



FOREWORD

BirdLife Botswana seems to have made great strides this year, and the subsequent employment of an Education Officer, starting in January. Some may know Puso, an avid birder, who has a lot of knowledge about birds and a keenness to transfer knowledge to anyone who cares to listen. *(Remind me to post a picture of him here in the next edition of the FC please!).*

Apart from the healthy current account, and an optimistic forecast in terms of expected funding from a variety of sources much thanks to our Director, **Motshereganyi Virat Kootsositse**, the organisation has started to draw a new breed of birder – Batswana. Younger birders are finally starting to take the front seat in many of the walks we are doing and on the social media platforms. Of mention, are Changu and Stone, not to mention a slew of other up and coming local birders, mostly, but not exclusively professional guides. Welcome, WELCOME, *Welcome!!*. This is the direction BLB should be moving: Full of young enthusiastic, well-educated local birders.

Thanks Harold H, our former Chair, for the two articles in this edition, and as always, our current Chair, Ian White, for the fantastic photos!

CONTENTS

Page 2 – ‘It happened again’ – A report on a weekend camp to Moshaneng Dam

Pages 4 & 5 – **Photos from the BLB WhatsApp Group**

Pages 6 to 8 – **BLB Camp at Kubung**

Page 9 – Farewell to longtime members of the BLB family

.... *And...* A birdlist on the Boronyane River, Maun

Page 10 – **CHRIS BREWSTER** – BLB’s Rarities Expert and Records Committee Chair

Page 11& 12 = **It’s for the Birds! – BIRD TABLES**

Page 13 - Matching skulls to groups of birds

Page 14 – Contacts, Bird Population Monitoring & the 2022 Botswana Birdlife Calendar info.

One of Ian White’s many photos that are making waves, locally and across the subcontinent. (Check him on Flickr (https://www.flickr.com/photos/ian_white/))



It happened again; it always does.....

.....A camp earlier in the year



The last thing campers say when they are bidding farewell to one another is, “When is the next camp?” Again, and again, I ask myself why these BLB camps are so enjoyable every time, wherever we go.



We had a good turn-out with a blend of experienced birder-campers and newbies. It is always rewarding to welcome newcomers from different walks of life and different backgrounds. They come tentatively, unsure of what to expect, and leave as seasoned members of our community, eyes lit up with excitement and wonder, having experienced Nature so closely for two days and having explored different issues around successive campfires with others who have no hidden agendas. Fresh air, exercise provided by

walks and continuous birdsong were added stimuli. One supposes that getting away from all the nonsense of the last year was an added dimension.



As promised, our venue was superb, being a comfortable hour and a half drive away from Gaborone. We camped on lawn under large trees growing below the Moshaneng Dam wall, with a small stream meandering past us. We, six families and three singles, spent almost two days revelling in paradise. What the wrinklies among us appreciated was having three young men to help with organising the fire and the heavy work. It was rewarding that they were able to drop the average age considerably and it was enlightening listening to positive youngsters talking about their careers and possibilities unfolding in these tough times.



Puso, an experienced, registered guide, was the natural leader on our walks. He was very good and his ability to recognise the calls of a Yellow-bellied Greenbul and Grey Tit-Flycatcher was especially appreciated. It was nice to repay him by explaining and then providing examples of the subtle differences between the calls of a Brubru and Barred Wren-Warbler. With the downturn in the tourist industry this past year, Puso would

welcome any birding assignments. We would be pleased to endorse his capabilities. Abiding memories were of the handsome Maccoa Duck couple swimming on the dam and the little Red-billed Firefinches and Black-faced Waxbills flitting about in the undergrowth and a Black-chested Snake Eagle soaring overhead. Hopefully Ian was able to capture these and other species in his inimitable way.

