

Familiar Chat



Contents

As always, we can never publish a Familiar Chat without something from Harold Hester. & Ian White. Thanks for your leadership bo-ntate.

Page 1 - Operation Dead Air
[continued on page 7]
State of the World's bird
[continued on page 5]

Page 2 - World Rivers Day

Page 3 - Saddle-billed Storks
[by our new columnist, Neville]

Page 5 - State of the World's
Birds 2025

Page 6 - How you can support
Migratory Bird
Name changes of birds

Page 7 - Operation Dead Air

Page 8 - Birdwalk - Ranaka,
September 9th

Page 9 - Darnaway - Weekend
camp on the Limpopo

OPERATION DEAD AIR



These little birds are boiled and served beneath a bed of salad leaves. A plate of 10 or 12? 60-100 euros...

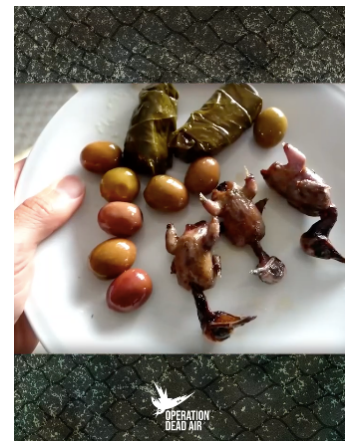
Shockingly much of the illegality takes place on British sovereign land— specifically on British military bases, where the UK-controlled Base Police continue to turn a blind eye.

“We’re bringing these stories live on our social media platforms over the next few days— tune in to the broadcasts and help us make this an issue our Government and the MoD can’t ignore.”

Thrush, robin, blackcap ... you name it, we can get a plateful for 100 Euros in Cyprus.

300,000 of these migrants continue to be killed every year, just in Cyprus, yet it is illegal.

Check page 7 for more



“We've met with 'Akas', most of Europe's most notorious bird killers, killing a thousand songbirds a day. Watch live for updates.”

World's Birds 2025 Annual Update

BirdLife International is the official Red List Authority for birds, responsible for assessing and documenting the global extinction risk of all 11,000+ species for the IUCN Red List. Following expert discussions on BirdLife's [Globally Threatened Bird Forums](#), the 2024 Red List update saw 25 species uplisted to higher threat categories due to a genuine deterioration in status, while just seven were downlisted to lower threat categories due to an improvement in status.

CHECK OUT THE ARTICLE ON PAGE 5 TO LEARN MORE

28 SEPTEMBER 2025 Celebrating World Rivers Day

The rivers of Botswana run mostly into the sand within Botswana. Check out the map below which shows maybe



three quarters of the area of Botswana consisting of the Okavango river basin. It runs from high up in Angola, where the tributaries of the Okavango originate from to Namibia and most of the Kalahari desert and all of the Makgadigadi. On the Southern corner, the Nossob and Molopo rivers take water - when there is any - in the dry arid environment there, to the Orange river and beyond to the Atlantic ocean. In the East of Botswana the two main rivers are the Chobe (that feeds Zambezi), and Limpopo (fed by Notwane and other upstream tributaries), which run into the Indian ocean.



The Limpopo river basin and tributaries

Read about the importance of the OKAVANGO RIVER BASIN in the following OKACOM link, a site administered by Angola, Botswana & Namibia; <https://www.okacom.org/cubango-okavango-river-basin-corb>



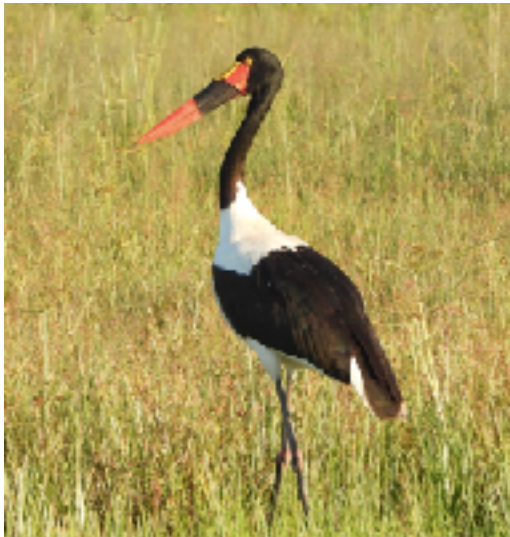
Above: The Zambezi river basic, with our tiny contribution to this massive system from Northern Botswana

