



The BirdLife International partner in Botswana,
and member of the World Conservation Union

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NEWS RELEASE

27 March 2010

BirdLife: Champions for birds and people in Africa

BirdLife Partners from across Africa have just completed a meeting (16–19 March 2010) in Botswana, organised to deliberate on progress with their shared conservation vision, and to develop plans for the coming two years. Delegates from 23 African countries have been discussing a wide range of issues under the theme: 'BirdLife: Champions for birds and people'.

"This has been a critical meeting for BirdLife's Africa Partnership", said Professor Obot Emmanuel- Chairperson for the BirdLife Africa Partnership. "We've reviewed progress and future plans for joint projects covering a wide range of issues including Important Bird Areas (IBAs), migratory birds, vulture declines, saving Critically Endangered birds and our work with local community groups and school children".

The meeting has been held in Kasane, Botswana, and has been jointly organised by BirdLife Botswana (BirdLife Partner). "We are pleased with the partnership approach of BirdLife International and the support of BirdLife Botswana to improve the opportunities and lifestyles of local communities, in Botswana, through birds and biodiversity conservation", said the Honourable Gibson Nshimwe, Member of Parliament, Chobe District, during his opening keynote speech.

The BirdLife Africa Partnership has been exploring mechanisms to promote local communities - site support groups (SSGs) whose livelihoods depend upon the biological resources found within IBAs - to sustainably manage their site for the benefit of themselves and the birds. "SSGs are a vital constituency for the conservation and sustainability of IBAs" added Dr Julius Arinaitwe - BirdLife Africa IBA Programme Manager. The BirdLife Africa Partnership is currently working with 18,000 local people from 198 SSGs.

Delegates also discussed their biggest constituency, children - over 400,000 children are involved in environmental school clubs. "The importance of working with school children cannot be overemphasised - they are our future", added Dr Arinaitwe. African Partners have reviewed progress with the efforts to save the 29 Critically Endangered birds found in Africa. Half of these species now have focused organisations and individuals - Species Guardians - undertaking priority actions to save them. These guardians are being linked with a community of donors - Species Champions - who are providing the funding to undertake the urgent conservation action needed to save the species from extinction.

The impact of chemicals on birds has been a key topic at the meeting. The increasing numbers of vulture deaths is particularly alarming. In Botswana alone, over 200 vultures have been reported to have died due to poisoning, the most recent incidence having been reported last week. Yet these records have not been collated systematically. Most of the recorded individuals are White-backed Vultures *Gyps africanus*. Vulture deaths due to poisoning, mostly unintentional, have also been recorded in several other Eastern and Southern African countries.

An overarching theme discussed in Kasane has been climate change and the threat it poses to birds and people. The BirdLife Africa Partnership has just published a brochure on its climate work in Africa entitled: 'Climate change in Africa, What is BirdLife International doing about it?'. The publication clearly establishes that the conservation of biodiversity and their habitats is crucial to address climate change. "The Africa Partnership is working hard to ensure that the maintenance of healthy ecosystems is a fundamental part of climate change actions and strategies for people and our planet", concluded Dr Ngeh.

Issued by: Kabelo Senyatso
Director, BirdLife Botswana

Contacts:

BirdLife Botswana, Private Bag 003, Suite 348, Mogoditshane, BOTSWANA

Telephone: +267 3190540/1

Facsimile: +267 3190541

E-mail address: blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw

Web site: www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw