

Welcome to an Autumn issue

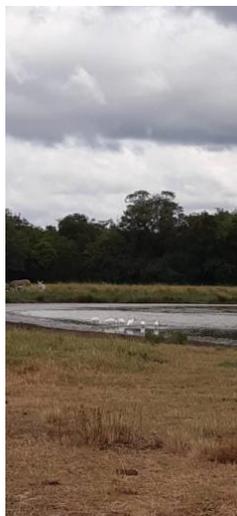
Newsletter of BirdLife Botswana – April 2023



Familiar Chat

Our main article in this edition is to celebrate / commiserate the departure of Virat, our BirdLife Director.

The photos below show a somewhat blustery day which was Sunday 5th February – the monthly birdwalk.



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This walk was to the waterbody just South of the Vulture colony at Oodi. You can see the hill – Manyelong, in one of the photos above where to 'famous' colony of Vultures nest. The local rubbish dump proved to be a good stopover for storks of various description including Marabou and Abdim's.

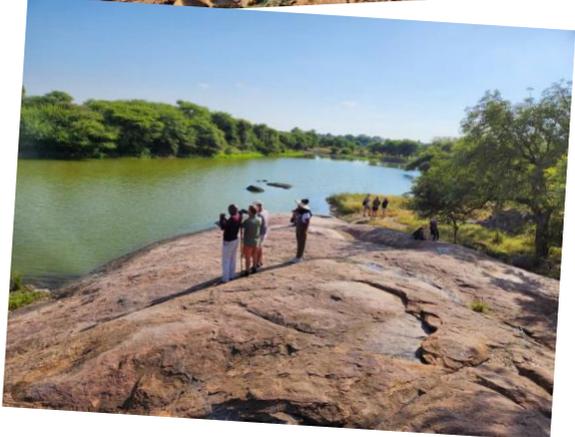
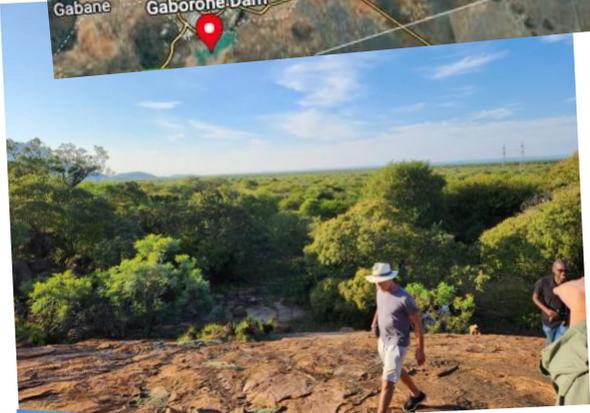
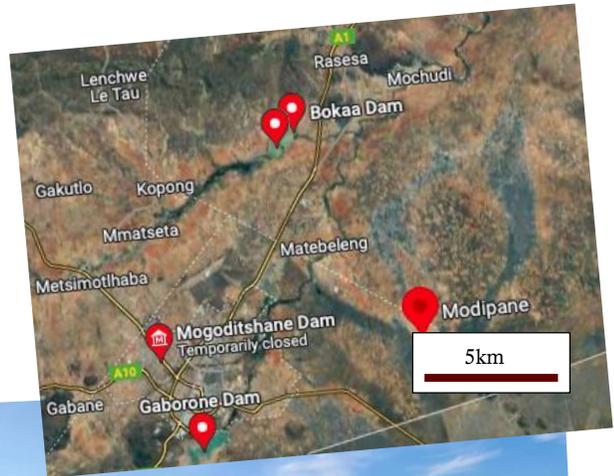


Queries etc about this edition can be sent to Peter D'Arcy on [peterdarcybotswana@gmail](mailto:peterdarcybotswana@gmail.com)

APRIL '23 MODIPANE WALK

'As autumn draws in, the migrants are preparing to leave'. Listed are the birds spotted on this visit, plus a few more that Chris Brewster added after others had departed. The info is taken from the SABAP 2 project database. Anyone can access it. Modipane is in Quadrat 2435_2605. **(Which birds on this list are our summer visitors and ones we would not expect to see were the walk to have been a month or two later?)**

