



# FAMILIAR CHAT

## Welcome to the Summer & Autumn 2019 newsletter

One of the greatest benefits of being a member of BirdLife Botswana is to join the **monthly birdwalk**, most often led by someone who is an expert, not only on seeing, but more so, hearing birds in the vicinity. This quarter's FC (Familiar Chat) features two walks in two very different habitats – the semi-urban edge of Gaborone (Sanitas nursery near Gaborone dam, and the very rural Kgope Hill, some 15 kilometers West of Rasesa). All monthly walks take place on the first Sunday of every month. We meet at Molapo Crossing in Gaborone at 6.30am in the summer and 8.30am in the winter. We will send you a reminder the week before with some details about where we are going. Beginners are more than welcome.

The **BLB shop** is in Gaborone in the Kgale Spar complex, next to Game City complex. It's in the back of the Craft shop. Lots of interesting things to buy in there for the kitchen, garden, and lots of interesting books too.

We encourage you to add any comment or picture to our **Facebook BirdLife Botswana** page. When you see anything related to birds, share it with us all please! Anything vaguely related to birds is fine.

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/.../11/181109101508.htm...>



SCIENCEAILY.COM  
Leading researchers call for a ban on widely used insecticides... risks to early brain development still too high



A waddle of penguins

A parliament of owls

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(Nov.'18)**

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Mass Extinction?**  
Scientists estimate that 40% of the world's insects are in catastrophic decline. (Does it surprise you with the widespread use of billions of litres of poisons being thrown all over our farmland every year, and washed into our watercourses)

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birdwalk (Feb.19)**

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Botswana 2019**

48 species sighted and or heard, on a three hour stroll...

- Arrow-marked Babbler
- Crested Barbet
- Southern Boubou
- African Red-eyed Bulbul
- Orange-breasted Bushshrike
- Grey-backed Camaroptera
- Rattling Cisticola
- Long-billed Crombec
- Diderick Cuckoo
- Cape Turtle-Dove
- Namaqua Dove
- Rock Dove
- Red-eyed Dove
- Laughing Dove
- Western Cattle Egret
- Red-billed Firefinch
- African Paradise-Flycatcher
- Crested Francolin
- Go-away-bird Grey
- African Hoopoe
- Hadeda Ibis
- African Sacred Ibis
- Yellow-billed Kite
- Red-faced Mousebird
- Speckled Mousebird
- Common Myna
- Black-headed Oriole
- Speckled Pigeon
- Tawny-flanked Prinia
- Black-backed Puffback
- White-browed Scrub Robin
- Swainson's Spurfowl
- Cape Glossy Starling
- White-bellied Sunbird
- Greater Striped Swallow
- Lesser Striped Swallow
- African Palm Swift
- White-rumped Swift
- Little Swift
- Brown-crowned Tchagra
- Spotted Thick-knee
- Water Thick-knee
- Karoo Thrush
- Kurrichane Thrush
- White-backed Vulture
- Black-faced Waxbill
- Blue Waxbill
- Southern Masked Weaver

## SANITAS MONTHLY BIRD WALK – Nov 2018

What better than a tour of the Sanitas premises to spot birds followed by a reasonably priced healthy snack at the Sanitas Tea-room, on a warm and pleasant Sunday morning!



Greater (A) and Lesser (B) Striped Swallows – the Greater has less boldly marked stripes!



Karoo Thrush

Limited to the Southern tip of Africa, but not a coastal bird.



Kurrichane Thrush



Widespread across Southern to Central Africa,



Species are similar but the Karoo Thrush has greyer underparts and it has a dark eye with a yellow, not brown ring around the eye. The Kurrichane has black speckling marks on the throat.

## **Insects are dying off at record rates — an ominous sign we're in the middle of a 6th mass extinction**

**Roughly 40% of the world's insect species are in decline, a new study said.**

**The die-offs are happening primarily because insects are losing their habitats to farming and urbanisation. The use of pesticides and fertilizers is also to blame, as is climate change.**

**The study's authors said the repercussions of this loss of Earth's insects could be catastrophic.**

**The rapid shrinking of insect populations is also a sign that the planet is in the midst of a sixth mass extinction**

Somehow, it's easier to be concerned about wolves, sea turtles, and white rhinos dying off than it is to feel remorse over vanishing bugs.