Below: The Chobe river, in full flood



SADDLE-BILLED STORKS

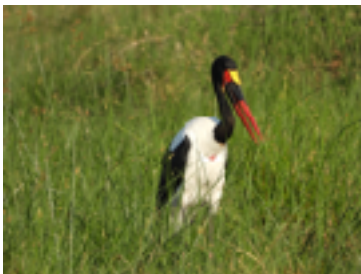
Hello and welcome to my first article for the Botswana BirdLife Botswana's Newsletter, Familiar Chat. A little background on myself, I reside in the south of Wales but am a regular visitor to Botswana enjoying the birds and wildlife and supporting a local primary school in Maun with various projects. Previously I have been writing wildlife articles for a Spanish newspaper, but I have offered to support BLB with some articles. With such a wonderful array of colourful and characteristic birds here it is difficult to choose one, so I am hoping my first article will be of interest to you.



My first encounter with the Saddle-billed Stork (*Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis*) was in Mababe, where a handsome bird was stood motionless at the side of a small waterhole, staring intently at what looked like a frog moving just below the surface of the water. A small herd of Zebra came in for a drink and he moved on, but I got to see others on my subsequent visits, and each one looked as impressive as my first. Their character and amazing bill colouring seem to command your attention.

What impresses me is their size. They are a large and very noticeable bird, with a height of 4 ft 9 inches – 4 ft 11 inches, a length of 4 ft 8 inches and an impressive wingspan of 7 ft 10 to 8 ft 10 inches. The male is larger and heavier than the female ranging between 5 – 7.5kg. The females weight range usually lies somewhere between 5 and 6.8kg. Although they can appear identical in the field when perched,

the sexes can be told apart quite easily by the golden-yellow irises of the female, and the brown irises and dangling yellow wattles of the male. In flight, the female is whiter in the primaries than the male, a good flight identification feature. The head, neck, back, wings and tail are an iridescent black with the rest of the body (and the primary feathers) being white. Juveniles are distinctive, being a browner-grey in plumage. Like all storks, they fly with the neck outstretched - not retracted like a heron, and the large heavy bill is kept drooping somewhat below belly height, giving it a distinctive appearance. This makes it easily recognisable, even if seen from a distance (another good identification feature).



For me and I would imagine many other observers, it is the bill that is the most impressive – and certainly their most eye-catching feature. The bill is massive consisting of red with a black band and a yellow frontal shield (the saddle). The bill is also powerful and used to good effect when hunting for food. The legs and feet are black with pink hocks (region formed by tarsal bones connecting the tibia



and metatarsus). The chest has a bare red patch of skin which darkens in colour as the breeding season approaches.

Apart from bill-clattering at the nest site, they are a relatively silent bird. Even when they fly off at the last moment at the approach of a predator, they are silent but always watching carefully as they pass by. (Continued.....)

BLSA - NEW
LOGO Congrats
to our Southern
sister organisation
for their new logo -
celebrate the Blue
Crane


BirdLife
SOUTH AFRICA

Giving
Conservation
Wings

(Saddlebilled Stork continued)

They are a solitary nester and build a large nest platform that will be used for many seasons. What makes this species unusual is that during the non-breeding season they are often seen in pairs, which adds strong evidence that they form lifelong pair bonds. The preferred breeding habitat is in forested wetlands and other floodplains. A large, deep nest constructed entirely of sticks is built in a tree (where there is some protection from land animals) but not necessarily from a Chacma Baboon or opportunist snake. One to five eggs can be laid with the usual being two to three eggs. Each egg weighs around 5.1 oz. Incubation lasts for 30 – 35 days, with another 70 – 100 days before the chicks fledge, so quite a long time in the by now, cramped nest. The young will remain within the parents' territory until at least the next breeding season from where they will begin wandering further afield to find and establish their own breeding territories.

**Food and feeding**

One beautiful dawn morning in the Nxai Pans National Park, after enjoying a beautiful sun rise, we found some Lion tracks on a sandy path and soon located a group of lionesses in an open area. They were playing and mock fighting, and after a while a young lioness spotted a Saddle Billed Stork perched in the grass. She started to approach, and the stork was unfazed. She got quite close and eventually the stork decided to casually take off, leaving the lioness to just watch her drift slowly past. It was a lovely calm moment to watch, and she trotted back to the pride with a look of proudness for some reason.

