

Familiar Chat

Winter Edition



Contact us:

BirdLife Botswana, P O Box 26691,
Game City, Gaborone, BOTSWANA

Tel & Fax: **+267-3190540**

Email: blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw

Website: www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw

Facebook: www.facebook.com/BirdLifeBotswana

Twitter @KgoriBustard

Editor: peterdarcybotswana@gmail.com



Hornbill
Specialist
Group

**What do
you know
about
Hornbills?**

There are 55 different species across Africa and Asia. They are largely diurnal, omnivorous and some species, when not in the breeding season flock in groups of up to 2500 individuals.

Of the 24 species found in Africa, 13 are birds of the more open woodlands and savanna, and some occur even in highly arid environments; the remaining species are found in dense forests. This contrasts with Asia, where a single species occurs in open savanna and the remainder are forest species.

Check out the IUCN site:
<https://iucnhornbills.org/african-hornbills/>

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p8-9 .. and just in case you thought all is well in the environment (with us all being locked up and prohibited from travelling)... here is a depressing article:

'OILSPILL OFF THE COAST OF MAURITIUS'



Bird camp at Kalahari Vultures, 13 to 15 March, 2020

Eight intrepid souls, all members of BirdLife Botswana, escaped the media hype of global corona virus and falling stock exchanges and currencies around the world, and spent a tranquil weekend just beyond Lephepe, doing what they enjoy best, namely watching birds. Our venue was Kalahari Vultures Camp, situated on a cattle and game farm, which is twenty-eight kms west of Lephepe and forty kms from the central Kalahari Game Reserve.



The farm is very well run by Wynand and Marietta, and we were made to feel very welcome.

The camp site is situated under a number of leafy acacias and has a central fire place around which all problems seem to melt away. It is supplemented by two long-drop toilets and two cold water showers which are ideal in a hot climate. Obviously, there is game on the farm, but the only indication we had was that a couple of fences had been broken by two elephants the night before we arrived. But birds and birding are the main attraction. There is a special waterhole constructed about four kms from the camp site and this is serviced by a generous hide to

the west of the waterhole. Wynand intends building an additional hide to the east of the hole and closer to it. This will then be user friendly in the mornings. Vultures, mostly White-backed and Lappet, visit the water regularly, but for us the main attraction this weekend were six Lanner Falcons, four residents near the campsite and two at the waterhole. Playing a subsidiary, but never the less important role, were flocks of thousands of Red-billed Quelea which needed to sate their thirst. We were surprised at the apparent lack of success of the Lanners, who spent much of the day in hunting mode. Unsuccessful sortie after unsuccessful sortie was made by the hunters, and the hunted seemed to almost ignore them and carried on with their drinking and twittering business, all the time flocking in their inimitable way. There were so many quelea, that as they took off and landed it almost sounded like distant thunder. We spent quite some time watching these aerial battles, marvelling at the swiftness of the lanners and the agility of the quelea. Then there were the other Kalahari specials. One of the most exciting was a pair of Pirit Batis, whose territories take over where the Chinspot Batises leave off. These species rarely overlap, but this farm is one of those places where overlap does occur. Ian educated the ignorant among us, as to where the name "Pirit" comes from.



Evidently, they were first identified by the French ornithologist Levillant. He thought that the name Pirit most closely described the wingbeat sounds they make....in French of course. Others were

an Icterine Warbler, Red-billed Spurfowl, Namaqua Doves a plenty, a magnificent Purple Roller in our campsite on arrival, many Spotted Flycatchers, several Fawn-coloured Larks, a myriad Shaft-tailed Whydahs chasing one another, the odd Kalahari Scrub-robin, and a majestic Bateleur. In the evening we were entertained by a Pearl-spotted Owlet, a couple of Barn Owls, a duet of Southern White-faced Scops Owls and the distant deep calls of a Verreaux's Eagle-Owl. What more could a birder want?



