



FAMILIAR CHAT

NEWSLETTER OF BIRDLIFE BOTSWANA

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WHAT'S GOING ON IN BLB?

We are grateful to say that we have number of sponsors from a variety of organisations, and hope these partnerships will continue into the new year.

National Geographic have expressed an interest in helping with the BPM (Bird Population Monitoring) programme. The US Embassy has continued to support the annual World Migratory Day celebrations. The BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) host our data for the BPM programme.

The UNDP SGP (Small Grants Programme) has taken on BLB for a number of years to help develop programmes in Makgadikgadi that impact on communities and environment. We hope they will continue to have confidence in our organisation to continue to engage us this year and the coming ones...

FAREWELL FROM SALLY JOBSON

By the time you read this I will have migrated north to Cairo, somewhat nearer 'home' and family in Europe. After 30 years in Botswana it was time for a new adventure, but I will miss this place dearly.

Steve and I arrived in Gaborone early January 1990 on teaching contracts – on the same plane as Chris Brewster, a returnee teacher. We were put in the President Hotel for 2 weeks and I remember waking up the first morning, looking out onto the mall and wondering where the centre of town was! One Sunday Steve, Chris and I went by taxi to the sewage ponds, keen to see birds (well, 2 of the 3 of us actually...). I also recall phoning Wendy Borello to find out about Botswana Bird Club and went on my first BBC walk on January 7th to somewhere near Oodi. No record of the participants.

Steve and I were posted to Selibe Phikwe and I continued to enjoy the birdlife. This is an extract from what I wrote to my previous RSPB club in early 1990.

The Motloutse River is dry most of the time; one of my students asked what the English word for a river with water was! There are enough permanent pools to attract a good variety of birds and a resident colony of white backed vultures. One tall acacia is a well-used nest site and local geologists erected scaffolding so we could climb up and watch a pair of saddle billed storks raise two young. Redbilled buffalo weavers, Meyer's parrots and redbilled oxpeckers also use the tree.

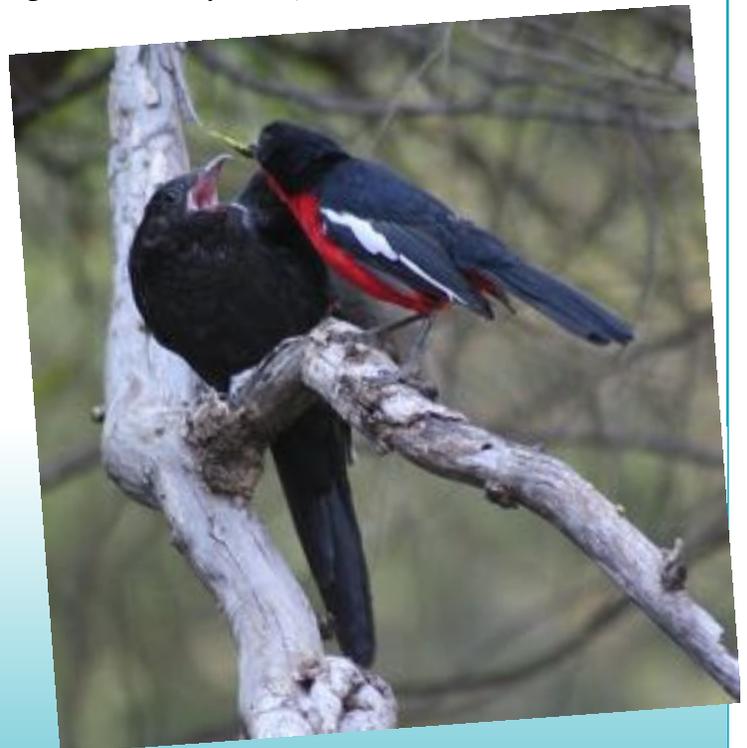
I contributed reports to the Atlas of Southern African Breeding Birds. Couldn't afford a copy but I am in the credits!