The powerful bill is used to great effect by stabbing into the water and catching its prey by contact. The same method is used when delving into vegetation and mud. Visual detection is also used when hunting, and in one study over a period of 255 minutes, 71% consisted of successful catches using visual foraging, and 29% of catches were obtained by tactile foraging. Prey usually consists of aquatic animals, especially Lungfish and Catfish weighing up to 2.9 lb in weight. Prey is swallowed headfirst followed by a drink of water. If a fish is a little oversized, it will be taken to the shore where the pectoral fins are usually clipped off before it too is swallowed headfirst. They are



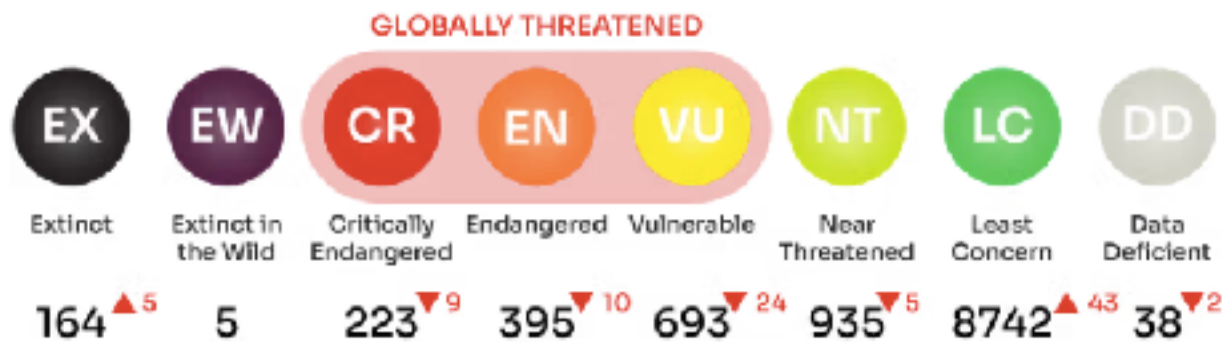
opportunists however and will readily take other prey items including small mammals, birds, insects such as Grasshoppers, Termites and Water Beetles, snakes and frogs. My picture shows an unfortunate frog caught at a small pool that tried to put up a fight, but the stork was not going to let it go. There is an unusual case reported of a Saddle Billed Stork killing and then consuming a Red-Billed Duck, and another report of one killing a Spitting Cobra. There has even been a report of one attacking (although unsuccessfully), a Slender Mongoose. That would have been an amazing scene.

There are of course other great stork species to be seen in Botswana, and I have enjoyed many special moments watching Woolly Storks emerging at dusk, where they are silhouetted in the bare trees, Yellow-Necked Storks feeding in small adventurous groups and Marabou Storks feeding in

the grassy plains in large numbers, outwitting any animal that approaches too close. But nothing beats a Saddle Billed Stork up close, with that amazing, coloured bill and penetrating eye.