It was uplifting to have relative newcomers to the birding scene. Watching their eyes light up when seeing an Eremomela for the first time and then listen to them trying to pronounce that name, was a reminder of when we first learnt about them. Where was Mary Webb with her T-shirts describing many bird calls? Fortunately, Craig was wearing one, so it was easy to point out what the birds were trying to say. From the positive “I-am-a-red-eyed-dove” to the negative call of Natal Spurfowls’ “Who-is-it, who-is-it?” we were able to run the gambit of their calls. Always providing joy and amazement are the calls of Emerald-Spotted

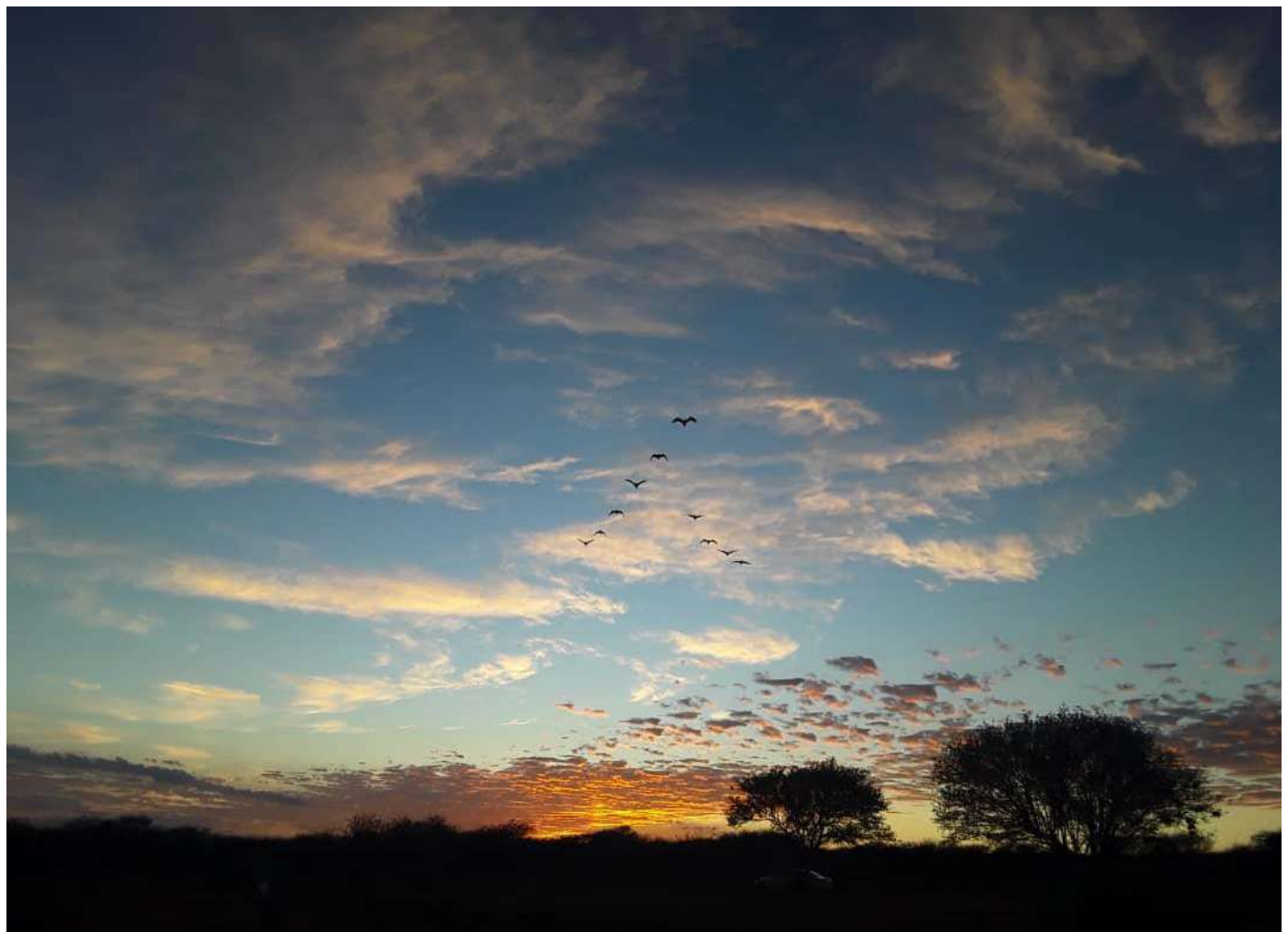
Wood Doves, whose families are dying around them (“My father is dead! My mother is dead! All my relations are dead! Boo hoo hoo hoo”) and the strident sermons of Fiery-necked Nightjar’s “Good Lord deliver us.”

