EDITORIAL

It is a moot point whether bird conservation is about birds or people—it is about both, as encapsulated in the slogan “together for birds and people”. The previous issue of the newsletter had a picture of a bird on the cover; now it is time to feature a person. And who better than BirdLife Botswana’s Chairperson/Acting-Director, Harold Hester who has been shoudering responsibility for the organization full-time since 2009 when Kabelo Sinyatso embarked on his PhD through the University of East Anglia. Rumour has it that no-one is happier to see Kabelo back than Harold! Our front cover articles opposite pay tribute to Harold, and challenge Kabelo to ‘hit the ground running!’ Without people, bird conservation does not take place …

Pete Hancock
(Editor)
CHANGING OF THE GUARD

It seems like just yesterday that Kabelo Senyatso set off for the UK to do his PhD, but three years have slipped by very quickly and he is now back—armed, of course, with his PhD!

He picks up where he left off, with the organization in good shape, having forged steadily ahead under the leadership of the Chairman and Board members during his absence.

While some things have remained unchanged in the interim, the status of birds has not; for example, Botswana now has 30 globally threatened birds (as opposed to 25 in 2008 when he left). It is thus with a sense of urgency that we welcome Kabelo back—there is a great deal of work to be done, and the challenges continue apace. Kabelo’s thesis, although focusing on the Kori Bustard, is very broad-based, and the information and experience gained during the past few years will be put to good use. He will be involved in raising project funding, creating a greater awareness of BirdLife Botswana with government partners and potential sponsors and the general public.

RETIRING FOR THE SECOND TIME

A decade ago when Harold Hester retired from the business world, he could never have dreamt that he would one day be working full-time again (unpaid!)—for BirdLife Botswana. But this is exactly what happened. In order to provide an opportunity for BLB Director Kabelo Senyatso to undertake his PhD overseas, Harold stepped into the breach and took over the day-to-day management of the organisation. This contribution is not to be underestimated—BirdLife Botswana has come a long way from the days when it was the Botswana Bird Club with an annual budget of P20,000.00. It now employs seven full-time staff and has a budget over 100 times larger, and is involved in bird conservation projects all over the country.

It has been a long three years, and much has been achieved under Harold’s direction. With the active support of all Board members, partners in Government and the private sector, as well as the donor community, business has continued as usual.

Despite a very busy daily schedule, Harold has maintained his interest in birds, and has managed to share his enthusiasm for the outdoors with members young and old alike. The cover picture shows him climbing Moremi Gorge to see the Cape Vulture colony there.

Harold can proudly hand over the reins of a dynamic, growing organisation to Kabelo. To Harold we say a big thank you for a job well done.
BirdLife Botswana’s largest project “Strategic Partnerships to Improve the Financial and Operational Sustainability of Protected Areas” is now entering its fourth year. This project, funded by UNDP-GEF, aims to promote co-management of protected areas as a way of improving biodiversity conservation while at the same time investigating new innovative funding sources to sustain protected area management. Integral to the project is a pilot site in southern Sua Pan, a key breeding area for Lesser Flamingos, which is serving as a model for co-management. There is a core, gazetted flamingo sanctuary surrounded by a buffer of tribal land committed by local communities, thereby making a larger, more viable sanctuary from which the communities will also benefit through tourism.

At present, a detailed management plan is being developed for the area, facilitated by a team under the guidance of Dr Graham McCulloch. The plan will build on the foundation laid by the Makgadikgadi Framework Management Plan completed for the whole region in 2010. Among other things, the plan will provide details relating to the management structure (focusing on co-management between DWNP and communities) as well as defining the boundaries of the area in consultation with the communities so that a new type of protected area will be established—one that is a partnership between DWNP and local communities. Once these two fundamentals have been resolved, the private sector will be invited to participate in the partnership.

A detailed Management Plan for the southern part of Sua Pan is nearing completion.
MANAGEMENT PLAN CONTD.