In 1992 we were transferred to Molepolole and I hated being so far from the wild north but met wild Peter D'Arcy instead, a fellow teacher at Kgari Sechele. I don't recall him being much interested in birds of the feathered kind at that point. I will say no more, but if anyone needs details, message me. (Messages have been officially blocked – Ed.!!) I did bird counts with another Peter, a Canadian, at a local dam where I sometimes took my students. I soon found out which waterfowl were considered the most 'monate' (in the pot, that is..).

In 1993 my daughter Elena was born and birding took a back seat, and this continued for some years since my son Owen arrived in 1998, by which time we were at Maru-a-Pula and fully immersed in school and family to the detriment of simple hobbies like birding. There is a saying 'Don't put your daughter on the stage'. I made the mistake of putting my daughter on a horse when she was 7 and there followed 12 years of being chief groom. As Daphne Goldsworthy will tell you, you can't hold binoculars and ponies at the same time.

Fast forward to September 2012 and suddenly my weekends were free (boys don't appreciate their mums at basketball matches) and I rejoined what was now Birdlife Botswana and persuaded Virginia, a fellow teacher at Maru-a-Pula to become a birder.

I have enjoyed the last 7 years of monthly walks and a couple of camps immensely. Thank you all for your expertise, but particularly for your company. I can't think of a nicer bunch of people. In the words of the black cuckoo (seen here in my garden in May 2017) "I'm so sad".



Sally Jones is my birth name. In 1990 a married woman couldn't open a separate bank account in Botswana, thus I became a Jobson. Not only birds get frequent name changes.

BIRDS AS INDICATORS OF HABITAT DETERIORATION

Article by Keddy Moleofi - BirdLife Botswana education@birdlifebotswana.org.bw

Birds globally are in danger and habitats are deteriorating. So says the BirdLife International 2018 State of the World's Birds report. It says that one in eight of the planet's bird species are in danger. Furthermore, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) reported that a shocking one million species may be currently threatened with global extinction. The habitats of these species are being lost with 75% of the terrestrial environment and 40% of the marine environment being severely altered by human impacts.

BirdLife Botswana has joined global efforts to develop indicators to address current global conservation issues through the Bird Population Monitoring (BPM) Programme. The BPM Programme is aimed at developing a wild bird index that will show birds' population trends over time, whether birds' populations are increasing or decreasing. The Programme started in 2010 and the results showing trends of common and widespread terrestrial species in Botswana were produced from 2010 to 2018. The results show that there is a moderate population increase of 1.2 % per year, from 2010 to 2015, for the overall trends of common terrestrial species in Botswana. However, in 2016 and 2017, there was a population decline of -9.2% per year. Terrestrial common birds found in protected areas show a moderate decline of -1.6% per year trend from 2010 to 2015. In 2016 and 2017, there was a steep decline of -21.5% of the protected areas species. The steep decline in the protected areas could be due to climatic alteration factors like heat waves. The results could be an indicator that there is deterioration of the ecological status of the protected areas.

The overall trend for common birds outside protected areas shows a moderate increase of 1.8% per year. The results conclude that terrestrial common birds are doing better outside protected areas than inside protected areas. There is a moderate decline of -3.3 % per year for the overall trends of the grassland species. The grassland habitat could be affected by overgrazing and overstocking of livestock in Botswana. If there are no rains and the temperatures are consecutively very high, livestock will tend to move to places that have available grass to feed on and this will result in increased degradation of the habitat. Savanna habitats are doing well with a moderate increase of an overall trend of 1.5% per. Woodland habitats show that bird populations are relatively stable between 2010 to 2018 at -0.8% per year.

One bird species that shows a continuous decline from 2010 to 2018 is the migrant Willow Warbler. According to the European monitoring programmes the majority of the migratory birds are declining including the Willow Warbler. This is a conservation concern to the habitat and the population of the species. There is a need for further research to investigate what caused this decline and the size of the population to conclude whether it needs IUCN Red listing upgrade and to implement the recommendations for conserving it.



