

# Familiar Chat

Quarterly Newsletter of BirdLife Botswana - Summer (2022)



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DO PLEASE CONTACT IAN, BOARD CHAIR IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE ADDED TO OUR WHATSAPP GROUP.

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## Bird identification course



After receiving many requests to run a bird identification course, five lectures were held at Northside School, the first starting at 18:00 on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> November. The course cost members P50 each and non-members P100, whether one lecture was attended or all five. Classes lasted an hour each roughly.



The syllabus covered an eight-point identification guide, including size, colour, behaviour and most importantly, calls of different species. There were lectures on local Gaborone birds, raptors, water birds, passerines and non-passerines. The most important of Botswana's six hundred bird species were discussed. Time was spent on the "little brown jobs" and how to differentiate them. Attendees were encouraged to bring their bird books to the classes with them. There was also a lecture on swallows, swifts and martins. The hope was that it should be enjoyed, fun be had, and attendees emerged as more confident birders at the end of the course.

## Neonicotinoids: The Effects on Humans and Bees

What you need to know about the toxic insecticide that's decimating populations of pollinators.

Around the world, bees and other pollinators are dying off in droves, with potential long-term impacts to ecosystem health and food security. Scientists are now pointing to a highly toxic and widely used family of pesticides known as neonicotinoids ("neonics" for short) as a primary culprit. Here's what you need to know.

### What are neonicotinoids?

Neonics are a class of synthetic, neurotoxic insecticides that are used on agricultural crops, lawns, gardens, golf courses, and in flea and tick pet treatments. Developed in the mid-1990s, neonics are now the single-most popular insecticide class in many countries across the planet.

The way they work is by permanently binding to the nerve cells of insects, overstimulating and destroying them. Exposed insects often exhibit uncontrollable shaking and twitching followed by paralysis before eventually dying. Even at nonlethal doses, neonics can weaken critical functions, such as an insect's immune system, navigation, stamina, memory, and fertility.



*Worker and drone bees on honeycomb*

### Why are neonicotinoids so bad?

The reason neonics are bad is the same reason they're used in the first place—to insects, they're some of the deadliest pesticides ever created. The problem is that they kill indiscriminately, exterminating not only "pest" insects but also countless butterflies, bees, and other wildlife. In fact, since their introduction, neonics have made intensive agriculture nearly 50 times more harmful to insect life.

Neonics are considered "systemic" pesticides. This means they can be applied directly to the soil (as a "drench") around a plant's roots, or as a coating on a plant seed, which the plant then literally soaks up as it grows. That makes the plant itself—including its nectar, pollen, leaves, stems, and fruit—toxic. What's worse is that only a small portion of the neonics make it into the target plant, about 2 to 5 percent for most seed coatings, leaving about 95 percent in the soil.

Once in the soil, neonics remain active for years, and rain or irrigation water can easily carry them long distances to contaminate new soil, plant life, and water supplies. Given neonics' widespread use, the result has been vast ecosystem contamination, which we notice most often in water. A 2015 study found neonic pollution in more than half of streams sampled.

Neonics also harm much of the wildlife they touch. Studies in just the last few years have linked neonics to losses of birds, the collapse of fisheries, and birth defects in deer, to name a few.

Despite the threat to our environment, nothing has slowed the widespread application of these insecticides. Neonics are most often used "prophylactically," which is another way of saying whether they're needed or not. So the vast majority of neonic applications—covering hundreds of millions of acres—are treating pest problems that don't exist. When they do, neonics can actually make those pest problems *worse* for farmers by killing off beneficial bugs and soil microbes that improve crop health, resiliency, and output.

### What do neonicotinoids do to bee populations?

Hundreds of studies, several comprehensive academic assessments, extensive research, and even a major pesticide industry-funded field study all point to neonics as a leading cause of massive bee and pollinator die-offs around the globe.