6	Grebe	Little
61	Egret	Western Cattle
84	Ibis	Hadada
97	Teal	Red-billed
100	Duck	White-faced Whistling
114	Falcon	Lanner
130	Kite	Black-winged
146	Eagle	Black-chested Snake
185	Spurfowl	Swainson's
212	Coot	Red-knobbed
238	Plover	Three-banded
245	Lapwing	Blacksmith
258	Sandpiper	Common
264	Sandpiper	Wood
311	Pigeon	Speckled
316	Dove	Cape Turtle
317	Dove	Laughing
318	Dove	Namaqua
339	Go-away-bird	Grey
365	Owlet	Pearl-spotted
385	Swift	Little
387	Swift	African Palm
392	Mousebird	Red-faced
402	Kingfisher	Brown-hooded
405	Bee-eater	Blue-cheeked
413	Roller	Lilac-breasted
418	Hoopoe	African
421	Scimitarbill	Common
424	Hornbill	African Grey
432	Barbet	Acacia Pied
447	Woodpecker	Golden-tailed



More bird species on the next page.....



493	Swallow	Barn
502	Swallow	Greater Striped
506	Martin	Rock
517	Drongo	Fork-tailed
521	Oriole	Black-headed
522	Crow	Pied
544	Bulbul	African Red-eyed
557	Thrush	Groundscraper
582	Robin-Chat	White-throated
588	Scrub Robin	White-browed
601	Eremomela	Burnt-necked
621	Crombec	Long-billed
628	Camaroptera	Grey-backed
654	Flycatcher	Spotted
673	Batis	Chin-spot
708	Shrike	Red-backed
711	Shrike	Crimson-breasted
730	Shrike	Southern White-crowned
734	Myna	Common
737	Starling	Cape
748	Oxpecker	Red-billed
763	Sunbird	White-bellied
780	Sparrow-Weaver	White-browed
784	Sparrow	House
837	Firefinch	Red-billed
839	Waxbill	Blue
841	Waxbill	Black-faced
852	Whydah	Long-tailed Paradise

What a load of guano: 5 facts you might not know about bird poop

To most people, bird poop is just something they scrape off the windshield of their cars, but it's more important than you may think. In fact, droppings were once a very important commodity in the United States. Buying and selling bird poop is not as featherbrained as it may seem either. This stinky substance, referred to as bird guano, was sailed around the world during the 19th century to be sold as the principal agricultural fertilizer in the United States.

1. Plants love guano. It was an important agricultural fertilizer in the 19th century.
2. Want the best guano? Peru, because of the massive population of seabirds along its coast
3. The guano trade was dangerous: importing it on ships from other parts of the world was treacherous, as was the harvesting of it due to the high concentration of ammonia
4. Guano made agriculture production boom before ammonia was manufactured by the Haber process.
5. There is a legislative act for guano in some countries – strict controls on who, how and what can be imported.

<https://americanhistory.si.edu/blog/what-load-guano-5-facts-you-didnt-know-about-bird-poop>

PASSERINE PHOTOS SHARED ON OUR BIRDLIFE WHATSAPP GROUP



Violet-backed Starling
Yellow-crowned Bishop



Burnt-necked Eremomela
Red-billed Firefinch
Bar-throated Apalis
Monotonous Lark
Lark-like Bunting



INTERVIEW WITH MOTSHEREGANYI VIRAT KOOTSOITSE

- Outgoing BLB Director

Virat, whom we mostly know as our BirdLife Director has within the last month decided to set a new course for himself and will be leaving our organization after 14 years. What has he been doing all these years, where is he going and where did he come from?

Virat has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Biology (Ecology) and Environmental Management from the University of Botswana and a Post Graduate Diploma in Education from the same University. Some years later he attained an MSc in Strategic Management from the University of Derby, UK, as a correspondence student. To enhance his professional service he has also studied several short courses including project management, HR management, Advocacy, EIA, and GIS.

