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Black Crake – Photo: Ian White

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Editorial	1
Revisions to the Red List	2
Ashy Tit feeding Fork-tailed Drongo on the nest Marc Herremans and Diane Herremans-Tonnoeyr	3
Lappet-faced Vultures as predators George McAllister and Peter Mundy	5
Ostriches and the San people Michael P.S. Irwin and Peter Mundy	6
Vulture Counts in the Ghanzi District Modiegi Bakane	8
Northern Grey-headed Sparrow in Botswana Stephanie J. Tyler	11
Crowned Hornbills near Kasane Linda Taylor	14
Waterbird Counts in Winter of 2020 Stephanie J. Tyler	16
Drinking habits of Birds at Ruretse Stephanie J. Tyler	20
High numbers of Maccoa Duck in south-east Botswana , winter 2020 Chris A. Brewster	30
The Status of Secretary Birds <i>Serpentarius sagittarius</i> in Botswana Stephanie J. Tyler	31
Fourth Record of Magpie Mannikin <i>Spermestes fringilloides</i> in Botswana Mark Muller	44
Thick-billed Weaver <i>Amblyospiza albifrons</i> at Lobatse Chris A. Brewster	46
Eastern Long-billed Lark <i>Certhilauda semitorquata</i> south of Lobatse Chris A. Brewster	47
Notes from the Records Subcommittee	
Some Records from the Kang area, summer 2019/2020	50
Pygmy Goose <i>Nettapus auritus</i> at Taueshele Dam near Kanye	50
Excitement at Gaborone Dam and other sites in south-east Botswana, late 2020	51
European Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i> in Maun	53
Report from the Records Subcommittee	
Category A Rarities Chris A. Brewster	54
Summary of Category B Records Chris A. Brewster and Stephanie J. Tyler	56
Contributors	69
Some Breeding Records in 2020 and early 2021 Stephanie J. Tyler and Chris A. Brewster	70
BirdLife International - new hope for vultures?	74
Recent Publications on Birds of relevance to Botswana	75

Front Cover: Crowned Hornbill, Photographer: Lyn Francey



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Malachite Kingfisher

Photo: Ian White

Editorial

The year 2020 was a very difficult one for many people but despite the pandemic and lockdown restrictions, many exciting birds, including five new to the country (see Category A Rarities), were seen in Botswana and there were many publications of interest. My attention was drawn to the paper by Mills *et al.* (2020) on birds in south-east Angola (see publications of interest), where 10 records are provided of Slaty Egrets in June and July 2015. Slaty Egret was previously known from Angola from four specimens collected along the Cunene River and recently, an unpublished sight record by D. Dugmore in May 2015 along the Cuito River, an Okavango tributary. These 10 additional records were all in the Okavango/Kavango catchment. Some 33 records from Steve Boyes' team were unfortunately rejected as there was not enough evidence to show that they weren't Black Herons. The Slaty Egret Action Plan called for more data on distribution so these records from the upper Kavango are welcomed but we still do not know whether they are visitors to Angola in the winter months or whether they are resident and breeding? Access is unfortunately difficult in the rainy season from September to March.

Poisoning incidents continue to hit the headlines. Sadly, 55 or more White-backed Vultures were killed in late October, near Rakops in yet another incident. The death of 330 Elephants was also from poisoning but not from poison set by humans rather from cyanobacteria. These bacteria flourish where blue-green algae grow and release toxins which can affect birds and mammals. I was alarmed to read of yet another threat to wildlife in Botswana. If ongoing tests look promising, a company plans to drill for oil and frack large swathes of land in the northern reaches of the fragile Okavango Delta. The massive Namibian oil concession, owned by a Canadian company, is on the Kavango River and within the Kavango Basin - a vital feeder to the Delta. ReconAfrica began drilling its first test well in January with a multi-million dollar rig from Texas and a local activists revealed that a pond for wastewater from the drilling doesn't appear to have a water-proof lining. Without proper lining, the toxic wastewater can leach into the groundwater - endangering local wildlife, crops and people.

This issue of *Babbler* includes many interesting notes as that by Marc Herremans who was editor of *Babbler* prior to my taking over in 1996 and by Peter Mundy of Black Eagle fame in Zimbabwe. Modiege Bakane writes again, this time about vultures in the Ghanzi District and Linda Taylor reports on her finding a Crowned Hornbill and Bradfield's Hornbills in the Lesoma Valley near Kazungula. Chris Brewster describes his high counts of Maccoa Duck at some pans in western Botswana, his observations of Eastern Short-billed Larks near Lobatse, another new bird for the country and the highlights of birds at Gaborone Dam in October when two more new birds for Botswana were found. I have written up my data on birds coming to water to drink at Ruretse back in 1997-2000 and the usual report of waterbirds seen on the counts in July 2020 as well as a review of the status of Secretary Birds in Botswana.

Finally, my congratulations to Keddy Moleofi for being on the staff of Birdlife Botswana for 15 years and for all the work that she has done for bird monitoring and bird conservation in Botswana. **Stephanie Tyler, Editor**

Revisions to the Red List

In December 2020 BirdLife International and the IUCN published a revised Red List of birds after looking at 161 species of bird worldwide. They decided to reclassify 137 of these. Some 78 of these have been put in a lower threat category but only eight of these due to genuine improvements in populations; 40 have been put in a higher threat category, 18 due to genuine recent deteriorations. Sadly, amongst these are three African savanna species namely **Secretary Bird** *Sagittarius serpentarius* which has been moved from Vulnerable to Endangered, **Martial Eagle** *Polemaetus bellicosus* and **Bateleur** *Terathopus ecaudatus* both now considered Endangered.

Worldwide 22 species that were considered to be **Critically Endangered** are now **thought to be extinct** and 201 other species are **Critically Endangered** including **White-backed Vulture** *Gyps africanus*, **Hooded Vulture** *Necrosyrtes monachus* and **White-headed Vulture** *Trigonoceps occipitalis*. These are species whose numbers have decreased or will do so by 80% within three generations and are hence facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild.

There are 460 species considered to be **Endangered**, species whose population is at risk because it has few individuals or is threatened by environmental and predation parameters. These species face a high risk of extinction in the wild in the near future. In Botswana as well as Secretary Bird, Martial Eagle and Bateleur, they include **Grey Crowned Crane** *Balearica regulorum*, **Cape Vulture** *Gyps coprotheres* and **Lappet-faced Vulture** *Torgos tracheliotos*.

798 species are considered **Vulnerable**, as are likely to become **Endangered** in the future unless circumstances threatening their survival and reproduction improve. **Slaty Egret** *Egretta vinaceigula* is one of these as too are **Wattled Crane** *Grus carunculatus*, **Tawny Eagle** *Aquila rapax*, **Maccoa Duck** *Oxyura maccoa* and **Southern Ground-Hornbill** *Bucorvus leadbeateri*. **Near Threatened** species are those species which are close to qualifying for Vulnerable status and many species found in Botswana are on this list such

Conservation efforts should be directed towards all these declining species. As Birdlife International said "Habitat loss and degradation, poisoning, poaching and disturbance are all likely factors in these declines, but more research is needed to identify the root causes and the most efficient way to address them. Action is needed, faster than a Secretary-bird stomps its long legs on prey."

Ashy Tit feeds incubating Fork-tailed Drongo on the nest!

Marc Herremans & Diane Herremans-Tonnoeyr

To avoid reputational damage, unlikely observations of wildlife encounters are better not made public, certainly in the absence of compelling evidence. One possible reason for a story to be unlikely is that it actually was a wrong perception or interpretation of the reality. More than one observer can help in ascertaining a record and make it more 'objective', but is no guarantee against misperception. For example, we vividly remember an evening at dusk driving along the Gaborone Dam with three (sober) persons in the car adamantly spotting an aardvark on the road in the distance. Upon approach opinions changed and all three were now convinced we were watching an eagle owl sitting in the middle of the road. When we drove on, it eventually flew away in two parts (as two Swainson's francolins).

Now, with retirement around the corner, I (MH) don't have to worry too much anymore about my professional reputation, and there still is one highly unlikely observation from Botswana now almost 30 year ago that was never put on paper before, but merits doing so, even without photographic evidence.

In the early 1990's, we conducted a series of point-transect-counts in all major vegetation types throughout Botswana to sample bird communities and establish a quantitative baseline to measure future changes. The transects consisted of 20 points all a few hundred meters apart. At each point birds were counted during 5 minutes. Counts were repeated in different seasons (for some results see e.g. Herremans 1992, 1993, 1995, 2004, Herremans & Herremans-Tonnoeyr 1994).

9 November 1991 near Sekoma (24°34'14" S, 23°58'34" E)

One of these transects was in southern Kalahari bushveld, to the south of the Jwaneng-Sekoma road, 15 km south-east of Sekoma and 79 km west of the turnoff to the airstrip at Jwaneng. In the morning of 9 November 1991 this transect was counted from sunrise onwards and we reached the 11th count station of the morning by 9h25. MH counted from the canopy of a (4x4) vehicle, giving a good view over the bushveld, while DHT was note taker and standing on the ground. Almost immediately a Fork-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis* sitting on a nest was noted 4 m up in a little leafed Shepherd's tree *Boscia albitrunca* some 15 m away. Soon after, we picked up a singing and calling male Ashy Tit *Parus cinerascens*. This turned out to be carrying a heavy load of food in the bill. As we were also keen nest recorders (and we presumed there were still few nest records of Ashy tit), MH alerted DHT to help follow the bird in order to find the nest. To our utter surprise, the Ashy Tit flew past into the top of the *Boscia*, descended straight down to the Drongo nest, fed the incubating Drongo (which willingly opened its beak upon approach of the tit), wiped its bill and flew off. As we were both stupefied by what we had witnessed, we looked at each other and asked "Did you see what I saw?" We had different points of view but both independently clearly recorded the same puzzling event. The conditions of the observation were excellent: full light, short distance, two focused observers (with a different viewpoint, following the bird with binoculars).

Notwithstanding the above remarks about risks of perception, we are confident that this is what really happened: the tit fed the adult drongo on the nest! We waited some time after the count to see if the tit would return once more, but soon had to press on to continue with the counts to avoid the heat of the day. We shortly stopped at the nest of the Drongo, which chased the incubating adult off, alarming. I could not park close enough to the tree to look deep into the nest, but there certainly were no sizeable chicks. Fork-tailed Drongos are known to be clever birds, capable of manipulating other animals, including birds in Botswana (Herremans & Herremans-Tonnoeyr 1997). But in this case the initiative came entirely from the Ashy Tit. We have no idea for the reason of this strange behaviour by the tit (and the drongo, which accepted the food readily). Both species are quite different in size and share no obvious traits of breeding behaviour or ecology: Ashy Tit is a cavity nester, so why was it visiting and feeding a much larger adult bird (which is not begging) on an open nest?

Other cases of interspecific feeding behaviour

Interspecific feeding behaviour turns out to be not so exceptional in birds. However, it concerns almost invariably adult birds feeding the young of another species: see e.g. recent reports from Europe of a Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* feeding a young Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* (Gestraud 2012), Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* feeding a nest with young of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *D. minor* (Thye 2015), a House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* feeding House Martin *Delichon urbium* nestlings (Jukema et al 2010), Black Crows *Corvus capensis* adopting a young Raven *C. corax* (Werkman 2020) or a Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* feeding young Blue Tits *Cyanistes caeruleus* in the nest (webref 1), to name but a few. More bizarre cases are White-tailed Sea Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla* raising Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* chicks alongside their own (Literak & Mraz 2011). In an exhaustive review, Shy (1982) listed dozens of bird species that have been observed feeding other species. Almost all cases involved adults feeding young of the other species: some were mixed clutches, others had their nest with young destroyed and continued feeding young in another nest nearby, still others just adopted orphaned or calling young. However, adult birds of different species feeding each other, seems to be very exceptional (Shy 1982).

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Webref 1: Consulted on 15-7-2020 at <https://twitter.com/BBCSpringwatch/status/1266444731493625857>

Lappet-faced Vultures as predators

George McAllister & Peter Mundy

In April 1990, George McAllister (GM) and a friend were travelling towards Mopipi from Rakops, on the road just south of Ntwetwe Pan, Makgadikgadi. About 11 km from Mopipi, and to the left (north), they saw eight Lappet-faced Vultures *Torgos tracheliotos* "plummeting down" to the ground, which was open grassland with grass no taller than about 40 cm (HDS 2026C). No other species of vulture were in sight. The vultures were about 60 m from the road. GM and friend drove to the site, and there lying in the grass was a dead Ostrich *Struthio camelus* chick, about a third grown, and with its entrails pulled out and "steaming". Of course the body was still warm. In the immediate vicinity were six more young Ostriches, all lying down with their heads flat along the ground. On GM's approach they got up one by one and ran off. No other predators in the shape of canids and humans were seen. Three vultures had remained circling low over the site, and as the observers drove back to the road so they returned to the carcass. Such a large grouping of Lappet-faced Vultures is itself noteworthy.

In a second instance, and in June 1991, GM and another friend travelled to Koronje island in the south-east corner of Sua Pan (HDS 2124B), because a week earlier the friend had seen vultures killing flamingo chicks there. The island is about 6 km into the pan, and at

the time there was no water in the Sua. Milling around mainly in the air but some also on the ground, were at least 37 Tawny Eagles *Aquila rapax*, one Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer*, and no less than 17 Lappet-faced Vultures, again something of an awesome sight. Small groups (30-50 birds in each) of Greater Flamingo chicks *Phoenicopterus roseus* would approach the edge of the island, turn around, and retreat into the dry pan and its mirage; they were about ½-grown. There were large numbers of dead flamingo chicks strewn about, not whole but in bits and pieces, and here and there would be a solitary vulture feeding on one. The visitors did not witness a vulture actually killing a chick on this occasion, but several times verified them feeding on the flamingos.

(These observations have been written down by Peter Mundy from GM's notes, about 30 years later and with no knowledge today of how to contact GM. No doubt he would acknowledge the company of W. Harrison and C. King).

George McAllister (Selebi-Pikwe at the time) and Peter Mundy (Bulawayo).
Corresponding address Email: mundy@gatorzw.com

Editor: When Volume 1 of Birds of Africa was published in 1982 Lappet-faced Vultures were suspected of killing weak or small animals such as hares or calves of gazelles but there was then no proof. Leslie Brown and Alan Root had in 1971 however, documented these large vultures killing adults and young at flamingo colonies and eating their eggs. At Sua Pan these vultures have more recently, also been recorded killing flamingos trapped in veterinary fences.

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Ostriches and the San people

Michael P.S. Irwin & Peter Mundy

In September and October 1954, the then Bechuanaland Protectorate was visited by the C.S. Barlow Expedition of the National Museum of Southern Rhodesia (Borello & Borello 1997: 192). The late Michael Irwin (MPSI), wrote two notes from this, and with the help of the late Mr. Ronnie W. Rankine collected a number of birds. While encamped at the Tsodilo Hills, they met a !Kung San female filling up Ostrich *Struthio camelus* eggshells from the water spring that they themselves were using (see photograph). Unfortunately neither collector mentioned how the (small) woman managed to carry nine eggshells filled

MPSI noted that the flat, featureless, and waterless savannas west of the Okavango Delta are prime habitat for the Ostrich, as indeed they still are (Dean 2005). At that time of year, it was reckoned that this spring in the Tsodilo Hills was the only water between the Okavango Delta and the then South West Africa. MPSI thought that only about a dozen Europeans could have ever visited the Hills before 1954. What could have been the impact of the San usage of Ostrich eggs in this way? We think very little, considering the numbers of Ostrich in Ngamiland and the presumed rather few San in the area. Presumably also, this relationship of egg usage has no doubt been in sustainable operation for centuries past, if not longer - and perhaps too with hominids before *Homo sapiens*?

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M.P.S. Irwin and P.J. Mundy (Bulawayo) mundy@gatorzw.com



San woman and Ostrich eggs

Photo: R. W. Rankine

Vulture Counts in Ghanzi District

Modiegi Bakane

Introduction

Last year (2019) Botswana recorded a high mortality of vultures (537). Of these, 468 were White-backed Vultures *Gyps africanus*, 28 Hooded Vultures *Necrosyrtes monachus*, 17 White-headed Vultures *Trigonoceps occipitalis*, 14 Lappet-faced Vultures *Torgos tracheliotos* and 10 Cape Vultures *Gyps coprotheres*. Regionally, in Namibia at Bwabwata National Park, an estimated 600 White-backed Vultures were also killed at one elephant carcass, together with a number of other scavenging birds and mammals. Vulture species suffer from continuous poisoning as collateral damage to farmers as they attempt to poison predators such as jackals, hyenas and leopards (Simmons & Bridgeford 1997, P Bridgeford, RE Simmons unpubl. data). As a result M. Bakane, K. Motshabi and O. Dingake from Ghanzi Research embarked on vulture counts and tried to establish the breeding sites in the Ghanzi District. The Central Kalahari Game Reserve was not covered during this vulture survey though it may have a viable population of vulture breeding pairs.

Results and Discussion

Most vultures used farms/ranches (game or livestock) as breeding sites. During this survey a total of 82 vultures (all White-backed Vultures) were recorded in Ghanzi District. Of these, 19 breeding vultures (in or near their nest) were recorded in Ghanzi Farms, 59 were soaring and four perching on trees.

Selection of tree species for nesting of White-backed Vultures

White-backed Vultures selected and favoured four tree species for nesting, namely Camel thorn *Acacia/Vachelia erioloba*, Purple-pod Terminalia *Terminalia prunioides*, Leadwood *Combretum imberbe* and Umbrella thorn *Acacia/Vachelia tortilis*. Large and tall acacia trees with large canopies were chosen for nesting because large tree are crucial to support the weight of the White-backed Vultures and their chicks. Tall and large tree are also essential to assist the chicks during the fledging phase to aid in gliding when learning to fly (Bakane pers.obs.). Such heights are also sufficient with thermals that aid in flying. Nests placed so high are also a defense mechanism to deter predation. In total nine non-active nests were recorded. These were either abandoned due to some disturbances or they had been used during the previous breeding season.

Surveys at Lemcke Ranches, Ghanzi on 10 September 2020, 11h30-13h30

Summary: There were six active White-backed Vulture nests and four non-active nests at Lemcke ranches. Chicks could be heard in the nests up in tall trees. The tall and spiky trees deter predators and above all the tall trees assist the chicks during fledging when

they learn to fly. In this livestock ranch, 83.3% of the nests were in *Acacia/Vachelia erioloba* species and only two nests were recorded on non-acacia species, these being a *Terminalia prunioides* and *Combretum imberbe* respectively. The most favoured trees for nest sites were *Acacia/Vachelia erioloba* (see Table below Table 1). The vultures were nesting in loose colonies of 50-200m apart.

Table 1: White-backed Vultures at Lemcke ranches, Ghanzi on 10 September 2020

NO. BIRDS	PERCHING	SOARING	ON NEST ON	GPS
1			<i>Acacia erioloba</i>	S 21°24.063' E 021°54.442'
1			<i>Acacia erioloba</i>	S 21°24.202' E 021°54.369'
1			<i>Acacia erioloba</i>	S 21°23.982' E 021°54.509'
1			<i>Terminalia prunioides</i>	S 21°24.043' E 021°54.141'
1			<i>Acacia erioloba</i>	S 21°24.255' E 021°54.122'
1			<i>Acacia erioloba</i>	S 21°23.751' E 021°53.949'

Surveys at Tholo Safaris, Ghanzi on 24 September, 10h00-13h00

Summary: At Tholo safaris, which is a game farm surrounded by livestock farms, 61 White-backed Vultures were recorded (See Table 2 below). Of these 60 soared above and followed hunting vehicles. This has somehow conditioned the vultures which associate vehicles with hunting (Bakane pers. obs). During hunting the guts especially intestines, are often discarded and left for scavengers hence the presence of the vultures. Only one nest was recorded; a vulture and a maturing chick were observed at this nest.

Table 2: White-backed Vultures at Tholo Safaris, Ghanzi on 24 September 2020

NO. BIRDS	PERCHING	SOARING	ON NEST ON	GPS
1	Perching			S 21° 28.889' E 021° 49.640'
55		Soaring		S 21°25.940' E 021°50.003'
4		Soaring		S 21° 18.653' E 021° 43.611'
1			<i>Combretum imberbe</i>	S 21°34.109' E 021° 46.460'
			Old nest	S 21° 21.999' E 021° 51.085'

Surveys at Dqae Qare, Ghanzi on 11 September 2020, 08h30-11h40

Summary: There were 12 active White-backed Vulture nests and five old nests i.e. Non-active nests were also recorded. These were either abandoned due to some disturbances or they were previously used by the vultures. All the vultures had chicks in their nests. In this Game ranch, 75% of the nests were in *Acacia/Vachelia erioloba* species while 16.6% or two nests were recorded on *Acacia/Vachelia tortilis* species and only one was on *Combretum imberbe*.