How massive? Well, beekeepers lost more than 45 percent of their honeybee colonies between April 2020 and 2021, the second-highest losses on record. And honeybees are likely the "canaries in the coal mine" for the 4,000-plus species of native bees. This should matter to everyone because wild bees are essential to sustaining the global food supply as well as the health of entire ecosystems.

### What effect do neonicotinoids have on human health?

Many populations across the planet are exposed to at least one type of neonicotinoid on a regular basis, with children ages three to five having the greatest exposures. Other research links neonics to a host of neurological harms like muscle tremors as well as health effects, including lower testosterone levels, altered insulin regulation, and changes to fat metabolism. Peer-reviewed research has even linked exposure to neonics while in the womb to birth defects, such as deformations of the heart and brain.

Unfortunately, neonics regularly pollute water sources and traditional chlorination treatment typically fails to remove them from tap water. These pesticides also contaminate our food. Neonic residues are found in honey, and they show up in popular produce like apples, cherries, and strawberries. And because neonics are inside the fruit and vegetables themselves, they can't be rinsed or peeled off.

*Spray application of pesticides on a farm*

**Does all this neonic use make sense?**

For the most part, the use of neonics is all for nothing. While up to 100 percent of conventional corn seeds and 50 to 75 percent of conventional soybean seeds are pretreated with a neonic before planting, study after study shows that these treatments provide almost no economic benefits for growers. Or worse, they reduce crop yields and damage soil health. Meanwhile, additional research finds that top fruit crops are now "pollinator-limited" nationwide; the gist being that farmers are producing fewer of these crops because of a loss of pollinators. Even where pests are a problem, effective and less harmful substitutes, like regenerative growing practices or minimum-risk pesticides, are available.

Adapted from <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/neonicotinoids-101-effects-humans-and-bees>



**BirdLife Botswana at 15<sup>th</sup> Pan African Ornithological Congress, Vic. Falls Zimbabwe, Nov. 2022**

The PAOC is held every four years and brings together researchers, scientists, conservationists and anyone involved in the conservation of African Birds in any capacity. It is great opportunity to catch up with colleagues from across the globe in a face to face basis and putting faces to those names you maybe have only ever interacted with online and of course an even greater opportunity to make new acquaintances and forge new connections and collaborations. This year it was held in Victoria falls from 20<sup>th</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup> November 2022, hosted by BirdLife Zimbabwe. Over 300 participants from 60 nations, 33 of them African countries attended the event. At least 200 talks across 26 symposia and with 13 more interactive and open discussions were made.

Each Symposium had several talks focusing on a specific topic with topics ranging from Vulture conservation work and research, bird monitoring programs, community engagement, migratory species and flyways, wetlands and waters, technology in bird conservation, funding opportunities etc. with a lot of amazing presentation on great work done and ongoing across the continent.

BirdLife Botswana was represented by Mpho Williard our Conservation Officer – Species Monitoring. The day before the PAOC on the 20<sup>th</sup> was an opportunity for a face to face meeting of the BirdLife Partnership representatives attending the PAOC with some first time in person meeting for Pre-PAOC East Atlantic Flyway Initiative meeting at Victoria Falls Safari Lodge, Zimbabwe where Mpho shared a talk on BLB's work towards conservation of migratory birds. During the congress BLB had an opportunity to display two posters presentation, the first one was our flagship Bird Population Monitoring Program sharing lessons on the achievements and challenges from the community engaging citizen science bird monitoring work in Botswana. To highlight the work done to conserve vultures and the plight they are currently facing in Botswana, BLB also shared a poster presentation discussing issues surrounding vulture conservation in the country as well as past, present and near future initiatives to conserve vultures. We also had an opportunity to share our work towards supporting livelihoods and community involvement through avitourism on the "Community involvement in avitourism, ornithological research, and bird conservation" roundtable talk organised with other southern African partners.

As part of the roundtable panel, Mr Williard gave a talk on the recent work done by BLB to support to the Nata Bird Sanctuary avitourism project by Nata Conservation Trust which was financially supported by the American Embassy in Botswana.