The development of the management plan has been participatory, with focus group discussions being held in all four villages in the planning area, in order to generate a shared vision. In general, the communities support the idea of having a co-managed area providing that some tangible benefits are realized and equitably shared. In order for this to take place, they would like to see one main Trust comprising representatives from each village. Natural resources in the area would be managed holistically, and community members saw a role for themselves in managing and protecting the resources. The community Trust together with its strategic partners will co-manage the area in an integrated manner so as to maintain and enhance its tourism attributes. The objective of tourism development is to benefit and empower the people of the four villages and promote their culture and heritage to their maximum benefit. In order to incorporate the co-management concept, the draft plan recommends the establishment of an Advisory Committee comprising all relevant stakeholders.

The management plan, when complete, will ultimately set the parameters for a new type of protected area, where — by involving relevant stakeholders in PA management — control over their resources will be democratic, costs to central government will decrease, destructive behaviour will be reduced, law enforcement improved, local capacity expanded, a more equitable distribution of benefits will be possible, and the service provision functions of PAs will be better recognized and protected.

Focus group discussions were held in all four villages to capture community aspirations

OKAVANGO DELTA WORLD HERITAGE SITE LISTING

By the time you read this, the comprehensive nomination dossier motivating for recognition of the Okavango Delta as Botswana's second World Heritage Site (after Tsodilo Hills) should be on the desk of the Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in Paris. The 31st January is the deadline for submissions every year, and the Site Working Committee and Task Force pulled out all stops to finalise an excellent dossier that will meet the required criteria. The next step from here, once the dossier has been reviewed by IUCN (which assists UNESCO in this regard) is for an Evaluation Mission to visit the site in order to verify that the Okavango is a site of “Outstanding Universal Value”. This will probably take place by mid-year, and if all goes well, the nomination will be tabled at the World Heritage Convention Annual Conference later in the year, for a final decision. It is with keen anticipation that we await the outcome.
The KAZA Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA) is an initiative by the governments of Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe to link the protected areas of the five countries to create one world-class tourist destination. The project is located in the (O)Kavango-Zambezi basin (hence the abbreviation KAZA), a huge, wildlife-rich area straddling parts of the five countries. It is an ambitious but achievable undertaking which, like any large project, becomes more manageable when broken down into smaller components - in this regard, the participating countries (including Botswana) have each been working on their draft management plans, which later will be integrated into one comprehensive Development Plan for the region.

The Botswana component was discussed at two stakeholder workshops held in Maun during 2011; at the first workshop, some of the working groups recommended that the KAZA boundaries in Botswana should be realigned to include two Important Bird Areas:

- Lake Ngami IBA
- Makgadikgadi Pans IBA (in particular the southern part of Sua Pan)

This suggestion was made in recognition of the importance of these two areas for biodiversity conservation and of their potential for wildlife-based tourism. In the case of the Makgadikgadi, the recent gazettement of the Flamingo Sanctuary in southern Sua Pan contributed in part to its being chosen for inclusion. In addition, the completion of the Makgadikgadi Framework Management Plan, which highlights the role tourism can play in improving livelihoods in the area, lent further credence to this suggestion.

The inclusion of these two IBAs in KAZA will mean that five of the Botswana IBAs will be included in the area, the others being Chobe National Park IBA, Okavango Delta IBA and the Linyanti Swamps IBA.

Lake Ngami and Makgadikgadi Pans Important Bird Areas included in KAZA

KAZA is the stronghold for the globally threatened Slaty Egret (Photo: G Atkinson)
It has long been BirdLife Botswana’s contention that the reflooding of Lake Xau after decades of being dry will result in a massive influx of waterbirds, thereby creating a wetland that will qualify as Botswana’s 13th Important Bird Area. Reason for this speculation is the historical information in Smither’s 1964 checklist of birds of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, and the checklists of the Peterhouse Expeditions from the same period; these show that Lake Xau was then a rich wetland supporting many waterbirds.

After a slow start when the 2010 floods just reached the lakebed, bird numbers have steadily increased at the lake, and a count by BirdLife Botswana member Chris Brewster over the Christmas period showed that key bird species are now arriving at the lake. These include Wattled Cranes and Black-winged Pratincoles, both of which are globally threatened. They join other globally threatened birds such as Lappet-faced and White-backed vultures, Bateleur, Martial Eagle and Secretary-bird, all of which are present in the area irrespective of the presence or absence of water.

