

# FAMILIAR CHAT

*September 2007*



Familiar chat babies in the storeroom last summer

Hi Birdlife Members,

This is my first edition as editor of the Familiar Chat and my baptism by fire included attending the recent committee/ management meeting in Maun. As a 'social' member I had previously not appreciated the exciting and rapidly evolving nature of the organization into a world-class scientific research and conservation group. Please read the Conservation Newsletter and Babbler (available on the website) to find out about all the work being undertaken and check out the website regularly for a comprehensive overview of Birdlife Botswana.

I see the role of the FC as a general newsletter to members and as such would greatly welcome contributions or suggestions. Remember this is your newsletter and needs to reflect your birding interests, observations and ideas as well as being informative on Birdlife matters!

My email address is [skelton@home.co.bw](mailto:skelton@home.co.bw).

Bruce and Polly Hargreaves have finally retired to America and Anthony Vodraska has joined Anita in Iowa. We wish them all great happiness in their new homes and every success in their future ventures. We miss them greatly, and hope to keep in touch.

My family and I had a marvellous fortnight 'on safari' in central and northern Botswana recently and had some wonderful bird sightings, not to mention far too-close encounters with crocs, elephants and hippos. What an amazing country this is for real wilderness adventure – we are truly blessed to live here! So, wherever you are, get out there and then send us your humorous stories, views and pictures!

Eugenie Skelton

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

## CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<b>Environmental Cycling Challenge</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>A Familiar Story</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Test your knowledge</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Gaborone branch Winter Camp</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Staff News</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Committee</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Regional Events</b>	<b>11</b>



African Skimmer, Chobe River islands

IF ANYONE CAN

**Canon**

CAN

# *Environmental Cycling Challenge*

*A report from Tsogo Maiphetho*

*"Do not tell me you are doing this fresh!"* That was Khaya, asking me if I had trained for the exercise I was about to take - cycling 1000 km from Gaborone to Maun via the Trans-Kalahari Highway. *"Well, yes and no! I'm a runner - not a long distance runner, but I run around the football pitch and do some stretching exercises. I also play volleyball, although not much because fieldwork sometimes takes me away for a long time. As for cycling, I will be riding a bike for the first time since joy riding with my schoolmates a decade ago."* He looked so surprised and frightened, listening with wide open eyes. *"Hey man, you must be careful my friend! Do you really know what you are about to do? It's from here to Maun man! Do you realize that?"*

We left Maun for Gaborone on the 19<sup>th</sup> June 2007 with all our bicycles and stuff loaded into two trucks. Zee, Brooks and I travelled in one while the fourth rider, Daisy, was with Pete in the other. We had arranged to meet the other cyclists, Modiri and Danielle in Gaborone, where we had allowed for a full day to finalize preparations and to rest before the big ride.

The long awaited official launch day, Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> June, finally arrived. There were speeches by Mr. Ronald Ridge, honorable M P for Maun West and Mr. Kabelo Senyatso, the Director of Birdlife Botswana. The facilitator and organizer, Zee Mpofo, introduced the cyclists and at 10.30 a.m. the six of us set off on our ten day journey. Until then I honestly didn't realize what I had got myself into. I told myself "this is a first for me and I will do it right and cycle all the way to Maun." I had assured Khaya (Zee's youngest brother whom I thank very much for sacrificing his time to help us with back-up), not to worry, as well as Keddy, Reiko, K.B., Mark Muller, friends and family who doubted.

The first day was filled with excitement. We were escorted out of the city by a Traffic Police motorcyclist, our destination being Kanye, some 89 kms away. We were encouraged to cycle at our own pace, alone or as a group. We stopped for a rest and lunch at Thamaga, checked our bikes and headed off for the most challenging and exciting part of the day, the hills between Moshupa and Kanye. There was one hill that even some cars struggled to get to the top of. I was really used up and very hot when I got there! One would say that God was at his best when he created this side of our country. The view was breathtaking and this recharged me for a very speedy descent. Hey! It was joyous! The sun was getting low and it started to become cold, so I kept my fast pace all the way, arriving at Kanye junction after six, where Steve waited to take us to Mmakgodumo Lodge for the night.