Table 3: White-backed Vultures at Dqae Qare, Ghanzi on 11 September 2020

NO. BIRDS	PERCHING	SOARING	ON NEST ON	GPS
1			<i>Acacia erioloba</i>	S 21 ⁰ 38.613' E 021 ⁰ 53.707'
1			<i>Acacia erioloba</i>	S 21 ⁰ 39.389' E 021 ⁰ 53.550'
1			<i>Acacia erioloba</i>	S 21 ⁰ 39.676' E 021 ⁰ 53.271'
1			<i>Acacia erioloba</i>	S 21 ⁰ 39.527' E 021 ⁰ 53.175'
1			<i>Acacia erioloba</i>	S 21 ⁰ 39.714' E 021 ⁰ 53.284'
1			<i>Acacia erioloba</i>	S 21 ⁰ 39.559' E 021 ⁰ 52.839'
1			<i>Acacia tortilis</i>	S 21 ⁰ 39.431' E 021 ⁰ 52.763'
1			<i>Acacia erioloba</i>	S 21 ⁰ 39.544' E 021 ⁰ 52.440'
1			<i>Acacia erioloba</i>	S 21 ⁰ 39.335' E 021 ⁰ 52.231'
1			<i>Acacia erioloba</i>	S 21 ⁰ 38.388' E 021 ⁰ 50.438'
1			<i>Acacia tortilis</i>	S 21 ⁰ 38.150' E 021 ⁰ 52.944'
3	Perching			-
1			<i>Combretum imberbe</i>	S 21 ⁰ . 69987' E 021 ⁰ . 84225'

Modiegi Bakane



Scimitarbill
 Photo: Ian White

Northern Grey-headed Sparrows *Passer griseus* in Botswana

Stephanie J. Tyler

When sorting through various old papers recently I came across a letter from Michael Irwin dated 7 November 2002. I print it below as it is of particular interest given the increasing number of Northern Grey-headed Sparrows now being seen in northern Botswana. Sadly Michael died in Zimbabwe in September 2017.

“Dear Dr Tyler,

*I wonder if you or anyone else could provide me with positive information of the status of the invasive Northern Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer griseus* in Botswana?*

*In Honeyguide 2002 48:41-46 I charted its history in Zambia and I now believe that this spread has involved the species spreading out from the drier savannahs north of the Equator and within the historical period, to include the whole of the Congo Basin, Angola, Zambia (and now Zimbabwe) and further, most of eastern Africa where it is now in direct contact with *suahelicus*, *swainsoni*, *diffusus* and *gongonensis*. This situation I believe to be a relatively recent event, though naturally, almost impossible to date precisely. Anyway, the situation as presented for Zambia, probably largely applies elsewhere and the spread is an ongoing event.*

We believe that it has reached Kasane, is in the Caprivi and very likely elsewhere in northern Namibia but details are lacking. Quite a bit of information however, has been forthcoming from Pete Leonard in Zambia but he does remark that those further south seem to show little interest in what seems to be an extremely interesting event! And it may also arrive in South Africa without anybody really noticing. And that would be a pity. So perhaps from where you are you might be able to generate some fresh interest that the problem certainly deserves and it is something the Botswana List Committee will in due course have to deliberate on.

With kind regards

M.P.S. Irwin”

At that time I had no knowledge of any Northern Grey-headed Sparrows having been seen in Botswana. Craig (1997) in The Atlas of Southern African Birds did not show any records for *Passer griseus* in the region although *P. diffusus* was shown throughout except in western Namibia and South Africa, Craig noted though that further north *P. diffusus* was replaced by other taxa formerly included in the greyheaded sparrow *Passer griseus* species-complex.

However, just two years after Michael Irwin’s letter, the first record of Northern Grey-headed Sparrows for Botswana was accepted. This record was made on 14 October 2004 by Ken Oake and Richard D. Randall who saw and photographed six birds at Kazungula (Brewster 2007).

Northern Grey-headed Sparrows could easily be overlooked or mistaken for the common Southern Grey-headed Sparrows but see distinguishing features noted by Richard Randall below. A second record soon followed, of four birds seen by Richardl at the immigration buildings at Ngoma on 6 March 2007 (Brewster 2009). He noted that since 2004 he had seen many, and often, on and around buildings n Kazungula/Kasane where he described it as a common resident.

Identification features noted by RDR:

1. Robust black bill, larger than Southern Grey-headed's bill
2. Clearly defined white throat
3. Grey head without brownish tones
4. Grey colour below reaching to about mid-breast
5. Rich chestnut mantle
6. Small white shoulder bar
7. White lower breast, belly and vent
8. Very dark eye
9. Brownish legs and toes

Hockey et al. (2005) did give records at Victoria Falls, Hwange, suburbs of Harare and Kazungula in Zimbabwe and also the Kasane records in Botswana. They noted that *griseus* are invariably found around human habitations whereas *diffusus* generally occurs in savanna woodland, especially Acacia, as well as cultivations and around settlements. They added that where the two species co-exist then *diffusus* tends to remain in woodland around habitations and *griseus* among the houses and other buildings.

Following the establishment of its presence in Kasane, one was then trapped and photographed on 3 November 2008 at Maun by Ursula Franke (Brewster 2018). In 2010 Dean Hatty observed several possible Northern Grey-headed Sparrows on 14 December at Pandamatenga Homestead Farm 50 using a stone birdbath. Dean observed that they were bigger than the normal (Southern) Grey-headed Sparrows with no distinct white marking on the wing. He observed the white throat patch when he saw the bird perched on his shed. He and his wife observed them for some time as they moved from tree cover to drink and hop around the water feature. Unfortunately this record was not accepted. Such an unaccepted record does not mean that the observer was necessarily wrong in his identification. These may well have been Northern Grey-headed Sparrows but the Records Subcommittee decided there was insufficient evidence to confirm this.

Kopij (2018) in his atlas of the birds of Kasane noted 87 pairs of *Passer griseus* but he called them Grey-headed Sparrows and had no records of *Passer diffusus*.

Then on 29 December 2014 four Northern Grey-headed Sparrows were seen and photographed at a filling station at Shakawe by P. Kleiman.

This was the first accepted record away from Chobe District. (Brewster 2016). This was followed by one photographed further south, at Nata on 25 October 2019 by Rihann Geysler (Brewster 2019).

This note is a plea to any birder in or visiting the northern half of Botswana or indeed anywhere in Botswana to look carefully at any grey-headed sparrow to decide whether it is Northern or Southern. It seems as Michael Irwin predicted, that the larger northern species is advancing south. . How long will it be before a careful observer finds them in Francistown or even Gaborone?

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Northern Grey-headed Sparrow

Photo: Ian White

Crowned Hornbill *Tockus alboterminatus* near Kasane

Linda Taylor

We moved to Lesoma in August 2016 from Notwane near Gaborone. Our property is 3.8 hectares and lies between Senyati Lodge and Elephant Valley Lodge, approximately 7km from Kazungula. The birdlife here is great and Lesoma valley has a huge population of White-backed Vultures *Gyps africanus*, many breeding.

We started feeding seed to the Red-billed Hornbills *Tockus rufirostris*, francolins and starlings in our garden and it has been very rewarding as one gets to know all the birds and then they bring their youngsters.

Our neighbours (there are three homes on our property) came running to us a few months ago and were so excited as they had seen a pair of Three-banded Coursers *Rhinoptilus cinctus* on our property; the coursers have been breeding and we saw the chicks once but they then moved into a much denser bush where it is impossible to see them. Hopefully the grass will get longer and they will move back to the front of the property.

We noticed in August what we thought were a pair of Bradfield's Hornbills *Tockus bradfieldi* which we do sometimes see as they occur further into the Kasane Forest Reserve which is adjacent to our property. Lyn Francey asked me to keep an eye out for Crowned Hornbills *T. alboterminatus*. I started seeing slightly different behaviour as the Bradfield's are bullies and this pair was much more gentle. I got out my bird books and started to question if they might be Crowned Hornbills; my husband laughed at me but I was determined and managed to get a few pictures which I posted on our Chobe bird club forum. Everyone agreed that they were a pair of Crowned Hornbills. We were so excited. The female was much more at home here than the male, (don't laugh but I talk to them and their response is amazing, the minute they hear my voice they start calling! I know, I am the hand that feeds them!)

Around 4 October only the male started coming which means they are nesting and we have calculated that any day now we should see the female and then hopefully the chicks in mid- January.

Linda Taylor

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Postscript: on 4 January 2021 Linda wrote that 'the female is coming more frequently and the male maybe twice a day. The chicks must be getting ready to leave the nest as the parents are looking worn out.

On 23 January Linda wrote “Good news, the Crowned Hornbills have both been coming (to the feeders) so their behaviour has changed and we have been hearing juvenile versions of their call. Yesterday (22 January), I saw three flying past and thought that there was one youngster. However, I then saw another one flying over, so making two juveniles. This morning (23 January) the female arrived and she brought one of her chicks which landed on the ceiling fan and was a bit wobbly, I gave her a meal worm which she promptly fed to her youngster. Unfortunately I didn’t have time to take a photo, but I will keep my camera handy and hopefully send you a picture.

Ed. At the time of writing this note in March 2021 it is being debated whether the Crowned Hornbill male actually mated with a Bradfield’s Hornbill which would be the first record of hybridization between these two species. However, this is only the second record of a Crowned Hornbill in Botswana and an excellent breeding record. Richard Randall reported that a pair was regularly seen at Thebe River Safaris some 9km away from Linda’s plot from 2004 until the summer of 2006/07. Alan Kemp noted that birds in Botswana are at the western end of the species’ southern African range and in the contact zone with its nearest relative, Bradfield’s Hornbill, typically resident in teak woodlands.



Crowned Hornbill
Photo: Lyn Francey

Waterbird counts in the winter of 2020

Stephanie J. Tyler

South-east Botswana

Despite difficulties with the restrictions for Covid 19, counts were made at 19 sites, 15 of which were dams – Bathoen (Mmakgodumo), Bokaa, Gaborone, Gamoleele and Upper Gamoleele, Gampudi (north-west of Kanye), Kubung, Mamakhasi (Kanye), Mogobane, Moshupa, Nnywane, Sehatlane, Sephatlhphatla, Taueshela and Thagale. Lobatse and Ramotswa Sewage Ponds (S.P.) were visited in July and Phakalane and Broadhurst S.P. and the adjacent area of Gaborone G.R. in August.

The 12 most numerous water birds are shown below (Table 1). Both species of flamingo occur in this league table thanks to high numbers of both species at Phakalane S.P. Not surprisingly, six of the other most numerous species were ducks or geese although Maccoa Duck has never figured in this league table before. Their position is due to high counts at Sehatlhane Dam and Kubung Dam.

Table 1. The 12 most numerous in south-east Botswana in July 2020

Species	Count	Species	Count
Red-billed Teal	1,445	African Spurwing	347
Egyptian Goose	1,369	Lesser Flamingo	328
Greater Flamingo	909	Blacksmith Lapwing	309
White-faced Duck	886	White-breasted Cormorant	267
Little Grebe	647	Cape Teal	231
Red-knobbed Coot	630	Maccoa Duck	203

Bokaa Dam which usually holds the most waterbirds and the greatest variety of species of any other site in south-east Botswana was overtaken by **Phakalane Sewage Ponds** in terms of overall numbers of waterbirds (see Table 2). Of note at **Bokaa Dam** were 100 White-breasted and 90 Reed Cormorants, 447 Egyptian Geese, 200 Red-billed Teal and 426 Red-knobbed Coot. **Phakalane ponds** however, boasted 900 Greater Flamingos and 310 Lesser Flamingos and 160 Little Grebes as well as scarce species as White-backed Duck (two birds) and 44 Cape Teal.

At **Gaborone Dam**, counted in mid-August, there were 349 Egyptian Geese and 99 Kittlitz’s Plovers. This dam was second only to Bokaa Dam in terms of numbers of species with a group of 14 Marabou Stork.



Table 2. Counts of waterbirds at sites in Botswana in July 2020

	No. Birds	No. Species		No. birds	No. Species
Southeast Botswana	9,499	57	Upper Gamoleele Dam	5	3
Bathoen Dam	42	9	Mogobane Dam	699	21
Bokaa Dam	1,682	38	Moshupa Dam	114	20
Broadhurst S.P./Gabs GR	752	26	Nnywane Dam	194	11
Gaborone Dam	854	30	Phakalane S.P.	1,876	27
Gamoleele Dam	965	11	Ramotswa S.P.	640	15
Gampungudi Dam	89	9	Sehatlhane Dam	197	14
Kubung Dam	240	15	Sephatlhphatla	83	19
Lobatse S. P	604	19	Taushele Dam	189	17
Mamakhasi Dam	42	10	Thagale Dam	237	20

Gamoleele Dam had unusually large numbers of waterfowl with 563 Red-billed Teal, 220 Egyptian Geese and 106 Spur-winged Geese as well as 17 Lesser Flamingos. Upper Gamoleele Dam was almost dry at the time of the visit. At **Broadhurst (Tsholofelo) S. P.** together with the adjacent wet area of **Gaborone G.R.** the count of 440 White-faced Duck was the highest count of this species in the winter as was 32 African Jacanas whilst it was the only site for Purple Swamphen.

Lobatse S. P. held the only Black-crowned Night Herons and Wattled Lapwings seen in south-east Botswana in July. African Black Ducks were recorded here but also at Gaborone Dam. Cape Teal numbered 44.

Of note at **Ramotswa S.P.** was a Fulvous Duck and also breeding South African Shelduck and Cape Teal. A pair of Shelduck had two ca one week old young and a pair of Cape Teal had seven ca 3 week old ducklings. There were 133 Cape Teal at these sewage ponds (245 in February).

Mogobane Dam sported the second highest count of White-faced Duck and the highest count of Spur-winged Goose of any site and 23 Black-headed Herons in reeds at the inflow end was also a notable count. Apart from four Great Crested Grebes at Bokaa Dam, the only other counts of this species were of six at **Moshupa Dam** and eight at **Mamakhasi Dam**. On a DWNP extra count at **Taushele Dam** there were three too. At **Thagale Dam** were a single Yellow-billed Stork and 18 Marabou Storks.

DWNP Research staff notably Tumelo Lempehu, visited some of the sites mentioned above that had already been counted by Chris Brewster or by Mike and Daphne Goldsworthy and Harold Hester. but two sites that DWNP staff covered that nobody else had visited recently was **Nnywane Dam** where there was a high count of Yellow-billed Ducks (135) and **Mamakhasi Dam**. Their counts at other sites were rather similar to those made already but clearly birds move from dam to dam and sometimes they had more or fewer of some species.

As already noted some dams near Kanye and Moshupa counted also by DWNP staff were visited by BLB volunteers and surprisingly high numbers of Maccoa Duck were seen at **Sehatlhane Dam** (105), **Kubung Dam** (56) and **Gampudi Dam** (23), north-west of Kanye. There were also 14 at **Moshupa Dam** and three at **Taushele Dam** west of Moshupa. The presence of two White-backed Ducks at both Gampudi and Sehatlhane Dams was of note as was a Yellow-billed Stork at Taushele.

Table 3. Total numbers at all sites in south-east Botswana of each species of waterbird in July and August 2020

Great Crested Grebe	18	African Black Duck	4
Little Grebe	647	Cape Teal	231
White-breasted Cormorant	267	Red-billed Teal	1,445
African Reed Cormorant	120	Hottentot Teal	16
African Darter	40	Yellow-billed Duck	240
Grey Heron	38	Cape Shoveler	58
Black-headed Heron	26	Southern Pochard	152
Great White Egret	3	Maccoa Duck	203
Intermediate Egret	4	African Black Crake	6
Little Egret	25	Common Moorhen	28
Squacco Heron	3	Purple Swamphen	1
Cattle Egret	70	Red-knobbed Coot	630
Black-crowned Night Heron	2	African Jacana	38
Yellow-billed Stork	1	Black-winged Stilt	129
Marabou	32	Pied Avocet	82
Hammerkop	4	Blacksmith Lapwing	309
Sacred Ibis	159	Three-banded Plover	125
Hadada	31	Kittlitz's Plover	175
Glossy Ibis	11	Wattled Lapwing	2
African Spoonbill	23	Wood Sandpiper	29
Greater Flamingo	909	Greenshank	5
Lesser Flamingo	328	Common Sandpiper	1
Fulvous Duck	2	Curlew Sandpiper	3
White-faced Duck	886	Ruff	20

White-backed Duck	6	Little Stint	6
African Spurwing	347	Grey-headed Gull	4
Comb (Knob-billed) Duck	105	White-winged Tern	3
Egyptian Goose	1,369	African Fish Eagle	11
South African Shelduck	71	Total count	9,457

Other species seen in south-east Botswana wetlands in July/August included 13 Pied Kingfishers, 3 Malachite Kingfishers, one Brown-hooded Kingfisher, 59 Cape Wagtails, 18 African Pied Wagtails, one Pearl-breasted Swallow, two Brown-throated Martins, eight South African Cliff Swallows and three White-throated Swallows as well as four African Quail Finches.

Western Botswana

Modiege Bakane again made counts at **Ghanzi Sewage Ponds** and at **two pans at Tsootsha (Kalkfontein)**. Other sites were dry. Numbers of species and overall counts were rather low but of interest were two immature Lesser Flamingos and an immature Greater Flamingo at the sewage ponds and 27 adult Lesser Flamingos and two immature birds at Tsootsha Pans.

Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks to all those who have made waterbird counts in Botswana in July 2020. I particularly welcome the counts from DWNP Research staff notably Tumelo Lempehu in south-east Botswana and Modiege Bakane in Ghanzi District and of course those such as Chris Brewster, Mile and Daphne Goldsworthy and Harold Hester who do so many counts twice a year.

I would love to hear from anyone in northern Botswana who could count at a dam, pan, lagoon, river section or anywhere else in January and July each year. It is rewarding and fun as well as providing valuable data.

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Drinking habits of birds at Ruretse

Stephanie J. Tyler

Introduction

The drinking habits of birds in southern Africa have been described in the semi deserts of Botswana (Irwin 1956), in the central Namib (Willoughby & Cade 1967) and in the central Transvaal bushveld (Skead 1975). Since these publications, much more has been learnt about drinking behaviour of many species but the diurnal and seasonal patterns of behaviour still remain unclear for some birds.

Brewster noted 46 species of bird coming to drink at Crocodile Pool, Notwane south of Gaborone during April 2020 (Brewster 2020). He provided water on his plot but no food and recorded the species composition and the relative abundance of the species coming to drink and bathe. This prompted me to look at extensive data that I gathered in Plot 48 (where I lived) at Ruretse between 1996 and 2000. Ruretse (24° 37'S 25° 04'E) lies 20 km east-northeast of Gaborone and comprises houses in 4 ha plots within Acacia savanna, dominated by *A.mellifera* and *A.tortilis*, and fallow fields, many reverting to savanna. This contrasts with habitat in the Plot at Notwane which was in mixed acacia / broad-leaved woodland.

From April 1996 to December 2000 water was provided at Ruretse in three trays and in a small artificial polythene-lined pool close to the house. An open swimming pool was also full of water and often contained breeding amphibians. In the dry season the pools and trays represented the only permanent water available to birds within a radius of 2-3 km. After heavy rain, other nearby natural depressions, pans and small dams filled with water and then these provided alternative sources of water for birds.

The bathing habits of birds at Ruretse was briefly described by Tyler (1999) with many weavers, waxbills and sparrows bathing but also some unusual species that included Ashy Tits *Parus cinerascens* and Red-backed Shrikes *Lanius collurio*. This note concentrates on birds that came to drink rather than bathe. From April 1997 until December 2000 counts, especially in the winter months, were made of birds per hour coming to drink at the pools (Table 1). In all, birds were observed over 186 hours with counts made of each species in 181 hours. Counts were made in every month with more than 10 hours in each except in December and February when only three and five hours of observation respectively were made.

This brief paper summarises these hours of observations and other casual observations of birds drinking from the pools.

Table 1. Number of hours in each month in which observations were made of birds drinking at pools at Ruretse

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1996				9								
1997			1	1				2		4	5	1
1998	5	1	8	7	8	9	4	7	13	10	13	1
1999	12	4	7	4		1	2	3	4			
2000						1	12	6		9	6	1
TOTAL	17	5	16	21	8	11	18	18	17	23	24	3

Results

Many of the common resident birds at Ruretse were Kalahari bushveld or dry *Acacia* woodland or savanna species. Whilst these may normally be independent of water, some species evidently do drink or bathe when an opportunity arises. A few species (Sabota Larks *Mirafra sabota* and Desert Cisticola *Cisticola aridula*) were never observed drinking and Kalahari Robins *Erythropygia paena* foraged for insects around the pools but they too were never seen to drink. Crimson-breasted Shrikes, Rattling Cisticolas and Black-chested Prinias however, did very occasionally drink and/or bathe, so too more regularly did many other species such as Titbabblers, Pied Babblers and Scaly-feathered Finches.

Birds drinking outside 'hour counts'

Some 15 species were noted drinking outside the hour counts. Occasional single Cattle Egrets or flocks of up to 20 came to the pools but the species was only recorded in two counts. Black-headed Heron *Ardea melanocephala* was an occasional visitor in October and November 1998 to water at Ruretse but only outside the counts; they were probably attracted by tadpoles in one pool. Two raptors - Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus migran parasiticus* and Gabar Goshawk *Micronisus gabar* - were also observed drinking in the summer months but not during the counts and a Barn Owl *Tyto alba* once came to water. Likewise, Swainson's Francolin *Francolinus swainsonii* were also recorded drinking outside the counts - a female drank soon after dawn on 30 January 1999 and was seen at water on many days in February; chicks were with an adult at water on 24 March 1999. Lilac-breasted Rollers *Coracias caudatus* were only ever observed at water in November 1997 and a Red-billed Wood-Hooper *Phoeniculus purpureus* was also only observed drinking once, on 16 November 1998.

