

FAMILIAR CHAT

December 2007



Juvenile Black Sparrowhawks at St Josephs, near Kgale

Hi Birdlife Members,

Another year is nearly over and perhaps it is a good time to reflect on the status of birds in Botswana. The pressures on habitat are ever increasing and the proposed sugar cane plantation near Kasane is perhaps the greatest threat. 10,000 hectares of prime Chobe Forest presently supports several bird species endemic to the region, including the Miombo Rock Thrush, Green-capped Eremomela, Stierling's (Barred) Wren-warbler and the Black-eared Seed-eater (Canary). It is here that a group of South African farmers propose to clear the Miombo and Baikaeia woodland to grow sugar cane, a product that is already in surplus world-wide. Birdlife Botswana has made its standpoint clear and will do everything in its power to prevent the destruction of this important conservation area.

Thankfully good rain has fallen over much of the country which bodes well for all flora and fauna as of course everything is interdependent. In our garden it seems to be a good breeding season for birds with the Familiar Chats having reared two families in the same storeroom boxes as they did last year. The Diderick Cuckoos are even more vocal than last year, the Weavers have built numerous nests high up in the Acacias, the Green-winged Pytilias have nested in the pergola creeper and the so the list goes on.

Please **renew your membership** as it runs from January to December each year. A form is available on page 11. Remember too, that we greatly welcome contributions or suggestions. This is your newsletter and needs to reflect your birding interests, observations and ideas as well as being informative on Birdlife matters! My email address is skelton@home.co.bw.

Eugenie Skelton - editor

Newsletter of Birdlife Botswana
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The first Familiar Chat baby in the nuts and bolts box in the storeroom this summer

IF ANYONE CAN

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WEATHER FORECASTING

... for the birds?

Taken from an interesting little indigenous/traditional knowledge book of Batswana beliefs, *The Elders Speak to Tomorrow's Children* published in 1995 by Permaculture Trust of Botswana in Serowe.

Words by Doreen McColaugh - Education Officer
Pics by Eugenie Skelton

By closely observing the surrounding environment over many years, various systems of weather forecasting have evolved. These observations include changes in the growth of plants and trees and also changes in animal and bird behaviour. Due to major alterations in the local and global environment, many of these traditional systems are no longer accurate. The following provide several examples of traditional systems of weather forecasting.

If the *legakabe* (Pied Crow) started crowing in the night, it was a strong indication that when the sun rose, the sky in the morning would be overcast. It was not necessarily a sign of rain.

If *lehututu* (Ground-hornbill/Storks*) and *mmamoleane* (Cattle Egret) appeared in the farmer's field during the growing season it was a sign that good rains were in progress and it would continue to be a good season. If both of these birds did not appear, the opposite was true - a sign of a poor season.



Southern
Ground-
hornbill

*The article translates *lehututu* as stork, but the illustration used is of a Ground-hornbill and *lekololwane-le-lesweu* is usually used for White Stork

Another sign of good rains was the appearance of many *mokgweba* (Korhaan). This is particularly true if they fly straight up in the air, tuck in their wings and free fall down.



Northern
Black
Korhaan

The early return of *peolwane* (Swallows and Swifts) from the north was also a good indication of rain. It was often believed that these birds travelled with the rain clouds.

Another sign of good rain was when there were many *kgoris* (Kori Bustard) in the area. If it pounded its large wing on the ground it was a sign that the rain would come shortly. This was another reason why the *kgori* was protected; it was regarded as an omen of good rain. The presence of Secretarybirds was also an indication of good rain for similar reasons.



Kori
Bustard

Observations of frogs, toads and mice as well as plants and trees, star constellations, clouds and wind were also used to forecast rain.

If you know of any stories or traditional beliefs about birds and weather forecasting, please send them to the editor of *The Familiar Chat* to be shared in another issue.

Black Sparrowhawks in Gaborone

By Mpho Bowie

I know of a small dam not far from St Joseph's College, where Herons, Wahlberg's Eagles and a pair of Black Sparrowhawks nest. The dam, surrounded by a small forest clearing where they all hunt is in turn surrounded by dense woodland where they nest.