But the loss of insects is a dire threat - one that could trigger a "catastrophic collapse of Earth's ecosystems," a new study said.

The research, the first global review of its kind, looked at 73 historical reports on insect declines around the world and found the total mass of all insects on the planet is decreasing by 2.5% per year.



If this trend continues unabated, the Earth may not have any insects at all by 2119.

"In 10 years you will have a quarter less, in 50 years only half left and in 100 years you will have none," Francisco Sanchez-Bayo, a study coauthor and researcher at the University of Sydney, told The Guardian.

That's a big problem because insects are food sources for countless bird, fish, and mammal species. Pollinators such as bees and butterflies also perform a crucial role in fruit, vegetable, and nut production.

### **Insects are going extinct 8 times faster than mammals, birds, and reptiles**

Sanchez-Bayo and his coauthors focused their analysis on insects in European and North American countries. They estimated that 41% of insect species are in decline, 31% are threatened (according to criteria set by the International Union

for Conservation of Nature), and 10% are going locally extinct.

That extinction rate is eight times faster than the observed pace of extinction for mammals, birds, and reptiles.



The study suggested that bee species in the UK, Denmark, and North America have taken major hits - bumblebees, honey bees, and wild bee species are all declining. In the US, the number of honey-bee colonies dropped from 6 million in 1947 to 2.5 million just six decades later.

Moths and butterflies are also disappearing across Europe and the US. Between 2000 and 2009 alone, the UK lost 58% of butterfly species on farmed land.

Dragonflies, mayflies, and beetles appear to be dying off as well.

When looking at all animal populations planetwide (not just insects), according to a 2017 study, the Earth appears to be undergoing a process of "biological annihilation." That analysis estimated that "as much as 50% of the number of animal individuals that once shared Earth with us are already gone."

This rapid decline in global biodiversity is sometimes called the "sixth extinction," since it's the sixth time in the history of life on Earth that the planet's fauna has experienced a major collapse in numbers.

In the past, mass extinctions have been caused by the emergence of ice ages or asteroid collisions. This mass extinction, however, is driven by human activities - namely deforestation, mining, and carbon-dioxide emissions that contribute to global warming.

"As insects comprise about two thirds of all terrestrial species on Earth, the above trends confirm that the sixth major extinction event is profoundly impacting life forms on our planet," the authors wrote.

**'Catastrophic consequences for** (..to p6)

(from p5) ... **the survival of mankind'**

The study emphasized that insects are "essential for the proper functioning of all ecosystems" as food sources, crop pollinators, pest controllers, and nutrient recyclers in soil.

"If insect species losses cannot be halted, this will have catastrophic consequences for both the planet's ecosystems and for the survival of mankind," Sanchez-Bayo told The Guardian.

Substantial declines in insect populations therefore threaten the food, timber, and fiber production that humanity's survival depends on, according to Timothy Schowalter, a professor of entomology at Louisiana State University.

"The pollinator declines jeopardize 35% of our global food supply, which is why European countries are mandating protection and restoration of pollinator habitats," he told Business Insider.

Schowalter added that insects also are critical food resources for many birds, fish, and other vertebrates, which would disappear if their food sources do.

"Insects are often maligned, or at least their significant contributions to ecosystem productivity and delivery of ecosystem services are underappreciated," Schowalter said. "In short, if insects and other arthropods do decline, our survival would be threatened."

### **Farming practices are behind the insect die-off**

This isn't the first time scientists have called attention to plummeting insect populations.

In 2017, a study indicated that 75% of Germany's flying insects had disappeared since the 1990s. Another recent study showed that the total biomass of arthropods - creatures such as insects, spiders, and lobsters that have jointed legs but no backbone - in Puerto Rico has taken a nose dive since the 1970s.

Pesticides, fertilizers, and heavy land use for farming are primary drivers of this decline.