A Rufous-cheeked Nightjar *Caprimulgus rufigena* was regularly seen drinking from the swimming pool at dusk from late September to February in most years. Lesser Honeyguide *Indicator minor* was only noted in November 1997 and July 1998 and a pair of Groundscraper Thrushes *Turdus litsitsirupa* was at the pools in March 1998 and one was seen drinking on several days in late July 1996. White-browed Scrub Robins, whilst recorded twice during counts, were also seen drinking outside the counts in October and November 1998 and from January to March 1999. Wattled Starlings *Creatophora cinerea* were observed outside counts, singly or in small flocks (<15 birds), in October/November 1998, January/February 1999, and October/November 2000. Red-billed Oxpeckers *Buphagus erythrorhynchus* were only recorded outside counts, twice in February 1997 (two and four birds), singles in March 1999 and in November 2000; they were very noisy before they flew down to drink. A Long-billed Crombec *Sylvietta rufescens* that had a nest with eggs nearby once came to the water, in November 1998.

A Fairy Flycatcher *Stenostira scita* attempted to come to water several times in August 1999; one finally settled and bathed in early September 1999 but it was unclear if it actually drank any water. Black-chested Prinias were first seen drinking in July 1996, outside counts; they also drank in a hot dry spell in January 1999. A single Red-billed Buffalo-weaver *Bubalornis niger* was only recorded drinking once, outside counts, in February 1999.

Uncommon drinkers are shown in Table 2. Some species were only ever observed once during the hour counts at water, for example Jacobin Cuckoo, Greater Honeyguide, Ashy Tit and the scarce winter visitor, Fiscal Flycatcher. It is possible that these insectivorous species may have been attracted by insects on the water surface but they did apparently drink when at the pool. Certainly the European Sedge Warbler that drank was attracted by small lycaenid butterflies and Black-chested Prinias were commonly attracted to water by insects in the summer months.

Lesser Masked Weavers may have been more common than actually recorded as may have been overlooked among the numerous Southern Masked Weavers. One flock of 12 Yellow-crowned Bishops did drink outside counts in February whilst Red Bishop females may have been overlooked among the frequent flocks of White-winged Widows that visited daily in the winter and early summer; 74% of the White-winged Widow records were between August and November, with a sighting in January 1999 outside the counts. Single Common Waxbills were seen drinking outside the counts, in March 1988 and again in late 2000. The swallow sightings were when birds skimmed down to drink at the swimming pool rather than the small pools.

Table 2. Species (n=30) rarely recorded at water at Ruretse as shown by the number of hours and frequency in which they were seen and the maximum number per hour. Months in parentheses were when a species was noted drinking outside the hour counts.

Species	total no. birds	No. hours recorded	%	Max no/hr	Months
Cattle Egret <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	2	2	1.1	1	July 1998 Sept 1998
Crested Francolin <i>Dendroperdix sephaena</i>	12	5	2.8	5	June-Nov 1998, 2000
Jacobin Cuckoo <i>Clamator jacobinus</i>	1	1	0.5	1	Jan 1999
Burchell's Coucal <i>Centropus burchellii</i>	2	2	1.1	1	Feb 1999 Oct 2000
White-backed Mousebird <i>Colius colius</i>	3	3	1.6	1	Nov-Dec 1997 Jan-Feb 1999
Greater Honeyguide <i>Indicator indicator</i>	6	6	3.2	1	Aug-Oct 1998

Species	total no. birds	No. hours recorded	%	Max no/hr	Months
Fork-tailed Drongo <i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>	10	9	5	2	67% Oct/Nov also Jan/Feb and June-Aug
Crimson-breasted Shrike <i>Laniarius atrococcineus</i>	1	1	0.5	1	June 1998 (July 1996)
Pied Crow <i>Corvus albus</i>	8	7	3.8	2	Mainly Oct/Nov
Ashy Tit <i>Parus cinerascens</i>	1	1	0.5	1	Nov 2000 (Jan 1999)
African Red-eyed Bulbul <i>Pyconotos nigricans</i>	10	4	2.1	3	May/ June 1998 (Aug 1999)
European Barn Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	24	7	3.8	11	Summer months
Red-breasted Swallow <i>Hirundo semirufa</i>	7	4	2.1	2	Oct/Nov
Lesser Striped Swallow <i>Hirundo abyssinica</i>	3	2	1.1	2	Sep 1998, Jan 1999
Sedge Warbler <i>Acrocephalus scoenobaenus</i>	1	1	0.5	1	Dec 2000
Rattling Cisticola <i>Cisticola chiniana</i>	10	9	5	2	Oct-Nov 1998 Late Jan 1999
Black-chested Prinia <i>Prinia flavicans</i>	9	7	3.8	2	Jan 1999
Arrow-marked Babbler <i>Turdoides jardeneii</i>	2	1	0.5	2	June 2000 (Feb 1999)
Violet-backed Starling <i>Cinnyricinclus leucogaster</i>	3	3	1.6	1	Nov 1998, Jan 1999, also Nov 1997
White-browed ScrubRobin <i>Cercotrichas leucophrys</i>	2	2	1.1	1	March and Oct 1999
Fiscal Flycatcher <i>Sigelus silens</i>	1	1	0.5	1	May 1998
White-bellied Sunbird <i>Cinnyris talatala</i>	14	9	5	3	Aug-Feb (July)
Lesser Masked Weaver <i>Ploceus intermedius</i>	5	4	2.1	2	Apr, Nov
Yellow-crowned Bishop <i>Euplectes afer</i>	29	9	5	7	Mainly July- Nov and Jan.
Red Bishop <i>Euplectes orix</i>	2	2	1.1	1	June, Oct
Cut-throat Finch <i>Amadina fasciata</i>	12	7	3.8	2	Apr-June 1996, 1997

Species	total no. birds	No. hours recorded	%	Max no/hr	Months
Common Waxbill <i>Estrilda astrild</i>	2	2	1.1	1	March 1998, late 2000
Village Indigobird <i>Vidua chalybaeta</i>	2	1	0.5	2	Oct 2000
Pin-tailed Whydah <i>Vidua macroura</i>	2	1	0.5	2	Nov 1998
Buffy Pipit <i>Anthus vaalensis</i>	1	1	0.5	1	Jan 1999 (Nov 1996)
Yellow-fronted (eyed) Canary <i>Crithagra mozambicus</i>	1	1	0.5	1	Oct 1998

Numerous other species were more regular or daily visitors at water, often in very high numbers during the dry winter months or at times of drought. Speckled Pigeons and Cape Turtle Doves drank in all months but largest counts of the latter species were made at dusk in August and September. Laughing Doves were seen in over 90% of the observation hours being regular and abundant through the year, especially early mornings and evenings although less common in late summer. High counts were made in January, May, August, September and especially, in October. Namaqua Doves were in some years regular and abundant, as singles, pairs or small groups, through the year and throughout the day. A few were seen early in 1997, numerous birds from October to December 1997, through 1998 to April 1999 when they disappeared until singles were noted again in October and November of 2000.

Blue Waxbills occurred in 95% of counts. Southern Grey-headed Sparrows were recorded in almost 86% of observation periods, followed by Green-winged Pytilia (73%) and Southern Masked Weaver, Scaly-feathered Finch and Black-throated Canary in almost 70%. Shaft-tailed Whydah (66%) and Yellow Canary (67%) were also frequently seen.

Very large numbers of certain species sometimes came to drink during a single hour of observation with the maximum number per hour of any species being Lark-like Bunting (1,885) and Red-billed Quelea (750) followed by Masked Weaver (647), Shaft-tailed Whydah (530), Blue Waxbills (310) and White-winged Widows (270). These high numbers were mainly in the dry season between May and July 1998 or in the case of White-winged Widows and Red-billed Quelea in the dry winter of 2000.

Some species preferred climbing down pipes at the end of the swimming pool to sip water rather than going to the small pool. Small parties of Black-faced Waxbills invariably used this method to get to water.

Although drinking was most common in the late dry seasons (winter months), some birds were wet season visitors. These included palaeartic or intra-African migrant summer visitors, such as swallows, Rufous-cheeked Nightjar, Plum-coloured Starling and Red-backed Shrike as well as some resident species such as Grey Louries, Pied Barbet, Red-faced Mousebirds. A few species came to the small pool to collect mud for their nests, notably Red-breasted Swallows *Hirundo semirufa* and some species were 'plunge-divers', coming to the swimming pool to wet their plumage and then preen. Brown-hooded Kingfisher *Halcyon albiventris*, both Little *Merops pusillus* and Swallow-tailed Bee-Eaters *M. hirundineus* and Fork-tailed Drongos fell into this category. Occasionally some drank water too.

Many birds, especially in light rain or after heavy rain, flew to the water to bathe rather than drink, but no species, except possibly some of the plunge-divers, was observed only bathing and never drinking. Canaries and sparrows frequently pecked succulent leaves of Heartleaf *Aptenia cordifolia*, growing close to the pools. This may have been for either moisture or possibly for salts as the plant grew where the outflow from the swimming pool was discharged.

Table 3. Species (n=36) that were recorded on more than 5% of the observation periods

Species	total no birds	No. hours recorded	%	Max no/hr	Months
Speckled (Rock) Pigeon <i>Columba guinea</i>	98	60	32.1	6	All
Cape Turtle Dove <i>Streptopelia capicola</i>	244	53	28.5	40	All
Laughing Dove <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	3,696	168	90.3	262	All
Namaqua Dove <i>Oena capensis</i>	1,046	120	64.5	50	All (absent May 1999 to Sept 2000)
Grey Go-away Bird <i>Corythaixoides concolor</i>	63	20	10.8	15	All, mainly Oct-Dec
Red-faced Mousebird <i>Urocolius indicus</i>	221	53	28.5	20	Most Sept-Feb, none May/June.
Little Bee-Eater <i>Merops pusillus</i>	38	23	12.4	4	All, mainly Oct-Jan
Acacia Pied Barbet <i>Tricholaema leucomelas</i>	38	22	11.8	6	July-March, mainly Oct/Nov
Chestnut-backed Finchlark <i>Eremopterix leucotis</i>	12	11	5.9	2	Jan-March 1999
Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler	110	30	16.1	10	June –Nov (Jan/Feb

Species	total no birds	No. hours recorded	%	Max no/hr	Months
<i>Cuuruca subcaerulea</i>					1999)
Pied Babbler <i>Turdoides bicolor</i>	109	30	16.1	7	All, mainly July-Oct
Cape Glossy Starling <i>Lamprotornis nitens</i>	103	54	29	4	All, mainly July to Oct
Marico Sunbird <i>Cinnyris mariquensis</i>	17	12	6.4	3	Sept-April
Great Sparrow <i>Passer motitensis</i>	105	60	32.3	5	All, mainly June to Nov
Cape Sparrow <i>Passer melanuros</i>	332	99	53.2	13	All, mainly June to Aug
House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>	43	25	13.4	5	Most July-Sept
S. Grey-headed Sparrow <i>Passer diffuses</i>	1,034	159	85.5	35	All, mainly May to Sept
Scaly-feathered Finch <i>Sporopipes squamifrons</i>	1,716	130	69.9	80	All, especially Sept-Nov
S. Masked Weaver <i>Ploceus velatus</i>	8,782	129	69.3	647	All, mainly July to Sept
Red-billed Quelea <i>Quelea quelea</i>	8,947	97	52.1	750	June to March (see text)
White-winged Widow <i>Euplectes albonotatus</i>	4,123	93	50	270	May to Dec
Green-winged Pytilia <i>Pytilia melba</i>	803	136	73.1	39	All (see text)
Red-headed Finch <i>Amadina erythrocephala</i>	1,135	81	43.5	93	All, mainly May-Aug
Red-billed Firefinch <i>Lagonosticta senegala</i>	593	92	49.5	24	Most May-Dec (see text)
Jameson's Firefinch <i>Lagonosticta rhodopareia</i>	140	41	22	17	mainly May-Dec
Blue Waxbill <i>Uraeginthus angolensis</i>	11,813	177	95.2	310	All, most May-Oct <rains
Violet-eared Waxbill <i>Uraeginthus granatinus</i>	793	94	50.5	47	Mainly dry season
Black-faced Waxbill <i>Estrilda erythronotos</i>	1,250	107	57.5	66	All (see text)
African Quail Finch <i>Ortygospiza atricollis</i>	70	24	12.9	12	Most months
Shaft-tailed Whydah	8,290	123	66.1	530	All (see text)

Species	total no birds	No. hours recorded	%	Max no/hr	Months
<i>Vidua regia</i>					
Paradise Whydah <i>Vidua paradise</i>	80	40	21.5	10	All (see text)
Black-throated Canary <i>Crithagra atrogularis</i>	1,622	129	69.4	119	All, especially Sept-Nov
Yellow Canary <i>Crithagra flaviventris</i>	780	125	67.2	42	All, mostly Aug-Nov
Golden-breasted Bunting <i>Emberiza flaviventris</i>	215	59	31.7	15	All, mostly May-Nov
Lark-like Bunting <i>Emberiza impetواني</i>	18,733	89	47.8	1,885	Mainly April-Nov 1998
Cinnamon-breasted Bunting <i>Emberiza tahapisi</i>	26	18	9.7	4	April-Nov

Only two species of sunbird were seen at Ruretse. Both White-bellied and Marico Sunbirds were late dry season and wet season drinkers and bathers. White-bellied Sunbirds were recorded mainly from August to February and outside the counts in July. Marico Sunbirds were more frequent at water with 58% of records between September and November and 42% from January to April.

Of the small seed-eaters firefinches were common at water in the dry seasons of some years, especially the prolonged dry seasons of 1998 and 2000. For example, Red-billed Firefinches occurred mainly from May to November 1998 and the end of June to December 2000. Jameson's Firefinches were seen mainly in May, August and November 1997, May to October 1998 and were most numerous from late June 2000, when an influx to the area occurred, to the year end. Blue Waxbills were abundant throughout the year, drinking and bathing, but most numerous from May to October before the rains started. A few Violet-eared Waxbills were seen in most months of the 1996/97 summer but were numerous from June to October 1998, some remaining to March 1999 but then absent until May 2000 from when they were frequent. Black-cheeked Waxbills drank in all months in pairs or small groups but were absent in some months in some years as October 1998 and June 1999. They were especially numerous in August 2000. Quail Finches were regular in pairs in the 1998 dry season but singles or pairs were also daily visitors from January to March 1999 and one flock was seen in July 2000. Green-winged Pytilas were frequent in small numbers in all months but in some years were scarce or absent in some months as in late 1998 and late 1999 to early 2000. They were most numerous in June and July 1998 and August 2000. Red-headed Finches were sporadic in small flocks through the year but more than 50% of records were between May and August. The resident and common Scaly-feathered Finches drank throughout the year but more records were from the end of the dry season, September to November than at other times.

Red-billed Queleas were erratic in occurrence. The largest numbers were recorded from June to December 2000 but small flocks were common from January to March 1997 and from October 1998 to January 1999. The two most common whydidas were Shaft-tailed and

Paradise Whydahs with only two records of Pin-tailed Whydahs. Both Shaft-tailed and Paradise were recorded at water throughout the year but numbers varied from year to year. The former species was most numerous through the 1998 dry season until October but was scarce at other times. Paradise Whydahs were seen in small numbers at water mainly from November through to June.

Of the three species of canary Black-throated Canaries were most numerous and drank throughout the year but most commonly at the end of the dry season. Likewise Yellow Canaries were recorded throughout the year but more commonly in the late dry season. Yellow-fronted (eyed) were rare with only one record at water in October 1998.

Three species of buntings were present during the survey period. Two were resident whilst Lark-like Bunting was a nomadic visitor. Golden-breasted Buntings drank in small numbers and mainly (91.5% of records) in the dry season from May to November but especially from June to August. Cinnamon-breasted Bunting was also a dry season drinker from April to November.

A single Lark-like Bunting was seen at water in March 1996 and November 1996 but there was an influx from late March to November 1998 with some lingering until April 1999. Data on Lark-like Buntings that came to drink in large numbers at Ruretse only in 1998 have already been provided by Tyler & Tyler 2001. Many hundreds came from surrounding fields and plots to drink each hour, with higher numbers on average per hour from 07h00 to 11h30 than later in the day. Evening counts were particularly low. The maximum number per hour was 1,885 at 08h00 on 26 July. From mid-November 1998 when heavy rain fell in the area birds soon dispersed.

Discussion

Some 81 species of birds came to drink at Ruretse, 66 during counts, compared with 46 at Notwane but the Ruretse study was over a much longer time period than at Notwane. There is much analysis still to do on the diurnal pattern of birds coming to drink from the Ruretse data but it is clear that Ruretse bird communities and the species coming to drink differed considerably from those at Notwane. Brewster (2019) found that Grey Go-away Birds and Red-eyed Bulbuls were common at water whereas at Ruretse, bulbuls were rarely seen at water (only 10 sightings) and fewer Grey Go-away Birds occurred at Ruretse than at Notwane so only 63 individuals were ever seen drinking. Likewise Pied Babbblers were common at Ruretse and Arrow-marked Babbblers rare and this was reflected in the numbers of the two species coming to drink.

At Notwane Laughing Doves, Cape Turtle Doves and Emerald-spotted Wood Doves *Turtur chalcophilos* were all regular at water, especially the latter. At Ruretse whilst the first two species were regular, Emerald-spotted Wood Doves were very rarely seen and never at water whereas Speckled Pigeons and Namaqua Doves, the latter in some years, were frequent at water.

Blue Waxbills were the most numerous species coming to drink at Notwane, followed by Southern Grey-headed Sparrow and Southern Masked Weaver. Whilst these three species were also numerous and frequent at Ruretse, other species were too, notably Shaft-tailed Whydahs and Laughing Doves. The abundance and frequency of waxbills, whydahs and canaries differed greatly at the two sites again reflecting the very different habitats. For example, Yellow-fronted (-eyed) Canary was the common canary drinking at Notwane whilst at Ruretse in drier bush, Black-fronted and Yellow Canary were frequent and Yellow-fronted rare.

At Notwane Brewster (2020) noted that Red-billed Firefinch and Violet-eared and Black-faced Waxbills were all uncommon so he had few records of these species drinking. By contrast the drier Acacia savanna at Ruretse favoured these three species and they were all commonly seen at water, especially in the late dry seasons of some years.

Provision of a regular supply of water especially in the dry season can be important for birds but is also very rewarding for any birdwatcher. The numbers and variety of birds visiting each hour can be staggering.

Acknowledgement. I thank my husband, Lindsay Tyler, for making the pools and for counting birds in some of the hour periods.

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High numbers of Maccoa Duck in south-east Botswana, winter 2020

Chris A. Brewster

The Maccoa Duck *Oxyura maccoa* is regarded as a threatened species in Africa although in Botswana there appear to be few threats to this duck. Maccoa Ducks gather at wetlands, especially sewage ponds such as Mahalapye Sewage Ponds (D'Arcy & Tyler 2016), when not breeding. Sometimes small flocks are found too at dams as at Bokaa (Tyler 2011).

Numbers in south-east Botswana in winter and summer counts are usually low (<100 birds). In July 2019 there were 46 Maccoa Ducks at Sehatlhane Dam west of Thamaga , making up most of the 52 seen in south-east Botswana wetlands in that month. The other six were seen at Taushele Dam.

In July 2020 unusually high numbers of Maccoa Duck were seen in south-east Botswana. On 1 July I visited two dams, Sehatlane and Kubung Dams, west of Thamaga. These dams were counted by DWNP staff and Sehatlhane by me in July 2019. I do not think the Maccoas are, in general, breeding at these dams, but rather they are breeding on smaller dams and impoundments, of which there are many in the area, and are congregating on larger bodies of water when these small bodies of water dry up. When I was at Sefhare, Maccoas regularly bred on one tiny body of water which dried up after the rains, moving away when this happened. If all waters in the area could be visited at this time, it would give us an idea of how many birds breed in south-east Botswana.

I counted 105 at Sehatlhane Dam whilst at Kubung Dam there were 56. Then I saw five at Taushele Dam and 23 at Gampudi Dam and Mike and Daphne Goldsworthy and Harold Hester saw 14 at Moshupa Dam. The total of 203 is the largest count of Maccoa Duck from south-east Botswana wetlands in either the summer or winter counts. Later in the month DWNP staff, notably T.W. Lempehu, found a total of 25 Maccoa Ducks when they visited the same sites – six at Moshupa Dam, 11 at Taushele Dam and six at Sephatlhephatlhe and two at Gampudi Dam. Clearly the duck were moving around. On 16 Oct 2020 I went to Ratotoboro Dam, just north of Molepolole, off the Sojwe road, a few days after heavy rain, and found 11 Maccoas, probably just arrived there and could possibly breed there.

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The status of Secretary Bird *Sagittarius serpentarius* in Botswana

Stephanie J Tyler

The Secretary Bird was upgraded in December 2020 from Vulnerable to Endangered in the Red List of threatened birds produced by IUCN and Birdlife International because of declines in its African range. How is the species faring in Botswana? Unfortunately, rather few records are submitted to the Records Committee to adequately assess whether the species is stable or declining. However, all records of the species that have been reported in Babbler were extracted to try to elucidate the current distribution and status of the species in Botswana. These include records submitted for the Bird Population Monitoring scheme and from records submitted for the Southern African Bird Atlas Project (SABAP2). Penry (1994) described this strange raptor as a fairly common to common resident throughout except in the east where it is generally sparse, and in the north-west where it is largely absent. He added that it was locally very common in Deception Valley in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (G.R.) and along the Nossob Valley in the Kgalakgadi Transfrontier Park. It was recorded in 104 (45%) of the half-minute squares in the country.

The Kalahari

Khama Rhino Sanctuary near Serowe and nearby areas *Uncommon*

Kvist (1989) noted it as uncommon and of uncertain status, seen singly or in pairs on Serwe Pan, (three immatures together on one occasion) in May and October to December. Fabis (2008) in a brief survey between 14 April and 1 May 2008 saw only two.