The morning of the second day was very cold but we made an early start to reach our next stop, Jwaneng about 120 km away. Debswana kindly accommodated us at their Game Park, Jwana where we were welcomed by friendly and tame White-browed Sparrow-weavers and Crimson-breasted Shrikes. It wasn't a good day for me at all - I felt totally exhausted and my whole body ached. It was very cold and after fixing a puncture I decided to retire to bed early.



In the early hours of the third day I really thought twice about what I had got myself into. Am I going to make it to Maun? Who told me that these so called beneficiaries need the money I am raising? Where are they this moment when I'm feeling this pain? Aagh! Anyway, I cycled on and after a while I was back on a high, ready for the challenge to reach the Wildlife camp at Mabutsane. From that day we committed to cycle as a group. It was fun sharing stories from the past and our diverse life experiences, coming from different families, races, tribes and countries.

A guy at Mabutsane was expecting us all to be white and was surprised to see only one. Well, that's the way it is I think, Blacks think Blacks cannot do anything challenging like cycling 1000 km! Interestingly, the guys at the camp had reared some Ostriches that had been collected as chicks from the bush.

Our target for the fourth day was Kang, about 115 km away. We spent the night in luxurious Lodge cabins, for which we were very appreciative. It was a day with fewer pains, although many punctures to fix. I remember having my last cup of tea at 1 a.m. before going to bed.

The fifth day saw us in Lone Tree where the hectic days began. If there was anything I hated it was cycling against the wind that made it very difficult to go anywhere. When a truck approached from the front I was almost forced to a complete stop if I wasn't pedalling hard. I liked it when they came from the back giving me an extra push. Hm! Ups and downs. This was a real cycling challenge. The winds were getting stronger by the day and I also began to see many birds killed by the side of the road - Crimson-breasted Shrikes, Fork-tailed Drongos, Southern black-faced Scops-Owlet, African Hoopoes and Hornbills. Despite this we had a great lunch at one of the very beautiful spots, the Hanahai Valley. That evening was the worst. We camped in the middle of nowhere, on almost bare ground. It was terribly windy and very cold.

Things improved the next day and we covered the 65km to Ghanzi easily. We were now much stronger and lighter and no strong winds blew against us. The team was warmly welcomed by the Peace Corps, who were waiting for us on the outskirts of the Kgalagadi town. They cheered and waved as we approached and escorted us to the Score supermarket with honks and ululations which gave us the strength to cycle faster. That night was spent at Tautona Lodge.

We set out very early the following morning to cover the 120 km to Kuke veterinary gate, arriving at around nine in the evening. The next day it was a further 120km or so to Toteng where we camped 4km beyond the village. This was our last night camping in the bush as we were only a night away from home! We had dinner around the fire and checked our bikes for the big day to come - the arrival of the heroes!

Next morning we left at eight, feeling the excitement of reaching home after so many days of cycling. It was a smooth journey into Maun and we were met by cheering people at Shashe Bridge. It was great! We were right on schedule, four o'clockish, and the Police escorted the crew and well wishers to our final destination, Riley's Hotel, via the town centre. There was a wonderful reception with drinks and a lot of thankyou's to the different stakeholders and it was great.

The event, started in July 2006 by three avid cyclists, is now an annual event with the hope of increased fundraising for environmental charities and to increase environmental awareness. Our goal was to raise funds for four non-governmental organizations in the Ngamiland District - Birdlife Botswana to educate the public on bird issues; Bana Ba Naga to provide environmental outreach services to disadvantaged children; the Maun Tree Planting Foundation to buy 'cages' to protect newly planted trees; and Women Against Rape to educate the public about social issues.

The challenge also promotes cycling in Botswana, road safety awareness and healthy living. From a bicycle one can see how beautiful the land is and have the freedom to explore the wonders of the wilderness. One can also see how people interact with Mother Nature, in both good and bad ways and above all establish wonderful bonds with fellow cyclists.

What a wonderfully rewarding experience!

(Ed: This report was edited for space reasons)

Note that it is still possible to make a financial contribution to the Environmental Cycling Challenge – cheques should be made out to Meyer and Associates Trust, First National Bank Account # 62098326137, or call Zee Mpofu (mobile 72142399).

