier Park. The final event was held at Gaborone Game Reserve with about 13 participants representing Otse Cape Vulture Environment Club, Khutse Game Reserve and Gaborone Game Reserve. Other senior officials will be trained by April this year.

The programme (initially from April 2007 to October 2011), runs concurrently with seven other African countries with financial assistance from the European Commission and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). The objective is to institute an effective biodiversity monitoring tool for Protected Areas that are also Important Bird Areas. The main thrust is to institute a simple, robust and sustainable method of gathering information that provides trends in biodiversity over time.

It has been a year into the programme and an Annual Project Review and Planning meeting was held at the Big Five Lodge in Gaborone from the 26th to the 28th February 2008. This was for all the eight countries, Botswana, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Tunisia, Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Zambia, together with delegates from the United Kingdom. The Department of Wildlife and National Parks and Department of Environmental Affairs also had some representation at the workshop.



*"This meeting marks a critical point along the path to establishing better management and monitoring of some of Africa's most important wildlife sites. For the past year conservationists in eight countries have been setting the groundwork for a much more participatory approach to assessing the status of 160 protected areas of enormous value for their biological wealth, ecosystems services and livelihood benefits. The Gaborone meeting enables the different countries to re-group, re-energize and compare the success of their strategies so far. By the end of the programme, generously funded by the European Commission, government, NGOs and local communities should be acting together to assess the status of these irreplaceable sites, the threats to them and the level of conservation response enabled. We hope we can advise, encourage the participants and continue them along the correct road to a successful project outcome. Africa's biodiversity needs and deserves this assistance towards better management and a more sustainable future"*

Paul Buckley (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds).

Any further enquiries on the programme contact Motshereganyi Virat Kootsositse at [ibamanager@birdlifebotswana.org.bw](mailto:ibamanager@birdlifebotswana.org.bw) or at Birdlife Botswana office.

Ed: The following issue of FC will feature Monitoring of Protected Areas and Important Bird Areas Key to Tourism Prospects and Improved Livelihoods in Botswana

# *Lesser Flamingo Breeding Event at Kamfers Dam*

Mark D. Anderson, Specialist Nature Conservation Scientist (Ornithology)  
Department of Tourism, Environment & Conservation, Kimberley

Lesser Flamingos have started breeding at Kamfers Dam, the large, permanent wetland located just north of Kimberley, in the Northern Cape Province, South Africa. The first chicks, in excess of 500, started hatching in December 2007 and it is estimated that there are thousands of eggs still to hatch. It is difficult to determine the exact number of breeding flamingos, as the island is located several hundred metres from the shoreline.

Kamfers Dam is only the fourth breeding locality for the near-threatened Lesser Flamingo in Africa, and the sixth in the world. Lesser Flamingos breed at Etosha Pan (Namibia), Sua Pan (Botswana) and Lake Natron (Tanzania), as well as at Zinzuwadia and Purabcheria salt pans in north-western India. As all of these breeding sites are threatened by various human-induced factors, it is critically important that Lesser Flamingos now have another breeding site. This is the first time that Lesser Flamingos have successfully bred in South Africa and the first time that they have bred on an artificial island.



Although the most numerous of the world's flamingos, the Lesser Flamingo is classified as "Near Threatened" in the 2006 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, indicating that it is considered likely to qualify for a threatened category in the near future. The Kamfers Dam flamingo breeding island project is a collaborative project of the Department of Tourism, Environment & Conservation, Ekapa Mining, Envirosec, and Kamfers Dam's landowners, Herbert and Brenda Booth. The construction of the flamingo island was proposed by Mark Anderson, the Department of Tourism, Environment & Conservation's ornithologist, and he has been responsible for managing this project.

Ekapa Mining, a majority black-owned junior mining company, funded and constructed the flamingo island, the third of its type in the world. Soon after construction was completed in September 2006, the flamingos started using the island and even constructed nests and laid a few eggs a few months later.

The island, 250 m x 25 m in size and S-shaped, was built with 26,000 tons of calcrete, rocks and clay. A submersed pump, powered by three solar panels, provides water for four ponds on the island, and thus the wet clay that the flamingos use to construct their nest turrets.