Kutse Game Reserve *Frequent to common*

Pausch (1998) regarded it as a fairly common resident throughout the reserve, usually seen on pans. He saw 13 in one day in January 1997. An adult and an immature were on Molose Pan on 4 April 2012. Two were seen on Motailane Pan and one on Moreswe Pan on 14 May 2014, two in the reserve on 29 June 2014 and one on 8 May 2015.

CKGR *Frequent*

Not uncommon especially around and on pans. For example five were seen between Deception Valley and Leopard Pan on 4 January 2001 and four the next day between Deception Valley and Piper Pans. From Matswere Gate via Piper Pans to Passarge Valley 19 Secretary Birds were seen between 17 and 22 January 2001 (Tyler 2001). Taylor (2005) noted 11 birds (three singles and four pairs) between 26 and 29 July 2004 in ca 220 km between the CKGR Scout Camp, Letiahau, Piper Pans and Sunday Pan. Taylor (2006) saw only four in 335 km within the CKGR between Letiahau and Sunday Pan in July and August 2005. Taylor (2008) in May and June of 2006 and 2007 estimated 10 per 100km in the Letiahau area and 5.7 per 100km at Piper Pans. Twelve were seen in Deception Valley on 2 July 2011 and two on 17 September 2014. One was seen at Matotsi on 25 February 2012. There were breeding records in 2008 and 2009 from near Letiahau waterhole (see Table 1).

Ghanzi area

On a Hainaveld Ranch Linda Style reported a breeding pair up to 2020 and a single bird occasionally, especially in the dry season.

Kalagadi Transfrontier Park and western Kalahari Frequent

On 27 August 2001 one was seen between Boskspits and Gunang waterhole and between 23 and 24 December 2002 some 22 birds were counted between Two Rivers and Polentswa Pan and on 25 December in Mabuasehube a pair was seen on Bosobogolo Pan, one on Mabutsane Pan and four on Mabuasehube Pan (pers. Obs.). One was seen east of Mabuasehube on 21 July 2012, two at Monamodi Pan, Mabuasehube and one at Lesholoago Pan, Mabuasehube on 11 September. One was near Tshane Tshane and two near Rooiputs in the lower Nossob valley on 25 July 2012. Two were in the Molopo valley in 2621C4 and one south of Tshabong on 26 July 2012, two at Norfolk Farms on 4 February 2012, one in the Molopo Valley on 24 July and two at Oxford Farm in the Molopo Ranches on 22 February 2014. On 16 January 2013 some 24 birds, pairs and gatherings of up to eight birds were seen between Two Rivers and Dikbaardskolk and at Polentswa Pan (pers. obs).

Two were seen daily on Masetleng Pan, north of the KTP, between 12h00 and 13h00 from 9 to 14 December 2009 (Eifler 2010). Three were seen near Zutshwa on 25 February 2012. One was at Masetleng Pan on 20 May 2014 and on 28 September 2014 with singles at Kaa and Poswane near this pan in late December 2019 (Brewster 2020); one was on Name Pan near Zutshwa on 30 September 2014.

In the 1980 and 1990s it was regarded as occasional to frequent at the game reserve at Jwaneng (M. Soroczynski) where there were several breeding records (Soroczynski 1994). A pair was seen there in winter 2000 and also in December 2011.

Makgadikgadi Pans and Nxai Pan Uncommon to frequent (17 records)

During the years of the Peterhouse Expeditions, Secretary Birds were reported at Nata (2026A), Mompwe (2025B) and the Mosu/Nthane (2026D3, 2126A1/3, 2125B4) areas with one bird seen being eaten by a Giant Eagle Owl. On Nxai Pan the species is a frequent breeding resident. Various observers have recently noted a single and two pairs on Nxai Pan on 21 and 22 April 2001, four there on 8 July 2001, four on 8 July 2011, two on 14 November 2011, four on 10 March 2013, one on 25 February 2014, one on 8 May 2015 and two there from 29 September to 3 October 2018.

Two were seen near Lake Xau on 20 August 2014, two on 13 Jan 2015 and one on 7 November 2015.

A pair was seen at a nest near Jack's Camp, Ntwetwe Pan on 3 April 2004. Two were on Ntwetwe Pan on 8 August 2012, one at X(K) humaga on 7 Aug 2013, one south-west of Gweta near Jack's Camp on 25 February 2014 and two on Sua Pan on 29 November 2014.

Okavango Delta *Uncommon* (17 records)

Hancock *et al.* (2007) regarded it as an uncommon resident, occurring on grassland plains and open savanna. Records are few but include one seen at Vumbura on 30 March 2001, one near Santawani south of Moremi Game Reserve in mid-July 2001, two along the Xini Lediba loop in Moremi Game Reserve on 11 September 2001, one between Third Bridge and Mboma Island on the same date and two north-west of Fourth Bridge in the game reserve also on 11 September and two on the track from Maun to Moremi in the savanna between the buffalo fence and the South Gate entrance on 10 July 2002. Records of singles came from Chitabe on 15 April 2002 and in 1923D1 on 17 May 2002, in 1923C2 on 18 June and 1923C1 on 6 July 2002. In January 2003 during a month of travelling in the delta the only records were of two between Maun buffalo fence and Xaxaba on 19 January and one south of Daonora Gate near Maun on 21 January (pers. obs.). One was in Moremi G.R. on 11 February 2015, two near South Gate on 16 May 2015 and one on 21 January 2020 in the Kweddi Concession.

When Lake Ngami is dry Secretary Birds can often be seen on the lake bed. Six were seen on 4 and 6 September 2001 and three were seen there on 21 January 2003.

North-west Botswana – *rare in the far north-west; (two records)*

Between 1985 and 1988, Brewster (1991) saw none in the Gumare area in the north-west of the Delta although he observed one on 17 April 1990 flying over Gumare and one, possibly the same bird, two days later on the floodplain east of Moporeta. One was seen at Kgabanyane Pan on 19 April and 23 August 2004. One was seen near Gumare on 26 November 2011.

North-east Botswana

Chobe National Park and adjacent areas *fairly common in Chobe N.P. especially in Savuti (24+ records).*

Savuti within the park is an apparent stronghold with for example, eight sightings made by Brian Rode between 5 and 30 December 2003 – five singles and three 'pairs'; One was seen at Ihaha in August 2004 and Gavin & Marjorie Blair saw singles in Savuti Marsh on 31 January 2012 and on 2 February 2014, at Rhino Vlei on 30 January 2013, on Bushman Painting Hill on 1 February 2013 and at Warthog Alley on 2nd. Two were in Savuti on 15 March 2015, singles there on 10 July 2015, one on 6 October 2015, two on 12 October 2015, two at a nest on 5 March 2016, two on 9 June 2017, two on 9 June 2018 and on 9 September 2020.

Elsewhere in Chobe N.P. one was seen on 17 May 2012 and Randall (2001) reported them as regular on the floodplain at Puku Flats. On the floodplain Lyn Francey observed a pair nest-building over two weeks in March 2012 but tourists disturbed the birds. She had sightings of singles or pairs and a juvenile on five dates from March to May 2015 and of a pair in June and July 2016. In July 2016 the pair was roosting on the top of a Woolly Caper Bush *Capparis tomentosa*. In August 2016 Lyn saw a pair foraging on the Namibian side of the river.

Outside the national park one was in Sibuyu Forest Reserve on 27 Feb 2019 and further south at Pandamatenga Farms, there are occasional sightings although Hatty (2014) did not include them in his account of birds at these farms.

South-east Botswana and the eastern hardveld *Rare to uncommon*

Wilson (1981, 1984) noted that Secretary Birds were not uncommon in the Pitsane grasslands in the extreme south-east of Botswana. Beesley & Irving (1976) noted that it was a visitor to the Gaborone area between October and March but Barnes & Bushell (1988) remarked that it was 'now found sporadically in virtually any month of the year'. Records included one near Pitsane in October 1980, one near Lobatse in September 1979, one at Mogobane in October 1981 and two near Ramatlabama in November 1981. Nearer Gaborone, Bushell (1984) reported occasional birds near Tsholofelo S.P. and Neville Skinner frequently saw two in and near Gaborone Game Reserve between January and August 1984.

Tyler & Borello (1998) wrote that this raptor was rare to uncommon in the Gaborone area. Birds had not been seen recently within Gaborone Game Reserve but in the Ruretse area 30 km south-east of Gaborone, Tyler (2007) observed singles or pairs on fallow land in July 1997 to May 1998 and in March 1999 and a pair north of Modipane in late March 1998. Bishop & Tyler (1998) noted one in September 1996 near Phakalane and a pair on arable fields nearby at the end of July. Breeding was attempted in the Lion Park on the Lobatse road in August 1994 and again in 1995. On 30 June 1999 and on 23 July 1999 one was seen along the east shore of Gaborone Dam. Further afield two were seen in a cultivated field in July 1984 near Shoshong in 2326A2.

Post 2000, one was seen at Phakalane in March 2001, a pair over the Marico River near Malolwane on 29 July 2001 and one between Modipane and the Tlokweng Road also on 29 July 2001. The last record of one at Ruretse was on 2 July 2005. A single bird was seen east of Mahalapye on 14 November 2011. After an absence of sightings for almost 10 years in the vicinity of Gaborone an immature was seen at Gaborone Dam on 28 January 2021.

In the extreme south-east of Botswana in the Pitsane grasslands one was at Kgoro Pan on 11 November 2013.

Brewster (2004) described it as a rare visitor to the Bobirwa area of eastern Botswana, usually seen singly in open areas as fallow land in December, January, February and April to July. A pair was at Limpopo Lodge in early November 2012. One was seen on 4 September 2017 just south of Palapye and one at Shashe Farm on 11 Feb 2018.

Discussion

From five minute spot counts (1,762) and roadside counts (55,577 km) between 1991 and 1995, Herremans & Herremans-Tonnoeyr (2000) found that on average in 100 x 5 minute counts of all diurnal raptors 11 Secretary Birds were seen in protected areas and just one in non-protected areas and on roadside counts there were six birds per 1,000 km in protected areas versus just one in unprotected areas. In sub-tropical woodland they encountered on average one bird every 245 km in the dry season in protected areas and one per 216 km in the wet season; in unprotected areas the figures were one per 985 km in the dry season and one per 920km in the wet season. In the Kalahari in protected areas there was one per 415 km in the dry season and one per 67 km in the wet season, compared with one per 334 km in the dry season and one per 453 km in the wet season in unprotected areas. The authors suggested that depletion of biomass and biodiversity following damage to vegetation caused by overgrazing by cattle and other livestock was the main reason for the poor status of Secretary Birds and all raptors on unprotected land.

The answer as to whether Secretary Birds have shown any change in status since Penry (1994) and Herremans & Herreans-Tonnoeyr (2000) is not entirely clear. However, records from the year 2000 to 2020 came from only 60 half minute squares (26%) compared with 104 (45%) recorded between 1980 and 1990. They still appear to be reasonably common in the Kalahari especially in the Central Kalahari G.R., the adjacent Kutse G.R. and the Kgalakgadi Transfrontier Park as well as in the Makgadikgadi Pans complex. Outside these areas they are rare to uncommon and the species has declined in the eastern hardveld (especially around Gaborone) due to expansion of the city and of towns and the growing human population with consequent disturbance as well as the impact on vegetation from overgrazing by cattle and other livestock.

Breeding records

Skinner (1997) looked at data for 25 nests and determined that egg-laying took place in all months except February; 14 records (61%) were between October and December.

Table 1. Some breeding records of Secretary Birds in Botswana

Site	Date	Comments	Obs.
Sedebeng, north of Phitsane Molopo 2525C1	Nov 1977	Occupied nest but no details given	John & Helen Start
Gaborone Game Reserve 2425D2	April 1984	Adult sitting on nest	Nigel Hunter
Nxai Pan 2024B	7 January 1987	Three chicks in nest; they fledged on 3 February 1987	Ken Oake
Kanyu, Nxai Pan 2024B	13 Feb 1988	Nest with one egg and a day old chick; same nest used again in June	Ken Oake
Kikbos 2622C	29 July 1987	Adult on nest on top of small camelthorn <i>Acacia erioloba</i>	Richard White
Jwaneng Game Park 2424D2	Nov 1980	Nest with two eggs	Mike Soroczinski
Jwaneng Game Park	14 Sept 1991	One egg in nest on top of thornbush, one chick seen on 18 Oct but later predated	Mike Soroczinski
Jwaneng Game Park	17 Oct 1993	Nest-building on top of <i>Acacia tortilis</i> tree; one egg in early December and a small downy chick on 18 December	Soroczinski (1994)

Lion Park south of Gaborone 2425D4	Mid-Aug 1994	Nest with two young; nest-building at same place in December 1995	
Nxai Pan N.P. 1924D4	13 Feb 1994	Nest with one chick ca. 6 weeks old	Ken Oake
Puku Flats, Chobe N.P. 1925C	Sept to Dec 1992-2000	Nested annually on top of 4m high <i>Capparis tomentosa</i> tree at the edge of the Flats	Randall (2001)
Passarge Valley	11 Nov 2004	Bird sitting on nest 3m up in low Acacia	D.Pietersen
Near Jack's Camp Ntwetwe Pan	3 April 2004	Adult started incubating on top of <i>Acacia mellifera</i> tree	Super Sande
Near Maokane	22 Nov 2009	Fully grown chick on nest 3.5m high on top of <i>Acacia tortilis</i>	Chris Brewster
Between Sojwe and Kodibeleng	12 Jan 2008	Adult on nest in crown of <i>Acacia mellifera</i> tree; adult still sitting on 20 Jan	Chris Brewster & Stephanie Tyler
Near Letiahau waterhole, CKGR	17 Feb 2008	Active nest	Mark Muller
Near Leiahau waterhole, CKGR	18 Oct 2009	Pair at nest, possibly regurgitating food for young in deep nest	J Steyn
Chobe N.P. 1724D4	15 March 2012	Adding material to nest over 2 weeks; pair deserted due to disturbance	Lyn Francey
Savuti 1824C1	5 March 2016	Two adults feeding a chick on a nest	Gavin & Marjorie Blair

Five nests were also found on tree tops in the Okavango Delta during aerial surveys by Mark Muller, and Pete Hancock but birds have been roosting on the nests rather than breeding (Pete Hancock, pers.comm.).

Acknowledgements

Many people submitted records to the Records Committee and most records have been published in issues of *Babbler* under 'Interesting and unusual Records', 'Category B Records' or 'Breeding Records'. I am particularly grateful to Chris Brewster, Pete Hancock and Majorie & Gavin Blair for submitting numerous records or providing me with other records. Other observers included Jenette Armstrong, Janet Barnes, Alan Bentley, Osiah Boitshwarelo, Chapson Gabohumisiwe, John Dalziel, Johan Drotsky, Lyn Francey, Jim Glover & Christine Skinner, Geoff Goetsch, Mike & Daphne Goldworthy, Pete Hancock, Dean Hatty, Theresa Hay, Harold & Geraldine Hester, Victoria Inman, Ray Lovett, Mothusi Karabo, Reuben Kokolo, Mark Muller, Bellamy Noko, Pat Nurse, Ken Oake, Frank Pendleton, Hennie Peters, D. Pietersen, Nicholas Proust, Richard Randall, Boikobo Ready, Brian Rode, Mike Soroczynski, James Stone, Linda Style, Neil Taylor, Chief Tsholofelo, Stephanie & Lindsay Tyler, Ian White, Ros Wyer and Phil Zappala.

I make a plea to all BirdLife Botswana members to send in their records of Secretary Birds so that we can have a fuller picture of their current distribution and status.

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Appendix 1. Records of Secretary Birds from 2000 to 2020.

An asterisk denotes a breeding record.

Western Kalahari and KTP				
No.	Date	Location	Square	Obs.
2	Winter 2000	Jwana Game Park	2424D1/2	MS
1	Feb-01	Jwana game park	2424D1/2	SJT
2	09- 14/12/2009	Masetlheng Pan	2320D2	CAB
*1	22/11/2009	near Maokwane	2424D3	CAB
1	05/12/2011	Jwana game park	2424D1/2	RK
2	04/02/2012	Norfolk farm	2524A3	JA
3	25/02/2012	Zutshwa	2421A2	CG
1	21/07/2012	east Mabuasehube	2422C3	CAB
1	24/07/2012	Tshane Tshane	2620B4	CAB
2	25/07/2012	NR Rooiputs, Nossob	2620D3	CAB
2	26/07/2012	Molopo valley	2621C4	CAB
1	26/07/2012	south of Tsabomg	2622A	CAB
1	24/07/2012	Molopo valley	2622C1	IW
24	16/05/2013	Nossob Two Rivers to Dikbaardskolk AND Polentswa Pan	2420C 2520A,B,D 2620B,D	SJT
2	22/02/2014	Oxford farm, Molopo ranches	2523A/B	JA
1	20/05/2014	Masetlheng pan	2320D2	CAB
1	28/09/2014	Masetlheng pan	2320D2	DG, MG
1	30/09/2014	Name pan, Zutshwa	2421A2	DG, MG
2	11/09/2017	Monamodi Pan, Mabuasehube	2522A1	IW
1	11/09/2017	Lesholoago Pan, Mabuasehube	2422C	IW
1	11/12/2019	Kaa Pan	2420B3	CAB
2	13/12/2019	Phoswane Pan	2320D2	CAB
OKAVANGO				
1	30/03/2001	Vumbura	1822D4	FP
1	mid-July 2001	near Santawani	1923B	

6	04/09/2001	Lake Ngami dry lake bed	2022B2	SJT
6	06/09/2011	Lake Ngami dry lake bed	2022B2	SJT
2	11/09/2001	Xini Lediba loop in Moremi G.R.		PN, RL
1	11/09/2001	Between 3rd Bridge and Mboma loop Moremi G.R.	1923A2	PN, RL
2	11/09/2001	NW of 4th Bridge, Moremi G.R.	1923A4	PN, RL
2	10/07/2002	Buffalo fence to S Gate, Moremi G.R.		SJT
1	15/04/2002	Chitabe	1923C2	FP
1	17/05/2002	Moremi	1923D1	FP
1	18/06/2002	Moremi	1923C2	FP
1	06/07/2002	Moremi	1923C1	FP
2	19/01/2003	Buffalo fence to Xaxaba Moremi S of Daonora Gate		SJT, JOS
1	21/01/2003	Near Maun		SJT, JOS
3	21/01/2003	Lake Ngami dry lake bed	2022B2	SJT, JOS
1	11/02/2015	Moremi G.R.	1923A2	JR
2	16/05/2015	Near South Gate	1923D2	PN, RL
1	21/01/2020	Kweddi Concession	1822D4	MB
Nxai Pan N.P.				
1	21-22/04/2001	Nxai Pan N.P.	1924B,D 2024B	FP
2	21-22/04/2001	Nxai Pan N.P.	1924B,D 2024B	FP
2	21-22/04/2001	Nxai Pan N.P.	1924B,D 2024B	FP
4	08/07/2001	Nxai Pan N.P.	1924B,D 2024B	DG, MG
2	14/11/2011	Nxai Pan N.P.	1924B,D 2024B	CT
4	10/03/2013	Nxai Pan N.P.	1924B,D 2024B 1924B,D	PZ
1	25/02/2014	Nxai Pan N.P.	1924B,D 2024B	
1	08/05/2015	Nxai Pan N.P.	1924B,D 2024B	PN
2	29/09-03/10/2018	Nxai Pan N.P.	1924B,D 2024B	JD

Makgadikgadi Pans				
2*	03/04/2004	Nr Jacks camp, Mk pans	2025C	
2	30/09/2011	Lake Xau	2124B3/4	CAB
1	07/08/2012	Xhumaga	2024B	
2	08/08/2012	Ntwetwe pan	2025A,B,C	BN
1	25/02/2014	sw Gweta nr Jacks camp	2025C	OB
2	20/08/2014	Lake Xau	2124B3/4	CAB
2	29/11/2014	Sua Pan	2026C	MS
2	13/01/2015	Lake Dow	2124B3/4	HH, GH
1	07/11/2015	Lake Xau	2124B3/4	
Chobe				
F.	2000-2001	Puku Flats	1724C	Randall (2001)
2	05/12/2003	S Dish Pan, Savuti	1824C	BR
2	12/12/2003	S Dish Pan, Savuti	1824C	BR
2	20/12/2003	Phuduhudu, Savuti	1824C	BR
1	21/12/2003	W Rock Pan, Savuti	1824C	BR
1	24/12/2003	E Munchwe Pan, Savuti	1824C	BR
1	28/12/2003	W Rock Pan, Savuti	1824C	BR
1	30/12/2003	Boscia tree, Savuti	1824C	BR
1	30/12/2003	Phuduhudu, Savuti	1824C	BR
1	Aug-04	Ihaha, Chobe River	1724D4	BR
1	31/01/2012	Savuti marsh	1824C3	BG MB
1	17/05/2012	Chobe		LF
1	01/02/2013	Bushman Painting Hill Savuti	1824C	BG MB
1	30/01/2013	Rhino Vlei, Savuti	1824C	BG MB
1	02/02/2013	Warhog Alley, Savuti	1824C	BG MB
1	02/02/2014	Savuti marsh	1824C1	GB, MB
*2	15/03/2015	Savuti	1824C1	GB., MB
1	10/07/2015	Savuti	1824C1	GB. MB
1	10/07/2015	Savuti	1824C1	GB, MB