En route to and from camp we stopped at Sojwe Pan. This is an ephemeral wetland, which occasionally is filled with water. This weekend was one such time and we were richly rewarded for our stops. As usual, breathtakingly beautiful was a large flock of Greater Flamingo, supported by a couple of Lesser Flamingoes. Then there were large flocks of Avocet, Little Stint, Ruff, Cape Shoveller and Red-billed Teal. Trying unsuccessfully to remain incognito, was a White-backed Pelican, a group of Maccoa Ducks, a couple of SA Shelduck, some Southern Pochard, a large flock of Spur-winged Geese, and taking the good-looking stakes, a Black-necked Grebe. Of course, there were the usual Black-winged Stilts, Common and Wood Sandpipers and Ringed Plovers. On the dry grassland fringing the Pan, were Chestnut and Grey-backed Finchlarks and a few Red-capped Larks. A Yellow Canary brightened up the surrounds.

The character of a camp is made by the personalities of those there. And this was no exception. There was Archie Makgothi, he with lovely anecdotes and wisdom of the bush, his colleague Zappa Tlale with similar stories, Kabo,

erstwhile leader of Jwaneng branch, now a businessman in Gabs, Sabina, quietly, confident in a Germanic way, Craig, who is not the silent type, Janet his understanding wife, the English lass who understands Afrikaans without letting on that she does, Ian, our Chairman and photographer, and bird-spotter cum photographer supreme, but who struggles to differentiate between Brown Snake Eagles and Tawny Eagles.

It was an excellent camp as usual and as expected. Officially we saw 111 species. A report will follow in a few days and will appear on our website, Facebook and probably Familiar Chat. These camps are not to be missed as they are a lot of fun and we escape all the dreadful news highlighted on TV and the media. We are investigating options of the next camp taking place some time in May. Watch this and other spots.

Hey you guys won't believe this. As soon as you left me there in Sojwe interesting things happened. The flamingoes came around me and did a flamingo dance followed by the little grebes with their synchronized swimming. Then that pelican returned with 5 of his friends and the house martins were doing their acrobatic stunts around my chair. It turned out I've been sleeping for about an hour!! 😊😊😊😊 Great camp never disappointing. Thanks. I did go to Shadi shadi pan though when i woke up and found not as many birds as cows. Sojwe was tops

One must give Ian his due; he is very good at spotting birds and identifying them quickly. Lastly there is little old me, shyly minding his own business. It was a lovely camp and most were a little heart-sore when we had to say good-bye. There will be another time, and hopefully a few more will be able to join in the enjoyment.



If any reader wants to get away from it all, experience the Kalahari Bushveld at its best, see some unusual birds and their activities, you could do far worse than give Wynand or Marietta, his wife, a call at 00267-73565228 and arrange a visit to Kalahari Vultures. Immerse yourself in the place and luxuriate in its tranquillity



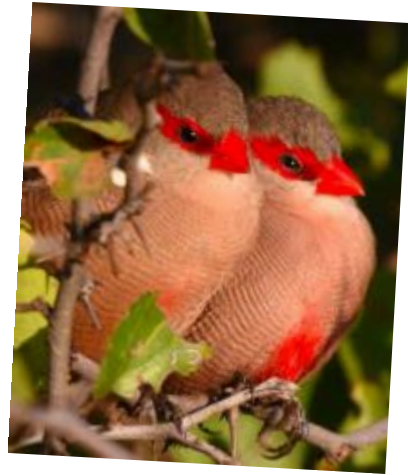
Harold
Hester

Bird
photos by
Ian White.

A few of Jan White's more notable fotos since March 2020. Well done Sir!!



Yellow morph Crimson Breasted Shrike



Common waxbills



Leucistic Marico Flycatcher



(Male) Burchell's Sandgrouse
(having a dustbath)



Tawny Eagle (Sita Pan)



White winged tern

The story of Boris, Jenny and Aaos - Egyptian Vultures who live in Albania but travel to Southern Sahara countries during their annual migration and face dangers all along the way....
(Thank you to our Egyptian Correspondent Sally Jobson)



FROM ECO ALBANIA.ORG

Only 6 breeding pairs and 3 single adults remain today in Albania and all of them along Vjosa (Aaos) river and its tributaries such as Drino river, Benca river, Shushica River, Kardhiq stream etc. Those only nine territories are just a mere sign compared with the presence in 14 territories in 2004. Thus, the Globally Endangered Egyptian Vulture has lost in just 15 years circa 35 % of its territories in Albania. The only remaining territories occur today only in Vjosa watershed. It is evident that there is an extra strong bond between the Egyptian Vulture and Vjosa (Aaos) river and vice versa. Due to that spirited relationship, an expression has found its way in people's hearts and minds: "When we say Egyptian Vulture we mean Vjosa (Aaos) and when we say Vjosa (Aaos) we mean the Egyptian Vulture.

