

FACT SHEET – Lesser Kestrel

One of the most spectacular natural sights in summer in Southern Africa is hundreds of thousands of migratory Lesser Kestrels congregating at dusk at their communal roosts, usually in large Eucalyptus trees. Unfortunately this is now no longer a common scene, and in Botswana there is currently only one active roost - in Palapye.



Photo: W T arboton

The world population of the Lesser Kestrel has declined drastically - by more than 20% over the past decade - due to habitat loss and degradation of its range in Europe. This has come about due to intensified agriculture, deforestation and urbanization. This is particularly serious since this kestrel breeds in the northern hemisphere, and only overwinters in Southern

Africa. Nevertheless, it is important for us to ensure that when it is in Botswana, it is not confronted by any further problems. Since it is largely insectivorous, potential threats could be the excessive use of pesticides, particularly those used to control swarming locusts, to which the kestrels are particularly partial. Another problem already faced by the birds is persecution at their roosts, and removal of the roost trees – it must be conceded that 10,000 kestrels can make quite a mess of the area around their roost and some people feel that this offsets their value as a natural insect control system.

The communal roosts are important places for monitoring Lesser Kestrels, as all the birds within a 30 kilometre radius come together at one site where they can be counted. These co-ordinated counts take place throughout Southern Africa during January every year, and have provided minimum population estimates and an indication of trends over the period for which they have been conducted. If you know of any active roosts in Botswana, please inform your nearest BirdLife office so that they can be included in the monitoring programme.