1	06/10/2015	Savuti	1824C1	GB, MB
2	12/10/2015	Savuti	1824C1	GB, MB
*2	05/03/2016	Savuti	1824C1	GB, MB
2	March 2012	Between Simwanza Dam and Chobe River	1724D4	LF
2	11/03/2015	Chobe floodplain	1724D4	LF
1	09/04/2015	Chobe floodplain	1724D4	LF
2 incl. juvenile	11/05/2015	Mokwetus, Chobe floodplain,	1724D4	LF
1 juvenile	18 and 25/05/2015	As above	1724D4	LF
2	11/06/2016	Serondela, Chobe floodplain	1724D4	LF
2	25/08/2016	Chobe floodplain	1724D4	LF
2	09/06/2017	Savuti	1824C1	VI
2	09/06/2018	Savuti	1824C1	
1	27/02/2019	Sibuyu F.R.	1825D	DH
2	09/09/2020	Chobe	1725C 1824C	
Occ.		Pandamatenga farms	1825D1	SABAP
NW and western Botswana				
1	19/04/2004	Kgabanyane Pan	2022C1	CAB
1	23/08/2004	Kgabanyane Pan	2022C1	CAB
1	26/11/2011	Near Gumare	1922A3	MK
3 PR+1	2020	Hainaveld	2022D4	LS
Central Kalahari area				
5	04/01/2001	Deception Valley to Leopard Pan	2123C,D	SJT
4	05/01/2001	Deception Valley to Piper Pans	2123C,D	SJT
19	17-22/01/2001	Deception/Passarge Valleys	2123B,D	SJT
2	11/11/2004	Deception Valley	2123D	DP
1	11/11/2004	Deception Valley	2123D	DP
4	11/11/2004	Deception Valley	2123D	DP
1	11/11/2004	Passarge Valley	2123D	DP
*1	11/11/2004	Passarge Valley	2123B	DP
*2	12/01/2008	between Sojwe and Kodibeleng	2325B2	CAB, SJT
2	14/04/2008-	Khama Rhino	2226B1	Fabis 2008

	1/05/2008	Sanctuary		
3	May 2008	20km Letiahau, CKGR	2122D	Taylor (2008)
2	May 2008	26.5km Piper Pans, CKGR	2123C	Taylor (2008)
1	June 2008	Letiahau, CKGR	2122D	Taylor (2008)
1	June 2008	Piper Pans, CKGR	2123C	Taylor (2008)
*2	Feb 2008	Near Letiahau	2122D	MM
*2	Oct 2009	Near Letiahau	2122D	J. Steyn
12	02/07/2011	Deception valley, CKGR	2123B,C,D	MG, DG
2	04/04/2012	Molose pan, Khutse G.R.	2325A/C	CAB
1	25/02/2012	Matotsi, CKGR	2123B4	NP
2	14/05/2014	Motailane pan, Khutse	2324A4	CAB
1	14/05/2014	Moreswe pan, Khutse	2324A	CAB
2	29/06/2014	Khutse G.R.	2324A/C	DG, MG
2	17/09/2014	Deception valley	2124A, 2123B/C/D, 2122C/D	DG, MG
1	08/05/2015	Kutse G.R.	2324B3	HP
1 imm	23/08/2020	Kutse G.R.	2324	IW
1	04/09/2020	Northern CKGR	2123A3	RT
1	06/09/2020	Northern CKGR	2123D2	RT
2 ad	07/09/2020	Northern CKGR	2123B3	RT
Eastern Hardveld				
1	02/07/2005	near Ruretse	2426C	SJT
1	Mid-March 2001	Phakalane	2425D	CAB
1	01/07/2002	Tsholofelo s.p.	2425D	JS
1	late July 2002	Ruretse	2426C	RW
1	29/07/2002	Modipane to Tlokweng Road	2425C	SJT, Jdal
2	29/07/2011	Near Malolwane	2426B	SJT
1	14/11/2011	east of Mahalapye	2326B2	BR

2	early Nov 2012	Limpopo Lodge	2229A1	IW, Jdal
1	11/11/2013	Kgoro pan	2525A4	CAB
1	11/02/2017	Shashe Farm	2229A1	CAB
1	04/09/2017	South of Palapye	2227C	GG
1 imm	28/01/2021	Gaborone Dam	2625D2	CAB

Observers are given in past issues of Babbler and in Contributors to Records in this issue.



Secretarybird
Photo: Ian White

Fourth record of Magpie Mannikin *Lonchura fringilloides* in Botswana

Mark Muller

On Sunday 7 February 2021 Ali and I were staying with friends in Kasane. When we arrived at our friends' home, the lady of the home advised that she was frustrated because the Golden Weavers *Ploceus xanthops* had built two nests in a tree at the bottom of the garden and then had appeared to abandon the nests.

Early on Monday morning, I wandered down the garden to try to see what was going on in the nests. As I approached the nests I saw a small bird fly up and perch, head down on the side of the lower nest site. At that point the nest was backlit by a grey clouded sky and, other than the "Black" panel, I could not make any detail out on the bird (I had left my bins up at the house). As I stood there the bird changed its position and I could then make out a very dark head terminating in a clearly defined line at the top the breast. My instantaneous reaction was that I was looking at a Violet-backed Sunbird. However, I realised immediately after that thought, that it was in fact a Magpie Mannikin *Lonchura fringilloides*. I ran back to the house and collected my camera and bins and, over the next one to two hours took the photos below.

We sat on the verandah, four of us, and watched the bird fly up, on several occasions, and perch on the side of the nest before scrambling down it and entering it. It would spend a few minutes in the nest and then drop out and fly up to perch not far from the nest. While it was out of the nest we could clearly see the nest twitching around and I knew that there was second bird in the nest or large chicks. Eventually both birds dropped out of the nest and flew off into the thick underbrush that surrounds the nest site. We then had to go off to meet Linda Taylor to see if we could get to see her Crowned Hornbills but we dipped.

We were leaving Kasane the next morning and so, immediately it was light enough, I watched the nest carefully but never saw the birds around the nest site. Just before we left I decided to walk up and look up into the nest site; as I approached the nest, both birds dropped out of the nest and flew away.

While I have never seen Magpie Mannikins before, I advise that I grew up, in N. Tanzania, where both Bronze *L. cucullatus* and Red-backed Mannikins *L. nigriceps* abounded. I know that Bronze Mannikins are occasionally recorded as having used the old nests of weavers/bishops in which to nest. Other seedeaters as Blue Waxbills *Uraeginthus angolensis*, Cut-throat Finches *Amadina fasciata* and Red-headed Finches *A. erythrocephala* to name a few, often also nest in old weaver nests. Accordingly, I believe that the fact that these two are using an abandoned Golden Weaver nest to breed in, while unrecorded in Magpie Mannikins, this behaviour is entirely consistent with these kinds of species.

Interestingly, I have recently been engaging with a young Dutch birder who lives in Livingstone in Zambia. This guy is astonishingly knowledgeable and passionate. Just before I went up to Kasane he asked me to keep an eye open for Magpie Mannikins as he is seeing them regularly in Livingstone – are we looking at a range expansion going on here?

Mark Muller
P O Box 21188

Editor: Thanks to Dieter Oschadleus for comments on this note. He wrote “The Magpie Mannikin has not been recorded as using weaver nests before, so this is an interesting record. Breeding was not confirmed, but was at least attempted. Some estrildids roost in weaver nests, but are not known to breed in them, but roosting occurs at dusk until dawn, so activity at weaver nests during the day indicates breeding (or attempted breeding). The nests of Golden Weavers have been used for breeding by Bronze Mannikins, Brown Firefinches, and other estrildid species.”

The southern African Atlas refers to a record in NE Namibia and its occurrence quite widely in Zimbabwe. In Botswana there was one record in 1994 from the Chobe River (Bishop 1995) and then in 2014 one from Savuti in February and from Kasane in July (Brewster, C.A. and Tyler, S.J. 2021. New Bird Records from Botswana. African Bird Club Bulletin).



Magpie Mannikins
Photo: M Muller

Thick-billed Weavers *Amblyospiza albifrons* at Lobatse

Chris A Brewster

On the morning of 5 February 2021, I undertook a waterbird count at Lobatse Sewage Ponds. After counting the main sewage ponds and also the old sewage ponds, which were full of water due to recent heavy rains, I went to the seepage pond, below the main ponds, into which water flows from the main pond. The seepage pond is surrounded by reeds and on the side of it is a small pool surrounded by trees. The pool is always worth checking as Black-crowned Night Herons often roost in the trees and often one or two other birds of interest are found beside the water of the pool.

When I went to the small pool, I noticed some Southern Masked Weaver *Ploceus velatus* nests hanging from a tree over the water. Close to these nests, there were three different nests, which I was unfamiliar with, over the water. These three nests were each attached to two reeds in the water and were constructed between the two reeds. As I arrived at the pool, a brown bird, that I was unable to identify as it flew quickly, flew directly out of one of the nests.

I moved around the pool and noticed a Thick-billed Weaver in the canopy of the trees. Its heavy bill, brownish plumage and streaked underparts made the bird easy to identify.

I left the pool and then walked along the stream that was flowing strongly away from the seepage pond. Returning to the small pool later, a brown bird again flew directly out of the nest when I approached. I sat down beside the pool and after a few minutes I noticed, in the canopy of the trees, two Thick-billed Weavers. One was an adult female and the other was a juvenile, begging from and being fed by the adult female, confirming that breeding had been successful. Later, I checked Steyn (1996), in which two Thick-billed Weaver nests are illustrated. The nests illustrated are exactly the same as the unusual nests above the water in the pool, confirming that the nests seen were Thick-billed Weaver nests.

Hancock & Weiersbye (2016) indicate that Thick-billed Weaver is, in Botswana, an uncommon and local resident along the Okavango Panhandle and also at isolated places around the Okavango Delta, in the Linyanti Swamps and along the Chobe River, but not elsewhere. These birds in northern Botswana are of the dark brown tropical subspecies *A a maxima*, which does not occur elsewhere in southern Africa.

Thick-billed Weaver was first recorded in what is now Gauteng in the 1960s possibly after a natural expansion along the Olifants River (Craig 1997). It is now a common resident in north-east South Africa including Gauteng and its range continues to expand (Peacock 2012). It has been recorded increasingly regularly in the Northwest Province of South Africa, not far from the Botswana border, in recent years (SABAP2 data).

The first record of a Thick-billed Weaver in Botswana, away from the northern wetlands, was of a bird seen on 23 January 2019 by Harold Hester at Notwane Dam south of Gaborone (Tyler and Brewster 2019). This breeding record at Lobatse is the second record in south-east Botswana.

These two records indicate that it has now expanded its range to south-east Botswana. It is very likely that there will be more records there in the near future.

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Eastern Long-billed Lark *Certhilauda semitorquata* south of Lobatse

Chris A. Brewster

I was birding in a hilly area just south of Lobatse on 3 December 2020. The area in which I was birding comprised of a small valley with sloping sides. The ground was generally stony and there were also some rocky outcrops, mainly on the valley floor. The vegetation was mainly grassland with some scattered small trees, particularly on the valley floor. Where there were rocky outcrops along the floor of the valley, there were some small pools. Following good rainfall in the past couple of months, the grass was green and there were many flowers. Despite the lack of grazing pressure, the grass was relatively short, due to the poor, stony soils. The weather was cloudy and cool.

As I walked up the valley I could hear a loud, descending whistle in front of me, though I could not see the source of the whistle. I did not know the identity of the bird uttering the whistle, which was repeated several times. While the whistle was audible close by, I saw what appeared to be a pipit on the rocks immediately in front of me. The bird was quite confiding and allowed a close approach. It walked over the rocks and then it disappeared behind a rock before flying a short distance up the slope into some grass. When I went to the spot where it had landed I was unable to locate it – it had presumably moved away through the grass. It appeared to be a pipit, due to its longish tail and slender bill.

The bill was similar in size and shape to that of a pipit. Though it did not occur to me to give attention to the structure of a bill, it appeared to be more slender and possibly slightly longer than a typical large pipit and was not noticeably de-curved. The base of the bill was flesh-coloured.

It was quite active, walking over the rocks and it appeared to be a bit lower on the ground than a typical large pipit. Its tail was not seen to wag at all. Its size and build recalled African Pipit *Anthus cinnamomeus*. The head was not well marked, with only a faint malar stripe and a rather indistinct pale supercilium, not distinct as with Short-clawed Lark *Certhilauda chuana*. There was an indistinct dark line from the lores through the eye, not as distinct or noticeable as on Short-clawed Lark. The underparts were coloured pale buffy, though this buffy coloration was richer on the breast. There was only faint, indistinct streaking on the breast. The upperparts were a reddish brown, faintly streaked darker. The crown was not noticeably streaked. When the bird flew this reddish brown colouration was noticeable on the back and wing coverts, unlike on Rufous-naped Lark, which was seen not far away, on which the rufous colouration on the wing in flight is mainly on the primaries and secondaries. The tail, seen in flight was similar in colouration to the rest of the upperparts with no noticeable pale out tail feathers.

Due to its not well marked head pattern, the only indistinct streaking on the breast and the complete lack of tail wagging, and also because it was clearly not one of the expected pipits in the area (Buffy *Anthus vaalensis*, Plain-backed *Anthus leucophrys*, African and Bushveld *Anthus caffer*), I concluded the bird was possibly a Nicholson's Pipit *Anthus similis*. However, the upperparts colouration was not right for this species and the bird also did not appear to be as bulky as a Nicholson's Pipit, so I had some doubt.

As the loud whistling had stopped and the bird I had been watching had disappeared, I moved away to walk through the flatter grassland above the valley. I came back 20 or 30 minutes later and sat down on some rocks beside a pool to see if the bird uttering the loud whistle would appear. After a short time, two birds, with the broad wings of a lark and a longish tail, similar in size to Short-clawed Lark, flew low over the ground in front of me. They flew with a dipping flight in the manner that Short-clawed Lark tends to do when a person enters its territory, before disappearing behind a tree. A bird, clearly of one these birds, soon started to call a loud descending whistle, though the calling birding couldn't be seen. Though the call was unfamiliar, it was not unlike the opening whistle of the song of Short-clawed Lark. The song of Short-clawed Lark, which I know very well, however, typically consists of series of whistles, rising and falling, typically also with some harsher-sounding song. Only when Short-clawed Lark utters what appears to be a quiet sub-song from the ground, or is in display flight, does it utter a single whistle, in both cases sounding quite different to the bird that was calling.

Unlike Short-clawed Lark, which typically sings from a prominent position, such as a fence post, in an open area, the calling bird couldn't be easily seen as it tended to call from inconspicuous positions. It called from different positions and I struggled to get a view of the bird, but I did eventually have a brief view of the bird calling from a small tree. The head of the bird was similar in general appearance to a Short-clawed Lark, but the dark line through the eye was not as noticeable as on Short-clawed Lark, the bill was not as black as on Short-clawed Lark and the bird did not point its bill slight upwards as is so typical of Short-clawed Lark when it sings. Nevertheless I tentatively identified it as a rather

untypical Short-clawed Lark as I couldn't think of any other species known to occur in the area that it could possibly be. That it was seen in a habitat not generally favoured by Short-clawed Lark, did, though, surprise me. Eastern Long-billed Lark was not on the radar at all for me, as I had never considered it likely to occur in Botswana and anyway I was not familiar with the species. I did not also consider at the time that the calling bird was the same species as the apparent pipit that I had seen earlier on the ground.

I had not been carrying any field guides, as I had come to Lobatse on a non-birding trip, and then decided to also do a bit of birding. When I returned home, I consulted Peacock (2012), particularly in regard to the unfamiliar call. Only then did I realize that the calling bird was an Eastern Long-billed Lark. Still it didn't occur to me that the apparent pipit that I had seen on the ground was the same species that I had seen calling. As I had seen the calling bird only briefly, I resolved to go back the next morning to have another look at the bird. Only the next morning, when I had another look at Peacock (2012) before I departed for Lobatse, did the penny drop. The reddish brown lightly streaked upperparts of the bird seen on the ground, which did not seem right for Nicholson's Pipit, are the characteristic plumage of Eastern Long-billed Lark. That the bird seen on the ground appeared similar in size to an African Pipit, indicated that it was probably a female, which is smaller than a male, while the calling bird was presumably a male. The bill of an Eastern Long-billed Lark is not noticeably de-curved and the bill of a female is 25% smaller than the bill of a male (Peacock 2012). The size of the bill also indicated that the bird on the ground was probably a female rather than a male. According to Peacock (2012) Eastern Long-billed Larks are easily confused with pipits. Clearly the two birds I had seen, one on the ground and one calling, were a pair of Eastern Long-billed Larks.

When I returned the next morning, I was unable to locate the birds again and it was presumed that they had left the area. Possibly they had not found the habitat of the area entirely suited to their requirements, so they had moved on.

According to the distribution map in Peacock (2012), Eastern Long-billed Lark occurs within about 100 km of the Botswana border, southwards from Lobatse. Peacock considers it to be, in southern Africa, an uncommon resident in upland grassland, usually on rocky ridges. Suitable habitat for the species in Botswana is probably only found around Lobatse, where the slopes and tops of hills are often quite open with few trees.

This record is the first accepted record of Eastern Long-billed Lark for Botswana. As a species that is considered to be resident in its range, it is possible that the species is a resident in Botswana. The area around Lobatse is private freehold land and much of the slopes of hills and hill tops have rough topography with no roads, making them difficult of access. With its preferred habitat being difficult of access, it is possible that this species has been overlooked due to lack of attention from birders. Alternatively, it is also possible that the birds seen had moved into Botswana temporarily in a year of good rainfall.

REFERENCE

Peacock, F. 2012. *Chamberlain's LBJs*. Mirafr Publishing. Cape Town.

Notes from the Records Subcommittee:

Some records from the Kang area, summer 2019/2020

Iain Guthrie noted several interesting birds near Kang in December 2019 and January 2020. An adult Yellow-billed Stork *Mycteria ibis* was photographed by him at Kang on 12 December. This species is unexpected in the Kalahari. Likewise Pied Avocet *Recurvisrostra avocetta* and a Dusky Lark *Pinarocorys nigricans* on 21 December and five Greater Striped Swallows *Cecrosis cucullata* on 6 January were at the edge of their expected range near Kang in 2322D1. An Olive-tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum* was also seen by Iain on 11 December.

Chris Brewster was in the Kang area too and to the west in December 2019 (see Brewster 2020). He saw three Red-billed Oxpeckers *Buphagus erythrorhynchus* south of Kang in 2322D4 on 10 December 2019; the Kalahari is outside of the expected range of this species. Seven Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus* were at Kaa Pan (2426B3) on 11 December 2019 and there were 30 at Ukwi Pan on 14 December. He also recorded Burnt-necked Eremomela *Eremomela usticollis* between Kang and Hukunsi in 2322C3 on the same date; there are few records of this species from the Kalahari.

REFERENCE

Brewster, C.A. 2020. A visit to the western Kalahari in December 2019. *Babbler* 66: 17-20.

Pygmy Goose *Nettapus auritus* at Taueshele Dam near Kanye

Pygmy Goose is a bird of the northern wetlands, notably the Okavango Delta where it favours rivers and lagoons with floating vegetation, notably water-lilies. Indeed, the Okavango is the species' stronghold in southern Africa. It is quite scarce in the Linyanti/Chobe system. Occasional vagrants appear away from the north. A few records have come from Shashe Dam, where five were seen in early February 1998, two or three in January 1999 and two in January 2004 (Tyler 2011). At Talana Marsh, in the northern Tuli Block, Chris Brewster saw five in January 1999 (two were there with nine immatures in May 1996). In the Makgadikgadi system one was seen at Planet Baobab near Gweta in April 2006.

The first record in south-east Botswana was of two birds at Bokaa Dam in October 1994 and two were then seen at Phakalane sewage ponds in January 1997 (Tyler 2011). None were recorded subsequently in south-east Botswana until a pair was seen at Taueshele Dam near Kanye on 26 January 2019 by Chris Brewster.

Excitement at Gaborone Dam and other sites in south-east Botswana late 2020

Gaborone Dam in south-east Botswana was excellent for unusual species since 19 August when eight South African Cliff Swallows *Hirundo spiloderma* were seen at the dam by Chris Brewster (CAB) with a Pearl-breasted *H. dimidiata* and three White-throated Swallows *H. albigularis*. November though was incredible for interesting species including two new species for Botswana.

Up to six Grey Plovers *Pluvialis squatarola* were there between 14 November and 13 December, a Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* on 15 November with two on 24th and a single again on 13 December, a White-fronted Plover *Charadrius marginatus* from 14 to 16 November and again on 13 December and a Chestnut-banded Plover *C. pallidus* on the last date.

A Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* was seen and photographed at the dam by Ian White on 13 November; the first record of the species for Botswana; Another first came the next day when IW saw and photographed a Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus*, well away from its usual coastal haunts. Next an uncommon Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica* was seen by CAB and this stayed until 29 November. On 25 November IW spotted three Ospreys *Pandion haliaeetus* and on 29 November a Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*.

Then on 30 December IW saw and photographed a Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*, two on 31 December and then one on 1 January. A bird was present until at least 16 January. This pipit breeds in the boreal regions of Europe and Asia and usually spends the non-breeding season in central and eastern Africa so a record in Botswana is well to the south of its usual range. It is also another first record for Botswana.

On 8 January after heavy rain the dam was filling but IW noted Fulvous Whistling Ducks *Dendrocygna bicolor* (eight birds) and another Osprey, this one bearing a ring,

At nearby Gaborone Game Reserve IW saw a Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* on 6 November and two there on 24th. A Black Sparrowhawk *Accipiter melanoleucus* seen at Bokaa Dam on 4 October by CAB was a new sighting for this locality.