This important conservation initiative has already received acclaim, as Ekapa Mining has been the recipient of a prestigious Nedbank Capital Green Mining Award as well as a Wildlife & Environment Society scroll. Dr Brooks Childress, Chairman of the IUCN-SSC/Wetlands International Flamingo Specialist Group, described the construction and success of this new flamingo breeding island as the most significant flamingo conservation event internationally in many years.

Kamfers Dam supports the most important permanent population of Lesser Flamingos in southern Africa, usually numbering in excess of 25,000 individuals, but during recent months in excess of 50,000 birds. The dam is a Natural Heritage Site and an Important Bird Area.

Both Lesser and Greater Flamingos have previously attempted to breed at Kamfers Dam, constructing nests and even laying a few eggs. Disturbance from people and dogs was probably responsible for these breeding events not being successful. Lesser Flamingos are very sensitive while breeding and therefore people will not be allowed access to the area close to the island.

The Lesser Flamingo does not breed annually at the five other sites in Africa and India, mainly because they are only irregularly inundated during periods of good rainfall. They only breed infrequently at some sites, such as at Etosha Pan in Namibia. Conservationists are concerned that the most important breeding site, Lake Natron in northern Tanzania, will be severely impacted by the proposed mining developments on the shores of this ecologically important lake. The Kamfers Dam breeding event is therefore very significant as it is now another site at which the Lesser Flamingo breeds. It will thus contribute to the conservation of this threatened species, especially if they breed annually at this permanent wetland.



Check out our tickbird site [www.worldbirds.org/Botswana](http://www.worldbirds.org/Botswana) to see the latest lists and please contribute your own birding lists to this important initiative.

Also, read the Conservation Newsletter on [www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw](http://www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw) for in-depth coverage of the various projects undertaken by BirdLife Botswana

# Some recent extracts from the BBC website –

With thanks to Mary Lane-Jones for the links



## Birding Event in Britain

Over a weekend in late January, thousands of people in Britain spent an hour taking part in a national survey of garden birds. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds's annual Big Garden Birdwatch aims to find out which species are the most common visitors to UK gardens. In 2007 some 400,000 people took part in the survey and counted six million birds in 236,000 gardens. Participants were asked to submit their results online and the results of the latest survey will be published later this month. The RSPB will use the information to record patterns in bird numbers and prioritise conservation efforts.

During the past 30 years goldfinch numbers have increased by half in the survey benefiting from warmer temperatures. They would usually go to Southern Europe for the winter but they haven't needed to as much this year. The RSPB expects people to have seen fewer blue tits because they are laying their eggs earlier and because of the wetter weather which causes caterpillars to be washed off leaves and their food generally to have been harder to find. While chaffinches and great tit numbers have grown since the event began in 1979, the number of starlings counted has fallen by 76% and the number of once-common house sparrows counted has fallen by 52%. According to the RSPB, gardens are a vitally important habitat for wildlife, and many garden birds are doing well because people provide them with safe havens with food, water and shelter. The scheme originally began as an activity for children who were members of the Young Ornithologists Club.



## Twitchers Flock to See Rare Heron!

Birdwatchers are flocking to a Greater Manchester beauty spot in the hope of catching a glimpse of a rare heron. A **Cattle Egret** has been seen at Pennington Flash near Leigh in what is believed to be the first ever sighting of the bird in the Manchester area. The birds usually prefer Mediterranean climates and it has only been spotted in the north-west of England a few times. The all-white cattle egret is native to parts of Asia, America and Europe and Africa

Peter Alker, Wigan Leisure and Culture Trust senior ranger, said: "We are really excited at this find." It goes to show what a great environment Pennington Flash is for all kinds of birds, this is a real rarity and we are proud to have yet another first for Greater Manchester. "We have recorded more than 230 species of birds at Pennington and the list continues to grow."

From Moremi to Manchester?