*Pic from Nata*

# Bokaa Dam walk 7<sup>th</sup> Aug.22

Sarah Ward kindly noted the birds that were seen on this walk at the beginning of August this year. A great morning's viewing, especially given that these were mostly resident species, and no migrants were present.

*Picture by Amanda Marumo (taken during the summer months)*



The dam is very easily accessed from the Bokaa side, or you can get access from the Southern side of the Dam wall. It is particularly good for duck species, and waders, not surprisingly – especially when water levels are a bit low exposing some of the mud around the edges.



Best accessed using a four-wheel drive, but intrepid explorers can ask locals and they will give you a route where you can get close to the water's edge using a two-wheel drive.

*<Maps: Courtesy Google Maps>*

When visiting a waterbody for birdwatching, remember where the sun is. It's not helpful to be looking across a water body with the sun in your face – it needs to be behind you.

- Red-knobbed Coot
- Southern Pochard
- Black-necked Grebe
- White-faced Whistling Ducks
- Fulvous Whistling Duck
- Yellow-billed Duck
- African Black Duck
- Egyptian Goose
- African Spoonbill
- Sacred Ibis
- Black-headed Heron
- White-breasted Cormorant
- Reed Cormorant
- African Jacana
- White-winged Tern
- Ruff
- Kittlitz's Plover
- Wood Sandpiper
- Three-banded Plover
- Blacksmith Lapwing
- Grey Heron
- Pied Kingfisher
- Grey Go-away Bird
- Red- faced Mousebird
- Crimson-breasted Shrike
- Kurrichane Thrush
- Black-chested Prinia
- Ring-necked Dove
- Red-eyed Dove
- Laughing Dove
- Southern Masked-Weaver
- Burnt-necked Eremomela
- Groundscraper Thrush
- Red-capped Lark
- African Pipit
- Long-billed Crombec
- White-browed Scrub-robin
- Kalahari Scrub-robin
- African Hoopoe
- Chinspot Batis
- Blue Waxbill
- Black-cheeked Waxbill
- Grey-headed Sparrow



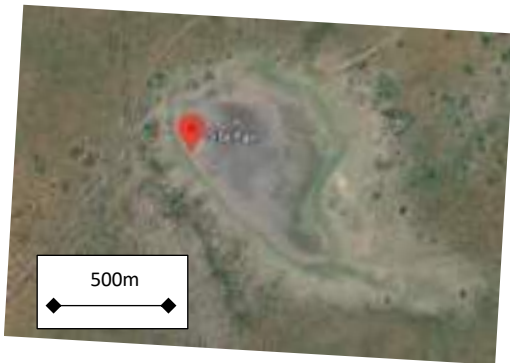
We also have photos on our WhatsApp group from Japan, where Shimozu Rentaro relocated after having spent some time in Botswana with us. Check this character to the left. Same species as ours.

Ian caught these Pratincoles on Gabs dam. Which species?



## BLB Camp at Sita Pan

**Preamble** – ‘The camp will take place at Sita Pan which is about a two-hour drive south from Gaborone. There are no facilities there, so you should take all your drinking water and a spade for the toilet. For the fastidious among you, if you bring your own water, we can heat it and provide superb shower facilities. There is nothing more cleansing than a healthy shower in the bush while listening to the birds singing. It is anticipated only hard core campers will attend. The camp is restricted to members only, but we will allow you to pay your membership fees on the camp. We will be camping adjacent to a dry pan and there will be wild animals in the vicinity as well as cattle. We will meet on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> October at 14:00 at Game City Total Garage **OR** at 14:20 at Notwane turn-off on the road to Lobatse. Could those planning on coming to the camp, please let me know at 7224 8324.