The Heron's nests are in a few tall fig trees on the edge of the clearing. They've recently started nesting and are already in pairs dawdling around the little dam, spearing any frogs in their path. The eagles on the other hand soar high above their nest in the fork of an exotic eucalyptus tree, looking out for any possible prey or any threats to their eggs. Deeper into the clump of eucalyptus trees over some old farm house ruins is the nest of an uncommon accipiter in Botswana, the Black Sparrowhawk. They are also the biggest Sparrowhawks in southern Africa. We found the nest some time ago, but we didn't know who owned it. For a long time we thought that the area was a communal nesting ground for migrant Yellow-billed Kites, mostly because they were the only birds big enough to own them in that area at the time.

Luckily, on Sunday the 21st of October, we noticed a melanistic Black Sparrowhawk mother perched on a bare branch not too far from where three nestlings were in the big pile of twigs they call home. I knew straight away what they were and I was fascinated and wanted to know more. I looked on the internet which wasn't so helpful, but luckily I had borrowed books on birds of prey of the world from Bill and they gave me all the information I needed.

The following Tuesday (which happened to be my 14th birthday), I couldn't resist a visit, so at around 5 or 6 we took a drive down there with the camera and tripod. It was cold and cloudy and after a while it started to drizzle but not before we got a few shots in. After the drizzle, came the wind which was surprisingly lucky because the chicks started jumping up and down, flapping their wings, exercising and preparing for their first flight. I went home to try and find out when they fledge and predicted that they would be flying by that Friday.

The next day I went back and was surprised by an empty nest. I then noticed one of the fledglings perched on a nearby branch. We scanned the tree for the others but only saw the mother. After a while, one flew sloppily out of the nest tree following the mother to another eucalyptus tree about 50m away. He landed just short of the tree, lacking wing power and then rested for a while, staring at us. We were dazzled and stayed stationary. He then flew up onto a low branch and we went home allowing him to fly back to the nest before daylight faded.

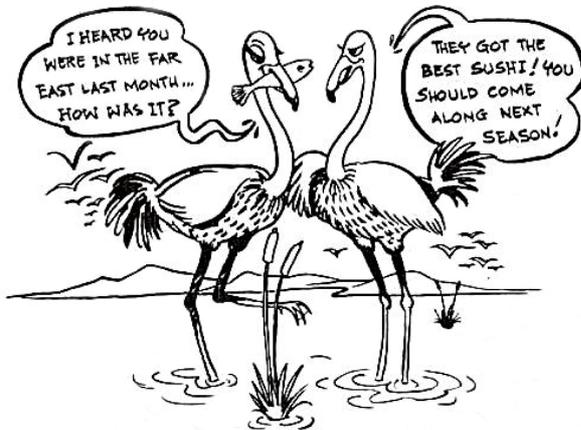
We continue to visit the inspiring hawks regularly and did end up seeing all of the chicks and we think the father, too.



The melanistic adult . See front page for nest and juveniles



Test your Knowledge



What incorrect messages are being sent by this cartoon from a book published by UNEP, *Environmental Reporting for African Journalists: A Handbook of Key Environmental Issues and Concepts*?

Ed: Well, having failed to receive any response from Members to Doreen's challenge in our last newsletter, I shall attempt it myself! Based on observations of the flamingoes at Lake Ngami and more recently Gaborone Game Reserve where Greater Flamingoes are on the sewerage ponds, here goes:

1. *the cartoon birds look half ostrich, half flamingo – flamingoes are slim, streamlined birds without tufted tails*
2. *they feed on microscopic algae and small aquatic invertebrates, using their specialized flattened bills upside down and filter the organisms with their tongues – no fish!*
3. *plain pink or white breast – no streaks*
4. *they stretch their long legs out behind them in flight*
5. *they migrate in large flocks northwards, not to the east!*
6. *bulrushes grow in riverine environments. Flamingoes only frequent large open expanses of shallow inland or coastal waters*
7. *Please tell me what else I've missed!!!!*

Check out our tickbird site www.worldbirds.org/Botswana to see the latest lists and please contribute your own birding lists to this important initiative. Also, read the Conservation Newsletter on www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw to find out what's happening on the various projects undertaken by Birdlife

Birding Big Day Reportback

from Kasane...