# A Familiar Story?

By Eugenie Skelton

Although commonly found in close association with man, our little family of Familiar Chats was no less thrilling to observe. Julia spotted them early in December when putting tools away in the shed. Most of the 8 plastic boxes on the wall had some sign of building material in them and just as the books say, the nests (three of them in adjacent boxes) were beautifully constructed. A firm foundation of stones and clods of earth supported a base of natural fibres, leaves, bark and seedpods topped by a neat cup of soft grass, fibre and dog hair. Three beautiful turquoise eggs, speckled with dark brown, mostly on the thicker end, lay inside.



Two days later (we had obviously missed most of the incubation period of about 14 days), the first chick hatched, followed the next day by number two. The third egg did not hatch. I photographed them almost daily, under the watchful eye of the parents and was astounded at their rapid development.





Huge dark grey eye bulges gradually diminished relative to the size of the head, and the eyes opened on the fourth day. Ear coverts were clearly visible and unruly tufts of down on the top of the head quickly transformed to feathers. The shafts of wing feathers literally grew out of the skin overnight. The temperature under the iron roof was unbearably high and the tiny chicks flopped about and gaped in distress, waiting for food. It worried me terribly that heat would overpower them. However, survive they did!

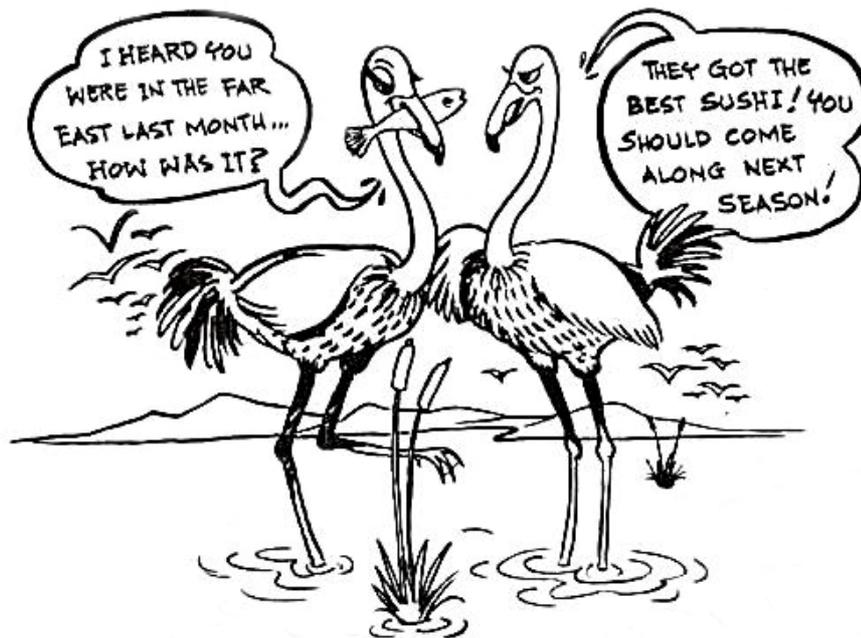


Sadly we had to leave Gaborone after a week and missed their fledging. When we returned the nest was empty but for the unhatched egg but we saw the family regularly for the rest of the summer.

The parents have been back recently (late August), looking around the shed again and will hopefully rear their young in our toolboxes again. I might have to delay the family holiday this year!

# Test your Knowledge

I recently attended the World Environmental Education Conference in Durban as one of the approximately 1000 delegates from 101 countries. The conference was extremely well-organized, the presentations interesting and the many exhibitor stands were a drawcard for educators with pack-rat tendencies. Among the educational materials collected from the stands was a new (December 2006) book published by UNEP, *Environmental Reporting for African Journalists: A Handbook of Key Environmental Issues and Concepts*. As I read different sections concerning educating the media about bird issues, in this case Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA), my attention was drawn by the cartoon reproduced below.



I appreciate that a cartoon catches interest and is intended as satire, caricature or humour and can often capture the essence of an issue with a few strokes of a pen. It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words and while that may have some truth to it, sometimes it is also necessary to carefully examine the picture, in this case the cartoon, to see what words or messages are being sent out.

Think about what you know about the birds in the cartoon – their special characteristics, habitats, food, feeding methods, behaviour and distribution, among other things. Make a list of the misinformation about these birds conveyed in the cartoon and send it in to the editor of the Familiar Chat, Eugenie ([skelton@home.co.bw](mailto:skelton@home.co.bw)). She will put your findings in the next issue of the FC so all can see what you careful readers have observed!

