

FACTSHEET - Slaty Egret

The Slaty Egret is globally threatened and is regarded as Vulnerable due to its relatively small population (estimated at approximately 4,000 birds) and its small geographical distribution (85% of the world population is found within the confines of the Okavango Delta).



Photos: G Atkinson

It is similar in appearance to the Black Heron, and was in fact only separated from this species fairly recently. It differs from the Black Heron in having all-yellow legs, a wine-coloured throat (from which it derives its scientific name *vinaceigula*) and the fact that it does not mantle its wings into an umbrella when fishing like the Black Heron.

The Slaty Egret is a bird of shallow, lightly vegetated floodplains where it hunts for small fish and aquatic invertebrates by sight. The presence of the alien aquatic waterweed, *Salvinia molesta*, which forms dense mats on the water surface is detrimental to this species as it impedes their vision when hunting.



There are only a few known breeding sites of Slaty Egrets in the Okavango Delta, and they are mostly small colonies in *Phoenix reclinata* palm islands. Other recorded sites are in *Phragmites* reedbeds, but these are susceptible to destruction by fire and elephants.

Botswana has a special responsibility for conserving this species since it is a near-endemic *i.e.* most of the world population is found in the Okavango.