[CONTINUED ON PAGE 6]

Photo Willow Warbler courtesy Ian White (@ Flickr)

International Vulture Awareness Day



BirdLife Botswana in conjunction with other conservation organisations in Botswana celebrated the International Vulture Awareness Day (IVAD) on the 7th September 2019 at the capital city Gaborone. The event started with a march from the venue Gaborone Secondary School Grounds passing in front of the City Council and Museum, past the State House, returning through the Main Mall back to the venue. The International Vulture Awareness Day has been commemorated before in Botswana by different organisation, independently. However, this year, Non-governmental conservation organisations (such as BirdLife Botswana, Cheetah Conservation Botswana, Kalahari Conservation Society, Kalahari Research and Conservation, Mokolodi Nature Reserve, Raptors Botswana, the Department of Wildlife and National Parks, and the Department of Environmental Affairs, chose to jointly commemorate this day and lift a red flag on issues surrounding our vulture populations in Botswana. The IVAD is commemorated each year internationally on the first Saturday of September and is aimed at publicising the conservation of vultures to a wider audience and to highlight the importance of vulture conservation. Recently, (June 2019) a massive total of 537 vultures and two tawny eagles were found dead in northeast Botswana adding up to a devastating statistics of poisoned vultures

The commemoration themed **Vultures: Nature's Solution for a Clean Environment** was attended by around 240 people. The event was graced by the Deputy Permanent Secretary (DPS) from the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources Conservation and Tourism (MENT) and Mr Felix Monggae, the Permanent Secretary from the Ministry of Agriculture. They gave the keynote address and the closing remarks respectively. The DPS mentioned that the threats to vultures are both severe and challenging to address, and demanded for a change in conservation action supported by all stakeholders, including many who



He further said that lessons learned and good practice can be applied more widely but new and creative solutions need to be found to address the clear and present danger that threatens to drive this spectacular group of birds to extinction. The DPS emphasised that many stakeholders concerned with vulture conservation must work together, and not rest until all vulture species are safe from their threat. He reflected on the status of vultures in Botswana by mentioning that there are only five vulture species and three are listed as critically endangered and two as endangered. Recent studies have reported a population declined of 79% for Hooded Vulture, 78% for White-Headed Vulture, 61% for Lappet-Faced Vulture and 33% of White-Backed Vulture between 1995 and 2016. An assessment of White-Backed Vulture nesting numbers between 2007 and 2017 in northern Botswana showed a decline of 53%. This is indeed a cause for concern! Now reflect on the recent record loss and what its influence is to these trends.

Deputy Permanent Secretary from MENT Mr Felix Monggae giving the keynote address.

Present at the event were school children, ranging from Primary to Tertiary institutions. Some performed entertainment acts such as drama, poems and marimba to the audience. The event pooled several donations from the business sector outside the conservation segment to provide various support. This effort has shown positive results in raising the profile for the need to conserve the vultures in Botswana. The donations were collected from Mr. Veg (fruits and vegetables retailer), Pie City, and Sefalana Cash and Carry who provided snacks, (pies, apples, peanuts, drinks and water) for the day. There was support from Boitekanelo Health Institute tertiary education and Botswana Red Cross Society with first aid ambulance. The Botswana Police service provided escort during the march. Five representative players from the Botswana National rugby team which is called the Vultures also attended the event wearing their team gear. There was a live White Backed Vulture brought for public viewing.