The 2,000 Black-winged Pratincoles seen by Chris Brewster were of particular note, being one of the largest gatherings of this species in recent times. According to Prof Phil Hockey, Director of the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology this species is in trouble, with declining numbers recorded in South Africa. He speculates that the birds may have moved northwards to Botswana, but this is not likely to be true judging by low numbers recorded here (during the 1980s, Penry and Tarboton saw 10,000 pratincoles at Lake Ngami, a number which has not been recorded since).

This emphasises the importance of Lake Xau for Palaearctic waders and other waterbirds. Once the international criteria for IBAs are met, the area will have to be formally registered as an Important Bird Area,
BirdLife Botswana members who are keen photographers should enter their best images in the Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition. The competition is being organized by Guy Symons and Steve Stockhall (based in Maun), and is open to citizens and residents from throughout the country. There are two bird categories (portrait and action/behaviour) and a maximum of three images per photographer, per category, may be entered. The closing date is end February, 2012.

For full information and a copy of the rules, contact Guy Symons at guy@elephanttrails.com
The Sociable Weaver has a remarkable communal nest built of dry grass. If this species built its nest in high rainfall areas, their nests would become water-logged and quickly disintegrate. Arid areas can experience heavy showers on rare occasions but usually the Sociable Weaver nests have plenty of opportunity to dry out. Sociable Weavers do need some rain and slightly higher rainfall can result in a longer breeding season, higher clutch size, and greater fledging success.

Changing climate could cause a change in the range of this species. This means we need to keep on monitoring its range. One way is by contributing weaver colony records to PHOWN (Photos of Weaver Nests, http://weavers.adu.org.za/phown.php). This project involves taking a photo of a weaver nest or colony, record the date, and the GPS location; then upload this information online. Ideally, identify the species and count the number of nests in a colony - in the case of Sociable Weavers, count the nest chambers in all the nest masses in a nest site. If you have not counted the nests (or chambers), you can still submit the record.

To monitor the range of the Sociable Weaver, record the first nest when driving into its range. Ideally we would like 'first occurrence' records along all roads and in every year. The Sociable Weaver has not changed its southern-most limit (near Williston in the Northern Cape) in 21 years, but what about other areas? There appears to be a range expansion in Botswana. The accompanying map shows the range of the Sociable Weaver in yellow, based on SABAP1 (first Southern African Bird Atlas Project, mostly covering 1987-1991). The red markers show all records submitted to PHOWN. One record was submitted from along the A2 road to Namibia and this record is out of range (see map, also online at http://weavers.adu.org.za/phown_sp.php?Spp=783).

Sociable Weaver distribution in Botswana could be affected by climate change
You are invited to submit your observations of Sociable Weaver nests in Botswana online

**Taking part in PHOWN**

Anyone can browse records and summaries but to upload records you need to register your email (to prevent spam from being submitted).

Records will contribute to how colony sizes vary, and provide information on breeding distributions and densities of weavers. Records of any weaver species can be submitted from anywhere, so if you travel outside of Botswana and come across weaver nests, you can still submit the records.


H Dieter Oschadleus, weavers4africa@gmail.com
Farmers in Botswana are fortunate to have the free tick control service of both Red-billed and Yellow-billed Oxpeckers (Dikala). The fact that these oxpeckers clean ticks off livestock is of course well-known to Batswana, and many farmers regard them as allies or friends - hence the Setswana name which shows the high esteem in which farmers hold this bird. In rural areas, they can be seen clambering over cattle and donkeys, holding on tightly, and combing through the animal’s fur with a scissors-like motion of the beak until a juicy tick is found. They are very thorough, checking in the ears and nostrils and even under the tail - and the tolerance that the host animal displays indicates that even they are probably aware of the beneficial role that these birds play.

The Red-billed Oxpecker has an all-red beak and a red eye with a bright yellow eye-ring. It is commoner than the Yellow-billed Oxpecker which looks similar but has a yellow bill with a red tip, and red eyes with no eye-ring. The Yellow-billed Oxpecker was virtually extinct in neighbouring South Africa where many were affected by toxic dips used for cattle. Even the Red-billed Oxpecker was badly affected by these poisonous dips, to the extent that it too declined dramatically. Both species have been reintroduced at great expense to parts of their former range, now that their value to farmers has been realised. Here in Botswana the oxpecker populations are healthy, and we should strive to keep them this way - prevention is always better than cure!