"Overall, the systematic, widespread and often



superfluous use of pesticides in agricultural and pasture land over the past 60 years has negatively impacted most organisms, from insects to birds and bats," the authors of the new study wrote.

They added: "The conclusion is clear: unless we change our ways of producing food, insects as a whole will go down the path of extinction in a few decades."

Sanchez-Bayo told The Guardian he thinks insecticides such as neonicotinoids and fipronil are especially damaging.

"They sterilize the soil, killing all the grubs," he said.

Climate-change-driven temperature shifts are playing a role in insect deaths, too, though it's not the main factor.



"So far, declines have been related more to land-use changes, especially agricultural intensification, forest fragmentation and urban development, than to temperature change," Schowalter said.

To address the steep decline in insect populations, Sanchez-Bayo and his coauthors are pushing for initiatives to restore insect habitats and cut down the amount of chemicals used in agricultural practices.

"It is imperative that current pesticide usage patterns, mainly insecticides and fungicides, are reduced to a minimum," they wrote.

**Aylin Woodward , Business Insider US**

Feb 12, 2019,

# Collective Nouns for Groups of Various Birds

We're all familiar with some of the basic collective nouns for birds, such as a murder of crows or a gaggle of geese, but what about a charm of finches or a parliament of owls?

So we've assembled a list of collective nouns for various types of birds. While the first term is typically the most common, the others are equally acceptable.

Before we get to specific groups of birds, a group of general birds has a number of names you can use. Perhaps the most common is a flock of birds, but it can also be a flight, volery, or brace.