These sightings show how rewarding it can be to keep visiting seemingly well-watched locations. Penry in his Bird Atlas of Botswana listed 37 species in an appendix that he thought might occur in Botswana in the future. At least 17 of these including *Black Tern* *Chlidonias niger* have since been recorded in the country. However, an additional seven species that were not in Penry's appendix have also been added to the Botswana list including the Common Tern, Kelp Gull and Red-throated Pipit. The Botswana list now stands at 605 species.



Red-throated Pipit
Photo: Ian White

European Nightjar in Maun

On 6 January 2021 Mark Muller wrote that a European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* had been coming into his garden for the last three years. After sending his photographs of the nightjar to SA “Experts” Mark wrote that “we believe that it shows it to be a male bird of the *sarudnyi* race”.

Mark added: “I have had my Verreaux’s Eagle Owl’s move back into my garden. They have brought their recently fledged youngster with them. This little guy is really naughty and sadly, has, on a couple of occasions now, chased the nightjar. For the last three weeks the nightjar has deserted my garden.



European Nightjar
Photo: Mark Muller

Report from the Records Subcommittee: Category A Records

Compiled by Chris A. Brewster

The following records were assessed by Chris A. Brewster, Andrew Hester, Richard D. Randall, Grant Reed and Stephanie J. Tyler. Records were assessed on the basis of majority vote. Observers did not vote on their own records.

Species	Square	Date	Comments
Red-necked Buzzard <i>Buteo auguralis</i>	1923D1	9.1.21	One seen and photographed at Santawani (H. Parsons). Third accepted record for Botswana.
Kelp Gull <i>Larus dominicanus</i>	2425D2	14.11.20	One adult seen and photographed at Gaborone Dam (I. White). First accepted record for Botswana.
Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i>	2425D2	13.11.20	One seen and photographed at Gaborone Dam (I. White). First accepted record for Botswana.
Gull-billed Tern <i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	2425D2	17.11.20- 22.11.20	One seen and photographed at Gaborone Dam (C. Brewster, I. White). Third accepted record for Botswana.
Black Tern <i>Chlidomias niger</i>	1923A2	22.3.18	One seen and photographed at Third Bridge, Moremi Game Reserve (T. Grim). First accepted record for Botswana.
European Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	1923C4	10.12.20	One seen and photographed at Maun (M. Muller). Fifth accepted record for Botswana.
Crowned Hornbill <i>Lophoceros alboterminatus</i>	1725C3	21.9.20 – 22.1.21	Breeding male at Lesoma Valley (L. Taylor, L. Francey). Second accepted record for Botswana.
Eastern Long-billed Lark <i>Certhilauda semitorquata</i>	2525B3	16.12.20	Pair just south of Lobatse on 16.12.20 (C. Brewster). First accepted record for Botswana.
Magpie Mannikin <i>Lonchura fringilloides</i>	1725C3	8.2.21	Two adults seen and photographed at Kazungula (M. Muller). Fourth accepted record for Botswana.
Red-throated Pipit <i>Anthus cervinus</i>	2425D2	30.12.20 – 16.1.21	One or two seen and photographed at Gaborone Dam, with three seen on 16.1.21 (I. White). First accepted record for Botswana.

Chris A. Brewster, Records Subcommittee, BirdLife Botswana

Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax* has been added to the Category B rarities list as it is now considered Vulnerable by IUCN. All records of this species will henceforth be included in the Summary of Category B Records



Osprey with ring
Photo: Ian White

Summary of Category B Records

Chris A. Brewster & Stephanie J. Tyler

Records are for the period from January 2020 to early March 2021 with a few earlier records.

CKGR = Central Kalahari Game Reserve; G.R. Game Reserve; S.P. Sewage Ponds.

African Black Duck *Anas sparsa*

In south-east Botswana, there were two at Lobatse S.P. on 30 July 2020 and again on 5 Feb 2021 and two at Gaborone Dam on 19 Aug (CAB). One at Lake Ngami on 5 Sept (MM); this record is well away from its known range.

Maccoa Duck *Oxyura maccoa*

For records in 2020, see note on Maccoa Ducks on page xx. On 24 Jan 2021, there were four at Taueshele Dam, near Mosopa and 20 at Gampudi Dam, near Kanye. There was one male at Broadhurst Ponds on 3 Feb and five (3 males and 2 females) were on a small pan near Letlhakeng on 9 March (CAB).

Lesser Flamingo *Phoenicopterus minor*

Most records are from south-east Botswana. There were 50 at Kgoro Pan on 31 Jan 2020, (TL), 19 at Gamoleele Dam on 29 July, 310 at Phakalane S.P. (with 900 Greater Flamingos) on 18 Aug, 29 at Bokaa Dam on 4 Oct and three at Bokaa Dam on 20 Jan 2021 (TL, MGG, DG, HH, CAB, BLB). Elsewhere, in late July, two juveniles were seen at Ghanzi S.P. and 27 adults and two juveniles at Tsootsha Pans (ModB)

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

Two immatures were seen near Botlhapatlou, in 2425A2, on 28 Oct 2020 and one near Kutamagoree, in 2026D4, on 19 Dec (CAB, MW).

Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia microscelis* (formerly *episcopus*)

One was seen south of Moremi South Gate on 27 Nov 2020 (CAB).

Yellow-billed Egret *Egretta intermedia*

One was seen near Shorobe on 28 Nov 2020 and there were three at Bokaa Dam on 20 Jan 2021 (CAB). One was seen at Khutse G.R., outside of the expected range of species, on 24 Feb (IW).

Slaty Egret *Egretta vinaceigula*

A new breeding colony of ca.50 pairs was found on 17 June 2020 in five hectares of *Phoenix reclinata* palm islands on the upper Boro south of the Jao (Xo) Flats (GR). A single bird was nesting in a Candle-pod Acacia *Vachellia hebeclada* south-west of Third Bridge camp site in Aug 2020 (MM, AF).

On the Jao Flats, in 1922B2 / 1822D4, in mid-October, there were about seven birds (RT). One was seen along the Boro River in 1923C4 on 30 Nov (CAB).

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*

One was seen in a small inlet at Gaborone Dam where there was also a Dwarf Bittern *I. sturmii* on 29 Jan 2021 (CAB).

Secretary Bird *Sagittarius serpentarius*

In the Hainaveld, in 2022D4, in 2020, there was one breeding pair and also a single (LS). One immature was seen at Khutse Pan, Khutse G.R. on 23 Aug 2020 (IW). In northern CKGR, there were single adults in 2123A3 on 4 Sept and in 2123D2 on 6 Sept and two adults in 2123B3 on 7 Sept (RT). An immature was seen at Gaborone Dam on 28 Jan 2021 (CAB).

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaeetus*

Three were at Gaborone Dam on 25 Nov and one, a ringed bird, on 8 Jan 2021 (IW). One was present there on 28 Jan (CAB).

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

One was photographed at Mogoditshane on 7 Feb 2021 and two were seen at Crocodile Pools, Notwane on 15 Feb 2021 (DL, CAB).

Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus*

One was seen nest-building at Khwai on 22 June 2020 (Eddie Everaedt per MBF). Two were seen on the Jao Flats, in 1922B2 in mid-October and four were seen at Khwai from 20 to 24 Nov (RT, MGG, DG). Six were seen at an elephant carcass on Chobe floodplain in 1725C3 on 9 Nov (CS).

White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus*

No. Birds	Date	Location	Obs.
1	21 May 2020	On adult on nest near Selekoleta (2425C3)	CAB
40+	23 May	Sita Pan(2524B1)	IW
1	24 May	Near Monametsana (2426A1)	CAB
1	31 May	Lekgolobotlo (2425D3)	CAB
2	4 June	North of Olifants Drift	CAB
3	7 June	Taung Floodplain (2425D4)	BLB
Circa 35	4-5 July	Mabuasehube	IW
20	6 July	Kokotsha	IW
15	6 July	Between Sekoma and Jwaneng	IW
22	15 Aug	Crocodile Pools, Notwane	CAB
3	19 Aug	Gaborone Dam	CAB
1	23 Aug	On nest between Khutse Pan and Molose Pan, Khutse G.R.	IW
Circa.200	30 Aug	Khutse G.R.	Per VP

No. Birds	Date	Location	Obs.
8	4 Sept	Northern CKGR in 2123A1	RT
29	5 Sept	Piper Pan, CKGR	RT
1	6 Sept	Near Ramotswa	BLB
1	28 Sept	Near Dikgonnye (2426A1)	CAB
2	8 Oct	Near Segwagwa in 2525A1	CAB
1	19, 24 Oct	West of Hatsalatladi in 2425B1	CAB
55+	22 Oct	Near Rakops; poisoned	DWNP
1	30 Oct	Near Matebeleng in 2426A3	CAB
17	1 Nov	Near Palapye	BR per BPM
1	5 Nov	West of Mogonono in 2425A2	CAB
20	9 Nov	At elephant carcass on Chobe floodplain in 1725C3	CS
2	11 Nov	Kgoro Pan	CAB
Circa 40	11 Nov	At dead cow along A1 at Hilda Vale	CAB
7	15 Nov	Gweta	TB per BPM
88	16 Nov	Gaborone Dam on dead impala	CAB
6	17 Nov	Matebeleng in 2426A3	PP per BPM
5	25 Nov	Near Ghanzi	ModB
20	25 Nov	Makoro, south of Palapye	CAB
37	26 Nov	Rakops	CAB
4	26 Nov	Near Motlopi	CAB
Circa 50	28 Nov	At dead cow near Shorobe at dead cow	CAB
10	24 Dec	Near Segwagwa in 2525A2	CAB
2	7 Jan 2021	Temshele in 2326D4	CAB
8	5 Feb	Lobatse S.P.	CAB
5	9 Feb	Kgoro Pan	CAB
82	14 Feb	Sita Pan	CAB
6	17 Feb	Near Monametsana in 2426A1	CAB
1	24 Feb	Khutse G.R.	IW
12	27 Feb	Near Thamaga at dead donkey	CAB
1	27 Feb	Lethakeng	CAB
Circa 80	28 Feb	At dead cow at Tshwaane	CAB

Cape Vulture *Gyps coprotheres*

Circa 15 were at a dead cow at Hilda Vale (2525B3) on 11 Nov 2020, one at a dead impala at Gaborone Dam on 16 Nov, six at Makoro, south of Palapye, on 25 Nov, five roosting on power lines near Artesia on 7 Jan 2021 and one at Sita Pan on 14 Feb (CAB).

White-headed Vulture *Aegypius occipitalis*

No. birds	Date	Location	Obs.
3	4-5 July 2020	Mabuasehube	IW
3	5 Sept	Piper Pan, CKGR	RT
1	28 Nov	At dead cow near Shorobe	CAB
Pair	24 Feb 2021	Khutse G.R.	IW

Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotos*

No. birds	Date	Location	Obs.
1	23 May 2020	Sita Pan (2524B1)	IW
1	4, 25 June	North of Olifants Drift	CAB, HH
8	4-5 July	Mabuasehube	IW
2	30 Aug	Khutse G.R. at dead eland	Per VP
2	4 Sept	Northern CKGR in 2123A1	RT
21	5 Sept	Piper Pan, CKGR	RT
1	1 Nov	Near Palapye	BR per BPM
6	16 Nov	At dead impala at Gaborone Dam	CAB
1	19 Nov	Near Rakops in 2125A4	MN per BPM
1	26 Nov	Rakops	CAB
1	28 Nov	At dead cow near Shorobe	CAB
1	28 Nov	Nxai Pan	BKper BPM
1	29 Nov	Jwala in 2228B2	AP
2	30 Nov	Boro River in 1923C4	CAB
2	5 Feb 2021	Lobatse S.P.	CAB
5	14 Feb	Sita Pan	CAB
1	17 Feb	Near Monametsana in 2426A1	CAB
1	24 Feb	Khutse G.R.	IW
3	27 Feb	At dead donkey near Thamaga	CAB
5	28 Feb	At dead cow at Tshwaane	CAB

Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus*

No. birds	Date	Location	Obs.
Circa 7	4-5 July 2020	Mabuasehube	IW
1 imm	23 Aug	Molose Pan, Khutse G.R.	IW
1 sub-ad.	7 Sept	Northern CKGR in 2123B3	RT
Ad. female	Mid-October	Jao Flats	RT
1	6 Nov	Chobe floodplain near Kasane	CS
1	13 Nov	Kasane Forest Extension	BL
1	15 Nov	Mabuasehube	KN
1	19 Nov	East Of Artesia in 2426B2	LJ
1	28 Nov	Khutse G.R.	AA
1	1 Dec	Boro River in 1923C4	CAB
Ad female	1 Jan	West of Artesia in 2426A1	CAB
1 imm	10 Jan	Lefubitsa Pans in 2326C4	CAB
1	11 Jan	Chobe floodplain in 1724D4	CS
1	24 Feb	Khutse G.R.	IW

Bat Hawk *Macheiramphus alcinus*

One was seen at Maun on 8 March 2020 (GW per MBF).

Martial Eagle *Polemaetus bellicosus*

No. Birds	Date	Location	Obs.
1 imm	23 Aug 2020	Khutse Pan, Khutse G.R.	IW
1 adult	1 Oct	Near Artesia	CAB
1	19 Nov	Near Rakops in 2125A4	BBeo per BPM
1 adult	28 Feb 2021	Mosarwe Pan, near Takatokwane	CAB

Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*

One was seen south of Moremi South Gate on 26 Nov 2020 (CAB).

Booted Eagle *Hieraetus*

One was at Kanye on 15 Nov 2020 and one at Gaborone Dam on 16 Nov (TL, CAB).

Ayre's Hawk Eagle *Hieraetus ayresii*

One adult was seen at Maun on 5 Jan 2020, then one or two were seen there from 2 to 19 April 2020 (GW, MM per MBF). An immature was photographed at Gaborone on 18 Feb 2021 (IW) and an immature was seen near Letlhakeng on 9 March (CAB).

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nepalensis*

Several were seen at Khwai from 20 to 24 Nov 2020 and south of Moremi South Gate on 26 Nov 2020; one was seen over the over Boro River in 1923C4 on 29 Nov (MGG, DG, CAB).

Lizard Buzzard *Kaupifalco monogrammicus*

Singles were seen at Gidichaa Lodge, 70 km west of Nokaneng on 3 July 2020, at Etsha 13 on 13 Dec and at Pandamatenga on 10 Feb 2021 (LO, KY and MM, all per BPM).

Black Sparrowhawk *Accipiter melanoleucos*

In south-east Botswana single birds were seen at Notwane on three dates from June to Oct 2020, one was seen on the Taung Floodplain, in 2425D4, on 7 June and one at Bokaa Dam on 4 Oct. One was seen in Maun on 15 Jan 2021 (MM, AF per MBF).

African Marsh Harrier *Circus ranivorus*

One was seen on the Jao Flats in mid-Oct 2020 and one was along the Boro River in 1923C4 on 30 Nov 2020 (RT, CAB).

Jackal Buzard *Buteo rufofuscus*

One juvenile was seen at Moshaneng, near Kanye on 21 May 2020 (CAB).

Kori Bustard *Ardeotis kori*

A pair was seen southwest of Sesung, in 2424D4, on 18 Sept 2020 and one was seen at Tswaiing Pans, in 2524B2, on 21 Jan 2021 (CAB). Two were at Natanga in 1725D3 on 12 Nov 2020 and one was on Chobe floodplain in 1725D4 on 11 Jan 2021 (BL per BPM, CS).

Black Sparrowhawk *Accipiter melanoleucos*

One was seen at Bokaa Dam on 4 Oct, the first sighting there (CAB).

Denham's Bustard *Neotis denhami*

One was seen at Jao Flats in 1922B1, outside of the expected range of the species, from 18 to 22 Jan 2017 (TA)

African Crake *Crecopsis egregia*

One was seen at Potsane Dam, south of Gaborone in 2425D3, on 3 Jan 2021 and one at Gaborone G.R. on 28 Jan and 3 Feb (BLB, IW, CAB). One was at Ghanzi S. P. on 19 Jan and one was seen at Maun from 5 to 9 Jan (ModB, BW per MBF).

Corn Crake *Crex crex*

One was seen at Maun on 25 Nov 2020 (MM).

Striped Crake *Aenigmamatomimnas marginalis*

A nest with four eggs was found near Maun on 11 Feb 2021 (MM per MBF)

Grey Crowned Crane *Balearica regulorum*

A pair was seen along Thamalakane River at Maun on 27 June 2020 and a pair, probably the same birds, was seen at Khumaga on 5 July (SB, AC per MBF). Two were seen at Sibuyu Forest Reserve in Nov 2020 (DH per BPM).

Wattled Crane *Crus carunculatus*

Two were seen on the Jao Flats in 1922B2 in mid-Oct 2020 (RT)

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Up to six were seen at Gaborone Dam from 7 Nov to 13 Dec 2020 (IW, CAB).

Chestnut-banded Plover *Charadrius pallidus*

One was seen at Gaborone Dam on 13 Dec 2020 (IW) and one was at Ntwetwe Pan on 19 Dec (IW, MW).

White-fronted Plover *Charadrius marginatus*

Single birds were seen at Gaborone Dam from 14 Nov to 13 Dec 2020; three were seen there on 16 Nov (IW, CAB).

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Single birds were seen and photographed at Gaborone G.R. from 6 Nov 2020 to 28 Jan 2021; two were seen there on 24 Nov (IW).

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Single birds were seen at Gaborone Dam from 15 Nov 2020 to 28 Jan 2021; two were seen at the dam on 24 Nov (IW, CAB). One was reported from Rhino Pan in Chobe N.P. from 26 to 28 Nov (per TH).

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

Two were at Bokaa Dam on 9 July 2020, circa 30 at Gaborone Dam on 16 Nov, circa 300 were at Bokaa Dam on 20 Jan 2021 and 10 at Broadhurst Ponds on 3 Feb (CAB).

Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni*

Four were seen at Kgoro Pan on 31 Jan 2020 (TL). One was seen at Sita Pan on 21 Nov, nine were in the Hainaveld in 2022D4 on 23 Nov, 95 were seen at Nxai Pan on 28 Nov, circa 120 were at Bokaa Dam on 20 Jan 2021, 15 were at Tshootsha in late January and one was at Tswaii Pans on 21 Feb (ModB, CAB, LS, DK per BPM, MB).

African Skimmer *Rynchops flavirostris*

Four on Chobe Floodplain, in 1725D4 on 12 Sept 2020, three were there on 5 Nov and four were there on 27 Feb 2021 (CS). Circa 35 were at Fourth Bridge, Moremi G.R. on 5 Dec 2020 and three at Maun S.P on 30 Jan (JS per MBF, KNel per MBF).

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*

Two were seen at Gaborone Dam on 16 Nov 2020 and on 18 Feb 2021 (CAB, IW).

Black Coucal *Centropus grillii*

Two were seen along the Boro River in 1923C4 on 30 Nov 2020 and two were on the Chobe Floodplain in 1724D4 on 16 Dec (CAB, CS)

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

One was seen near Shorobe on 28 Nov 2020 (CAB).

African Emerald Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx cupreus*

There were six reports of calling birds at Maun from Dec 2020 to Feb 2021 (MBF).

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*

Circa 20 were at Gaborone Botanical Gardens on 23 August 2020 and one was seen at Lobatse on 15 Dec (CAB).

Narina Trogon *Apoloderma narina*

One was seen at Muchenje on 5 August 2020 (HW per MBF). Three were seen at Samochima near Maun on 1 Dec (ML per MBF).

European Roller *Coracias garrulous*

Single birds were seen near Shorobe on 29 Nov 2020 and in the Hainaveld, in 2022D4, on 23 Dec. Three singles were seen north-east of Artesia on 7 Jan 2021 (CAB), two were near Sita Pan on 13 Feb and singles were seen between Takatokwane and Tshwaane on 28 Feb (CAB, LS, IW).

Southern Ground Hornbill *Bucorvus leadbeateri*

Heard calling on Jao Flats in 1822D4 in mid-Oct 2020 (RT)

Brown-backed Honeybird *Prodosticus regulus*

One was seen at Crocodile Pools, Notwane on 29 May 2020 (CAB).

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*

Small flocks were seen at Khutse G.R. 23-24 Feb 2021 and two west of Takatokwane on 28 Feb (IW, CAB).

Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus*

Two were seen at Hilda Vale, south of Lobatse, on 9 Feb 2021 and three were seen on the Chobe Floodplain on 27 Feb (CAB, CS).

Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*

One was seen at Khutse G.R. on 29 Nov 2020 and eight in the Hainaveld in 2022D4 on 23 Dec (AA per BPM, LS). One was on the Chobe floodplain, in 1724D4, on 23 Dec and two were there on 2 Jan 2021 (CS). It was common at Khutse G.R. on 23-24 Feb, with numbers in the hundreds (IW). Five were seen west of Takatokwane on 28 Feb (CAB).

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subuteo*

An immature was seen at Gaborone Dam on 29 Nov 2020 (IW).

African Hobby *Falco cuvierii*

A juvenile was seen 10 km north of Nossob Camp in the Nossob Valley, far away from its expected range, on 9 Nov 2020 (per TH).

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

Single birds were seen at Gaborone Dam on 19 Aug 2020 and 18 Feb 2021 (CAB, IW).

Bokmakerie *Telophorus zeylonus*

One was heard calling at Lobatse on 23 Sept 2020 (CAB).

Brown-throated Martin *Riparia paudicola*

Four were seen along the Limpopo River, north of Olifants Drift, on 20 July 2020 (IW). Single birds were seen at Thagale Dam on 16 July, at Gaborone Dam on 19 Aug, at Bokaa Dam on 4 Oct and at Phakalane S.P. on 5 Feb 2021 (CAB, BLB).