Doreen McColaugh – BLB Education Officer

**Eds note:** Lake Ngami is in flood and flamingos ( both species) are in residence. Ken Oake of Maun kindly took Harold, Doreen and me there after the recent Maun meeting and we counted 49 bird species in just a few hours. Check out our tickbird site [www.worldbirds.org/Botswana](http://www.worldbirds.org/Botswana) to see the list and please contribute your own birding lists to this important initiative. Also, read the March Conservation Newsletter on [www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw](http://www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw) to find out all about the three pilot projects to promote the sustainable use of biodiversity that enhances the livelihoods of local communities of which The Lake Ngami Trust is one. Two young guides are presently being trained to take avi-tourists to the site to witness this natural wonder.

# *Gaborone Branch – Winter Camp*

## *Coombe Farm, Tuli Block, 8–10 June 2007*

As a relative newcomer to Botswana, BLB has provided me with some amazing opportunities to get to know different areas not generally known to the public and I value this enormously. The most recent quarterly camp was just such a privilege.

Hosted by Mark and Jane Bing at Coombe Farm, on the banks of the Limpopo River, we camped next to a ‘forest’ of bushveld gardenia trees *Gardenia volkensii subsp. spatulifolia*, in absolute peace and privacy. No people pressure here! Although mid-winter and extremely cold at night, the days were lovely and with thirty-something km of river frontage and adjacent bush to explore, there was plenty of interest.



Predominantly a game farm and relatively safe from poaching, we saw several large herds of impala, some eland, bushpig, red hartebeest and porcupine. A 4x4 cross-country jaunt in Mark’s wake took us to a marvellous spot at the confluence of the Limpopo and a tributary where there was still water, complete with a few small crocs for sundowners and photo-opportunities for those of us so inclined.



Our focus, however, was on counting and recording the co-ordinates of Whitebacked Vulture nests in the huge Ana or Mokosho trees, *Faidherbia albida (Acacia albida)*, which lined the river banks. Easy to spot atop the foliage, many were occupied and as the air warmed, we were treated to wonderful sightings of vultures riding the thermals.

In all, 22 nests in a 3–4 km stretch were recorded, making this an important breeding area for the vultures. Listed as ‘near threatened’ in the IUCN red list, these birds although the most widespread and common vultures in Africa, are at risk from habitat destruction, poisoning and loss of food supply.



*Good company dispels the early morning chill*

Of the 100 or so species of birds sighted in the two days, a highlight was the pair of Giant Eagle Owls (I now know to identify them by size & extraordinary pink eyelids!) which we spotted in full daylight in the riverine trees.

So to all those who didn't make it .... eat your heart out and we hope to see you next time ....!

Eugenie Skelton

Note – If the back is not visible, Whitebacked Vultures can be distinguished from Cape Vultures by their smaller size (90 – 98cm long as against 105–115cm); darker overall colouration; brown, not white neck feathers; and dark, not honey-coloured eyes. They breed in winter, often using the same nest for several successive years, and produce a single white egg laid on a platform of sticks, lined with leaves or grass. Incubation takes just less than 2 months with both parents sharing the duties and nestlings are reared for nearly 4 months. After fledging the chick is dependent on its parents for a further 4 months.



*"...the great grey-green greasy Limpopo River..."  
– the croc is to the right of the tree stump!*



## *Staff news*

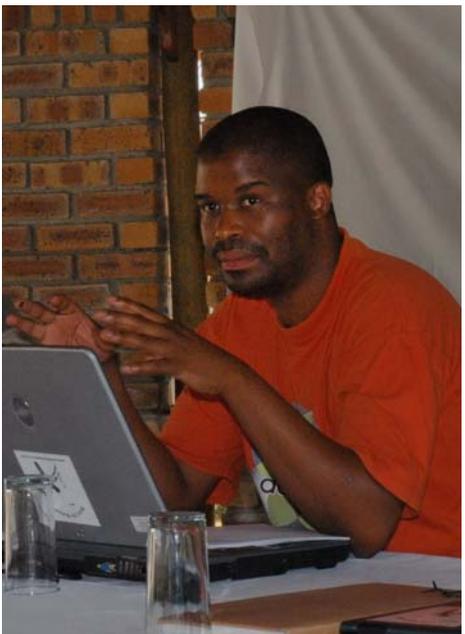
**Mooketsi Mfolwe** is a young man who has just completed his degree in sociology at the University of Botswana. He has been with BirdLife Botswana since 2005 as a volunteer during his winter vacations. He was involved in researching the Setswana names for the 'Beginner's Guide to Birds of Botswana' and translating the contents from English to Setswana. He will be joining Pete Hancock at the BLB Maun branch to complete the Swedbio project by the end of December this year.



