

FACTSHEET – Bateleur

The Bateleur is an ever-present feature of our skies, so it may come as a surprise to see it included as a Birds of Conservation Concern. The reason it is here is because it has declined dramatically in neighbouring Southern African countries, to the extent that in South Africa for example, it is confined to large protected areas. It is predicted that this scenario will soon apply to the whole region, Botswana included, and since forewarned is fore-armed, let's treat our Bateleur population as a cause for concern.

In fact, raptor counts conducted throughout Botswana during the early 1990s by the then DWNP Ornithologist, Marc Herremans, showed that Bateleur numbers already showed a decrease with increasing distance from a protected area (national park or game reserve).



Photo: G Atkinson

Bateleurs are quite sensitive to disturbance when breeding, but the major cause for their decline in Southern Africa is undoubtedly due to poisoning. Bateleurs scavenge to a large extent and since they are airborne before the vultures, they are often the first to arrive at a poisoned carcass (usually left out to kill a marauding lion or other mammalian predator).



Photo: P Hancock

The immature Bateleurs, easily distinguished from the striking adults by their uniform brown plumage, are especially susceptible to poisoning, and recruitment into the population suffers as a result. It appears as though Linyanti and Khwai in northern Botswana may be nursery areas for young, recently fledged Bateleurs from throughout the country, and if so, this bodes well for their survival since these two areas are relatively undisturbed.