EDITORIAL

For the past several years, the Independence Day fishing competition at the end of September has been held in the Okavango Panhandle, coinciding with the peak breeding time for the Near Threatened African Skimmer. This species nests on exposed sandbanks along the Okavango River, and the presence of a large number of fishermen and their boats has had a negative impact on its breeding success.

This year however, the fishing competition is under new management, and the organiser, Heather Clark from Bush Boutique in Maun has agreed to move the venue to Chanoga on the Boteti River. BirdLife Botswana commends Bush Boutique for this change of location, and we hope that this year’s competition is a great success. We are not against people who enjoy fishing (it’s much better than watching television!), and we believe that there is a place for birds and fishermen in the vastness of the Okavango; the upcoming fishing competition will be a test of whether this is true or not.

Incidentally, we also applaud the ‘catch and release’ approach to the fishing competition, and Bush Boutique’s efforts to guarantee that fishermen adhere to the “Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing in the Okavango Delta” and other regulations introduced to protect the environment, thereby ensuring a ‘win-win’ situation for all involved.

Pete Hancock
BIRD POPULATION MONITORING: TIME TO ACT!

It is widely acknowledged that birds are very useful indicators of biodiversity and the state of the environment. This is due to several reasons: birds occur in all habitats, often reflect trends in other animals and plants, and are sensitive to environmental change. Importantly, birds have a real connection with people and their lives. Birds, if monitored, can therefore be used to report on the status of Botswana’s biodiversity to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The evidence collected from monitoring birds can help conservation decision-makers to influence politicians to find suitable biodiversity management solutions and hence a healthy environment for us and future generation.

BirdLife Botswana’s work to date has been mainly focused on monitoring and conserving globally threatened birds in Botswana. This means that common birds have been ignored in bird conservation and monitoring practices in Botswana. There may be declines of common bird populations without our knowledge as to why, yet such declines might indicate a fundamental flaw in the way Batswana treat their environment. Therefore, BirdLife Botswana has introduced a Bird Population Monitoring (BPM) Scheme, formerly Common Bird Monitoring Scheme, for Botswana. The scheme is aimed at demonstrating that birds are useful in showing changes in the overall condition of our environment.

The BPM scheme will develop a Wild Bird Index for Botswana showing bird population trends over time and will use these trends to set conservation priorities, to report on biodiversity changes/state of the environment in Botswana (and to contribute to the African/global effort). The scheme runs twice annually - in February and November - and offers exciting birding opportunities from areas that are hardly visited. The BPM scheme calls for people with the inclination and who are willing to increase their basic knowledge of birds in Botswana to take part voluntarily. It is designed to accommodate as many participants as possible; the more there are the more robust it becomes.

As a key feature, Bird Population Monitoring Scheme is a small effort which needs to be sustained over a long period. Your count is very important and it will contribute to global bird data. Potential recruits should contact the nearest BirdLife Botswana branch to register for the scheme and to be allocated a transect to start counting annually. They will be given information about how to count along the transect and a form on which to record the counts. All those who take part in the scheme are requested to return their completed forms to the nearest BirdLife Botswana branch or send them back by post. To learn more about the scheme visit www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw or e-mail blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw or call 3190540. BirdLife Botswana is grateful to the supporters of this scheme who are the Global Environment Facility Small Grant Programme (GEF SGP) in Botswana and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), a BirdLife International Partner in the UK.

Keddy Mooketsa
TWO DOWN, FOUR TO GO

In the previous issue of this newsletter, an article featured the capture of flamingos for the purpose of fitting satellite tracking devices to determine their movements. Despite several attempts since then, no further birds have been caught. Only two birds have transmitters at present, and they are alive and well and still at Sua Pan. The pan is however drying up fast, and it is only a matter of a few weeks at most before all flamingos will be forced to leave the area. This is thus the ideal time to catch the remaining four birds and fit them with the PPTs. However it is a race against time - it is undesirable to have a situation where monitored birds stay in the area of capture for a protracted period since the information downloaded daily on their location is expensive to obtain, so ideally one would like to capture the birds just before the pan dries and the flamingos start moving. However, if the flamingos prove elusive, the pan may dry before they can be fitted with transmitters, and then the opportunity has gone until the pan fills again (next year or the year after)!