We had three teams compete in the Kasane area. Two were made up of the BirdLife Kasane Branch committee members, and one was a group that responded to our advertising ... a group of trainee guides and their instructor. Trish arranged a vehicle for them so that they could participate. All three teams identified around 150 birds.

from Gaborone...

One team took part and we saw about 125 birds in an area including Otse, Mogobane Dam, The Lion Park, Notwane and Gabs Game Reserve. A disappointing total, dampened by rain and lots of water everywhere but a great day out nevertheless.

Highlights : the Cape Vulture colony at Otse, a pair of Verreaux (Black) Eagles, Black Sparrowhawks at Kgale, Flamingoes and many waterbirds at Gabs Game Reserve.

from Francistown...

We had a fabulously exciting, stimulating day commencing at 04.30 at the Marang onto Shashe dam and ending on Tachila at 20.30. There were 4 in the team plus 2 scribes so we travelled in 2 vehicles in convoy. The group was made up of Ross Borroughs (of Uncharted Africa), Graham Mc Culloch, James Gifford, Nicky Bousfield and scribes Andrew Harkness and George Herd. As always we missed some very common everyday birds like Grey Hornbill and Barn Owl but sighted 2 B rarities i.e. Bat hawk and Yellow Wagtail.

Final score: 176.

All members are encouraged to participate in future for an outstanding, fun day and we learn so much from one another.

Gaborone Branch News

November walk – report by Linda Taylor

On Sunday 4th November we met in Notwane for our monthly bird walk. We were treated with lovely weather and a very big turnout. I really enjoyed myself and have decided to go birding on a more regular basis.

Chris Brewster gave us a fantastic talk about the basics of identifying birds and placing them into their various families. The basic tools one needs to start birding: a good field guide book, a pair of binoculars and time; a guide to bird calls is nice to have but not essential. He reminded us all that to gain better knowledge of birds one needs to spend more time out in the field watching birds, and trying to identify them not only by their appearance, but also their behaviour, call and habitat. He mentioned that we should start by trying to identify all the birds that we find in and around our gardens and when we are confident with these we should move further out. He suggested that we learn to know and identify the most commonly found member(s) of a species that would occur in our area and then move onto to those that are not that common.

We all enjoyed a fantastic display by the Sparrowhawks, which we think may have been defending their nest from the giant eagle owl or another predator. There was also a pair of Yellowbilled Kites flying over the top of the eucalyptus trees. The birds that were spotted/heard by the group: African Hoopoe, Rattling Cisticola, Familiar Chat, Glossy Starling, Yellowbilled Kites, Black Cuckoo, Forktailed Drongo, Black Sparrowhawk, Giant Eagle Owl, African Hawk Eagle, Blue Waxbill, Pied Kingfisher, Southern Boubou, Blackheaded Oriole, Little Sparrowhawk, Marico Sunbird, Egyptian Goose, European Bee-eater, Redbreasted Swallow, Steppe Buzzard and Little Swift.

However the most interesting bird spotted by Harold was an Orange-breasted Bush Shrike (moi)

The end of year highlight was a walk in Mokolodi Game Reserve on Sunday 2nd December, hosted by Bob and Doreen and laid out by intrepid New Zealander, Kevin. Thanks for a great morning.



Our newest member Pierre, who showed us the exquisite Banded Rubber Frogs and Reiko our wonderful young volunteer who returns to Japan soon. Au revoir, Reiko.



A great turnout shows some of our younger enthusiasts, staff and plenty of 'old-timers'



Birds, it seems are not the only excuse for hot debate!

For All Eternity

If you would like a really special way to remember someone who cared about the bush and its birds, an In Memoriam gift to BirdLife Botswana is something you may want to think about. That's because your gift would go directly towards protecting and conserving our birds and the environment in which they live. BLB is working assiduously to protect our birds and promote an interest in them. We are particularly trying to interest children in learning to appreciate and love our birds.

Your In Memoriam gift can ensure a future for the birds that meant so much in the life of someone who is sadly no longer with us. In celebrating the name of someone who cared about these things, you can help us learn more about endangered species, and promote the popularisation of a healthy pastime for others and in so doing, protect these precious birds and the environment.