Farmers who feel that oxpeckers alone are inadequate to control ticks on their livestock, and who still believe in dipping their cattle, should ensure that they use a stock dip that is non-toxic to the oxpeckers. In this way, the birds will still contribute to tick control. The following lists below show dips that are toxic and those that are not.

### Dips toxic to oxpeckers


### Dips non-toxic to oxpeckers

Farmers should take care to use the oxpecker-friendly dips according to the manufacturers’ instructions, otherwise they could possibly have an adverse effect on the birds too.

It is only when farmers reject stock dips that have unwanted side-effects that manufacturers will develop proper environmentally friendly chemicals. It can be done, and it is up to farmers to exercise their rights as consumers and make informed choices when caring for their cattle. In this way, farmers will be making a significant contribution towards ensuring that our environment remains healthy. Botswana beef is prized overseas due to the fact that the cattle are free-ranging and are not contaminated with hormones and poisons. And, even more important, don’t forget that an environment that is safe for cattle and oxpeckers is safe for us too. Using oxpecker-friendly dips is not just about caring for birds—it is about ensuring that the environment remains a healthy life-support system for all of us, our children and our children’s children.

Farmers who insist on using cattle dips should make sure that they use brands that are oxpecker-friendly.

A Red-billed Oxpecker with a beakful of ticks, salivates profusely! (Photo: I White)
ROBERT’S NESTS AND EGGS

Warwick Tarboton has recently revised and updated his “Nests and Eggs of Southern African Birds” which has now been published as part of the Roberts family of bird books. It is a comprehensive guide to the nesting habits of over 720 Southern African bird species, and is more than just a valuable reference source; serious birders will find it makes fascinating reading, and the outstanding photos (some of which are quite unique) are a visual treat. How does one find nests of species such as the Narina Trogon and Denham’s Bustard—these images leave one speechless with admiration. Similarly the array of cuckoo eggs and the unraveling of their breeding biology is the work of a lifetime, condensed into one handy field guide.

This book is a ‘must-have’ for BirdLife members, professional guides and other birders.

BIRD POPULATION MONITORING

The November bird counts were a great success, with more people than ever participating. The results are still being analysed, and a proper feedback will soon be available. In the meantime, a big thank you to all who participated—leka moso!

Talking of tomorrow, February is almost upon us, and we urge participants to start getting ready for the next round of counts.

AFRICAN WATERBIRD CENSUS

This is a reminder that the biannual Waterbird Counts are also due. The counts also inform conservation action in Botswana, and BirdLife Botswana has a dataset spanning 20 years of counts! The data for the period 2000 to 2010 have just been analysed by Dr Stephanie Tyler and published as a Special Edition of Babbler (our scientific journal) and anyone who is interested in this information should contact the BirdLife Botswana office in Gaborone.

We are always looking for more volunteers to cover new areas. If you are interested in participating (only twice a year), contact your nearest BirdLife Botswana office.
Membership Form

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

Rates

- Standard - 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 - P350
- Overseas (and outside SADC) - P450

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’ or Electronic Funds Transfer to First National Bank Botswana, Kgale View 284567, Account # 57110052562,
Swift FIRNWBGX

Please return, fax or mail this form with your subscription and payment details:
Just as the previous issue of this newsletter was being finalized, with an article entitled “Skimmers breed in peace” Professional Guide and photographer James Haskins sent me this great action shot showing a Water Monitor disturbing some breeding skimmers (or is it the other way round?). It looks as though the skimmers can cope with natural disturbance factors!

PHOTO OF THE MONTH

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CONTACT ADDRESSES

BirdLife Botswana
PO Box 26691
Game City
Gaborone
blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw
Tel: 3190540
Fax: 3190540
Physical address:
Unit C1
Kgale Siding
Plot 1069 KO
(Old HOORC site near St Joseph’s College)

BirdLife Botswana
PO Box 1529
Maun
birdlifemaun@gmail.com
Tel: 6865618
Fax: 74654464
Physical address:
Old HOORC site
off Disaneng road

Visit our website http://www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw/

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.