Community members, David Seabe, Dikatso Letebele and Bafana Dikgopolo from nearby villages have been assisting with the capture operation, and are thanked for their assistance (and perseverance).

THE LIST GROWS LONGER …

The 2010 IUCN Red List update released by BirdLife International earlier this year includes a further two species found in Botswana. They are:

Southern Ground-Hornbill *Bucorvus leadbeateri*
This species has long been a Bird of Conservation Concern in Botswana, although limited data show that it is slightly better off here than in neighbouring Southern African countries. The reason for listing it as **Vulnerable** is primarily due to loss of
nesting habitat; the bird nests in the hollows of large trees, many of which are destroyed by elephants and fire throughout its range.

Ludwig's Bustard *Neotis ludwigii*

This species is regarded as a Category A Rarity in Botswana, which means that there are less than 10 authenticated sightings of the bird in recent years. Based on the foregoing, it appears as though the species is indeed rare in Botswana and requires urgent conservation action; however, while the species is rare here, it is due to the fact that it is extralimital and its range only just extends into the southwestern corner of the country. It is endemic to South Africa and Namibia, where the major threat to the species is collisions with overhead powerlines - it has been uplisted from Least Concern to **Endangered**.
OKAVANGO FLOODS CONTINUE AHEAD

Ngamiland and Chobe Districts are still benefitting from the highest flood levels in recent times. The spread of water into long-dry areas has been very beneficial for birds, as shown by the July waterbird counts; a phenomenal 12,650 waterbirds of 53 species were counted along the Chobe River by BirdLife Botswana members and other volunteers (interestingly there were 1,102 African Openbills counted). As the Chobe floodplain has dried out subsequently, it has become a veritable paradise for birds (and other forms of wildlife).

The Chobe floodplain teems with wildlife (Photo: J Bestelink/S Paul)

Lake Ngami has also been spectacular, and this year has grown in size fivefold when compared with levels over the past few years. A formal count could not be conducted due to the inaccessibility of the area (the lake has flooded right up into the surrounding woodlands, so it is not even possible to get a clear view over any extensive area) but large numbers of ducks are present. As has been the case in previous years, waterbirds have commenced breeding as soon as the lake has started filling - in the middle of winter - which is contrary to the ‘norm’ as summer is their peak breeding season in most parts of Southern Africa.

White-faced Duck numbers were estimated at 7,500 during July (Photo: P Hancock)

The Okavango waters continue to flood down the Boteti River, and have reached the Mopipi area just north of Lake Xau. The front of the floodwaters is still moving...
steadily and may well reach its terminus at Lake Xau, in which case the birding will be spectacular.

During the late 1950s and 1960s when Smithers compiled his Checklist of Birds of the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Caprivi Strip, many interesting species were recorded in this area, including for example, the Gull-billed Tern (a Category A Rarity, seen less than 10 times in recent years). The frontispiece of his checklist (left) actually depicts this species at Lake Xau, and there is no doubt that if/when the water reaches this area, some interesting birds will be seen. According to Tim Liversedge, Great White Pelicans bred at Lake Xau at this time, and if this occurs again, it will be only the second breeding site for this species in Botswana.

All rainfall predictions for the coming summer show above average rain over northern Botswana (see for example, http://www.orc.ub.bw/datacat or http://www.orc.ub.bw/datacat/Seasonalforecast_botswana.htm) so it will be interesting to see the 2011 floods and the impact they will have on waterbirds.

**LESOMA VULTURES BREED WELL**

Earlier this year, a substantial number of White-backed Vultures were poisoned near Lesoma Village (see Birds and People newsletter #25 - March, 2010), and in this light it was expected that the breeding colony in the Lesoma Valley would be decimated. Imagine our surprise and pleasure when a survey led by Pete Laver of the BirdLife Botswana branch in Kasane, showed a record of 85 active nests this season!
The survey was conducted on 1st August, by 10 BirdLife members who covered the standard 6 kilometre stretch of the valley. Last year, just over half this number of nests was recorded along the same stretch.