Before he joined BLB he worked for the Department of Wildlife and National Parks initially as a Park Manager in Moremi Game Reserve and later he was transferred to Fisheries Division as a Scientific Officer in Maun. “I then worked as an ecotourism officer with the Botswana Tourism Organization in Kasane”.

“Since joining BirdLife Botswana in 2009, I have been working on different conservation projects as the project manager until I was promoted to the current post of the organisation’s Director” he said.

Among others, Virat worked on conservation projects while a Project Manager that included an EU/ RSPB funded project

(Instituting Effective Monitoring Of Protected Areas (Important Bird Areas) As A Contribution To Reducing The Rate Of Biodiversity Loss In Africa), a GEF funded project *(Strategic Partnerships to Improve the Financial and Operational Sustainability of Protected Areas)* and another GEF funded project *(Using SLM to improve the integrity of the Makgadikgadi ecosystem and to secure the livelihoods of rangeland-dependent communities)*.

One of the greatest achievements from these projects is the establishment of flamingo sanctuary in the Southern Sua pan as a protected area. This flamingo sanctuary is an important national and global site especially for the safe breeding of globally threatened Lesser Flamingos. Initially the breeding sites of the Lesser Flamingo in the Southern Sua Pan was open access and just protected by their remoteness, but in recognition of the crucial role they play in the long-term survival of the species, Government, working with BirdLife Botswana gazetted this flamingo sanctuary to provide a formal protection of the area.



Darnaway – Farm Feb 2023 – Weekend Camp

to cover various areas under BLB programs. As the Director of BirdLife, I was assigned with leading and ensuring successful implementation of our organisation’s projects and programs. What I enjoyed most was the cooperation, support and guidance that the BLB board offered me. I also enjoyed the cordial relationship we had with various donor agencies and the government ministries, especially the Ministry of Environment and Tourism”.



“When I joined BirdLife Botswana I was young, but with grooming from many people including Dr Kabelo Senyatso (previous BLB Director), Harold Hester and Ian White (former and current Chairpersons on the BLB Board), either directly or indirectly, I learnt not only how NGOs works but also the importance of patience and commitment in any set up. I am happy to have been associated with BLB as it’s one of, if not the most important conservation NGOs in Botswana. I enjoyed working with passionate birders from BirdLife Botswana and the BirdLife network globally.”

Virat comes from Serowe and had an interest in the natural world from a young age. He has a 13 year old daughter who also seems to be taking an interest in the natural environment.

Virat is going to spend three years in the Phillipines doing a doctorate. The world is yet his oyster. He has already turned down a couple of high paying and prestigious jobs with the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) abroad. Surely he will only be more valueable with a Doctorate under his belt as well? Well done Virat.



Go well!



Darnaway – Farm Feb 2023 – Weekend Camp

‘It is now cast in stone; the next camp will take place at Darnaway Farm on the Limpopo River from 17 to 19 February. This is a camp not to be missed as we have been there many times and have had many adventures. It is a beautiful site under large Ana trees (*Faidherbia albida*), with a shower and flush toilet, overlooking the river. It is entirely suitable for soft campers. We will have to make a nominal payment, to be advised, for these facilities. You should bring your own drinking water or take a chance on water from the river. It is about a two and a half hour drive to the farm on tar, then another half hour on dirt to the campsite. You will need a four-wheel drive vehicle to negotiate soft sand. Obviously you need to bring your own tent, camping equipment, food, drinks and binoculars.



On occasion we have followed a honeyguide which has led us to honey, on another we saw a Pels Fishing Owl and chick. Some of you may have read stories by Rudyard Kipling, writing about the “great, green, greasy Limpopo” and “How the elephant got his trunk” and “How the leopard got his spots.” Possibly Rudyard was on one of our first camps to the Limpopo in 1902 when he wrote those stories!! I think I remember him.