<http://www.ecoalbania.org/en/2020/03/30/the-bondbetween-the-egyptian-vulture-and-the-last-free-river-in-europe/>

FROM NATURE CONSERVATION EGYPT

Boris has made it through Egypt safely! Jenny and Aaos/Vjosa are following lead.

Boris, one of the oldest tagged Egyptian Vulture, entered Egypt on March 6th and managed to weather the storm and make it safely out of Egypt on March 10th. He is now almost safely back to Europe. We wish him a safe return!

Two other tagged Egyptian Vultures, Jenny and Aaos/Vjosa, are steadily making their way through Egypt's Eastern Desert.

We look forward to welcoming Jenny and Aaos/Vjosa to Suez where our team is conducting field research on the threats of collision and electrocution that these magnificent birds face in one of their most frequented rest stops in Egypt.

If you happen to be in the Eastern Desert grab your binoculars and look up, maybe you'll be one of the lucky few who can spot a soaring Egyptian Vulture.

<https://www.facebook.com/131002746947143/posts/2814584048588986/?sfnsn=scwpwa&extid=NHqSwZVAZySSmGMJ>

SO HAROLD HESTER CAME UP WITH THE IDEA THAT WE JOIN BIRDLASSER'S LOCKDOWN COUNTS AND A NUMBER OF US JOINED THE 'CHALLENGE'.

The Botswana Lockdown Challenge
From 2 Apr 2020 (00:00) to 31 May 2020 (23:59)

Leaderboard		Species count 249
Rank	Birder	Species count
1	Lyn F	129
2	Harold H	100
3	Mike G	87
4	Virginia	78
5	Haydn W	77
6	Stephen Chobe	57
7	Jack	49
8	Ann G	43
9	CraigB2020	36
10	carol Holmeyer	32
11	Peter D	26
12	Michael Nkuba	25



One supposes Lyn Francey was out at Muchenje, West of Chobe National Park. Quite a remarkable list from her with quite a number of species not seen in other parts of the country.

Harold was in the rolling estates of Notwane with a little water feature that attracted a few water birds, etc

The 5 most logged species	
Species	Count
Blue Waxbill	25
Ring-necked Dove	22
Grey Go-away-bird	20
Fork-tailed Drongo	18
Pied Crow	18

In fact it would be lovely to get the coordinates of the participants so we could see what was spotted where. Let's congratulate one and all for their observations and encourage others to join in next time

On 22nd April, almost halfway through the 'challenge', Harold gave an encouraging rally call to the participants:

It is exciting to see competition on the Botswana Lockdown Challenge is hotting up.
Mike Goldsworthy who was quarantined for two weeks is making a late challenge. Virginia is doing very well and breathing down his neck and Stephen from Chobe was a late entrant and coming up fast. The competition is still wide open. Keep those eyes peeled and don't forget to look upwards.

OTHER CHALLENGES THAT TOOK PLACE 'LOCALLY' AT THE SAME TIME AS OURS:

ESWATINI: 21 participants, 'Lee' got the most different species of bird with 76; RSA, Ashwell Glasson* with 261 species (must be an interesting garden!!... hmmm..) with 1219 participants; and NAMIBIA with 21 participants and 81 species recorded by the highest scorer, which was Toni.