Jack and Nell took the prize for being the most generous couple. Nell shared her precious cashew nuts around the campfire and Jack his even more precious Port. As Shakespeare was wont to say, “Port by any other name would taste as sweet.” Hopefully Jack has started a new tradition which brought our second evening to a most satisfying conclusion.

In the interest of the more numerate among our readership, we identified 109 species and a list of these will be circulated. It was pleasing to easily surpass the promised hundred.

We are sorry for those who missed the camp, but we did toast absent friends. Maybe next time

HAROLD HESTER



Kabo Ditshane’s picture of some Sacred Ibises coming home to roost – and a beautiful sunset.

PHOTOS FROM THE BLB WHATSAPP GROUP... All by our members...

Some of the 'water-bird' species (wader, plover, tern, stalk, heron, quail, kingfisher) sightings from around Botswana recorded for posterity by camera over the last three months and shared on our WhatsApp group. Well done to our photographers, in particular, Rentaro, Stone & Ian.



How many can you identify?



Mostly passerines....
... can you identify them all?



BirdLife camp at Kubung Dam

It was perfect, but then you expected me to write that, didn't you!

As usual, we left DSTV, Orange, Mascom, computers with e-mails, fake news and Bill Gates' phony vaccines, and immersed ourselves in the beauty of Nature with good friends similarly disposed. But there was a difference this time as we had Stone as our guide.

Stone is a self-taught birder from the local village and he is enthusiastically passionate about birds and birding. Since attending primary school and borrowing a book on birds from the school library, he has immersed himself in birding. He has a pair of binoculars and a bird book, but he probably knows the contents of the book from cover to cover anyway. His passion is infectious and he is very keen to share his knowledge and experiences with those around him.



There were six BLB members on the camp, Peter Eaton, Virginia, Craig, Janet, Geraldine and myself, all hard-core campers with a genuine love and interest in Nature. Perhaps we arrived there, a bit jaded from seeing babblers, barbets, batises and bulbuls and looking for something different. We were rewarded beyond our wildest imaginations.



Normally on camp we rise after six, someone gets the fire going, we make good coffee and set off after seven for our walk through the bush with one of us acting as guide. This time it was very different.



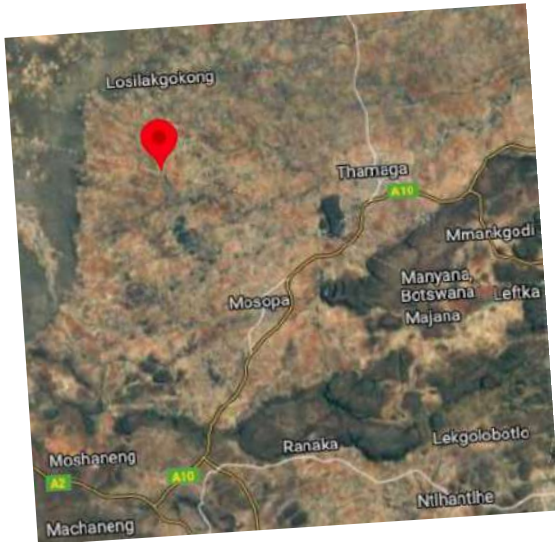
At five-thirty there was an announcement to all by Stone, that he was lonely and needed to go and look for birds. Sheepishly we arose, dressed, sipped our good coffee and set off for a walk around the dam.

Kubung Dam is a beautiful earthen wall dam built by the government to support local farmers. The dam is surrounded by healthy bush and grassland



to the water's edge. Paradise springs to mind as a description. The water is alive with most of the duck, geese, teal, wader species in their hundreds. It is an amazing spectacle, which immediately captivates one as one searches the flocks for new and unusual species. There is probably the biggest number of Maccoa Ducks at any venue in the country. White-faced, Yellow-billed and Knob-billed Ducks were well represented. Teals are represented by Red-billed, Blue-billed and Cape species. Ibises were represented by Glossy, Hadeda and Sacred varieties. Then there were the usual geese, Egyptian and Spur-winged backed up by SA

Shelduck. Waders were there in numbers, led by Spoonbills, plovers, sandpipers and stilts. It was a veritable treasure trove of water birds, possibly only matched by Bokaa Dam in South East Botswana when it is heaving with waterfowl. Then Stone came into his own as he said, “Let’s go for a walk around the dam.”