Pictures and story © Neville Davies. wildmajorca@gmail.com

State of the World's Birds 2025 Annual

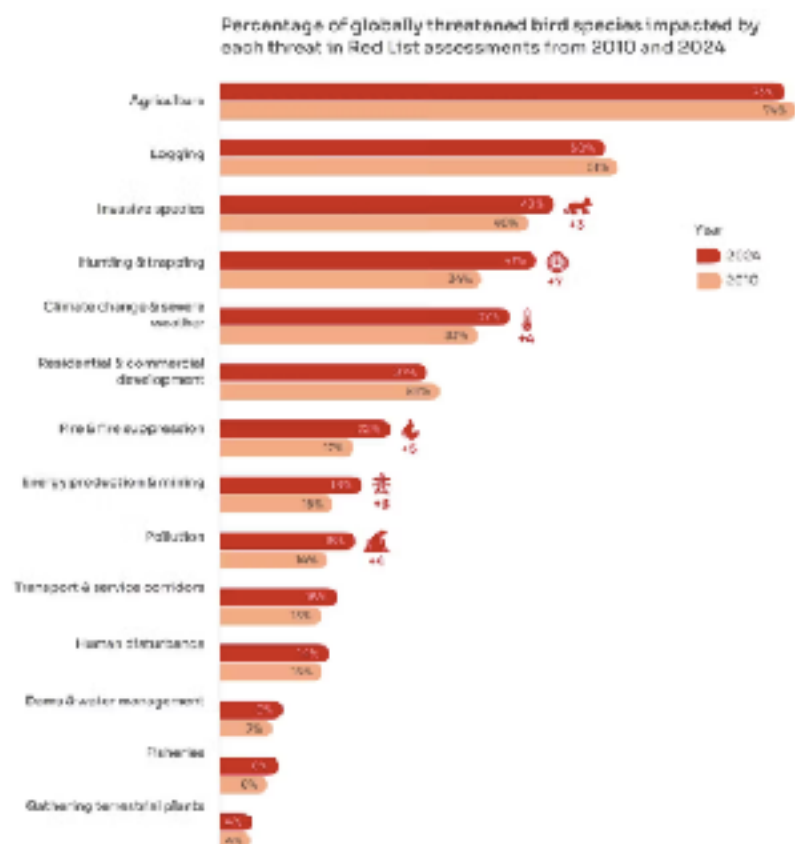


This update profiles some of the key developments in bird science and conservation over the last year. It summarises the latest knowledge on the changing conservation status and trends of the world's birds (State), the threats causing birds to decline (Pressure), and the conservation actions being taken to improve their status (Response).

State - Among the species that moved to higher categories of extinction risk were 16 migratory shorebirds. New analyses of data from long-term monitoring schemes reveal that the global populations of some of these species have declined by more than a third in recent decades. Furthermore, for a subset, the rate of decline is accelerating—underlining the urgent need for research to diagnose the causes and coordinated conservation action along flyways to address them.

Five species were reclassified as Extinct in the 2024 Red List update, including four species of birds from Hawaii. (Despite extensive surveys, there have been no sightings of these species for several decades, indicating that they may have been lost some time ago). Hawaii's forest birds have been exposed to numerous threats since the arrival of humans in the archipelago, most significantly non-native avian diseases, habitat loss and degradation, and predation and competition from invasive species. However, downlisted species provide reasons for hope, showing the positive impacts of conservation actions. Okinawa Woodpecker *Dendrocopos noguchii* was reclassified from Critically Endangered to Endangered thanks to the protection of forests on Okinawa Island and successful programmes to control invasive mongoose. Despite still having a small population of just 100-300 mature individuals, the population of this species is now thought to be stable.

Pressure - Analysis of data from BirdLife's latest species assessments for the IUCN Red List reveals that the threats affecting the greatest proportion of globally threatened bird species are, in order: A comparative assessment with data from the 2010 Red List reveals an increase in the proportion of threatened species recorded as being impacted by certain threats. Notably, the incidence of hunting and trapping as a documented threat has increased from 34% to 41% of threatened species. Similarly, the proportion of species assessments with fire/fire suppression, climate change, pollution, invasive alien species and energy production have each increased by 3-5



STATE OF THE WORLD'S BIRDS .. (Cont.)

These findings may indicate an escalation in the significance of these threats to birds. However, these results should be interpreted with caution, as the observed increases may be attributed to improved knowledge, rather than genuine changes in threat prevalence.

Response - Birds show that with effective conservation action, species can be saved and nature can recover. One of the most important actions needed to conserve birds and other biodiversity is to effectively protect, safeguard and manage the most critical sites for their conservation—Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs, many of which have been identified for birds). Globally, the average area of each KBA covered by protected areas and ‘other effective area-based conservation measures’ (OECMs) has steadily increased from 11% in 1980 to nearly 44% in 2024.

THE CONTENTIOUS ISSUE OF NAME CHANGES TO COMMON BIRD SPECIES

For the first time in recorded history, a Yellow-billed Kite was not seen in and around Gaborone in August. Please don't say it is due to climate change. Andy Moore and I know that it is due to another name change, to which the species has taken exception, so it is sulking. The PTB (powers that be) have changed the name of the Yellow-billed Kite to Black Kite. Can somebody please explain to me and the bird, what is black about the species apart from its eye. All its feathers are brown, and its bill and gape are yellow. If the name must be changed, please call it a Brown Kite or Black-eyed Kite. One wonders how intelligent this naming committee is. Several years ago, we had a Red-eyed and a Black-eyed Bulbul. The latter name was changed to Dark-capped Bulbul. But the Red-eyed species also has a dark cap. The mind boggles. The Black-shouldered Kite's name was changed to Black-winged Kite a few years ago.

(Continued on page 7.....)