This colony straddles the international border with Zimbabwe, and it is not known how many nests are on the Zimbabwean side; however, it is clear that this is a very important colony.

Special thanks to the BirdLife Botswana members in Kasane for undertaking this sterling monitoring work, underscoring once again the value of ‘citizen scientists’.

VULTURE POISONING AT KHUTSE

It is becoming monotonous reporting on vulture poisoning incidents, but the recent death of a single vulture at Khutse is worth highlighting for the simple fact that it illustrates that even the huge protected areas in Botswana do not provide a year-round safe haven for these peripatetic birds.

This incident was reported by BirdLife Botswana member, Patrick Taylor, who writes “We were up in Khutse and saw four Lappet-faced and three White-backed vultures at the new solar pump pan at Khutse 1 on Sunday the 29th of August 2010. The Lappet-faced Vultures were all fine, as were three of the White-backed Vultures. Sadly we found the fourth White-backed Vulture in severe stress, partially paralysed and fading fast. It looked like a clear case of poison”.

The dying vulture (Photo: P Taylor)

This incident is under investigation by colleagues from the Dept. of Wildlife and National Parks.
THE 2010 BIODIVERSITY TARGETS

In April, 2002 when signatories of the Convention on Biological Diversity adopted the 2010 biodiversity targets, 2010 must have seemed very far away. Their pledge to reduce global biodiversity loss may have seemed achievable, or they may have just been paying lip-service to biodiversity conservation. Now of course, 2010 is upon us, and next month, the Conference of Parties takes place in Nagoya, Japan, from 18th to 29th October. How will the signatories fare when they report on the rate of biodiversity loss in their countries?

Word is already out that world leaders have failed to deliver the commitments made to reduce biodiversity loss, and have instead overseen alarming biodiversity declines. These findings are the result of a study published in the journal *Science* and represent the first assessment of how the targets have not been met. “Our analysis shows that governments have failed to deliver on the commitments they made in 2002: biodiversity is still being lost as fast as ever, and we have made little headway in reducing pressures on species, habitats and ecosystems” said Dr Stuart Butchart of the United Nations Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre and BirdLife International, and the paper’s lead author. “Our data show that 2010 will not be the year that biodiversity loss was halted, but it needs to be the year in which we start taking the issue seriously and substantially increase our efforts to take care of what is left of the planet”. The study recognised that there have been some important local or national successes in tackling biodiversity loss, including the designation of many protected areas (e.g. the 20,000 km² Juruena National Park in Brazil), the recovery of particular species (e.g. the European Bison) and the prevention of some extinctions (e.g. Black Stilt in New Zealand). But despite these encouraging achievements, efforts to address the loss of biodiversity need to be substantially strengthened.

It will be interesting to know how Botswana has fared; BirdLife Botswana has contributed substantially to biodiversity monitoring in the country, through Important Bird Area monitoring where birds are used as a proxy for biodiversity. Our recently initiated Bird Population Monitoring Scheme (see article on page 2) will also, in time, provide factual information on trends in bird numbers as an important component of biodiversity. As a general statement, it appears as though Botswana has not fared too badly - the 2008 IBA Status Report, for example, indicated that the condition of biodiversity is stable. Although the list of globally threatened bird species in Botswana is growing continuously (see article on page 3), this is due to the species being under threat in other parts of their range.

‘Biodiversity: the variety of life’
BIRDLIFE and CBD CoP 10

The attendance at the Conference of Parties of the government representative from the Dept. of Wildlife and National Parks, Mrs Diana Chimidza, will be sponsored by the BirdLife Botswana-UNDP/GEF-GoB project “Strategic Partnerships to Improve the Financial and Operational Sustainability of Protected Areas”.

The BirdLife Partnership will also be sending a delegation to the CoP. Justin Soopu, the IBA Programme Manager from BirdLife Botswana, will be attending as part of this team. More on the CoP and the Convention in future newsletters.