**Motshereganyi Virat Kootsositse** joined Birdlife in July 2000. He holds a Bsc in Ecology and Environmental Management from UB. Virat's main focus will be as a project manager on the IBA programme, with his first assignment being the new EU programme on instituting effective monitoring of Protected Areas that are also Important Bird Areas as a contribution to reducing biodiversity loss in Africa.

Virat has worked for the DWNP as an assistant park manager in the Moremi Game Reserve and he gained experience in community liaison being involved in the drafting of the game reserve management plan. During his time at Moremi he was a member of the district technical committee and worked as a fisheries officer in the Fisheries Unit.

Virat has acted as a team leader for several expeditions in the Chobe river system, including among others for the FAO disease experts. He also co-authored a technical report for the Okavango delta fishery frame survey, part of the 2006 Okavango Delta Management Plan.



**Kabelo Senyatso**, Director of Birdlife Botswana, has recently left to study for a Doctorate at the University of East Anglia. Awarded a Commonwealth Scholarship, Kabelo will study the Kori Bustard, one of Botswana's 'Birds of Concern' and a long term interest of his. Although Kabelo will return periodically to spend time doing field work, his duties will largely fall to the remaining members of staff. His enormous energy and expertise will be greatly missed and we are counting the days 'til his return. We wish him a happy landing and great success in his studies. Hurry back, Kabelo!

# COMMITTEE OF BIRDLIFE BOTSWANA 2007

<b>Chairman</b>	Harold Hester ( <a href="mailto:haroldh@accelerate-it.co.bw">haroldh@accelerate-it.co.bw</a> )
<b>Vice-Chairman</b>	Mike Goldsworthy ( <a href="mailto:mgg@accelerate-it.co.bw">mgg@accelerate-it.co.bw</a> ) - also membership secretary
<b>Hon. Treasurer</b>	Daphne Goldsworthy ( <a href="mailto:daf@botsnet.bw">daf@botsnet.bw</a> )
<b>Hon. Secretary</b>	Mooketsi Mfolwe

## Committee members

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Pete Hancock - Conservation Officer in Maun and Sec. Maun Group  
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Mooketsi Mfolwe – Assistant CO - Maun  
Motshereganyi Virat Kootsositse – Assistant CO – Gaborone

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<b>Asst. Editors</b>	Pete Hancock & Doreen McColaugh

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

## Birdlife Events - Gaborone

Calendar of events for 2007		
<b>Sep 2</b>	Walk	Bokaa Dam
Sep 8	Committee meeting	Maun
Sep 22	<b>Annual dinner</b>	At the Hesters. Guest speaker – Mark Bing
<b>Oct 7</b>	Walk	Modipane
Oct 9	Committee meeting	Venue to be confirmed
Oct 16	Talk	Reiko – Life in Botswana – venue to be confirmed
Oct 20, 21	<b>Quarterly Camp</b>	Tuli Block?
<b>Nov 4</b>	Little Birding Day	
Nov 20	Committee meeting	
Nov 20	Talk	
Nov 24	Birding Big Day	
<b>Dec 2</b>	Walk	Mokolodi
Dec 11	Committee meeting	

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 Botswana Accountancy College at 19:30.

## Birdlife Events - Francistown

The Francistown Branch hold their **meetings** on the **second Thursday** of each month 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

## Birdlife Botswana - Maun

Date	Activity	Person leading
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.



**Remember to buy your tickets for the Birdlife Annual Dinner to be held at the Hesters, Notwane on Sat 22nd September.**

Tickets available at the Birdlife Shop, Broadhurst - P150 per head  
Guest speaker - Dr. Mark Bing