## Rare Bird is Spotted by Schoolboy

When nine-year-old Daniel Jones said he had spotted an avocet on the banks of the Dee estuary, nobody believed him. Now twitchers are flocking to catch a glimpse of the rare black and white bird seldom seen in north Wales. Daniel, of Nercwys, Flintshire, said he knew the bird by its colour and how its beak turned up. "People didn't think I was right because you don't see them on Deeside. Then people started to listen, they looked as well and saw it too". Daniel was taking part in an open day at Deeside Naturalists' Reserve when he saw the avocet through his binoculars near Connah's Quay. The avocet was nestled among thousands of other birds, but the youngster was convinced he had seen it.

The avocet - the emblem of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds - is normally found on the east coast of Britain in summer, or on the River Exe. It became extinct in Britain in the 19th Century, but after its re-introduction in 1940, has bred successfully in the south. The birds are so rare they are protected by law and anyone caught killing one faces a fine of up to £5,000 or up to six months imprisonment. The avocet is also known as a "cobbler's awl" due to the shape of its beak.

Alan Davies, site manager at RSPB Conwy, said: "It's very rare to see them in north Wales. My only other record of a sighting was three years ago, when a pair dropped in for a couple of days. The lad's done very well - hopefully it's the start of a fantastic bird-watching career."



## The Biggest Twitch

Another great story out of the UK, The Biggest Twitch, is an attempt to break the record of the greatest number of birds seen in a single calendar year, believed at present to be 3,662.

The participants: Alan Davies (the very same as quoted in the previous article) the site Manager of the RSPB reserve at Conwy on the north Wales coast who has given up a dream job to fulfill his lifetime ambition, and Ruth Miller who is a freelance marketing consultant having once worked at the RSPB.

The pair began their record bird-spotting attempt on the 1st January 2008 in Tucson Arizona, moved on to Mexico, Texas, Ecuador, the Amazon region, back to the UK, then to Ethiopia and are presently somewhere in the Rift Valley with their total species count at 1502.

Their mission is also to raise awareness of the role birds have to play in our lives and the importance of protecting habitats. Their trip is a fascinating one and readers may be interested in following their adventures on the website [www.thebiggesttwitch.com](http://www.thebiggesttwitch.com) There will be a book published in 2009.

Although world records are irrelevant in the greater scheme of things it is never-the-less a challenging undertaking, and what a wonderful way to see the birds of the world. Most bird enthusiasts are very parochial in their outlook and this brings home the bigger picture. I am sure the intrepid twitchers will turn up in Botswana to see our wealth of birds and particularly our near-endemic species!



## Bird Brain Reveals Flight Secrets

Using state-of-the-art scanning equipment provided by the University of Texas, Dr Angela Milner, of the Natural History Museum in London, used computed tomography to take X-rays of the fossilized brain case of a 150 million year old Jurassic era bird, *Archaeopteryx*. The scientist viewed extremely fine slices of the specimen and then converted the images into a 3D reconstruction of the brain case and inner ear using a computer.



The study revealed structures similar to those that modern birds use for flight and balance adding weight to the popular theory that the birds' wings were used for more than just flapping. Since the discovery of the first *Archaeopteryx* fossil in 1861, the species has been a source of some contention among the palaeontology community.

The carnivorous bird (around 50cm with wings outstretched), had features that were both dinosaur-like and bird-like. It had the distinctly avian characteristic of being feathered, yet also had teeth and clawed hands.

Dr Milner commented: "This all suggests that the development of the bird brain goes hand in hand with that of the physical structures, e.g. the wings that allow it to fly. In fact, the brain is so bird-like, that the flying process must have evolved much sooner than anyone thought."

Researchers will now examine fossils of other birds to look for further evidence of early flight. However there are no fossils that predate the study specimen from the Natural History Museum. There are only six *Archaeopteryx* fossils and one feather sample in existence.

Some interesting websites to find out more:

[www.nhm.ac.uk](http://www.nhm.ac.uk) ; [www.nature.com](http://www.nature.com) ; [www.utexas.edu](http://www.utexas.edu)



## A Climatic Atlas of European Breeding Birds

The recent publication of this book marks an important landmark in our understanding of the impact of human-induced climate change on our environment.