We will probably leave at 14:00 on Friday afternoon the 17th from Sebele car park, but this will be confirmed. In the meantime all or me accordingly. We have

those interested are to advise Ian White invited several young, old-time and former members of BLB, who no longer live in Botswana, to join us on a nostalgic camp to Darnaway. It may be a little too far for those who live in the UK and USA to come for the weekend, but you never know. (Harold Hester)

The trip was a resounding success with nearly 100 species spotted over the weekend:



50	Cormorant	Reed	154	Buzzard	Common	317	Dove	Laughing
54	Heron	Grey	158	Sparrowhawk	Little	318	Dove	Namaqua
63	Heron	Striated	161		Shikra	321	Dove	Emerald-spotted Wood
66	Bittern	Dwarf	171	Harrier-Hawk	African	327	Parrot	Meyer's
72		Hamerkop	174	Francolin	Crested	339	Go-away-bird	Grey
76	Stork	Yellow-billed	183	Spurfowl	Natal	347	Cuckoo	Levillant's
80	Stork	White	245	Lapwing	Blacksmith	348	Cuckoo	Jacobin
84	Ibis	Hadada	247	Lapwing	African Wattled	351	Cuckoo	Klaas's
89	Goose	Egyptian	258	Sandpiper	Common	363	Owl	African Scops
107	Vulture	White-backed	274	Thick-knee	Water	365	Owlet	Pearl-spotted
145	Eagle	Brown Snake	314	Dove	Red-eyed	392	Mousebird	Red-faced
149	Eagle	African Fish	316	Dove	Cape Turtle	394	Kingfisher	Pied

397	Kingfisher	Malachite	712	Puffback	Black-backed	719	Bushshrike	Orange-breasted
399	Kingfisher	Woodland	714	Tchagra	Brown-crowned	723	Bushshrike	Grey-headed
402	Kingfisher	Brown-hooded	533	Babbler	Arrow-marked	727	Helmetshrike	White-crested
404	Bee-eater	European	536	Babbler	Southern Pied	731		Brubru
405	Bee-eater	Blue-cheeked	550	Greenbul	Yellow-bellied	735	Starling	Wattled
407	Bee-eater	Southern Carmine	552	Thrush	Kurrichane	737	Starling	Cape
409	Bee-eater	White-fronted	582	Robin-Chat	White-throated	743	Starling	Burchell's
411	Bee-eater	Swallow-tailed	588	Scrub Robin	White-browed	748	Oxpecker	Red-billed
412	Roller	European	596	Warbler	Icterine	755	Sunbird	Marico
413	Roller	Lilac-breasted	599	Warbler	Willow	763	Sunbird	White-bellied
419	Wood Hoopoe	Green	601	Eremomela	Burnt-necked	779	Weaver	Red-billed Buffalo
421	Scimitarbill	Common	614	Wren-Warbler	Barred	780	Sparrow-Weaver	White-browed
424	Hornbill	African Grey	621	Crombec	Long-billed	792	Weaver	Lesser Masked
426	Hornbill	Southern Yellow-billed	628	Camaroptera	Grey-backed	803	Weaver	Southern Masked
432	Barbet	Acacia Pied	630	Cisticola	Desert	805	Quelea	Red-billed
439	Barbet	Crested	642	Cisticola	Rattling	835	Firefinch	Jameson's
440	Honeyguide	Greater	649	Prinia	Tawny-flanked	839	Waxbill	Blue
446	Woodpecker	Bennett's	654	Flycatcher	Spotted	841	Waxbill	Black-faced
447	Woodpecker	Golden-tailed	657	Tit-Flycatcher	Grey	847	Whydah	Shaft-tailed
450	Woodpecker	Cardinal	658	Warbler	Chestnut-vented	852	Whydah	Long-tailed Paradise
451	Woodpecker	Bearded	682	Flycatcher	African Paradise	860	Canary	Black-throated
493	Swallow	Barn	685	Wagtail	African Pied	4129	Hornbill	Southern Red-billed
517	Drongo	Fork-tailed	708	Shrike	Red-backed	4131	Coucal	Burchell's