As we walked, we saw a pair of Amur Falcons, an Ovambo Sparrowhawk, several Double-banded Sandgrouse flew down for their early morning drink, a Grey-headed Gull was very visible near some Whiskered and White-winged Terns wheeling and turning this way and that. On the water Little Grebes and a Great Crested Grebe searched for something to eat. A lone Black-winged Pratincole sat disconsolately. Ruffs, Kittlitz Plovers, a Marsh Sandpiper and a Greenshank minded their own business. In the adjacent bush there were the usual suspects, but nothing out of the ordinary. A cacophony of sound kept our identification skills challenged. Cuckoos were well represented. “Now you see me, now you don’t”, swallows, swifts and martins kept us on our toes. There were Barn, Lesser-striped and Greater-striped Swallows, competing with African Palm, Common, Little, African Black and White-rumped Swifts and several Common House Martins. We sadly couldn’t find a Grey Plover which had been seen there a week before. Our spotting and listening skills were being tested to the limit. Stone turned to us and asked us to be especially quiet as he searched for a Dwarf Bittern. Suddenly he stopped and gestured us to look where he pointed. There it sat patiently, not caring about us at all. We drank in its beauty; it

was a mega-tick for all of us and high fives all round. And on we walked, not forgetting to look skywards to see a lone White-backed Vulture, then a Black-breasted Snake Eagle, a Steppe Buzzard and a Wahlbergs Eagle a bit further on. We returned to camp a little exhausted. We had hardly sat down when Stone called excitedly as he pointed to a pair of Red-footed Falcons. This was another mega-mega tick with more high fives.



We had a quick lunch then an extensive tour of his garden. There we ticked Zitting and Desert Cisticolas, a selection of Black-throated, Yellow and Yellow-throated Canaries, Sabota, Rufous-naped and Short-clawed Larks, a White-winged Widowbird, a Red Bishop and a host of other bush species.



On our way home we stopped and walked along a gorge, almost a canyon. Blow me down, what do you think we saw? Not one, but a pair of Spotted Eagle Owls sat motionless in a tree then flew away. The next morning at a different site we had a better view of another pair of these beautiful creatures with their tufted ears, consisting of mother and fluffy chick. After a torrential downpour during the night, which Africa can deliver in abundance, we packed our wet, wet equipment and called in at a nearby koppie. There we searched for a Black-chested Apalis and a Mocking Cliff Chat. We succeeded

with the latter but instead of the Apalis we had a good view of a Freckled Nightjar perched on rocks, a fitting end to a most enjoyable weekend camp.

It was a perfect camp in a magnificent setting with an exceptional variety of birds on display. As usual, camaraderie around the camp was exceptional, with everyone totally relaxed and wanting to make the most of their time away from home. This has to be one of the best sites for birds in our part of the country. Only seventy kilometres west of Gaborone, we challenge anyone to find a better place for camping and birding. That we ticked more birds this weekend than on any other BLB camp we have attended over the last twenty-five years, goes without saying. (For the record we identified 130 birds on Saturday and another 18 on Sunday morning. I will forward a complete list as soon as I have

compiled it. Had we risen at five, birded all day until after sunset like good birders do, we'd have ticked 180) However, the best part of it all was our guide, Stone. His passion for birds, for the Kubung area and his deep knowledge and understanding of all birds found there, was amazing to behold. He doesn't have a formal guiding licence nor a driver's licence so he cannot charge you. But there is nothing stopping you from engaging him for a day and giving him a healthy tip. His passion, enthusiasm and knowledge will make your visit into something memorable. For those staying home these Christmas holidays, treat yourselves and take a trip to Kubung and adventure with Stone. His telephone number is 76 505 478.

HAROLD HESTER

BirdLife Botswana continues to erect signs all over the country. This one is in front of the offices at Kgale Mews, tucked 'dam-side' next to St Josephs Senior Secondary School.



MEMBERS OF BOTSWANA BIRDLIFE WHO ARE SADLY DEPARTING OR HAVE LEFT US FOR GOOD



Mike and Daphne Goldsworthy, selling off their pottery before they go to Europe where they will retire closer to their families.