The Atlas, written by Prof. Brian Huntley (Durham University), Prof. Rhys Green (RSPB and Cambridge University), and Drs. Yvonne Collingham and Steve Willis (both Durham University) has been published by Lynx Edicions in partnership with RSPB/Birdlife International and Durham University. It predicts that without vigorous and immediate action to reduce climate change, the potential future range of the average European bird species will shift by nearly 550 km north-east by the end of this century, and will reduce in size by a fifth. More species look set to lose than to gain from projected climatic change. For some species, there is no overlap between their potential future range and their current range, and for a few, there is no future potential range left in Europe. Some bird species that are currently found only in Europe, or that have only small populations elsewhere, are expected to run a significantly increased risk of extinction. The Atlas has added to the growing body of evidence telling us that our world and the life it supports are in grave danger from climate change. We must act to reduce the greenhouse gas pollution that is creating this crisis.

For more information: <http://www.hbw.com/lynx/en/lynx-edicions/novedades/ALT0007-climatic-atlas-european-breeding-birds.html>

Pete Hancock is trying to establish an archive of back numbers of the Familiar Chat. If any member has hard copies of issues predating January 2005, it would be greatly appreciated if they could make them available to him at PO Box 1529, Maun. telephone 6865618

## *Gaborone Branch News*

### *February walk report*

A large turnout of Members, old and new, thoroughly enjoyed the bird walk near the Metsemothlabe River north of Gaborone. Two groups, led by Chris Brewster and Harold Hester, respectively, later met for the traditional social 'breakfast' beside an enormous Acacia erioloba (Camel Thorn). The birds were fantastic and included a wonderful sighting of a large flock of Abdim's Stork feeding on the plentiful 'Corn Crickets'.



Sadly Irene Crona will shortly be leaving Gabs to pursue her career back in Sweden. We wish her well & hope she visits us often



Nick with a monkey skull found nearby



Keddy and Chris share a breakfast watermelon

## ***For All Eternity***

If you would like a really special way to remember someone who cared about the bush and its birds, an *In Memoriam* gift to BirdLife Botswana is something you may want to think about. That's because your gift would go directly towards protecting and conserving our birds and the environment in which they live. BLB is working assiduously to protect our birds and promote an interest in them. We are particularly trying to interest children in learning to appreciate and love our birds.

Your *In Memoriam* gift can ensure a future for the birds that meant so much in the life of someone who is sadly no longer with us. In celebrating the name of someone who cared about these things, you can help us learn more about endangered species, and promote the popularisation of a healthy pastime for others and in so doing, protect these precious birds and the environment.

It may be that you, your family and friends would like to do something more to honour the memory of the one you have lost. If so, you may wish to consider a *Feather Fund* in their name (e.g. the Mary Wilson Feather Fund). This on-going personalised fund will celebrate their memory, and can be added to at appropriate times, like special anniversaries that you may wish to honour. There are many ways in which friends, relatives and colleagues may wish to increase the *Feather Fund* – from fund-raising to making a regular donation. Just let us know if you would like to know more about this rewarding way to sustain the memory of someone who had a special love for birds and the bush.

Please contact Harold Hester on 3161766  
or email him at [haroldh@accelerate-it.co.bw](mailto:haroldh@accelerate-it.co.bw)



## **Growing Your Nest Egg**

**Harold Hester will be giving a further course of 4 lectures over a month on how to invest on the stockmarket.**

**Cost P1000 per person or P750 per person for 2 or more family members.**

Please contact Harold for further information

***All proceeds will go to BirdLife Botswana***

# Committee of BirdLife Botswana 2008

**Chairman** Harold Hester [haroldh@accelerate-it.co.bw](mailto:haroldh@accelerate-it.co.bw)  
**Vice-Chairman** Mike Goldsworthy [mgg@accelerate-it.co.bw](mailto:mgg@accelerate-it.co.bw) - also membership secretary  
**Hon. Treasurer** Daphne Goldsworthy [daf@botsnet.bw](mailto:daf@botsnet.bw)

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### In Memorium

It is with great sadness that we report on the untimely death of Tsogo Maipheto in a car accident in December. He was a great asset to the organization and will be greatly missed. Our condolences go to his family and friends and particularly Pete Hancock in the Maun office.