Vultures are an ecologically vital group of birds that face a range of threats in all areas they occur and populations of many species are under pressure and some species are facing extinction. Commemorating the day was one of our efforts to spread the message to conserve vulture species. Vultures are perfectly adapted to keep the environment clean and healthy by efficiently locating and consuming carcasses, recycling energy through the



food web and preventing the spread of diseases. It is an unpaid role hence saving them will save our finances. Therefore, everyone should take part in repaying vultures for their services, by giving them the protection they deserve. The success of the event was made possible by the



PROUDLY SPONSORED BY



organisations shown in the picture below whom we are very thankful to. For more information about vultures, IVAD, and BirdLife Botswana please contact Keddy Moleofi at 00267 3190540 or education@birdlifebotswana.org.bw or visit www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw.

[HABITAT DETERIORATION CONTINUED, FROM P.3]

The research will inform where the cause of the decline is rooted, Botswana or Europe?

Botswana's terrestrial common and widespread bird populations seems to be doing very well from a general perspective. However, there is a slight decline of bird species populations in the protected areas while outside protected areas birds seem to be doing well. This suggests that Botswana's protected areas need a revision of their management strategies and to apply adaptive management to ensure the status of the protected areas are maintained and kept at equilibrium.

Special thanks to the BPM participants without whom the production of the alerting report would not be possible. All the bird monitoring reports produced are a dedication to the volunteers who enormously contribute sustainably to the existence of the Bird Population Monitoring Programme in Botswana. Through their efforts, Botswana can also join the European bird monitoring schemes in tracking birds and biodiversity status.

Gratitude is given to the 2018/2019 financial sponsors; the Department of Wildlife and National Parks Conservation Trust Fund, National Environment Fund and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds for the ongoing technical support.

[Editors comment: In 2020 we are likely to receive support from the National Geographic organisation. To further boost our capability, we are told that there may be the distribution of some sound devices which will make our citizen scientists more familiar with the sounds of birds in Southern Africa - Wow!]



CATS KILL BILLIONS OF BIRDS ANNUALLY

Cats that live in the wild or indoor pets allowed to roam outdoors kill billions of birds each year, says a study that escalates a decades-old debate over the feline threat to native animals.



A three-year USA Fish and Wildlife Service-funded study was set up to estimate the number of birds killed by predators, chemicals and in collisions with wind generators and windows.

For years, bird lovers and cat lovers have clashed over whether outdoor cats, should be euthanized or allowed to roam free in managed programs that include neutering. City councils, animal shelters and state wildlife officials have long struggled with the balance.

"Our findings suggest that free-ranging cats cause substantially greater wildlife mortality than previously thought and are likely the single greatest source of anthropogenic mortality for birds and mammals," Marra and his co-authors conclude. "Scientifically sound conservation and policy intervention is needed to reduce this impact."

Extrapolated findings from 21 studies in the U.S. and Europe come up with an estimate of 30 million to 80 million "unowned" cats and 84 million "owned" cats in the U.S., their kill rates, and other factors leading to bird predation.

They defined "unowned" as farm cats living in barns, strays living outdoors that may be fed by humans, and feral cats that fend for themselves — all of which might live alone or in colonies.

Adapted from: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/01/29/cats-wild-birds-mammals-study/1873871/>

SOME OF OUR COMMUNICATION ON OUR WHATSAPP SITE...



Ian Nuttal-Smith got this shot of a Paradise Flycatcher while he was attending a workshop in Northern Gabs.



Chris Brewster spotted this African Skimmer at Bokaa Dam on the 11th Jan, 2020, and Ian White managed to snap it....



Virginia Parker posted some lovely pics of some members of the club who went to the Limpopo towards the end of last year. Apparently Harold organised a couple of days with good cloud cover and rain. How did you do that Sir?!!

Congrats to some of our intrepid team members who went to Maun to be part of this event.And to Ian Nuttal-Smith for the time and money he puts into Crane conservation:



2020 WORLD WETLANDS DAY

2 February each year is World Wetlands Day (WWD) to raise global awareness about the vital role of wetlands for people and our planet. This day also marks the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971, in the Iranian city of Ramsar.

The 2020 theme for WWD is 'Wetlands and Biodiversity', with the slogan 'Life Thrives in Wetlands'.