This couple were staunch members of the BLB family for many decades in Botswana and were regulars at the many weekend camps that have been enjoyed by many over the same period. You will be greatly missed. Bon voyage!



Dr John Mullineaux

passed on this October at home in his sleep in Port Elizabeth. He was a long-standing member of the Botswana BirdLife family. The BLB family send condolences to Wendy, Hannah, Chris and Caroline.

John was a genuine, hearty, lovely man with a great sense of humour and one of the pillars of the early Gaborone community. Rest in Peace.



A TWO HOUR WALK ON THE BORONYANE RIVER MAUN IN EARLY DECEMBER

We took a walk around the riverine trees by the river and saw or heard at least 65 species of birds as follows: Greybacked Camaroptera, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Rattling Cisticola, White-bellied Sunbird, Marico Sunbird, Long-billed Crombec, Burchell's Starling, Meve's Starling, Common Myna, Red-billed Oxpecker, Broad-billed Roller, Lilac-breasted Roller, Carmine Beeater, Little Beeater, Grey-headed Sparrow, Blue waxbill, Red-billed Firefinch, Scaly-feathered Finch, Burnt-necked Eremomela, White-browed Scrub-robin, White-browed Robin Chat, Namaqua dove, Cape Turtle Dove, Red-eyed Dove, Laughing Dove, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, Jacobin Cuckoo, Senegal Cuckoo, Red-billed Spurfowl, Crested Francolin, Grey Lourie, Lesser Jacana, Ruff, Black-winged Stilt, Whitebacked Duck, African Openbill, Great White Egret, Little Egret, Grey Heron, Purple heron, Blacksmith Lapwing, Yellowbilled Kite, Marabou Stork, African Hawk-eagle, Tawny Eagle, Gabar Goshawk, Walberg's Eagle, White-browed Sparrow-weaver, Palm Swift, Barn Swallow, Terrestrial Brownbul, Swamp Boubou, Dark-capped Bulbul, Black-collared Barbet, Puffback, Yellow-reasted Apalis, Chitspot Batis, Golden weaver, Magpie Shrike, Red-backed Shrike, Red-billed Buffalo Weaver, Fork-tailed Drongo, African Hoopoe, Woodland Kingfisher.

Compiled by Changu Gopolang & Pat Malatsi



A QUICK REMINDER OF HOW LUCKY WE ARE TO HAVE THIS MAN ON OUR TEAM! CHRIS BREWSTER

Chris is originally from the UK but has lived in Botswana for many years. His interest in birding started on a visit to Bharatpur Bird sanctuary in India in 1976. He was involved in atlassing for the Bird Atlas of Botswana, then for SABAP1 and now for SABAP2. He has a keen interest in bird distribution in Botswana. He is the Head of the Rarities committee for BirdLife Botswana.

He spends a lot of time moving across Botswana, doing bird counts and observing birds. He has written innumerable articles for the Babbler, the BirdLife Botswana scientific journal.

This year he has recorded, either by sight or sound, 395 bird species, and by the end of the year he expects to take this total over 400. There are 616 species of bird that have been recorded in Botswana apparently



And guess who found this nest in the grass on this walk to Gaborone Dam?!



FOR ANYONE TO HAVE POSITIVELY IDENTIFIED, BY SIGHT OR BY SOUND, 65% OF ALL THE BIRDS IN BOTSWANA IN ONE YEAR IS A FEAT RARELY ACHIEVED.

WELL DONE CHRIS, AND CONGRATS ON THE COACHING GOING ON WITH ANOTHER SUPERSTAR BIRDER IN THE MAKING!!

Dimapo's photo – 'On the move', from KTP (Kalahari Trans-frontier Park)

It's for the Birds! – How to lighen up your life with a bird table

A bird feeding table, just a metre or two from your office window, is a truly wonderful distraction for those who find work tiresome and something to be avoided, if possible!

Wild bird seed, smooth peanut butter and finely chopped apple are on the menu daily. For the sake of the late risers we've all agreed on a time: breakfast is served around 8 am.



(Courtesy of: <https://www.ridgwayramblers.co.za/blog/the-redwing-starlings-on-table-mountain>)

Everyone is a bit shy to start with – it takes a few seconds before the bravest risk landing - but then the sky darkens and the hordes rush in.