What a privilege it is to go on camps like this. Sita Pan has existed for

thousands, nay millions of years, almost undiscovered; certainly not discovered by the masses. To sit under the trees and gaze upon wildebeest, hartebeest, ostriches and tortoises going about their daily routines, which they have done for millennia, was so relaxing for the soul. A pair of Lesser Kestrels soared gracefully



overhead, followed later by a couple of White-backed Vultures and still later by three Avocets looking for water. Truly we were part of Paradise. Such a pity that Man has to come on the scene and destroy everything.

We heard that government want to eradicate the wildebeest as their diseases are harming local cattle. Imagine people sitting in their sterile offices planning to ruin their natural heritage.

But I am getting ahead of myself. For the record, attendees were Chris and his son Declan, Peter and his Scottish son-in-law, Craig and Janet, Virginia, Lori, Stone, Puso, Justus and Carol,



Geraldine and Harold. Very sadly Ravi and Priya, who arrived in the dark, couldn't find us, even though they were only a few hundred metres away. They returned to Gaborone and resolved to try to leave earlier in future.

The Pan is about 160 kms south-west of Gaborone and about a dozen hardy campers set off for the Promised Land, 110 kms on tar and the rest on a gravel road. For the

latter, years of experience have taught travellers to brace themselves for a corrugated experience. This is one factor which keeps Sita Pan unknown to the Western Community. I suppose it is a small price to pay for our access to exclusivity. On arrival we chose the biggest tree and set up camp as we normally do with a central braai and kitchen area. We have all camped together

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before and know each other well. We expect Peter to create an exceptional kitchen from which will come only the most delicious food imaginable. The humbler among us can only do our best, and salivate at what we see coming from Peter's imaginative culinary experiments. We were spoiled to have with us two outstanding and enthusiastic guides in Stone and later, Puso. Their eyes and ears are tuned to the bush; what we struggle to see through binoculars they have long since seen with naked eyes. What our damaged hearing strains to pick up, they have long before identified as a Grey-Penduline Tit or Pirit Batis. We walked around the Pan on both Saturday and Sunday and learnt and saw so much. We came across several ant bear' holes, recently or currently used. Ant bears are also known as Aardvark, and, being nocturnal, are rarely seen. Two of the holes had additional small holes bored into the walls. These were nests of Ant-eating Chats. There must be an unrealised symbiotic relationship between these two creatures. Amazing that they live together and hunt for ants at different times of the day. Later we came across a hole bored into an Acacia tree, which was home to Acacia Pied Barbet fledglings. As we walked, we were entertained by the raucous calls of Northern Black Korhaans, a plethora of different larks and pipits, shy Double-banded Coursers dashing for safety, like-minded Spring Hares going at a faster pace than a baby tortoise and its granddad. Some of us drove along a cut-line and saw a family of six adult ostriches with about sixty month-old chicks. While his dad was counting birds, Declan tried to count shongololos (millions of millipedes). He became a little flustered when he reached a hundred and his counting became almost Zuma-esque. Then there were the wild flowers; the karoo lily or more correctly, *Ammocharis coronica*, was resplendent with its dark pink flowers and broad green leaves. There were so many other flowers; where were Daphne and Mike in our hour of need? Add in the banter around our camp-fire as we regaled one another of recent adventures and



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discussed possible future camps in far-away places. Long forgotten were politicians and their antics and our miniscule problems at home and at our places of work. We revelled in one another's company and idiosyncrasies. Roll on the next camp.