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DESIGNING A BIRD FRIENDLY LANDSCAPE

Attracting a variety of birds to your backyard takes more than adding a few bird feeders or filling a bird bath – a bird-friendly landscape should fulfill all of a wild bird's basic needs, including food, shelter water and nesting sites. With these keys to the right habitat, your backyard can attract a wide range of popular birds.

Native Plants

The best types of plants to use to attract local birds are the plants they are most familiar with. Native landscaping uses local and regional trees shrubs, flowers and grasses, and those are the same plants that birds recognise as rich food sources and appropriate shelter. Exotic plants may be beautiful, but if the birds do not like the plants they will not be attracted to them.

Landscaping with native plants is also beneficial because those plants are adapted to the local climate. They will require less water, less fertiliser, and lower maintenance to stay beautiful and healthy.



Layered Vegetation

A bird-friendly landscape is one that offers different layers of plants for different birds to use. When many species of birds live in the same region, they adapt to using different areas of the available habitat. Some birds may prefer foraging on the ground for food, while others seek out food sources in low shrubbery. Some birds may nest in bushes, while others prefer tall trees and greater heights. Even the same bird species will frequently use different heights and layers of vegetation for feeding, roosting and nesting.

To provide layers of vegetation in your backyard, choose plants that will grow to different heights and space them appropriately to create a tiered effect. Larger, taller trees can be surrounded by moderately sized shrubs which can, in turn, be bordered by tall grasses or low flowers. This will give many bird species attractive places to visit in your yard without feeling crowded or competing for space.

Dense Plants

Birds will feel more secure and safe when there is adequate shelter in your backyard. To provide that shelter, create dense

areas of vegetation that will shield smaller birds from hawks, cats or other predators. Dense vegetation is also more suitable for roosting and nesting, which can make your backyard birds permanent residents instead of transient guests.

To add density to your landscaping, create clumps of vegetation and corridors of security that birds can use. A long, narrow bed filled with rich plants is more suitable than small, widely scattered beds. The corners of your yard and borders around buildings are perfect for dense vegetation, or you can create independent beds that are thickly layered.

Plant Diversity

Different birds prefer different types of plants, and if you choose to landscape with a wider range of plant species you will also be able to attract more types of birds. You can choose specific plants that are favoured by certain birds you wish to attract or opt for plants that are favourable to the birds already visiting your yard.

When choosing a range of plants, consider the seasons during which each plant is most useful. Early flowering shrubs will attract insects and provide nectar during the spring, while trees and bushes that produce nuts and fruit are essential sources of food in late summer and fall. Evergreen trees and shrubs will not only produce cones and seeds but are also superb sources of shelter in the cold winter months.

Reduce Open Areas

Open areas have the least food and virtually no shelter, making them poor resources for birds as well as being vulnerable to predators. Widen flower beds, plant trees, and add shrubbery instead of grass.

Mess is Best

A bird-friendly landscape is never perfectly manicured and neatly trimmed. Leaf litter, longer grass, and discarded brush piles are highly attractive to birds because they are rich sources of insects, nesting material and shelter. By mimicking the appearance of birds' natural habitats you can instantly make your yard more appealing. This does not mean that your yard has to be a jungle, however. Leaving some areas of your landscape in their natural state, particularly in a large lot, can attract a wide range of birds while you can still enjoy manicured landscaping elsewhere.

One highly effective way to attract birds to a natural landscape is to let flowers and shrubs go to seed without removing the plants. Birds will eat the seed, which is also a great way for backyard birders to enjoy a healthy landscape and save money on birdseed.

More Bird Landscaping Tips

When you are planning a bird-friendly landscape...

Choose natural and organic fertilizers that will not harm birds, or remove feeders for a day or two after chemicals have been used.

Add water features and birdhouses dust baths or feeding stations for even more bird attractors.

Sourced from: <https://www.thespruce.com/design-a-bird-friendly-landscape-386418>