Like any normal fast food joint the guest list varies throughout the year although the speckled pigeons are thinking of moving their beds in and I am certain the bulbuls have a maternity ward nearby.

It's a disadvantage, having a tin roof on the house: the speckled pigeons are always the first to arrive, you can hear the thump of their landing and the rattle of their claws as they impatiently march up and down, fretting the delay in delivery. A pair take up station on the edge of the roof alternatively staring at you and at the empty tray: the message is clear: hurry up and get on with it!



(Courtesy of <https://www.planetiune.com/blog/south-africa-wildlife-vi-the-magic-of-water/>)

At this time of year, it seems, the avian world are all thinking of starting a family so there is a high demand for food and pressure to find mates, thus there is a lot of posturing, pushing and shoving, billing and cooing but building up strength after the winter seems to be the driving force. We think the bulbuls can rustle up as many as 15 youngsters all feeding or being fed at the same time. Like a black mantel they swarm the table and demolish a cut-up apple in less than five minutes. The tiny sparrows swarm in, filling in whatever gaps remain, squeezing between cut throat finches, doves by the score, weavers, blue waxbills and a host of other LBJs (little brown jobs). The smaller birds are in what insurers describe as “a high risk category”. Should the big pigeons come bombing in when the little ones are feeding, their massive wings send a draught of turbulence across the table that pitches anything under a few grams spinning off in a flurry of fluffy feather balls that scatter like blown leaves. Mind you, they are quickly back and pretend that nothing is amiss.

The clown of the pack is the crested barbet. He's usually quite early but it's clear he struggles to get ready in time: his hair is always askew and, though he is a blaze of colour, we believe he chooses his ensemble with astoundingly bad taste. Terribly serious, he stands like a member of the constabulary, thoughtfully perusing the scene, as if he is wondering where he left his baton.



Courtesy of <http://elainesbirding.co.za/>)

He is unhurried, looking around and is quick to admonish any young birds within range, as if they commit a crime simply by being. His cousin, the black-collared barbet is top of the pops by comparison, neatly dressed and always ready for the photo-shoot. The thrushes take the cake for aggression, using their sharp beaks like Roman gladiators, they clear the table before attacking

the peanut butter and apple, pecking with short stabs at their smaller kin, through we notice they are rather better behaved when the pigeons are about (who are roughly three times their size). Red-winged starlings make a regal entrance, flaunting their florid wings telling the world of their arrival with their delightful whistling call. They don't hesitate to lord it over their cousins the glossy starlings who always seem politely to stand aside while their bigger cousins feast. Starlings come pretty much every day unlike the very striking black-headed oriel who is only an occasional visitor – but welcome, nevertheless. A young Kalahari robin created great excitement once in choosing to build her nest nearby. The staff, infected by our enthusiasm and excitement sought to help things along by filling the little nest with fresh grass cuttings, covering the two eggs, in an effort to make it more comfortable. Sadly, the robin did not approve and we have never seen her again. Fussy birds, robins.



(Courtesy of <https://www.flickr.com/photos/12981419@N07/31087668705/>)

There is no way that the bald ibis can gracefully land on the table so he stalks the handkerchief lawn like a demented auditor, probing here, there and everywhere but never seeming to find very much: perhaps that is why he is not so common a caller. Equally rare visitors are the coucals and the woodland kingfishers: both with their so evocative calls. The latter herald summer and the former, so unexpected in an urban environment such as ours make me think of Special Agents, furtively creeping around the garden, with their coat collars up, hat rims down, out of sight heard but seldom seen. Also out of sight – and never seen – are the fish eagles: odd that so haunting a cry, linked in memory to rivers and lakes, should echo round houses in the heart of a modern city but a handy dam and a plantation of gum trees

nearby provide both food and roosts and make for happy eagles.

Nowadays we put the peanut butter jar on its side. This does not work so well on very hot summer days when the contents melt themselves out over the table in a flood of goo; but it's a price we have to pay.