BOTSWANA TICKBIRD - WORLDBIRDS IN BOTSWANA

Support our web-based bird monitoring system.
Enter your bird checklist - www.worldbirds.org/Botswana

PHOTO OF THE MONTH

I have never liked the collective noun ‘a murder of crows’. However, when I recently encountered about 1,500 crows congregating on the electricity distribution line some 20 kilometres north of Jwaneng, at dusk, I could understand how it may have originated!

Not that the crows had murdered anything - far from it! I could not ascertain any reason for such a large gathering in the middle of nowhere, and readers’ hypotheses would be welcome. The photo shows only a small part of the ‘murder’.
WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY IN BOTSWANA

James Gifford and Steven Stockhall have recently released their practical guide to wildlife photography in Botswana, and copies are available from our shop in Gaborone. This comprehensive guide combines the authors' experience of 14 years photographing wildlife in Botswana, and provides invaluable advice for both the amateur and more skilled photographer. Over 200 images illustrating more than 75 species demonstrate basic technical aspects and advanced creative techniques that are applicable to both mammal and bird photography throughout Africa. This book would make a wonderful Christmas gift!

Steven Stockhall has also provided some of the photos for the BirdLife Botswana 2011 calendar, due out soon - something to look forward to!

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BIRDLIFE BOTSWANA MISSION

BirdLife Botswana aims to conserve birds and important bird habitats, by creating awareness, carrying out research and promoting beneficial relationships between birds and people.

This newsletter appears quarterly. If you would like to contribute an article on your field observations or bird conservation project, please send it to birdlifemaun@gmail.com
Membership Details

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

Rates

• Ordinary - P120.00
• Corporate - Minimum P2000.00
• Professional - Rangers, guides and SSG members - P60.00
• Life - P2000.00
• Students studying in Botswana - P15.00
• Schools/Clubs - nil
• SADC Region – P200.00
• Overseas (and outside SADC) – P300.00

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 (PRINT please): __________________________

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 one of the addresses given below:

The Secretary (membership) Pete Hancock Guy Brina Geoff Williams
BirdLife Botswana PO Box 1529 Private Bag F12 Private Bag K4
P/Bag 003 Maun Francistown Kasane
Suite 348
Mogoditshane or phone Pete to collect 6865618 or phone Guy to collect 2412913 or phone Geoff to collect 6250341
Botswana

OFFICIAL USE

Card issued? ___________________ Data base__________________________
Birds of Concern Reporting Sheet

BirdLife Botswana is very interested in collecting information on Birds of Concern - they are species that are either globally or nationally threatened. Please use the format below when submitting sightings to make computerisation of the data easier.

Note that the co-ordinates of each sighting are essential - it is convenient to get these from a GPS but of course they can be read off any good map. If you have a GPS, please set the datum to WGS 84 and the position format to decimal degrees. If you use any other datum/format, please just let us know what it is. Information in **bold** in the table below is the most important, if you cannot collect it all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species (see list below)</th>
<th>GPS co-ords</th>
<th>Quarter degree square e.g. 1923C4</th>
<th>Area e.g. NG 19</th>
<th>Locality e.g. 2 km west of Machaba</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th># of birds</th>
<th>Ad. M</th>
<th>Ad. F</th>
<th>Ad. ?</th>
<th># of Imm.</th>
<th>Observer (your name)</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The species that we are interested in are the following:

- Slaty Egret
- Maccoa Duck
- Wattled Crane
- Grey Crowned Crane
- Lesser Flamingo
- Cape Vulture
- White-headed Vulture
- Lappet-faced Vulture
- Hooded Vulture
- White-backed Vulture
- Bateleur
- Martial Eagle
- Lesser Kestrel
- European Roller
- Pallid Harrier
- Kori Bustard
- Southern Ground Hornbill
- African Skimmer
- Chestnut-banded Plover

Breeding records for these species would also be invaluable.

Please send this information to:

BirdLife Botswana, PO Box 1529, Maun, BOTSWANA. Alternatively, please e-mail us at birdlifemaun@gmail.com