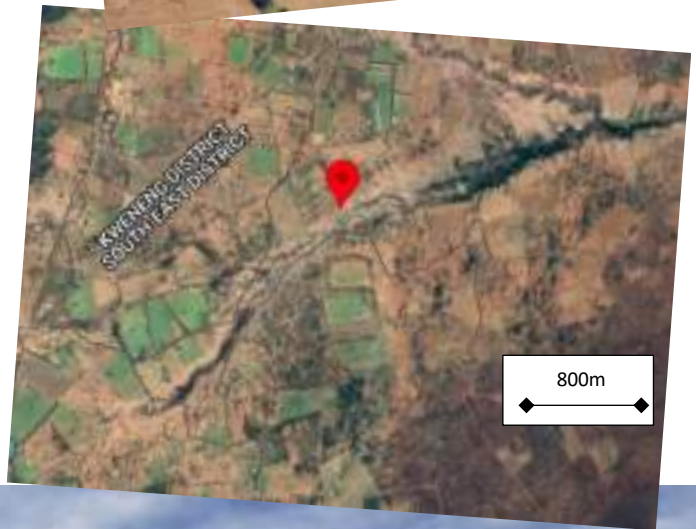


Craig Britz's fotos of lilies in flower – From Nov'22



Tloaneng Bird Walk in Pictures– Nov. 22

The penultimate Bird Walk of 2022 was at this site close to Gaborone.



Photos courtesy Virginia Parker

- |             |                       |
|-------------|-----------------------|
| Brubru      |                       |
| Apalis      | Bar-throated          |
| Barbet      | Acacia Pied           |
| Barbet      | Black-collared        |
| Barbet      | Crested               |
| Batis       | Chinspot              |
| Bee-eater   | Swallow-tailed        |
| Boubou      | Southern              |
| Bulbul      | African Red-eyed      |
| Bunting     | Golden-breasted       |
| Bushshrike  | Orange-breasted       |
| Buzzard     | Common                |
| Camaroptera | Grey-backed           |
| Canary      | Black-throated        |
| Canary      | Yellow-fronted        |
| Chat        | Familiar              |
| Cisticola   | Desert                |
| Cisticola   | Rattling              |
| Crombec     | Long-billed           |
| Crow        | Pied                  |
| Cuckoo      | African               |
| Cuckoo      | Black                 |
| Cuckoo      | Diederik              |
| Cuckoo      | Great Spotted         |
| Cuckoo      | Jacobin               |
| Cuckoo      | Klaas's               |
| Cuckoo      | Red-chested           |
| Dove        | Cape Turtle           |
|             | Emerald-spotted       |
| Dove        | Wood                  |
| Dove        | Laughing              |
| Dove        | Namaqua               |
| Dove        | Red-eyed              |
| Drongo      | Fork-tailed           |
| Duck        | White-faced Whistling |
| Egret       | Western Cattle        |
| Eremomela   | Burnt-necked          |
| Eremomela   | Yellow-bellied        |





- |              |                        |
|--------------|------------------------|
| Flycatcher   | African Paradise       |
| Flycatcher   | Southern Black         |
| Flycatcher   | Spotted                |
| Francolin    | Crested                |
| Go-away-bird | Grey                   |
| Goose        | Spur-winged            |
| Goshawk      | Gabar                  |
| Guineafowl   | Helmeted               |
| Honeyguide   | Lesser                 |
| Hoopoe       | African                |
| Hornbill     | Southern Red-billed    |
| Kingfisher   | Brown-hooded           |
| Kite         | Yellow-billed          |
| Lapwing      | Crowned                |
| Lark         | Rufous-naped           |
| Lark         | Sabota                 |
| Lark         | Short-clawed           |
| Mousebird    | Red-faced              |
| Mousebird    | White-backed           |
| Myna         | Common                 |
| Oriole       | Black-headed           |
| Oxpecker     | Red-billed             |
| Pigeon       | Speckled               |
| Plover       | Three-banded           |
| Prinia       | Black-chested          |
| Puffback     | Black-backed           |
| Pytilia      | Green-winged           |
| Scimitarbill | Common                 |
| Scrub Robin  | Kalahari               |
| Scrub Robin  | White-browed           |
| Shrike       | Crimson-breasted       |
| Shrike       | Magpie                 |
| Shrike       | Red-backed             |
|              | Southern White-crowned |
| Shrike       |                        |
| Sparrow      | Great                  |
| Sparrow      | Southern Grey-headed   |