**Bitterns:** sedge

**Chickens:** brood, clutch, peep

**Cormorants:** gulp

**Cranes:** herd, sedge

**Crows:** murder, congress

**Doves:** dole, flight, piteousness

**Ducks:** Raft, brace, paddling, raft

**Eagles:** convocation, aerie

**Emus:** mob

**Finches:** charm

**Flamingoes:** stand, flamboyance, pat

**Geese:** gaggle (on the ground), skein (in flight), plump (flying close together)

**Grouse:** covey, pack

**Gulls:** colony

**Hawks:** boil, cast, kettle, lease

**Hérons:** seige, sedge

**Ibises:** colony

**Jays:** band, party, scold

**Lapwings:** deceit, desert

**Larks:** bevy, exaltation

**Magpies:** charm, congregation, gulp, murder, tiding, tittering

**Mallards:** flush, puddling, sord, suit

**Nightingales:** watch

**Owls:** parliament, stare, wisdom

**Parrots:** company, pandemonium

**Peacocks:** muster, ostentation, pride, party

**Pelicans:** squadron, scoop, pod

**Penguins:** colony, waddle, rookery (on land), raft (at sea)

**Pheasants:** bouquet, nye, nide, nest, head

**Pigeons:** kit

**Plovers:** congregation, stand, wing

**Quails:** bevy, covey, drift

**Ravens:** congress, unkindness

**Rooks:** building, parliament

**Sandpipers:** fling

**Snipes:** walk, whisp

**Sparrows:** host, meinie, tribe

**Starlings:** chattering, cloud, congregation, murmuration, clattering

**Storks:** mustering, phalanx (migrating)

**Swallows:** flight, gulp

**Swans:** wedge, team, lamentation, bank, bevy, drift, eyrar, flight, whiting

**Swifts:** flock, scream

**Turkeys:** gang, rafter, gobble, posse, raffle

**Vultures:** wake, venue

**Waterfowl:** bunch, knob, raft

**Woodcocks:** fall

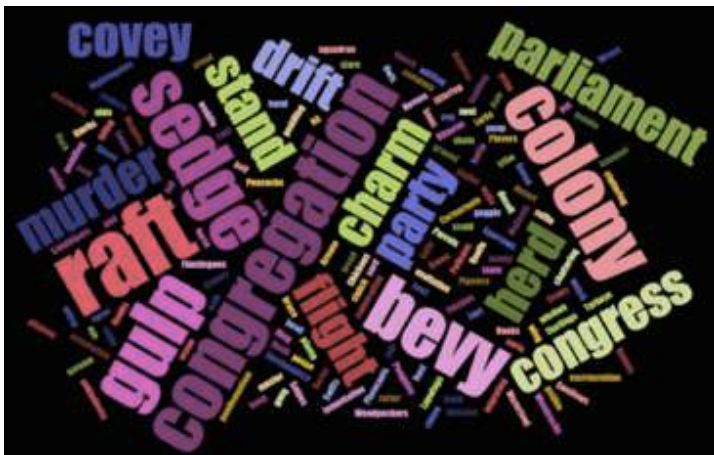
**Woodpeckers:** descent

**Wrens:** herd, chime

BY TIMOTHY MARTINEZ JR. ON SEPTEMBER 23,

2014 IN UNCATEGORIZED

<https://www.backyardchirper.com/blog/>

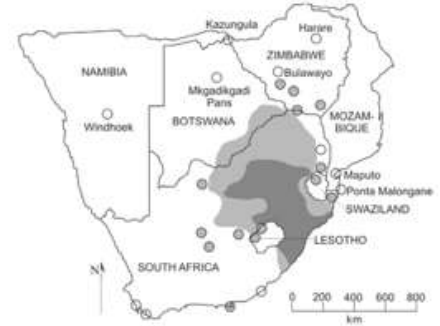


## The impact of the introduced Common Myna on the Birds of Southern Africa.



Photo courtesy, Ian White

The Common (Indian or Village) Myna, *Acridotheres tristis*, is native to southern and South-eastern Asia and was introduced to South Africa in about 1900. A few individuals introduced into Natal multiplied into millions, and are now found over a large portion of the eastern part of Southern Africa. They are now considered as one of the world's 100 worst alien invasive species (Global Invasive Species Specialist Group) and do not warrant protection. Myna's compete aggressively with many indigenous species, and tend to replace them in areas where Myna populations are well established. The Myna is a medium-sized chocolate-brown bird, with a yellow beak, eye patch, feet and legs. The head, throat and tail are black, with the tail having white tips and white undertail feathers. The large white patches in the wings are noticeably visible when the bird is in flight. Myna's are very noisy birds and are often found in pairs or small groups where they spend a lot of time on the ground feeding. They are omnivorous and feed mainly on fruits,



nectar and insects. Myna's usually roost communally in trees, under bridges and under roof eaves. Indian Myna's greatly affect the biodiversity of an area, especially with regard to the birdlife. In Hawaii the Myna was introduced to control pest insects on sugarcane, but



ending up being one of the main agents of the dispersal of the invasive plant, Lantana (*Lantana camara*). This is just one example of the effects that this bird can have on the biodiversity of indigenous fauna and flora. It thrives in urban environments, forming large noisy and visible roosting colonies, except in the mating system when it nests in cavities and is highly territorial. It is widely blamed for declines in native bird populations, and is considered the world's third most invasive species by the IUCN Species Survival Commission. It is considered particularly harmful in Southern Africa, where native species often prove vulnerable to competition by introduced animals. Common Mynas are thought to impact on populations of other birds. It seems likely that the Common Myna does have a strong adverse impact on small insectivorous birds, but that bigger birds are largely immune from this. The impact on cavity-nesting birds is more complicated, with some affected and others not; cavity-nesting bird appear to be seriously threatened by the presence of Common Mynas.

Map from 2007 showing distribution. We all know that this bird is now widespread across the Eastern side of Botswana and has recently reached Maun, much to the disgust of its residents!

Referenced and adapted from <http://sciencythoughts.blogspot.com/2012/07/the-impact-of-introduced-common-myna-on.html> and <https://www.sanparks.org/groups/birders/ alien>

Like chess players, these crows can plan several steps ahead New Caledonian crows can use tools like sticks and stones, in a pre-planned fashion, to accomplish a goal.

PLANNING AHEAD IS actually more difficult than it seems. To do so, you have to fix in your mind a possible future, and then take concrete steps to make that scenario real. Even humans are rather notorious for a certain lack of planning.