It may be that you, your family and friends would like to do something more to honour the memory of the one you have lost. If so you may wish to consider a Feather Fund in their name (e.g. the Mary Wilson Feather Fund). This on-going personalised fund will celebrate their memory, and can be added to at appropriate times, like special anniversaries that you may wish to honour. There are many ways in which friends relatives and colleagues may wish to increase the Feather Fund – from fund-raising to making a regular donation. Just let us know if you would like to know more about this rewarding way to sustain the memory of someone who had a special love for birds and the bush.

Please contact Harold Hester on 3161766
or email him at haroldh@accelerate-it.co.bw

Birdlife Botswana needs your quality photos!

We are looking for good bird images for a calendar to be produced for 2009. Please submit portrait shaped images on disc to Kevin at the Gaborone office by the end of February 2008.

Note that your name as well as the bird's name should appear. The rights to images submitted are given over to Birdlife and any published images will be credited to the photographer.

Growing Your Nest Egg

Harold Hester will be giving a course of 4 lectures over a month on how to invest on the stockmarket. The first course will commence in February, numbers permitting, and further courses may be arranged to suit.

Cost P1000 per person or P750 per person for 2 or more family members. Please contact Harold for further information.

All proceeds will go to Birdlife Botswana

COMMITTEE OF BIRDLIFE BOTSWANA 2007

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Birdlife Events - Gaborone

Calendar of events for 2007		
Feb 3	Walk	Kapong Hills
Mar 4	Walk	Metsemothlabe River

1. **Bird walks** start at 06:30 October to April and 08:00 May to September. Meet at the museum.
2. **All talks** take place at the Botswana Accountancy College at 19:30.

Birdlife Events - Francistown

The Francistown Branch hold their **meetings** on the **second Wednesday** of each month, starting at 19h00 at the **Supa-Ngwao Museum**.

The museum is located at the corner of the first turn to the left as you travel from the Bulawayo roundabout towards the light industrial area.

If you have any questions about the club, please call Guy Brina on 2412913 or email him at gltm@botsnet.bw.

Birdlife Events – Kasane

This branch plan to meet on either the last Saturday or Sunday of the month. Check the website www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw for details

Birdlife Events - Maun

Evening activities (talks, films etc.) are held at Maun Lodge starting at 19h00 unless otherwise indicated.

Field outings on weekends commence from the parking area outside Ngami Toyota. Exact details for outings (e.g. time of departure) are announced at the evening meeting prior to the field outing.

Additional activities may be scheduled depending on demand.

Contact P Hancock/T Maiphetho for further information – 6865618.

Maun office address – P O Box 1529, Maun.

Pete Hancock is trying to establish an archive of back numbers of the Familiar Chat.

If any member has hard copies of issues predating January 2005, it would be greatly appreciated if they could make them available to him at
PO Box 1529, Maun, telephone 6865618. Thank you

Membership Form - 2008

Membership is due in *January* of each year, as the subscription runs from January to December.

Rates

- Ordinary - P120.00
- Corporate - P2000
- Professional – Rangers, Guides and SSG members - P60.00
- Life - P2000
- Students studying in Botswana – P15
- Schools/Clubs – P50 plus P5 per club member with a minimum of 10 members per club
- SADC Region – P200
- Overseas (and outside SADC) – P300

The following details are required:

I/We/Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms: _____

wish to become members of BirdLife Botswana

Address: _____

Home/Cell

Phone: _____

Work

phone: _____

Email (please

PRINT): _____

I acknowledge that my family dependents, invitees and I take part in the BirdLife Botswana organised events entirely at our own risk. I, in my personal capacity and as representative of my spouse, children, dependents, and invitees hereby keep BirdLife Botswana, its committee, members and agents indemnified and hold them harmless against all loss, injury, or damage to person or property from any cause (including negligence) arising as a result of our participation in events organised by BirdLife Botswana.

Signed _____

Date: _____

Please make your cheque payable to 'BirdLife Botswana'

Please return this form with your subscription to the address's given below:

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