

FACTSHEET – Hooded Vulture

In terms of its global status, the Hooded Vulture is classified as Least Concern – making it a bird that we don't have to worry about. This is because it is widespread and abundant, particularly in West Africa where it thrives in association with human habitation.



Photo: M Muller

However, in Botswana the picture is different, and the Hooded Vulture is definitely a bird of conservation concern. Like all vultures in Southern Africa, it is susceptible to the scourge of indiscriminate poisoning, and a few major incidents involving substantial numbers of the species would have a serious impact on its population. It is largely restricted to northern Botswana, and throughout this area it is nowhere abundant. Its breeding range mirrors the distribution of the Jackalberry tree *Diospyros mespiliformis* which is the preferred nesting tree, this possibly limiting its wider dispersal throughout the country. The Linyanti Swamps Important Bird Area is one of the strongholds for this species in Botswana, and it is likely that the Okavango Delta will prove to be similarly important.

As scavengers, vultures are at the top of the food pyramid, making them a vulnerable group susceptible to any disruptions lower down the food chain. The Hooded Vulture is a highly specialized scavenger making it even more vulnerable to changes in ecosystem functioning. This is definitely a 'bird to watch' particularly when one acknowledges the recent drastic decline of the three Asian vulture species from being the most common vultures in the world to virtual extinction in a mere decade.