Some of the waterbirds spotted over the last 3 months – photos from BLB WhatsApp

Pectoral sandpiper



Common Greenshank



Buff-breasted Plover / Red Knott

Chestnut-banded Plover



Black-necked Grebe

SPOT THE BOP (Bird of Prey) – Photos from BLB WhatsApp



- Pale Chanting Goshawk
- African Barred Owlet
- Steppe Eagle
- Montagu's Harrier
- Lesser Kestrel
- Tawny Eagle
- Peregrine Falcon
- Common Buzzard
- Black-chested Snake Eagle



Flight is birds' most important adaptation. It takes them into an environment that most other animals can't reach: the air.

Flying machines

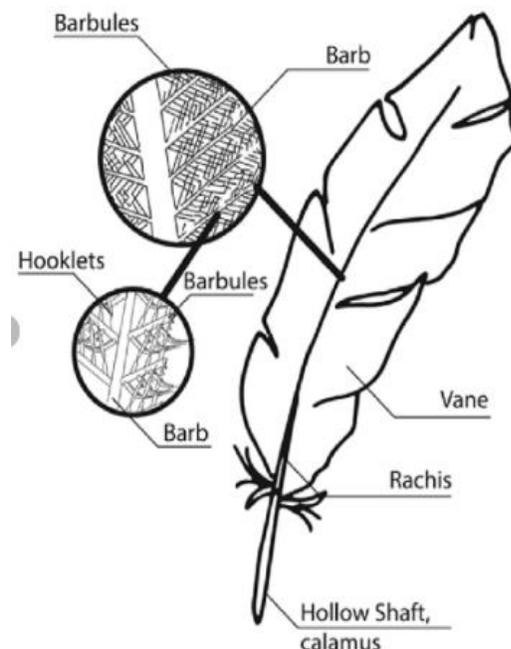
Birds are the champion flying machines of the animal world. Their bodies are designed for it. Their arms have transformed into wings to power them along. Instead of heavy jaws and teeth, they have lightweight beaks. And instead of fur, they have feathers. These are light, streamlined and cleverly adjustable for flight control. Their bones are also hollow (pneumatized) making them lighter for flight.

Egg weight

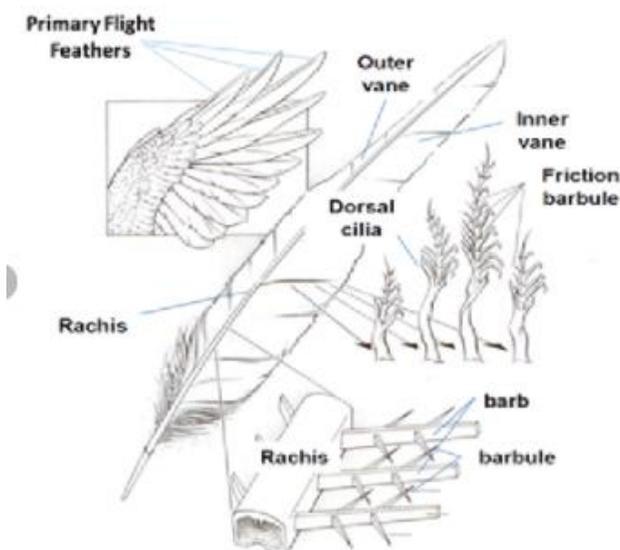
Laying eggs gives birds another advantage for flight. Unlike mammals, such as humans, a young bird develops outside its mother's body – in the egg. So the mother has less weight to carry.

This may be why the largest egg of any bird relative to its size is actually laid by the flightless kiwi. This huge egg takes up one third of the mother's body before it is laid. There's no way she could fly and carry the egg, even if her wings worked.

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/natures-home-magazine/birds-and-wildlife-articles/how-do-birds-survive/adapted-for-flight/>



Feather structure consisting of a hollow shaft (Quill) and rachis, with the vane consisting of barbs and barbules.



Schematic of an avian feather showing friction barbules responsible for reducing inter-feather slippage and separation during flight (adapted from [5]).

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