Below: sightings -End Nov, early Dec'22 – Ian White photographs

(Red Phalarope and Pectoral Sandpiper, bottom right side)





## An interview with Puso'Dimapo' Moleofi – BLB Education officer

Puso joined BirdLife Botswana in January 2022. His home village is Mankgodi and he is 30 years old. In case you would like to meet him in person, he frequently attends the monthly bird walk



### What are your main responsibilities?

My main responsibilities are coordinating Environmental Education in Birdlife Botswana, to liaise with schools and administer Environmental Education lessons to students of schools affiliated with BLB as well as encouraging more schools to affiliate with BLB.

### What is a typical day or week like for you?

A typical work day for me mainly involves preparing EE content for schools on different levels, attending EE clubs in schools as well as arranging for all schedules and programmes affecting EE within the organisation.

### What do you like most about your work?

As an Environmental Educator, professional guide, an enthusiastic birder and a conservationist, I'll say what I like most about my work is engaging and talking to people about the issues of conservation and environment. What makes it more interesting is the fact that mostly my audience is school children who are keen to know about interesting topics around nature, conservation and environment. In less than a year with BLB I have created a big network of school children and conservation organisations - in the battle to curb

environmental issues and concerns. What I will say I least like about my work is working under massive pressure to do and deliver on time. Which sometimes requires longer working hours than usual.

### What kinds of problems do you deal with?

One big problem I deal with is reviving Environmental Clubs in schools and convincing teachers and school heads how vital Environmental Education is to schools and students. The other challenge is to attract school children to the EE club and keep them entertained the whole time so that they don't get bored and leaving the club.

### What kind of decisions do you make?

I come up with ideas, activities, presentations as well as arrangements on EE programs as I deliver them to relevant schools, institutions and organisations. I also set schedules and time slots on every programme I make and deliver

### How does your position fit within the organization?

It is within BLB mandate to educate, raise awareness and empower communities about environmental conservation issues and ways to deal with them. In short, the only way for communities to be aware of the importance of conservation is through education hence EE within every conservation organization.

### How does your job affect your general lifestyle?

My job brings me close to birding and ornithology since a lot of research and content about birding is readily available. It has also drawn me closer to environmental issues and ways to present them to people and schools, while on the other side, it can affect one's social life as sometimes you have to work outside work hours and even weekends.

### What are current issues and trends in the field that we should know about or be aware of?

There is a constant need to keep educating communities about environmental issues and conservation. With environmental issues escalating, there should be a big need to work more on these issues until communities are aware of their importance. This is the biggest challenge for Environmental activists and conservationists.

**Tell us a bit about your background-schooling, tertiary and or previous employment?**

I grew up like any other child in our normal *tswana*-community set up. As farming is the backbone of most families so it is in my family. I grew up knowing that farming is the important part of my life. After completing my high school and having qualified for University, my aim was to enroll in a farming course and improve my farming skills and become a successful commercial farmer. On the other hand, I developed much interest in the outdoors and was fascinated by nature. So, nature and tourism was my second option. When my university admissions came, I went with a Tourism course. The tourism studies landed me in the most luxurious world of safari tourism, where I enrolled as a camp manager and later a professional guide. As my guiding career changed from one environment to another, I fell in love with birds, and continued to become a bird guide in one of the companies I worked for.

**What are some common career paths in this field? How do most people get into this field? What are common entry level jobs?**

Being an Environmental and conservation activist in Botswana comes with a lot of challenges and difficulties most of them being financial and emotional support. This is one job that requires a lot of passion and eagerness to make change. Failure to have those will lead to failure to deliver.

**What kinds of accomplishments tend to be valued and rewarded in this field?**

Experience working with school children over environmental issues.

**What skills, abilities and personal attributes are essential to success in your job/or this field?**

Hard work, ability to work with minimum or less supervision and also being fluent in written and spoken English and Setswana. Developing 'people' and sometimes to have to calm situations.

