

FACTSHEET – European Roller

Surprised to see the European Roller listed as a Bird of Conservation Concern in Botswana? This species has been steadily declining before our very eyes, without us even having noticed that it is now actually quite scarce. It has recently been added to the list of globally threatened birds.



Photo: [W T arboton](#)

There was a marked influx of European Rollers into Botswana during the summer of 2001, and this may have masked its decline locally. An increase in the number of a particular species looks superficially encouraging but may in fact be due to it being displaced from hitherto suitable areas. The European Roller has been affected by habitat destruction in Europe, where hedgerows have been destroyed to make way for monocultures, and its decline was detected by bird population monitoring activities there. It follows that since the bird is a summer visitor to Southern Africa that numbers seen here will be similarly lower. The use of pesticides in Europe has also undoubtedly had a negative impact on the species, since it is mainly insectivorous.

While it is easy to say that the reasons for the demise of this species lie in Europe, it is less easy to be sure that the European Roller is adequately protected across the rest of its flyway between north and south. It is definitely persecuted in some Mediterranean countries while on migration, and thousands are shot for food in Oman every spring. In Botswana, it is currently afforded no protection by wildlife legislation, and may be adversely affected by the marked increase in bird shooting using unregulated air rifles (or pellet guns) that has been a noticeable feature of the past few years. The use of pesticides in commercial farming areas in Botswana may also be taking its toll on the species while in the southern hemisphere. It is up to everyone in Botswana to ensure that we do our bit towards its conservation by maintaining suitable conditions for this species to thrive while it is a visitor here.