

FACT SHEET – African Skimmer

The African Skimmer is a globally threatened species which breeds in Botswana, mainly along the Okavango Panhandle. The threats to this species in Botswana are quite well documented: nesting birds are unintentionally disturbed by subsistence and recreational fishermen. The former often use exposed sandbanks as suitable places to repair their nets, and since the skimmers regard the same sandbanks as suitable places to lay their eggs, this results in a conflict, with the skimmers being on the losing side. The skimmers also lose to the recreational fishermen, since the wake caused by their boats inundates low-lying sandbanks and floods the skimmers' nests. Unfortunately it has become the practice to hold a fishing competition along the panhandle on the Independence Day long weekend, which is in the middle of the skimmer breeding season, and this has exacerbated the problems caused by recreational fishermen.



Photo: P Scheepers



Photo: P Hancock

It is now important to address these threats in a constructive way; BirdLife Botswana believes that the Okavango is large enough for fishermen **and** skimmers, and that a mutually acceptable solution can be found. Part of the solution lies in the creation of a sanctuary along the Phillip Channel which, coincidentally is the most important breeding area for the Nile Crocodile too (interestingly skimmers and crocodiles coexist happily, and may even benefit from each others presence!). The idea of a sanctuary has been incorporated in the Okavango Delta Management Plan, but will need to be supplemented with an awareness campaign targeting fishermen and other stakeholders. Time will tell whether people and skimmers can live together