(Courtesy of : <https://www.birdsbikesbuttercups.co.uk/birds/birds-bikes-botanics-and-more-in-the-rainbow-nation/>)

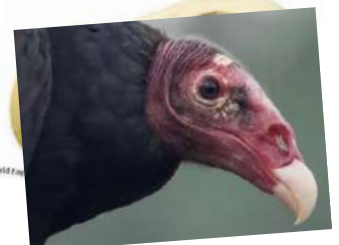
In the early days the jars were left upright but, as the level of peanut butter fell so the smaller birds had to reach further and further in and it turns out that some are greedier than others and have a greater propensity for risk. It takes about four hours and a day of recuperation to clean a greedy adolescent bird after it has thoroughly mired itself in glutinous butter; and they never seemed to learn – hence the change. Another recent learning was inspired by a friendly birder who suggested 'bone meal' as an addition to the daily fare. Meat and bone? Really? These are gentle, pretty little birds – not savage carnivores but, OK, we'll try it. The first day echoed my fears: hardly touched. The second day, it took all day to go.

The third day it was gone by mid-day. Now it goes, along with everything else, by 10am. Descended from dinosaurs? OK, well maybe! It is now 10.15 in the morning. As there is nothing left on the table, I guess I'll have to go back to work!

Mike Main. *(Sorry Mike, just happened on this article of yours today (Boxing Day – though you sent it to Harold in August!))*



Bird Skulls and their owners
.. Who's who?



https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55c0d7e5e4b05b835010c1f4/t/5e909049bf738422aafa7939/1586532433481/Madison+Audubon_Bird+Skull+Activities_Printer+Friendly.pdf



Contact us:

BirdLife Botswana, P O Box 26691,
Game City, Gaborone, BOTSWANA

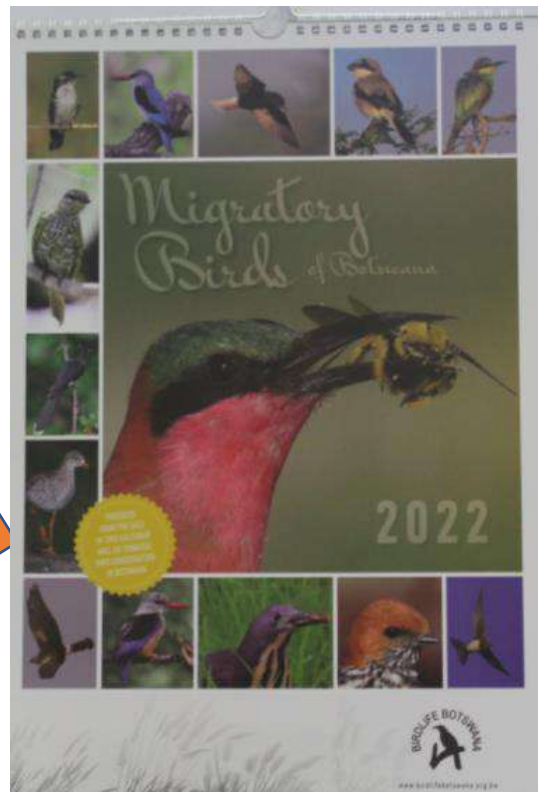
Tel & Fax: **+267-3190540**
Email: blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw

Website: www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw

Facebook:
www.facebook.com/BirdLifeBotswana

Twitter @KgoriBustard

Editor: peterdarcybotswana@gmail.com



BLB calendars for 2022

The theme for these calendars is **“Migratory Birds of Botswana”**. They are most attractive and make excellent Christmas gifts. The desktop calendars cost P60 each and the A3 size wall hanging ones P130 each. You can place an order with Dikabelo, BirdLife Botswana at 3190540

Bird Population Monitoring

BPM is a popular way for anyone interested in birds to add to our knowledge of birds in Botswana. Contact the BLB offices in Gaborone, or check the BLB website to learn a bit more about how you can contribute to this study of birds anywhere in Botswana. (Log on to our website for more info:

<http://www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw/bpm-reports>)



“Since I became part of the bird monitoring program in 2011, I have improved my bird identification skills and my confidence in bird guiding has grown tremendously. I have also developed a huge interest in birds that I attempt to identify every bird I see”.

Mr Boile Danabe, local community guide at Nata Sanctuary who is one of our volunteer participant in the Bird Population Monitoring Program.