The 5 most logged species	
Species	Count
Black-collared Barbet	21
Purple-crested Turaco	20
Dark-capped Butbul	19
Hadada Ibis	16
Bronze Mannikin	16

The 5 most logged species	
Species	Count
Hadada Ibis	2,691
Laughing Dove	2,541
Red-eyed Dove	2,397
Dark-capped Butbul	2,017
Cape White-eye	1,951

The 5 most logged species	
Species	Count
Laughing Dove	59
House Sparrow	56
White-backed Mousebird	50
Speckled Pigeon	50
Rosy-faced Lovebird	46

Interesting to see the five most common species from each country!

LIMPOPO CAMP JULY 2020

BLB camp at Limpopo July 2020

Why are these camps so enjoyable?

We arranged this camp in mid-winter on the coldest weekend of the year, and everyone thought it was wonderful! I suppose that a temperature of -2 degrees Centigrade on the first night was a challenge which had to be met as a starter. (Note Baboloki's frozen binoculars in the morning!)



But why are they all enjoyable? Is it because we are all fascinated by Nature especially birds? Is it because we come from disparate backgrounds? Is it because we leave our troubles behind us and escape from it all? Is it because we love the outdoors, fresh air and relaxing in new surroundings? Is it because we like debating and solving the world's problems around a camp fire? Is it because we all have different perspectives and there is no dominant voice? Is it because we go out of a sense of adventure, not knowing what we are going to see or meet? Is it because we want to test our new toys? Whatever reason anyone has, we all thoroughly enjoy ourselves and can't wait for the next camp, whenever or wherever it takes place.

There were twelve of us this time; Ian, Virginia, Archie, Baboloki, Justus and Carol, Craig and Janet, Gihan, Chris and Declan and Harold. A comfortable two-and-a-half-hour drive took us to this idyllic spot on the bank of the Limpopo, which was unspoilt and there were no outsiders or cattle to interfere with our enjoyment. Justus, Carol and Declan aged four, were first-timers, or newbies and quickly fitted in with the old-timers and their routines.

Birding was good but it was obviously not mid-summer, so the Limpopo specials were either silent or absent. We missed the calls of Orange-breasted Bush Shrikes but were happy to listen to Fish Eagles and Hornbills. We were excited to see a Shikra and Little Sparrowhawk on successive days. Some of the littlies were more elusive but we ticked off nearly a hundred species for the weekend, which made us rather proud.

The giant leadwood trees on this stretch of the river are spectacular, as are some of the *albidas* and River bushwillows. Most of the river banks are covered in lawn (*Cotyledon dactylon*), so it was good to spend time sitting there, absorbing the riverine ambiance.

Mid-winter has passed and we hope the next camp in Spring is not too distant. Roll on Spring!

And here is your list of sightings, spot on 100 species:

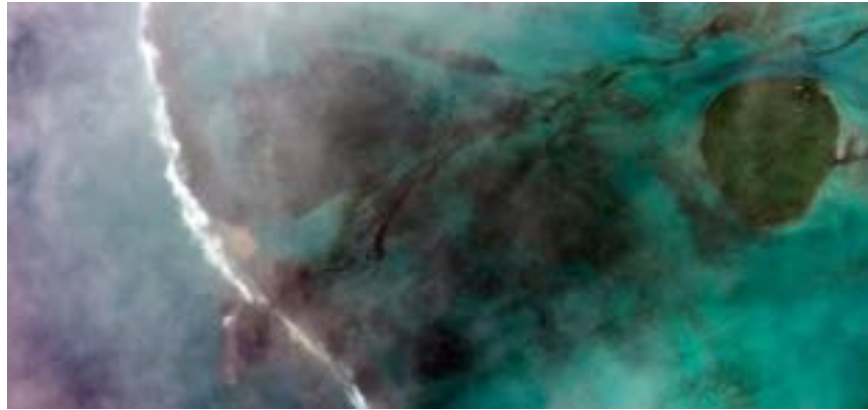
Spur-winged Goose	Grey Go-away-bird	Brown-throated Martin
Knob-billed Duck	Burchell's Coucal	Greater Striped Swallow
Egyptian Goose	Pearl-spotted Owlet	Long-billed Crombec
Helmeted Guineafowl	Fiery-necked Nightjar	Rattling Cisticola
Crested Francolin	African Palm Swift	Tawny-flanked Prinia
Natal Spurfowl	Red-faced Mousebird	Black-chested Prinia
Swainson's Spurfowl	Brown-hooded Kingfisher	Grey-backed Camaroptera
Marabou Stork	Malachite Kingfisher	Barred Wren-Warbler
Hadedda Ibis	Pied Kingfisher	Burnt-necked Eremomela
African Spoonbill	Swallow-tailed Bee-eater	Arrow-marked Babbler
Green-backed Heron	White-fronted Bee-eater	Southern Pied Babbler
Grey Heron	Green Wood-hoopoe	Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler
Goliath Heron	Common Scimitarbill	Common Myna
Hamerkop	Southern Red-billed Hornbill	Cape Glossy Starling
White-breasted Cormorant	Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill	Burchell's Starling
African Darter	African Grey Hornbill	Red-billed Oxpecker
White-backed Vulture	Acacia Pied Barbet	Kurrichane Thrush
Lappet-faced Vulture	Crested Barbet	Kalahari Scrub Robin
Bateleur	Golden-tailed Woodpecker	White-browed Scrub Robin
Shikra	Bearded Woodpecker	Marico Flycatcher
Little Sparrowhawk	Cardinal Woodpecker	White-throated Robin-Chat
African Fish Eagle	Chinspot Batis	Southern Grey-headed Sparrow
Water Thick-knee	Grey-headed Bushshrike	Lesser Masked Weaver
Blacksmith Lapwing	Orange-breasted Bushshrike	Southern Masked Weaver
Crowned Lapwing	Black-backed Puffback	Red-billed Quelea
Three-banded Plover	Crimson-breasted Shrike	Green-winged Pytilia
Double-banded Sandgrouse	Fork-tailed Drongo	Red-billed Firefinch
Burchell's Sandgrouse	African Paradise Flycatcher	Jameson's Firefinch
Red-eyed Dove	Southern Black Tit	Blue Waxbill
Cape Turtle Dove	Sabota Lark	Black-faced Waxbill
Laughing Dove	African Red-eyed Bulbul	Long-tailed Paradise Whydah
Emerald-spotted Wood Dove	Dark-capped Bulbul	African Pied Wagtail
Namaqua Dove	Yellow-bellied Greenbul	Golden-breasted Bunting

Thanks to Mike and Daphne Goldsworthy for compiling list on most of our outings! (This one done by Harold Hester I believe?)

ENVIRONMENT ALERT - OILSPILL 2KM OFF THE COAST OF MAURITIUS – 25TH JULY '20

If any of our readers have ever been to Mauritius then you will be aware of the attempts to save the Pink Pigeon, Fodies, the giant Tortoises etc. An unfortunate consequence of our reliance on fossil fuels is oil-tankers spilling their loads into the seas and oceans.....

On July 25, 2020, the Panama flagged tanker *MV Wakashio* ran aground off southeast Mauritius while carrying over 4,000 tons of heavy oil, lubricants and diesel. The disaster took place a mere two kilometres away from Ile aux Aigrettes, an island nature reserve managed by the Mauritian Wildlife



Foundation (MWF – BirdLife Partner), home to important populations of Pink Pigeon *Nesoenas mayeri* (Vulnerable), Mauritius Olive White-eye *Zosterops chloronothus* (Critically Endangered) and Mauritius Fody *Foudia rubra* (Endangered). The vessel was en route to Brazil when it hit a coral reef about three kilometres off Pointe d'Esny, in the vicinity of two important Ramsar wetlands – Blue Bay Marine Park and Pointe d'Esny wetlands – as well as Islets National Park.