The intelligence required to think well into the future is usually not attributed to animals. But new research shows that one type of crow can use tools to plan up to three moves ahead, to secure a meal—somewhat like a human playing chess, says Alex Taylor, a researcher at the University of Auckland in New Zealand.

The birds, known as New Caledonian crows, are famous for making tools, fashioning twigs into spears and hooks that they use to eat grubs. A member of the corvid family, they're related to ravens, American crows, and magpies, and live in a group of islands east of Australia.

These crows are intelligent in many ways, capable of, for example, dropping rocks into a water-filled container to displace liquid and snag a floating bit of food.

But the degree to which they can mentally plot out actions ahead of time has been unclear, because such things are very difficult to definitively show, Taylor explains. (Related: Crows have human-like intelligence, author says.)

"It's tricky to know how animals are thinking," Taylor says. It's easy to infer what's going on, he says, but it takes precise testing to show—you cannot, unfortunately, just ask a crow what's on its mind.

#### Bird puzzle

Taylor and colleagues created an experimental setup to do just that, which consisted of a box-like object in which different parts of a puzzle were hidden from the others. In one compartment, for example, they placed a twig. In another, a tube with a rock that could device dispensed a bit of meat when a

contained a distracting and unnecessary

The researchers familiarized and trained independently, so they for instance

into a chamber. After that, they set loose

(Related: Crows are better at tool-making After hopping around and getting a lay of correct sequences of events to free the

that these tasks were hidden from each in their minds the sequence necessary for

"Picking the correct tool under a variety likely means that the birds had a mental needed there to solve a complex task," University of Washington and an expert

Marzluff concurs with the study, published February 7 in *Current Biology*, that it "provides the first conclusive evidence that birds can plan several moves ahead while using tools."

Answers, questions The researchers also tweaked the tasks slightly to see if the crows were still capable of correctly planning and executing when circumstances changed, which many of them were. They found, perhaps unsurprisingly, that the animals were more adept at using twigs than rocks, which makes sense given their behaviour in the wild.

The study raises tantalizing questions. Can other animals plan ahead, and to what degree of complexity? And what does this say about their intelligence and level of agency? (Learn why crows are among the smartest birds.)

For instance, the study shows that these birds, which have brains very different than those of great apes, nevertheless possess many similar mental abilities, says Kaeli Swift, a researcher at the University of Washington not involved in the study

"Imagination is one of the cornerstones of the cognitive toolkit that we use to measure intelligence," Swift says. "This shows strong evidence of such abilities in a bird."

Studies of corvids keep showing that these animals high-order cognitive abilities—like planning and mental time-travel—to a degree that "we would have found laughable several decades ago," she adds.

"It really goes to show how wrong we have been in using the term 'bird brain' as an insult and begs for our future dedication to these research questions." [DOUGLAS MAIN](#)



only be freed with the stick. In a third, a rock was dropped in. A fourth area tool, either twig or rock.

wild-caught birds to solve the separate tasks learned how to get food by dropping a rock the birds on the four-part puzzle. than chimps.)

the land, many of the crows conducted the food without making any errors. The fact other suggests that the crows were imaging getting the food.

of scenarios for use somewhere else most representation of that [place] and what was says John Marzluff, a researcher at the on crows who wasn't involved in the paper.

that it "provides the first conclusive evidence



## February 2019 Birdwalk. Kgope Hill, West of Rasesa (S24.28714° E25.95000°)



Who would have guessed that this hill in the middle of the bushveld and farmland would give us a total of 72 species? (Maybe Chris Brewster?!) Apart from the one or two exclusively hill species like the Mocking Cliff

Chat, there were some waterbirds due to the proximity of a dam at the South-Eastern end of the hill. What a fantastic morning it turned out to be....