**Can you recommend journals, magazines etc which are helpful for your continued professional development?**

With Environmental Education, a lot of research, information pamphlets as well as posters are there to help students to go back research and read about environmental education. Online journals and also magazines on issues of environmental education are also available.

**If you could do it all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? If not, what would you change?**

I'll definitely choose the same path again

**What advice would you give someone who is considering this type of job (or field)?**

This is a passion driven job more than qualifications, you need to develop love and passion in nature and the environment.

**If you could live anywhere, where will it be?**

Somewhere in the isolated areas of the Okavango Delta, in a tent set up accommodation.

**What motivates you to work hard?**

To bring change nationally about EE

**Have you ever had a nickname?**

Yes, Radinonyane



## Doreen McColaugh 'Mogaka Wa Tikologo' Environmental Conservation Competition

Harold Hester, former Chair of BLB for many years, has made a permanent celebration of Doreen's important involvement in Environmental Education, especially in the early days of Botswana's growth and understanding of the environment.



'The aims of the Doreen McColaugh *Mogaka Wa Tikologo* Award were threefold, namely to honour Doreen and her efforts to promote environmental education for many decades in Botswana, to continue her campaign to raise awareness of conservation



among the youth, and to reward young achievers in this field. To encourage schools, youth and the public at large to be involved in all matters related to the environment, an annual award has been established that presents prizes.' The event was very successful and met all of BLB's objectives. The UK

High Commissioner graced the occasion with her family and sponsored the evening. All but one of the prize-winners attended which was rewarding as they came from all over the country. The children who came top of their age category each received a floating trophy of a mounted Kori Bustard made by Stone Madzila and many prizes organised by Joanna Laverick. They also received a smaller bird which they can keep. It looks like their parents and teachers never stopped smiling all night as they were so proud.

Puso Dimapo, the BLB Education officer did an excellent job in contacting many schools around Botswana and telling them about the competition.

After the speeches and prizegiving the attendees were entertained with a half-hour documentary about Doreen, creatively produced by Tefo of Maitisong.



The BLB team of Virginia Parker, Puso Dimapo and Joanna Laverick are highly praised for their outstanding and imaginative contributions to the success of the competition and the event.



BirdLife Botswana thank all the schools that participated in this competition. 'We appreciate your school's support, and the time and effort put into the work submitted by your students. There were many entries from across the country and it was gratifying to see the enthusiasm of young people for such an important cause. A wide variety of styles were entered: from projects with models and video recordings to poetry and mosaics. Picking winners was an enjoyable challenge for the team!

The following were the award winners:

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### Ages up to 12

1<sup>st</sup>

**Name:** Nissi Chipendo (age 10)

**School:** Botlhale English Medium Primary School

**Item:** house and water collection model and video



### Ages 18 – 25

1<sup>st</sup>

**Name** Mrs Shyam Boddu

**Individual**

**Item:** pottery bowl

“We hope schools will participate again next year. Our focus for the 2023 competition will be specifically what entrants have done towards

Environmental Conservation

themselves. Further details will be available early next year.”



3<sup>rd</sup>

**Name:** Blessing Rankurata (age 9)

**School:** Jackalas No. 1 Primary School

**Item:** egret mosaic picture

### Highly commended



**Name:** Xuan Han Zhou (age 9)

**School:** Legae English medium primary school

**Item:** a tree with a nest



### Ages 13 – 18

1<sup>st</sup>

**Name:** Edwin Gaobolawe (age 15) and Angel Kamogelo (age 14)

**School:** Sekgele Junior Secondary

**Item:** poetry and dance video



2<sup>nd</sup>

**Name:** Prince Poitshego (age 13)

**School:** Jackalas No. 1 Primary School

**Item:** lappet faced vulture mosaic



Bob McColaugh was present. He gracefully enjoyed the ceremony, that was performed in memory of his late wife Doreen, and gave a large sum of money to support the Award process.