

FACT SHEET – Southern Ground-Hornbill

It would be a sad day if the Southern Ground-Hornbill disappeared from our savannas – apart from occupying a unique niche, it is a colourful species full of character. It is widespread throughout the woodlands and plains of Africa where its booming call heralds the new dawn.



Photo: M Kamakama

Unfortunately in Southern Africa, it has declined noticeably in range and numbers during living memory, and in Botswana and neighbouring countries it is virtually confined to large protected areas. This is why BirdLife Botswana is concerned about its conservation status. It is a long-lived species, but breeds very slowly – although two egg clutches are common, there are no authentic records of both chicks surviving. In South Africa where a detailed long-term study was made by Alan and Meg Kemp, it was found that a breeding pair produced only one chick that survived to maturity, every ten years. This means that any adult mortalities, particularly of breeding females, can have far reaching repercussions – flocks usually have only one adult female, and if something happens to her, the group disintegrates.

Ground-Hornbills are directly persecuted by some people in response to their habit of smashing windows (they are highly territorial and attack their reflections) but in Botswana, the major threat is probably the burgeoning elephant population which impacts negatively on the availability of large hollow nesting trees. The species needs close monitoring so that an early-warning system can be established and remedial action taken before it joins the ranks of globally threatened species.