How You Can Support Migratory Birds

Even small actions at home can make a difference:

-  Join [Birding Big Day](#) in December 2025 to help us record birds across Southern Africa!
-  Plant indigenous vegetation - use the [EcoRestoration](#) website to find biodiversity-friendly plants.
-  Avoid pesticides and insecticides that reduce insect food sources.
-  Dispose of fishing tackle responsibly to protect shorebirds.
-  Pick up litter to prevent plastic ingestion and entanglement.
-  Make your windows bird-safe with decals to prevent collisions.



NAME SPECIES CHANGES.. (CONT)

Ever since then we hardly ever see this species which used to be a common sighting on telephone poles. Perhaps it too is sulking. The poor African Pipit was initially a Richards Pipit, then Grassveld and now African Pipit. Verreaux's Eagle was originally a Verreaux's Eagle, then a Black Eagle then back to Verreaux's. These birds must be so confused. Chris Brewster wouldn't dream of changing his name to Chris Teaster or Coffeester or even Beerster! Shakespeare was correct; "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." But the rose's name has never been changed to khakibos or daisy. Andy Moore has the solution; keep your early editions of Roberts because ultimately all names will revert to those listed there. Written by none other than Harold Hester, Court Jester to the BLB Board.

*Written by none other than Harold Hester, Court Jester to the BLB Board. (Speaking of Shakespeare, in his day, court jesters were intelligent entertainers who had a unique privilege: they offered witty and satirical criticism to the king and court without fear of reprisal. This allowed them to act as a voice of reason or a wise truth-teller, using their freedom to highlight folly and to deliver sharp observations. Their position lent them a subversive and influential political and social commentary role.) Thanks, as always **Harold**. What would BLB be without you!*

"OPERATIONDEADAIR"

I find it amazing that things that were talked about in my childhood in the 70's and 80's and which we thought had long been banned are still going on 40 and more years later.

The problem....

Every year hundreds of thousands of familiar songbirds – blackcaps, robins and warblers – are illegally trapped and slaughtered in Cyprus using glue-coated limesticks, mist-nets and electronic callers to supply a secret market for "ambelopoulia." Weak, inconsistent enforcement (including inside the British Sovereign Base Areas), lowered fines and dwindling anti-poaching resources mean the trade continues at industrial scale: CABS recorded 1,141 limesticks in 2024 and evidence points to losses in the hundreds of thousands of birds.

Chris and Megs return in 2025, 7 years after their last visit to uncover the evolving wildlife crime and the methods hunters are using to evade the law.

Please click on link to learn more about this. Sign a petition there as well

<https://www.operationdeadair.org/>

IN CASE YOU ARE NOT BRASSED OFF ENOUGH.....

...Doug Newman recently reported the following name changes: "Here is a raft of name changes for Southern Africa as well as some lumps.

- 1) Lazy Cisticola is now Rock-loving Cisticola
- 2) Yellow-throated Leaflove is now Yellow-gorgeted Greenbul
- 3) White-breasted Cormorant is lumped with Great Cormorant
- 4) Striated Heron is now Little Heron
- 5) African Hoopoe is lumped with Eurasian Hoopoe
- 6) Cinnamon-breasted Tit is lumped with Rufous-bellied Tit
- 7) Dark-capped Bulbul is lumped with Common Bulbul
- 8) - Miombo Blue-eared Starling is lumped with Lesser Blue-eared

RANAKA BIRDLIST - A

72		Hamerkop
533	Babbler	Arrow-marked
432	Barbet	Acacia Pied
431	Barbet	Black-collared
439	Barbet	Crested
673	Batis	Chinspot
409	Bee-eater	White-fronted
544	Bulbul	African Red-eyed
723	Bushshrike	Grey-headed
719	Bushshrike	Orange-breasted
860	Canary	Black-throated
570	Chat	Familiar
642	Cisticola	Rattling
629	Cisticola	Zitting
621	Crombec	Long-billed
522	Crow	Pied
317	Dove	Laughing
318	Dove	Namaqua
314	Dove	Red-eyed
316	Dove	Ring-necked
517	Drongo	Fork-tailed

Birdwalk - Ranaka, 9th September 2025

(Apparently Ian was at a nearby dam taking photos of these waterbirds while others were in the bush because none of them appear on the list!)