The wreck lay for twelve days on the reefs before oil started leaking on Thursday 6th August. About 800 tons spilled into the ocean, threatening Ile aux Aigrettes, Mauritius' fragile marine ecosystem, and its pristine turquoise blue lagoon. Within days, the oil patch had moved further north and reached the three islets overlooking Mahebourg bay, Ile de la Passe, Ilet Vacoas and Ile au Phare – key habitats for endemic reptiles such as the Bouton and Bojer skinks, extinct on mainland Mauritius. This Indian Ocean island nation, home to over 1.2 million people, is heavily

reliant on fishing and tourism, which has already been adversely affected by the COVID-19

pandemic. The oil spill has badly impacted its pristine lagoons, coral reefs and biodiversity, with images showing shorelines covered with black sludge, in what is turning out to be an environmental disaster.



responding to this

The MWF is at the forefront of crisis. A key focal point of this intervention is taking precautionary measures to protect the Endangered and Critically Endangered flora and fauna of Ile aux Aigrettes. Twelve Mauritius Olive White-eyes and six Mauritius Fodies were captured and transferred to the National Parks & Conservation Services' Black River Aviary facilities to be kept until the conditions improve. Similarly, 4,000 endemic plants from the island's nursery – including very rare species – have been transferred to the mainland and are being kept at the Forestry Services' Mahebourg premises.



MWF staff have been using *the Kestrel*, the organisation's ecotourism boat, to tirelessly support the oil pumping effort. Two tanks have been installed on the boat, oil on the surface of the waters along the Ile aux Aigrettes coastline is pumped into it. The boat then returns to the mainland to be emptied, and the process is repeated daily. Additionally, MWF has rallied volunteers through a call on social media, with the objective of setting teams to help with the cleanup effort, once it begins.



To date, the risk of a larger spill is low. Most of the oil has been pumped out of the ship, but adverse weather conditions could stop the pumping operations and scatter the oil across the bay. In addition, authorities have been deploying booms – floating barriers to contain the oil – with France sending in equipment and technical expertise from neighboring Reunion Island.

Thousands of residents and volunteers are assisting in the mop-up exercises through booms fashioned from stretch nets, sugar cane straw and plastic bottles, sewn together with nylon thread to channel oil on the water. These efforts are paying off, as these booms hold up the oil and facilitate the pumping.

“For the time being we are not risking volunteers in the clean-up exercises,” says Gardenne, “As we remain cautious about the toxicity of the products and the health risks to people exposed to it without proper protective equipment. We have had to fully equip our front line staff, and not risking ladies due to health concerns,” he adds. [Studies suggest women may suffer more severe effects from oil chemicals].

Gardenne issues a warning: “Many people are wading into the water in only shorts, and it is extremely dangerous. A couple of hours exposed to fumes can cause headaches, nose and eye burns and even dizziness.”

MWF is also looking at the impact of this oil spill on seabird communities in the vicinity, is carrying out surveys in other areas. Fortunately, there have not been many records of seabirds affected, with only one wader reported dead. Unaffected Red-tailed Tropicbirds *Phaethon rubricauda* have also been sighted flying over the region.



“The latest news is that the cleanup operation is starting, but the impact of this spill will definitely be felt for a long time to come. The local communities relying on



fishing to earn a living are heavily affected, whilst those residing on the coastline are constantly exposed to the fumes and vapour. The conservation work carried out on Ile aux Aigrettes during 35 years is at stake,” concludes Jean-Hugues.

Report from https://www.birdlife.org/worldwide/news/mauritius-oil-spill-environmental-crisis-unfolds?utm_source=BirdLife+International+News+Notifications&utm_campaign=75a0bb85fd-Summary_news_notification&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_4122f13b8a-75a0bb85fd-131698461&mc_cid=75a0bb85fd&mc_eid=32465f9f87

Photos courtesy of <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/08/15/world/mauritius-oil-spill-ship-splits/index.html>

ED: Latest news is that the Japanese owned tanker, which was travelling from China to Brazil, has spilled over 1180 tonnes of crude oil derivatives. By August 16th the ship had split into two halves.. One hopes the Japanese government / company who owed this ship have been sued.. or is that impossible because the ship is ‘Panama flagged’?

WINTER WALK TO A VILLAGE DAM OFF THAMAGA..



[Maps courtesy Google maps]

Even in the winter, walks can be very rewarding. A two hour walk around this dam near Thamaga and in the surrounding bush came up with over 50 species of birds..



Thamaga village

Site of dam.

= 15km



Dam

= 2km



400m

Photos by **Gihan Ilangakoon**, ..with thanks.