Pearl-breasted Swallow *Hirundo dimidiata*

One was seen at Gaborone Dam on 19 Aug 2020 (CAB).

South African Cliff-Swallow *Hirundo spilodera*

Eight were seen at Gaborone Dam on 19 Aug 2020, one west of Molepolole on 3 Sept and one at Kgoro Pan on 11 Nov (CAB). There was an active breeding colony, with about 50 nests, on 28 Feb 2021 (IW).

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

Singles were recorded near Temshele in 2326C4 on 10 Jan 2021, at Lobatse S.P. on 5 Feb and at Sita Pan on 14 Feb (CAB).

Collared Palm Thrush *Cichladusa arquata*

One was seen at Maun on 1 Aug 2020 and 23 Sept (MM, per RT).

Dusky Sunbird *Cinnyris fuscus*

One male was seen near Lone Tree in 2222C3 on 2 Dec 2020 (CAB).

Cuckoo Finch *Anomalospiza imberbis*

Two were seen on the Jao Flats in 1822D3 on 21 Jan 2017 (Tania Anderson). Two juveniles were seen at Chobe Farms on 31 Jan 2021 (LF).

Striped Pipit *Anthus lineiventris*

Two were seen on 28 Jan 2021 and one was there on 18 Feb (CAB, IW).

Streaky-headed Seedeater *Crithagra gularis*

Two came to drink at Taueshele Dam and one at Gampudi Dam on 5 July 2020 (CAB).

Interesting and Unusual Sightings

Compiled by Stephanie J. Tyler and Chris A. Brewster

This section does not cover rarities but rather interesting observations of more common birds. It might report on a species seen out of its usual range or on notably large numbers for a species. Observations on breeding or feeding behaviour are also welcomed. Records are from October 2019 to February 2021.

White-backed Duck *Thalassornis leuconotus*

Two were seen at three sites in the winter waterbird counts – Sehatlhane Dam near Mosopa on 1 July 2021, Gampudi Dam near Kanye on 5 July and Phakalane S.P. on 18 Aug. There were four at Taueshele Dam and 12 at Gampudi Dam on 24 Jan 2021 (CAB).

Knob-billed Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos*

Two were seen at Ghanzi S.P. on 19 Jan 2021 and one was at Tshwaane Pan on 28 Feb 2021 (ModB, CAB). Both records are outside of the expected range of the species.

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*

A pair was seen at Khutse G.R. on 24 Feb 2021 (IW).

South African Shelduck *Tadorna cana*

88 were seen at Tswaiing Pans in 2524B2 on 21 Feb 2021 and 5 were at Tshwaane Pan in 2323D3 on 28 Feb (CAB). Two were seen at Tsootsha in January 2021 (ModB).

African Pygmy Goose *Nettapus auritus*

A pair of adults was seen at Taueshele Dam (2425C2), west of Mosopa, outside of the expected range of the species, on 26 Jan 2020 (CAB). (see note on page 51)

Cape Teal *Spatula capensis*

245 were present at Ramotswa S.P. on 3 Feb 2020 (CAB).

Yellow-billed Stork *Mycteria ibis*

One adult was seen and photographed at Kang on 12 Dec 2019 (IG). This species is unexpected in the Kalahari.

Marabou Stork *Leptoptilos crumenifer*

250 were seen south of Mababe on 20 Dec 2019 (JR).

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Three were seen at Ghanzi Pan, near Ghanzi, on 20 Jan 2021 (ModB).

Green-backed Heron *Butorides striata*

One was seen at Ghanzi Pan, near Ghanzi on 20 Jan 2021 (ModB). In Botswana this species is confined to the river systems of northern and eastern Botswana, so this record is exceptional.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

One at Khutse G.R., outside of the expected range of the species, on 24 Feb 2021 (IW).

Great Egret *Egretta alba*

12 were seen at Ghanzi Pan, near Ghanzi, on 20 Jan 2021 (ModB).

Black Heron *Egretta ardesiaca*

Four were seen at Ghanzi Pan, near Ghanzi, on 20 Jan 2021 (ModB).

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Five were seen at Ghanzi Pan, near Ghanzi, on 20 Jan 2021 (ModB).

Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius*

Several hundred were seen near Mababe village on 20 Dec 2019 (JR).

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Seven were at Kaa Pan (2426B3) on 11 Dec 2019 and there were 30 at Ukwi Pan on 14 Dec (CAB).

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Reported from Kang on 12 Dec 2019 (IG). There were circa 250 at Sojwe Pan on 2 Jan 2020 (CAB).

Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius*

Forty were seen at Mosarwe Pan, near Takatokwane and 60 were seen at Tshwaane Pan on 28 Feb 2021 (CAB).

Three-banded Plover *Charadrius tricollaris*

One was seen at a puddle in a road in northern CKGR, in 2123B4, on 8 Feb 2020 (RT).

Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus*

One was seen at Masetlheng Pan on 13 Dec 2019 (CAB).

Greater Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*

One was seen at Tsootsha in January 2021 (ModB)

African Jacana *Actophilornis africanus*

One was seen in Deception Valley, CKGR on 1 Oct 2020 (PR per MBF).

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

30 were seen at Tshwaane Pan on 28 Feb 2021 (CAB).

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

In January 2021 16 were seen at Ghanzi S.P., one was at Ghanzi Pan and four were at Tsootsha (ModB).

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

50 were seen at Tshwaane Pan on 28 Feb 2021 (CAB).

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*

Five were seen and photographed at Bokaa Dam on 11 Jan 2020 and one at Khutse G.R. on 24 Feb 2021 (IW). These records are well south of the expected range of the species.

Red-chested Cuckoo *Cuculus solitarius*

One was heard calling at Island Safari Camp, Maun from 12 to 16 Dec 2019 (JR).

African Barred Owlet *Glaucidium capense*

One was heard calling at Notwane on 21 Oct 2019, well south of its expected range (HH).

Lesser Honeyguide *Indicator minor*

An adult was seen attempting to enter nest of Black-collared Barbet *Lybius torquatus* at Maun on 22 November 2020 (MM per MBF).

Greater Honeyguide *Indicator indicator*

In south-east Botswana, this species appears to have largely ceased the practice of guiding, but a guiding male was observed north of Molepolole on 8 Nov 2020 (CAB).

Crimson-breasted Shrike *Laniarius atriccineus*

One of the rare yellow morph was seen at Gaborone Dam on 1 March 2020 (BLB).

African Golden Oriole *Oriolus auratus*

One was north-west of Sojwe (2325B1) on 28 Mar 2020, south of expected range (CAB).

African Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone viridis*

Early date: one was seen near Artesia on 1 Oct 2020 (CAB).

Dusky Lark *Pinarocorys nigricans*

One was seen near Kang in 2322D1 on 21 Dec 2019 (JR). This record is at the edge of the expected range for this species.

Eastern Clapper Lark *Mirafra fasciolata*

Single birds seen at Gaborone Dam on 19 Aug 2020, 16 Nov and 28 Jan 2021 (CAB).

Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

Several thousand were seen between Serowe and Moiyabana on 2 Jan 2020 (CAB).

Greater Striped Swallow *Cecropis cucullata*

Five were seen near Kang in 2322D1 on 6 Jan 2020 (IG). This species is unexpected in the Kalahari.

Olive-tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum*

One was recorded near Kang in 2322D1 on 11 Dec 2019 (JR).

Green-capped Eremomela *Eremomela scotops*

At least three were seen at Drotzky's Camp, Shakawe on 14 Dec 2019 (JC). Small flocks were also reported from Kwedi Concession (1822D4) and Linyanti, in 1822D1, in mid-January 2020 (MB). Few records come in of this species.

Burnt-necked Eremomela *Eremomela usticollis*

Recorded between Kang and Hukuntsi in 2322C3 on 10 Dec 2019 (CAB). There are few records of this species from the Kalahari.

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*

One was seen in Mababe Village on 16 Dec (JR).

Red-billed Oxpecker *Buphagus erythrorhynchus*

Three were seen south of Kang in 2322D4 on 10 Dec 2019 (CAB). The Kalahari is outside of the expected range of this species.

White-backed Mousebird *Colius colius*

Small group seen between Sojwe and Dithopo on 28 March 2020 (CAB). This record is north of the expected range of this species.

Cape Wagtail *Motacilla capensis*

Reported from Hainaveld in 2022D4 on 1 Feb 2020 (LS).

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Some breeding records mainly from 2020 and early 2021

Compiled by Stephanie J. Tyler & Chris A. Brewster

Species	Date	Location	Nest site; nest contents	Obs.
White-faced Whistling Duck <i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>	31 May 2020	Gaborone Dam	Two sets of adults with juveniles	IW
Egyptian Goose <i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	28 July 2020	Sephatlhaphatla Dam, near Mosopa	Pair + three young ca. 3 weeks old	CAB
Egyptian Goose <i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	19 Aug 2020	Phakalane SP	Pair adults + 8 tiny goslings	CAB
Egyptian Goose <i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	16 Nov 2020	Gaborone Dam	Pair adults + 6 two week old young	CAB
Egyptian Goose <i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	17 Jan 2021	Thagale Dam	Pair adults + 4 ten day old young, also adult incubating on nest on tree	CAB
Egyptian Goose <i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	20 Jan 2021	Bokaa Dam	Pair adults + 3 ten day old young	CAB
Egyptian Goose <i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	28 Jan 2021	Gaborone Dam	Eight groups of pairs of adults with between 2 and 5 young, mostly less than two weeks old	CAB
Egyptian Goose <i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	9 Feb 2021	Kgoro Pan	Adult with four young ca. 2 weeks old	CAB
Egyptian Goose <i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	21 Feb 2021	Tswaing Pans in 2524B2	Pair + 9 four week old young, pair+ 5 young, four week old	CAB
South African Shelduck <i>Tadorna cana</i>	30 Jul 2020	Ramotswa SP	Pair adults + 2 ducklings, one week old	CAB
Hottentot Teal <i>Spatula hottentota</i>	18 Aug 2020	Phakalane SP	Pair adults + 6 well-grown young, 3 – 4 weeks old	CAB
Cape Teal <i>Anas capensis</i>	30 Jul 2020	Ramotswa SP	Pair adults + 7 young, three weeks old	CAB
Helmeted Guineafowl <i>Numida mealeagrif</i>	21 Feb 2021	Between Gasita and Selokolela	Pair adults + 4 tiny young	CAB
Orange River Francolin <i>Scleroptila gutteralis</i>	24 Feb 2021	Khutse G.R.	Pair adults + 5 young	IW
Crested Francolin <i>Dendroperdix sephaena</i>	14 Jul 2020	Crocodile Pools, Notwane	Pair adults + 4 young, circa 15 days old	CAB
Little Grebe <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	Late Jul 2020	Ghanzi S.P.	Adult on nest	MB
Little Grebe	27 Dec 2020	Gaborone Dam	Nest with one egg and one chick	IW
Little Grebe	19 Jan 2021	Ghanzi S.P.	Three active nests	MB
Little Grebe	24 Jan	Gampudi Dam,	Three pairs, one +1 tiny	CAB

	2021	near Kanye	young, one + 2 tiny young and one +2 two week old young	
Little Grebe	5 Feb 2021	Lobatse S.P.	Pair with four young, circa 2 weeks old	CAB
Little Grebe	12 Feb 2021	Near Maun	Active nest, adult incubating	KO
African Sacred Ibis <i>Threskiornis aithiopicus</i>	13 Dec 2020	Gaborone Dam	Adult feeding well-grown young	IW
Hadeda Ibis <i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>	5 Nov 2020	North of Molepolole	Adult incubating on nest 3.5 above ground in tree beside flooded pan	CAB
Dwarf Bittern <i>Ixobrychus sturmii</i>	16 Feb 2021	Near Maun	Nest with two chicks	BR per MBF
White-breasted Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax lucidus</i>	21 June 2020	Thagale Dam	5 active nests with chicks; 3 active nests there, with adults incubating on 16 Jul	IW CAB
White-breasted Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax lucidus</i>	5 Jul 2020	Taueshele Dam, near Mosopa	13 active nests with young, mostly well-grown	CAB
White-breasted Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax lucidus</i>	9 Jul 2020	Bokaa Dam	2 active nests, adults incubating	CAB
White-backed Vulture <i>Gyps africanus</i>	21 May 2020	Near Selokolela	Adult incubating on nest at top of <i>Acacia erioloba</i> . Small young on 14 Sept 2020	CAB
Black-chested Snake Eagle <i>Circaetus pectoralis</i>	24 Feb 2021	Khutse G.R.	Adult with begging young	IW
Wahlberg's Eagle <i>Hieraaetus wahlbergi</i>	1 Jan 2021	West of Artesia	Nest with fully feathered young being fed by adult at nest	CAB
Gabar Goshawk <i>Melierax gabar</i>	8 Sept 2020	Savuti Camp	Nest with two large young	HH, GH
Gabar Goshawk <i>Micronisus gabar</i>	24 Feb 2021	Khutse G.R.	Adult with begging young	IW
Striped Crane <i>Aenigmamatolimnasmarginalis</i>	11 Feb 2021	Near Maun	Nest with 4 eggs	MM per MBF
Allen's Gallinule <i>Porphyrio alleni</i>	30 Jan 2021	Near Maun	Active nest, adult incubating	GR
Common Moorhen <i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	15 Aug 2020	Broadhurst Ponds	Pair adults + 3 small young	IW
Lesser Moorhen <i>Paragallinula angulata</i>	12 Feb 2021	Near Maun	Nest with adult incubating	KO
Spotted Thick-knee <i>Burhinus capensis</i>	16 Nov 2020	Gaborone, near State House	Pair adults + chick	Per IW
Blacksmith Lapwing <i>Vanellus armatus</i>	16 Nov 2020	Gaborone Dam	Pair adults + 2 five day old young	CAB
Blacksmith Lapwing	Late Jan 2021	Tshootsha Pan, Ghanzi District	Nest with four eggs	MB

Blacksmith Lapwing	24 Feb 2021	Khutse G.R.	Pair adults + 3 chicks	IW
Crowned Lapwing <i>Vanellus coronatus</i>	8 Nov 2020	Near Molepolole	Pair adults + 2 tiny young	CAB
Crowned Lapwing	16 Nov 2020	Gaborone Dam	Pair adults + 1 five day old young	CAB
African Jacana <i>Actophilornis africanus</i>	20 Jan 2021	Bokaa Dam	Adult with four young circa 7 – 10 days old	CAB
Temminck's Courser <i>Cursorius temminckii</i>	14 Sept 2020	Near Sesung in 2425C3	Pair adults + 1 one week old young	CAB
Temminck's Courser	26 Nov 2020	Lake Xau	Nest, scrape on ground, with 1 egg	CAB
Double-banded Courser <i>Rhinoptilus africanus</i>	23 May 2020	Sita Pan	Nest, scrape on ground, adult incubating one egg	IW
Double-banded Courser	21 Nov 2020	Sita Pan	Pair adults + 1 tiny young	CAB
Collared Pratincole <i>Glareola pratincola</i>	22 Nov 2020	Khwai	Circa 6 nests, with just hatched young	MGG, DG
Cape Turtle Dove <i>Streptopelia capicola</i>	16 Sept 2020	Crocodile Pools, Notwane	Active nest, adult incubating	CAB
Burchell's Coucal <i>Centropus burchellii</i>	27 Dec 2020	Gaborone Game Reserve	Nest in reeds with chicks	IW
Diederik Cuckoo <i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i> and Cape Sparrow <i>Passer melanurus</i>	11 Feb 2021	Game City, Gaborone	One just fledged young being fed by Cape Sparrow	CAB
Diederik Cuckoo <i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i>	12 Feb 2021	Crocodile Pools, Notwane	One unfledged young found on ground, suspected host Southern Masked Weaver <i>Ploceus velatus</i>	CAB
Red-chested Cuckoo <i>Cuculus solitaries</i>	10 Feb 2021	Crocodile Pools, Notwane	Recently fledged young, suspected host White-throated Robin-chat <i>Cossypha humeralis</i>	CAB
Verraux's Eagle-Owl <i>Bubo lacteus</i>	Mid-Dec 2020	Maun	Recently fledged young with adults	MM per MBF
Rufous-cheeked Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus rufigena</i>	16 Nov 2020	Ruretse	Nest, scrape on ground, with 2 eggs	IN-S
Crowned Hornbill <i>Tockus alboterminatus</i>	Dec 2020 Jan 21	Lesoma Valley near Kasane	A nest with a male Crowned Hornbill produced 3 juveniles (see article by LT)	LT
African Hoopoe <i>Upupa Africana</i>	19 Oct 2020	Crocodile Pools	Two fledged young, begging from and being fed by adults	CAB
Green Wood-hoopoe <i>Phoeniculus purpureus</i>	21 June 2020	Gaborone Game Reserve	Fledged young being fed by adults	IW
Grey-headed Bushshrike <i>Malaconotus blanchoti</i>	22 Oct 2020	Crocodile Pools, Notwane	Adult incubating on nest in tangle of creepers at top of	CAB

			tree, 5 metres above ground	
Black-headed Oriole <i>Oriolus larvatus</i>	14 Nov 2020	Crocodile Pools, Notwane	Nest with 2 young	CAB
Cape Crow <i>Corvus capensis</i>	8 Oct 2020	South of Kanye	Adult incubating on nest 3 metres above ground	CAB
Chestnut-backed Sparrow- Lark <i>Eremopterix leucotis</i>	7 Mar 2021	Near Potsane Dam in 2425D4	Nest with 2 eggs on bare ground in borrow pit	IW
African Red-eyed Bulbul <i>Pycnonotos nigricans</i>	15 Nov 2020	Crocodile Pools, Notwane	Adult incubating in nest	CAB
Long-billed Crombec <i>Sylvietta rufescens</i>	17 Oct 2020	Gaborone Dam	Nest with 3 eggs	IW
Zitting Cisticola <i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	8 Jan 2021	Gaborone Dam	Adult feeding chicks	IW
Zitting Cisticola	10 Jan 2021	Lefubitsa Pans in 2326C4	Adults carrying food for chicks and a nest under construction	CAB
Arrow-marked Babbler <i>Turdoides jardineii</i>	5 Feb 2019	Kasane	Adult on nest in <i>Hyphaene</i> palm	LF
Wattled Starling <i>Creatophora cinera</i>	27 Dec 2020	Gaborone Game Reserve	Adult feeding two fledged young	IW
White-browed Scrub Robin <i>Cercotrichas leucophrys</i>	15 Oct 2020	Hatsalatladi	Nest with 3 eggs in fork of branch just above ground	CAB
Marico Flycatcher <i>Melaenornis mariquensis</i>	4 Jul 2020	Kasane Seep	Recently fledged juvenile	LF
Thick-billed Weaver <i>Amblyospiza albifrons</i>	5 Feb 2021	Lobatse S.P.	Adult feeding begging fledged young – see note on page ?	CAB
Cuckoo Finch <i>Anomalospiza imberbis</i>	31 Jan 2021	Chobe Farms, Kasane	Two juveniles wing-flicking and calling	LF
Cape Wagtail <i>Motacilla capensis</i>	17 Oct 2020	Gaborone Dam	Nest with 3 eggs	IW
African Pipit <i>Anthus cinnamomeus</i>	31 Dec 2020	Gaborone Dam	Adult feeding young that had recently left nest	IW

Observers: BLB BirdLife Botswana; BR Brent Reed; CAB Chris Brewster; DG Daphne Goldsworthy; GR Grant Rred; GH Geraldine Hester; HH Harold Hester; KO Ken Oake; LF Lyn Francey; LT Linda Taylor; MG Modiegi Bakane; MGG Mike Goldsworthy; MM Mark Muller; MBF Maun Bird Forum; IN-S Ian Nuttall-Smith; IW Ian White..

If you find any evidence of breeding activity of any species in Botswana, then please do send details to BirdLife Botswana.

In the African Bird Club Bulletin there is a fascinating note about a Little Bee-eater *Merops pusillus* feeding not one but two two Greater Honeyguide *Indicator indicator* fledglings on 27 November 2010 at Savuti Camp in the Linyanti Concession. See Bryan K.M. & Jamie, G.A. 2019. *ABC Bulletin* 26 (1): 101-102.

BirdLife International – new hope for vultures?

To see these majestic raptors soar above us, you would be forgiven for thinking nothing could harm them – but recent history has shattered that illusion. The well-documented Asian vulture crisis of the 1990s – which saw the Indian subcontinent’s populations plummet from abundance to the edge of extinction in the space of a decade – should have been a wake-up call to the world on the catastrophic impact poisoning can have on these ecologically important birds. But as we entered 2020, we still lacked the robust intergovernmental policy required to safeguard these scavengers. All this began to change at a critical migratory species summit last February.

While many vulture poisoning incidents are intentional, such as that which claimed the lives of large numbers of Hooded Vultures in Guinea-Bissau earlier this year, the poisoning incidents that saw Asian vulture numbers drop by 99% were purely accidental. The cause was diclofenac – a common non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) used in livestock – which is lethal to vultures that feed on the bodies of cattle that die soon after being dosed. The result is that just one contaminated carcass can wipe out an entire flock of vultures.

BirdLife and its partners in South Asia, including the Bombay Natural History Society and Bird Conservation Nepal (BirdLife in India and Nepal respectively), supported by the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) and all working under the Saving Asia’s Vultures from Extinction (SAVE) consortium, have managed to slow and even halt those declines, bringing about increases in certain areas like Nepal where decisive sustained actions have been taken, most notably getting veterinary diclofenac effectively banned and local vets and communities behind these measures through ‘Vulture Safe Zone’ initiatives and activities. However, the drug – and other NSAIDs which are definitely or potentially harmful to vultures – are still being widely used elsewhere in the world, putting many vultures in peril and compromising the good work being performed in other vulture range states.