RANAKA BIRDLIST - B

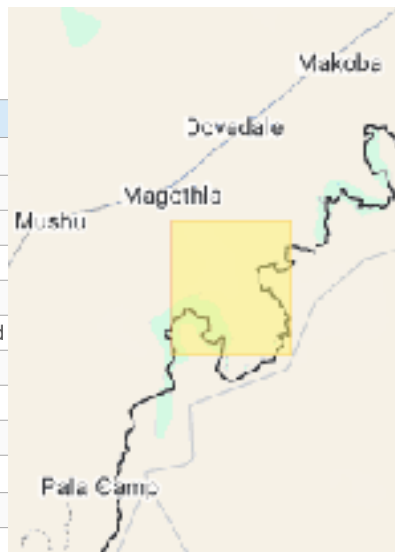
707	Fiscal	Southern
665	Flycatcher	Fiscal
661	Flycatcher	Marico
339	Go-away-bird	Grey
171	Harrier-Hawk	African
418	Hoopoe	African
424	Hornbill	African Grey
4129	Hornbill	Southern Red-billed
84	Ibis	Hadada
402	Kingfisher	Brown-hooded
403	Kingfisher	Striped
245	Lapwing	Blacksmith
506	Martin	Rock
392	Mousebird	Red-faced
390	Mousebird	Speckled
734	Myna	Common
311	Pigeon	Speckled
712	Puffback	Black-backed
421	Scimitarbill	Common
588	Scrub Robin	White-browed
711	Shrike	Crimson-breasted
784	Sparrow	House
4142	Sparrow	Southern Grey-headed
737	Starling	Cape
755	Sunbird	Marico



Darnaway farm grid 2335_2700 square - Sunday 21st September

~Gihan -267 75 961 257
Looks small and chilled
camping group 😊

	Brubru	Nilaus
72		Hamerkop
424	Hornbill	African Grey
439	Barbet	Crested
411	Bee-eater	Swallow-tailed
409	Bee-eater	White-fronted
544	Bulbul	African Red-eyed
11491	Bulbul	Common
723	Bushshrike	Grey-headed
719	Bushshrike	Orange-breasted
628	Cameroptera	Grey-backed
642	Cisticola	Rattling
4131	Coucal	Burchell's
203	Crake	Black
621	Crombec	Long-billed
351	Cuckoo	Klaas's
52	Darter	African
317	Dove	Laughing
314	Dove	Red-eyed
316	Dove	Ring-necked
517	Drongo	Fork-tailed
601	Eremomela	Burnt-necked
837	Firefinch	Red-billed
149	Fish Eagle	African
174	Francolin	Crested
339	Go-away-bird	Grey
89	Goose	Egyptian
192	Guineafowl	Helmeted
141	Hawk-Eagle	African
727	Helmetshrike	White-crested
56	Heron	Goliath
54	Heron	Grey
63	Heron	Striated
440	Honeyguide	Greater
418	Hoopoe	African



~Sara... 144 7576 325744
Looks like an
absolutely fantastic
weekend on the banks
of the great, grey
green, greasy
Limpopo River 😊

424	Hornbill	African Grey
4129	Hornbill	Southern Red-billed
426	Hornbill	Southern Yellow-billed
84	Ibis	Hadada
402	Kingfisher	Brown-hooded
395	Kingfisher	Giant
394	Kingfisher	Pied
245	Lapwing	Blacksmith
521	Oriole	Black-headed
359	Owl	Western Barn
365	Owlet	Pearl-spotted
748	Oxpecker	Red-billed
327	Parrot	Meyer's
238	Plover	Three-banded
649	Prinia	Tawny-flanked
712	Puffback	Black-backed
582	Robin-Chat	White-throated
258	Sandpiper	Common
421	Scimitarbill	Common
363	Scops Owl	African
730	Shrike	Southern White-crowned
4142	Sparrow	Southern Grey-headed
183	Spurfowl	Natal
185	Spurfowl	Swainson's
743	Starling	Burchell's
737	Starling	Cape
76	Stork	Yellow-billed
755	Sunbird	Marico
763	Sunbird	White-bellied
274	Thick-knee	Water
552	Thrush	Kurrichane
527	Tit	Southern Black
657	Tit-Flycatcher	Grey
107	Vulture	White-backed
685	Wagtail	African Pied
839	Waxbill	Blue
779	Weaver	Red-billed Buffalo
803	Weaver	Southern Masked
419	Wood Hoopoe	Green
321	Wood-Dove	Emerald-spotted
451	Woodpecker	Bearded
450	Woodpecker	Cardinal
447	Woodpecker	Golden-tailed