## BirdLife Events 2008 - Gaborone

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
March 2	Walk	Gabane
March 8 and 9	Camp	Bing Farm, Lobatse
March 18	Talk	Kabelo Senyatso
April 6	Walk	Kopong Hills
April 15	Film	
May 4	Walk	Manyane
May 20	Talk	
May 24	AGM	Kgale Siding
June 1	Walk	Ruretse
June 17	Talk	Virat
July 6	Walk	Notwane
July 12, 13	Water bird counts	S Tyler
July 15	Talk	
August 3	Walk	Bokaa
August 19	Talk	
September 7	Walk	Mogobane
September 16	Talk	
September 28, 29	National meeting/camp	Francistown
October 5	Walk	Gabane
October 18	Annual dinner	Kgale Siding
November 2	Walk	Modipane
November 18	Talk	
December 7	Walk	Mokolodi

1. **Bird walks** start at 06:30 October to April and 08:00 May to September. Meet at the museum.
2. **All talks** take place at the National Museum at 19:30.

## BirdLife Events - Francistown

The Francistown Branch hold their **meetings** on the **second Wednesday** of each month, starting at 19h00 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.

If you have any questions about the club, please call Guy Brina on 2412913 or email him at [gltm@botsnet.bw](mailto:gltm@botsnet.bw).

## BirdLife Events – Kasane

This branch plan to meet on either the last Saturday or Sunday of the month. Check the website [www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw](http://www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw) for details

## Calendar of Events 2008 – Maun

Date	Activity
March 12 <sup>th</sup>	Films – Year of the Flamebird / Kingfisher
March 15 <sup>th</sup>	Field outing to Kukale Pan or Tale Pan
April 9 <sup>th</sup>	DVD - An Inconvenient Truth (Al Gore)
April 12 <sup>th</sup>	Field outing to Lake Ngami
May 14 <sup>th</sup>	Films – For Birds and People / Tswapong
May 17 <sup>th</sup> & 18 <sup>th</sup>	Field outing to D'Kar Game Farm
June 11 <sup>th</sup>	Film - Life of Birds
June 14 <sup>th</sup> & 15 <sup>th</sup>	Kwebe Hills
July 9 <sup>th</sup>	Film – Talons: the Story of a Crowned Eagle
July 12 <sup>th</sup> & 13 <sup>th</sup>	African Waterbird Counts – Thamalakane and Boteti Rivers
July 19 <sup>th</sup>	African Waterbird Counts – Lake Ngami
July 26 <sup>th</sup> & 27 <sup>th</sup>	African Waterbird Counts - Moremi
August 13 <sup>th</sup>	Film - Okavango Magic
August 16 <sup>th</sup> & 17 <sup>th</sup>	Field outing – venue to be announced
September 10 <sup>th</sup>	Film - Birds and their Ways
September 13 <sup>th</sup> & 14 <sup>th</sup>	Field outing to Nxai Pan
October 8 <sup>th</sup>	Bird Quiz
October 11 <sup>th</sup> & 12 <sup>th</sup>	Field outing – venue to be announced
November 12 <sup>th</sup>	Film - Flying Devils
November?	Big Birding Day
December 10 <sup>th</sup>	Film – Amazing Behaviour of Birds of the Kruger National Park

**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.

**Note** that there will always be an activity on the dates listed – these dates can be diarized with a high degree of certainty that an activity will take place. If there is an unexpected problem with the listed activity, another will be substituted.

**Contact** P Hancock at BirdLife Maun office for further information - 6865618.

**Maun office address** – P O Box 1529, Maun

## Membership Form - 2008

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

### Rates

- Ordinary - P120.00
- Corporate - P2000
- Professional – Rangers, Guides and SSG members - P60.00
- Life - P2000
- Students studying in Botswana – P15
- Schools/Clubs – P50 plus P5 per club member with a minimum of 10 members per club
- SADC Region – P200
- Overseas (and outside SADC) – P300

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 (please

PRINT): \_\_\_\_\_

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 the address's 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 6865618

Guy Brina  
Private Bag F12  
Francistown  
or phone Guy to  
collect 2412913

Geoff Williams  
Private Bag K4  
Kasane  
or phone Geoff  
6250341

## OFFICIAL USE

Card \_\_\_\_\_ Data base \_\_\_\_\_