- |                            |                                 |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Bar-throated Apalis        | Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill |
| Arrow-marked Babbler       | Southern Red-billed Hornbill    |
| Crested Barbet             | African Grey Hornbill           |
| Acacia Pied Barbet         | Yellow-billed Kite              |
| Chinspot Batis             | Crowned Lapwing                 |
| Swallow-tailed Bee-eater   | Sabota Lark                     |
| European Bee-eater         | Pearl-spotted Owlet             |
| Brubru                     | Red-billed Oxpecker             |
| African Red-eyed Bulbul    | African Pipit                   |
| Golden-breasted Bunting    | Tawny-flanked Prinia            |
| Cinnamon-breasted Bunting  | Black-chested Prinia            |
| Orange-breasted Bushshrike | Green-winged Pytilia            |
| Common Buzzard             | White-browed Scrub Robin        |
| Grey-backed Camaroptera    | Kalahari Scrub Robin            |
| Yellow Canary              | Southern White-crowned Shrike   |
| Black-throated Canary      | Red-backed Shrike               |
| Mocking Cliff Chat         | Crimson-breasted Shrike         |
| Familiar Chat              | Southern Grey-headed Sparrow    |
| Anteater Chat              | Swainson's Spurfowl             |
| Rattling Cisticola         | Cape Glossy Starling            |
| Desert Cisticola           | Abdim's Stork                   |
| Long-billed Crombec        | White-bellied Sunbird           |
| Red-chested Cuckoo         | Marico Sunbird                  |
| Levaillant's Cuckoo        | Lesser Striped Swallow          |
| Diderick Cuckoo            | Barn Swallow                    |
| Red-eyed Dove              | Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler     |
| Laughing Dove              | Barred Wren-Warbler             |
| Emerald-spotted Wood Dove  | Violet-eared Waxbill            |
| Cape Turtle-Dove           | Blue Waxbill                    |
| Wahlberg's Eagle           | White-browed Sparrow-Weaver     |
| Verreaux's Eagle           | Southern Masked Weaver          |
| Lanner Falcon              | Shaft-tailed Whydah             |
| Scaly-feathered Finch      | Long-tailed Paradise-Whydah     |
| Spotted Flycatcher         |                                 |
| Marico Flycatcher          |                                 |
| Crested Francolin          |                                 |
| Egyptian Goose             |                                 |
| African Harrier-Hawk       |                                 |
| African Hoopoe             |                                 |



10km

5km

1km

400m

All map snippets courtesy of Google Maps  
[www.google.co.bw/maps/place](http://www.google.co.bw/maps/place)



## Bird Lasser Challenge Botswana 2019

We have set up three areas for Challenges in Botswana for 2019, namely Gaborone, Chobe and the Okavango Delta. They are all listed on website <https://www.birdlasser.com/challenges/> together with other challenges in Southern Africa. The challenges are free and are open to any birder, be they bird guide, local or foreign tourist, amateur or professional birder, or somebody interested in keeping track of where and when he or she saw different species.



All anyone has to do, is download the free BirdLasser programme on his or her Smartphone and join whichever challenge is suitable for them by clicking on “join” to register on the above website. We would like to have as many birders as possible entering these challenges as a way of generating interest in birds and birding. Obviously it is possible to be entered on all three challenges. The system will automatically download your sightings from your phone onto the above website whenever you are in a Wi-Fi zone. Maps of the areas covered by each challenge are shown on the individual websites. So, for example, Lake Ngami and Khwai Conservancy are included in Okavango, while Savuti is included in Chobe.

BirdLasser on its own is a very useful tool in helping the birder to record exactly where and when he or she identified different species. So, say for instance one is going to visit Savuti: Enter the name “Savuti” on your BirdLasser system and then, when you identify a species, tap on Savuti and “log” will appear. Then type in four successive letters of the species seen and select from all the species presented by the system. Bingo! Then the Chobe Challenge will take over, and provided you are within the radius, your sightings will automatically be recorded on the Chobe Challenge.

Some of you may have ideas as to how we can operate this system better. Let us know what they are and we may well modify the challenges for 2020. You will notice for instance, that the Gaborone Challenge is bounded by a circle with radius 50km, Chobe with one of 85 km and Okavango with one of 150 km.

At this stage we are not envisaging any prizes, but incredible bragging rights will go to the various winners. Depending on the response, we may change this decision later. Remember, each Challenge lasts for the whole year, not a day or week or month. Your Smartphone is about to become much more useful than making calls and sending WhatsApp's!



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