For several years, BirdLife International has been pushing for a strong intergovernmental policy on the use of veterinary NSAIDs. And in February this year, a resolution adopted by the thirteenth Conference of Parties to the **Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species** (CMS COP13) covered their use and regulation as never before, offering new hope for African-Eurasian vultures.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS ON BIRDS OF RELEVANCE TO BOTSWANA

Bird Records from the little-known region of south-east Angola, 2015-18. Mills, M.S.L., Booyesen, M, & Boyes, R.S. 2020. *African Bird Club Bulletin* 27(1):63-79.

Abstract

The status and distribution of the birds of Angola is relatively poorly known, especially for the south-eastern quarter of the country from where there were fewer than 2,000 bird records. Here we report on a database of 15,939 bird records collected by the National Geographic Okavango Wilderness Project between May 2015 and August 2018, from land and water, in the provinces of Cuando Cubango, Bie´ and south-west Moxico. The raw field data were scrutinised and records removed if there was uncertainty, lack of corroborating evidence or data entry errors. Additionally, relative abundance estimates of bird species from south-west Moxico province are provided based on 71 15-species lists compiled in April 2017. A total of 412 species were recorded in the study area, including one species new to the country (Southern Brown-throated Weaver *Ploceus xanthopterus*), two species recorded just once before (**Slaty Egret** *Egretta vinaceigula* and South African Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon spilodera*) and a further 108 new distributional records composed of new provincial records for 98 species and range extensions for another ten species. The ten most ubiquitous birds in south-west Moxico are all widespread savannah/woodland birds, although several miombo woodland specialists were among the 20 most frequently recorded species, demonstrating a strong component of these biome-restricted taxa.

Belly-wetting in African Skimmers *Rynchops flavirostris*: thermoregulation or a distraction display. Englebrect, D. 2020. *African Bird Club Bulletin* 27: 219-224.

Most authors have suggested that belly-wetting in African Skimmers is to cool down eggs or chicks at the nest but Derek Englebrect argues that it could be a form of distraction display.

Are vultures spreaders of microbes that put human health at risk? A paper submitted to *Ibis* September 2020. Wiley for phys.org.

A new analysis published in *IBIS* examines whether bacteria, viruses, and other microorganisms that are present in wild vultures cause disease in the birds, and whether vultures play a role in spreading or preventing infectious diseases to humans and other animal species.

The analysis examined results from published studies and found that microorganisms, which cause disease in humans, can be found in vultures with some bacterial pathogens showing multi-antibiotic resistance. In some cases, these microorganisms cause health alterations of variable degree in different vulture species, but there was no clear evidence that vultures play a role spreading pathogens to humans and other species. On the contrary, they may actually help to prevent the spread of infectious diseases when they

consume and remove decomposing carcasses from the environment. "Further research should evaluate the potential of vultures in disease regulation to avoid misconceptions and to promote scientific evidence of the ecosystem service they provide. This will help to conserve this globally threatened avian group and maintain the contributions they provide to people," said lead author Pablo Plaza, of INIBIOMA-CONICET-National University of Comahue, in Argentina.

A conservation criminology-based desk assessment of vulture poisoning in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area

Gore, M.L., Hübshle, A., Botha, André.J., Coverdale, B.M., Garbett, R., Harrell, R.M., Krueger, S., Mullinax, J.M., Olson, L.J., Ottinger, M.A., Robinson, H.S., Shaffer, L.J., Thompson, L.J., van den Heever, L., Bowerman, W., 2020., *Global Ecology and Conservation* doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gecco.2020.e01076>.

Abstract

Vulture declines are uniquely problematic for socioecological systems because they are nature's most important scavengers. Intentional and unintentional poisoning, human-wildlife conflict, energy infrastructure, belief-based use, and illegal hunting activities remain threats to vulture populations across Africa. Conservation stakeholders have identified evidence that a number of vulture species in particular ecosystems are being systematically targeted by poisoning with potentially significant effects on human, wildlife and ecosystem health.

We explored the extent to which an interdisciplinary expert-team approach linking conservation and criminology could help inform efforts to prevent poisoning of Africa's vultures. We used the case of illegal vulture poisoning and conservation in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area (GLTFCA), a known poisoning site, as an exemplar. We used an interdisciplinary framework, conservation criminology, to guide a desk assessment of how the local environment may create opportunities for illegal poisoning. Our assessment was conducted as a science team and included multiple iterations and structured discourse. The assessment identifies different elements of vulture poisoning and the opportunity factors that can both underlie the problem and inform prevention strategies and tactics. We discuss controlling tools and weapons, extending local guardianship, denying benefits, reducing frustration and stress, and assisting compliance to help prevent illegal poisoning. Results provide insights into harm prevention using evidence-based theory and illustrate the positive potential of interdisciplinary team science for vulture conservation. With additional application, monitoring and evaluation, strategies and tactics explored in this desk assessment may be revised and implemented and portend other benefits for vulture conservation beyond poisoning; the spread of beneficial influence could be a welcome force multiplier for this important scavenger guild.

The relative contribution of camera trap technology and citizen science for estimating survival of an endangered African vulture.
 Santangeli, A., Pakanen, V-M., Boorman, M., Kolberg, H. & Sanz-Aguila, A. 2020.
Biological Conservation 246: 108593.

Abstract

Technological advances such as camera traps, and citizen science, coupled with advanced quantitative approaches, can help fill existing knowledge gaps and aid effective conservation. The authors combine citizen and camera trap observations to estimate survival of the Endangered lappet-faced vulture, assess the relative contribution of data from camera traps and citizens, as well as impact of loss of individual marks (wing tags), on survival estimates. They used data from 762 lappet-faced vultures wing tagged as nestlings during 2006–2017 in western Namibia. Observations of wing tagged individuals were provided by citizens or via camera traps. They formulated a multievent capture-mark-recapture model to estimate survival while accounting for probabilities of resighting by citizens and/or camera traps, recovery of dead individuals, and loss of the wing tag.

Survival was relatively high for juveniles (0.79), and increased with age to 0.95. Citizen observations of live and dead birds were low in number. However, when combined with camera trap resightings of live individuals, citizen observations increased the precision of survival estimates of birds older than one year compared to using data from either sources separately. Wing tag loss was high after 5–6 years of tag age. If neglected, tag loss can result in severe underestimation of survival of the older age classes.

Overall, it was shown that filling ecological knowledge gaps is possible through the efficient use of data provided by different sources, and by applying state-of-the-art approaches that minimise potential biases, such as those due to tag loss.

In *Ostrich* 91 (3) 2020 there are several papers of interest. These include:

Ranging behaviour of Long-crested Eagles *Lophaetus occipitalis* in human-modified landscapes of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa by Machawe I Maphalala , Ara Monadjem , Keith L Bildstein , Shane McPherson , Hoffman, B. * Downs, C.T. Pages: 221-227 |DOI:10.2989/00306525.2020.1770888

On a collision course? The large diversity of birds killed by wind turbines in South Africa by V Perold , S Ralston-Paton & P Ryan
 Pages: 228-239 | DOI: 10.2989/00306525.2020.1770889

Variation in monthly sizes of home-ranges of Hooded Vultures *Necrosyrtes monachus* in western, eastern and southern Africa
 Thompson, L.J., Barber, D.R., Bechard, M.J., Botha, A.J., Wolter, K., Naser, W., Buechley, E.R., Reading, R., Garbett, R.A., Hancock, P., Maude, G., Virani. M.Z., Thomsett, M., Lee, H., Ogada, D., Barlow, C.R. & Bildstein, K.L. 2020. doi: 10.1111/ibi.12836

Tracking studies are often used to inform conservation plans and actions. However, species have frequently only been tracked in one or a few localities, whereas space use can be remarkably flexible, especially in long-lived species with advanced learning abilities.

We assessed variability in space use in the Critically Endangered Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus* by pooling movement data from three populations across the species' sub-Saharan range (in South Africa, Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, The Gambia and Mozambique). We estimated minimum convex polygons and kernel density estimators (KDEs) and compared monthly home range sizes between breeding and non-breeding seasons, age-classes and subspecies, accounting for uneven sampling within groups.

Mean (\pm sd) monthly home range sizes (95% KDEs) for adult Hooded Vultures from southern (12 453 \pm 21 188 km², n = 82) and eastern Africa (3735 \pm 3652 km², n = 24) were 103 and 31 times larger than those of conspecifics from western Africa (121 \pm 98 km², n = 48). This may relate partly to subspecific differences, and individuals with small Home ranges in western Africa and Ethiopia were trapped in urban environments. Regional variation in space use by Hooded Vultures may be linked to flexibility in feeding behaviour (degree of commensalism) which may arise in response to resource availability and persecution in different areas. Age-class also affected monthly home-range sizes, with immature birds generally having larger monthly home-range size estimates than adults. Our results highlight the flexibility of Hooded Vultures in terms of their home range sizes and suggest that home-range sizes differ between populations and individuals, depending on the extent of human commensalism. Our results also reaffirm the importance of international co-operation in conservation efforts aimed at protecting this wide ranging, non-migratory species.



Juv Cuckoo Finch
Photo: Lyn Francey

Known and potential distributions of the African *Ciconia microscelis* and Asian *C. episcopus* Woollyneck Storks

Gulah, J., Gopi, K. S. Gopi Sundar, Dean, W.R.J.2020. (IUCN Stork, Ibis and Spoonbill Specialist Group) SIS Conservation 2

Abstract

Rangewide distribution patterns and environmental requirements of the African *Ciconia microscelis* and Asian *C. episcopus* Woollyneck Storks are poorly understood, which has confounded the ability to develop empirical conservation status assessments for either species. We collated thousands of records for each species to create the first objective distribution maps, and used these data to model environmental suitability at the continental and regional scales in Africa and Asia with the machinelearning program MaxEnt.

We found the African Woollyneck to be fairly widespread in southern and East Africa but its distribution in West Africa was fragmented. The Asian Woollyneck had a widespread distribution in south Asia, an isolated population segment in Cambodia and Vietnam, and was sparsely distributed on the south-east Asian islands.

Predictions of suitable distributions and responses to climate variables in the MaxEnt models were scale dependent for both species. Annual and seasonal precipitation was most important in Africa, and the most influential variables differed across Asian models. Field studies testing these findings will bolster the knowledge of ecological requirements, as well as help determine how responses to environmental variation influence population dynamics. While our findings indicate neither species are of immediate conservation concern, there is evidence of population declines and range fragmentation and contractions in some regions. Understanding factors that have caused these changes is especially important in the face of ongoing environmental change on both continents.

It's time for the Saddle-billed Stork to be on our radar

Gula, J. 2020. Opinion SIS Conservation 2.

Jonah Gula argues that because Saddle-billed Stork is considered of Least Concern in the IUCN threat categories and is assumed to be common with a widespread distribution, then this diverts research attention and resources to species in higher IUCN categories suggestive of a greater level of threat. The Saddlebill—and many other large African waterbirds, suffer from this very scenario and have thus fallen by the wayside.

The Saddlebill is not as widespread and contiguous as has been assumed, and small peripheral populations are clearly sensitive to environmental changes. Similar responses to change are unclear in the core of the range, which is from Uganda and southern Kenya to western Zambia, northern Botswana and north-eastern South Africa. Additionally, South Sudan likely still holds a significant population: in 1981, the last survey of the Sudd alone found approximately 4,000 (Howell *et al.* 1988). Occurrence and status in the Congo region remains mysterious, as it is unclear if the lack of recent records in comparison to historic records indicates population declines or a lack of recent ornithological coverage due to civil conflicts.

The first range-wide assessment of Saddle-billed Stork *Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis* distribution

Gula, J., Weckerly, F. & GOPI Sundar, K.S. 2019. *Ostrich* 90(4): 347–357.

Summary

The Saddle-billed Stork *Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis* exemplifies a case in conservation research in which a species is assessed as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List and the resulting consideration of low conservation priority has precluded proper scientific study. As a first step in understanding this stork's true status, we collated all available data to develop a distribution map and then investigated range-wide patterns of occurrence. The updated map greatly improves on past knowledge of the stork's distribution and helps to identify regions where range contractions have occurred, particularly in Central Africa and parts of West Africa. We found that the stork's distribution closely overlaps with protected areas and that there has been an overall increase in surface water (largely manmade water bodies)—a proxy for habitat—across the species' extent of occurrence in recent decades. While this research represents a valuable contribution to our understanding of the Saddle-billed Stork, it also highlights the need for unbiased empirical data, especially from areas that are poorly surveyed, for developing a science-based conservation status assessment.

Urban waste no replacement for natural foods—Marabou storks in Botswana. R. J. Francis, R. T. Kingsford, M. Murray-Hudson & K. J. Brandis 2021. *Journal of Urban Ecology* 1-10. Doi:10.1093/jue/juab003.

Abstract

We compared diets of marabou storks *Leptoptilos crumenifer* foraging from urban landfills and natural areas in northern Botswana using stable isotope analyses and inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry on moulted feathers. There were significant differences in the diet of marabous foraging from natural areas compared to urban waste sites, reflected by lower $\delta^{13}C$ and less enriched $\delta^{15}N$ concentrations in those feeding at landfills, suggesting a shift in trophic niche. Feathers from birds foraging at landfills also had significantly higher concentrations of chromium, lead, nickel, and zinc and lower levels of cadmium and potassium than feathers sampled from natural areas. We also analysed marabou regurgitant (42 kg, naturally expelled indigestible food resources) from the Kasane landfill site. More than half was plastic, with single regurgitants weighing up to 125 g. Urban waste stored in open air landfills is altering some marabou diets, affecting their natural trophic niche, resulting in the consumption (and regurgitation) of large amounts of plastic, and exposing marabou to potentially chronic levels of trace metals. Despite the marabou's apparent resilience to this behavioural shift, it could have long-term effects on the population of the marabou stork, particularly considering Botswana has some of the few regular marabou breeding colonies in southern Africa.



Black Tern
Photo: Ian White

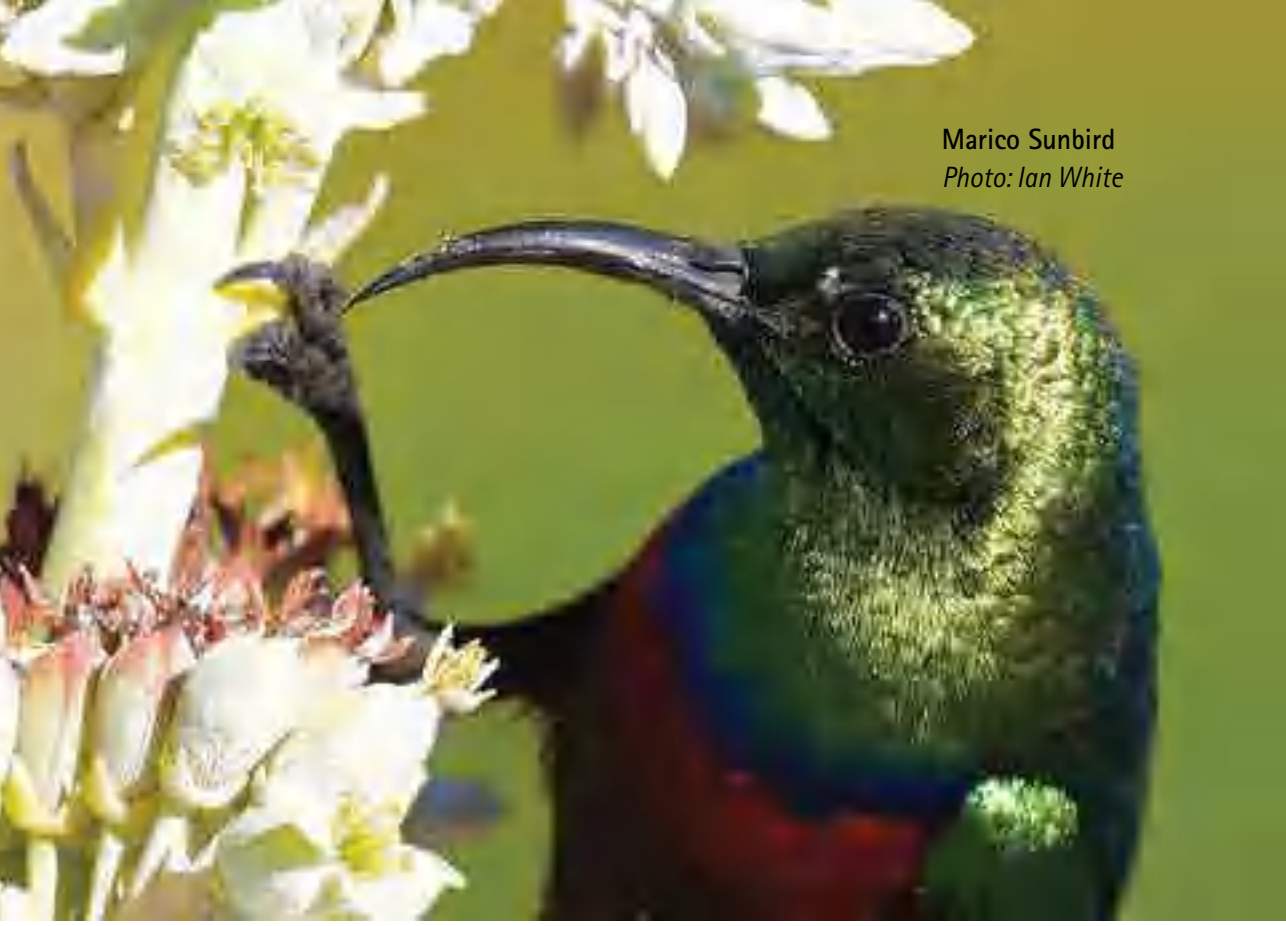


Ayres' Hawk-Eagle
Photo: Ian White

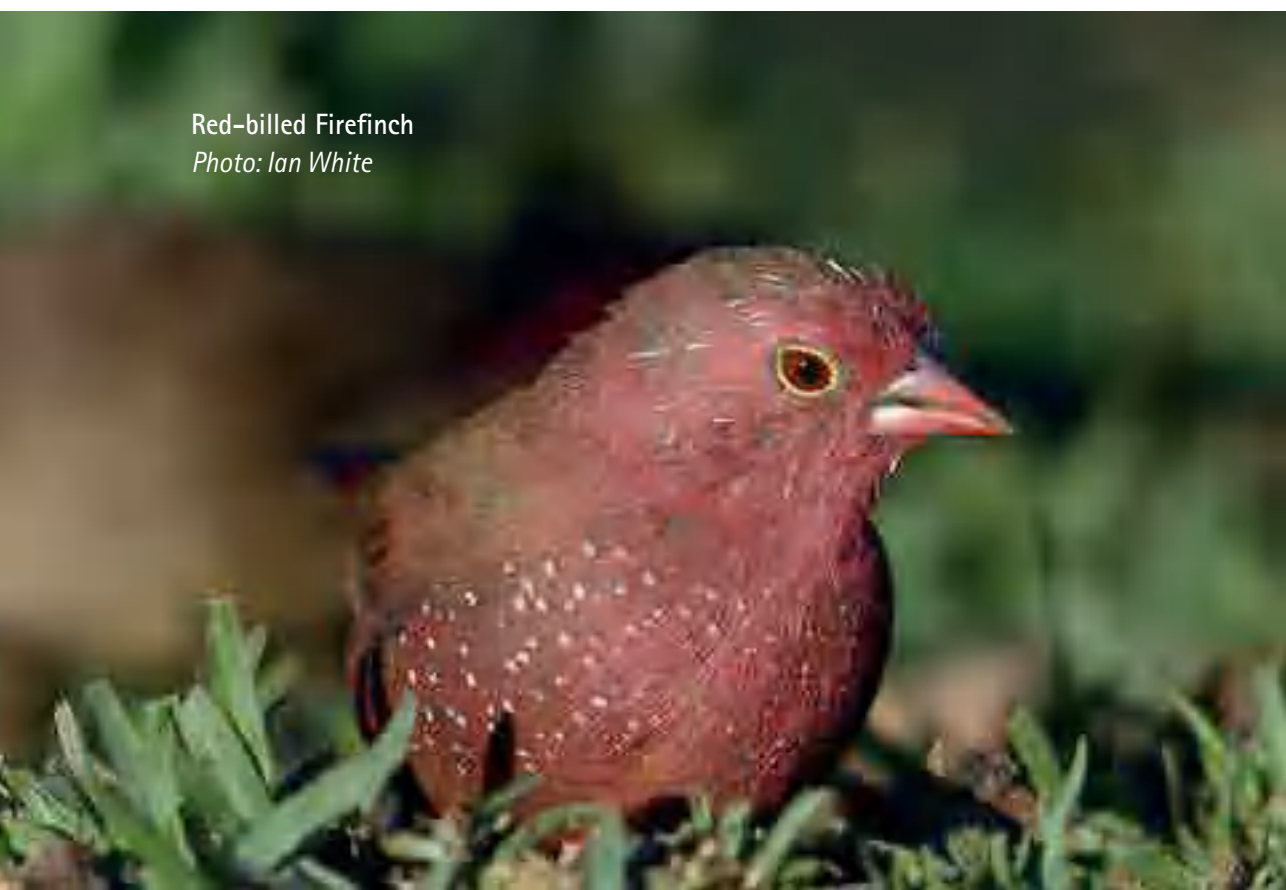


Kelp Gull
Photo: Ian White

Marico Sunbird
Photo: Ian White



Red-billed Firefinch
Photo: Ian White





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Yellow-billed Hornbill
Photo: Pete Hancock

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