

FAMILIAR CHAT

March 2005



Newsletter of Birdlife Botswana
Private Bag 003 #348, Mogoditshane, Gaborone

IF ANYONE CAN **Canon** CAN

March 2005

Dear Friends

One third of the year has flown and we are once again approaching winter. The rains this year have been very disappointing and everyone in Gaborone and the surrounding area is having to comply with water rationing regulations..Birdlife Botswana has undertaken various projects and Pete Hancock writes about the 2005 Slaty egret study. Stephanie Tyler has completed her waterbird counts with very spectacular results from Lake Ngami.

The tree identification course which was held by BLB was very successful and students can be seen diligently identifying samples supplied by Doreen .

The Annual General Meeting will be held on the 14th May at the new Bird Life Botswana Offices and the guest speaker will be Warwick Tarboton. This is an event not to be missed and as many members as possible should attend.

The Editor
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Illustrations by kind permission of Kenneth Newman
Photographs by Mike Goldsworthy

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Tree Identification experts

Francistown Bird News

Guy Brina

Unfortunately, during the past year or so, our meetings have become rather dry so perhaps it's time for a new format. I'd like to see a lighter more open one, possibly with a video at the beginning of the meeting and discussion afterwards

Learning about birds and nature, and sharing experiences have always been priorities but we also try to concentrate on the social side of birding. While I'm thinking of lightening up a bit, the BLB brass in Gaborone and Maun are hard at work trying to secure full partnership status in BirdLife International as the old Botswana Bird Club continues its transition from a social club to a more formal conservation organisation.

Lake Ngami still had water and loads of birds in early February. Steph and other BLB members counted 3000 birds at Ngami back in August when the basin first began to fill, but by December, the number was up to 58,000 - two-thirds of the total number of birds counted in the Okavango Delta system this year. Water was no longer flowing into the pan, however, so the very shallow lake was quickly drying up and many dry-habitat bird and mammal species were returning to the area. One of the most encouraging developments talked about at that full committee meeting held at Khama Rhino Sanctuary was the greatly improved relationship between BLB and the department of wildlife and national parks. The two groups are working together on conservation projects such as the ongoing Slaty Egret roost count, and when BLB pointed out limited hunting at Lake Ngami

was disrupting bird breeding, the department quickly declared the lake a conservation area and banned hunting for one year.

The Gaborone and Maun branches are becoming more concerned with research and fundraising issues, but that doesn't mean we have to follow the same path. New and potential members are very welcome to join us.

The bird club had a very enjoyable and informal first meeting in February. It was also quite well attended but we would still love to have a few more members. As we mentioned at the meeting, you don't have to know much about birds to be part of BirdLife Botswana, you just have to be interested in protecting the environment and learning a bit. We watched a documentary about a flamingo rescue operation which took place on Sua Pan the first year Botash began mining operations, and it raised some interesting questions about how we interact and interfere with nature. But not all our videos, presentations and discussions will deal strictly with birds. Down in Gaborone, the guest speaker talked about personal defence, and there's no reason we can't have something similar here. One slight change we made for this year is that we will usually hold our meetings on the second Thursday of each month. Most meetings will take place at the Supa-Ngwao Museum. The museum, by the way, is located at the corner of the first turn to the left as you travel from the Bulawayo roundabout towards the light industrial area.

Old Bird Books Needed

Birdlife Botswana is embarking on its Bird Guide training programme in the near future, and needs old field guides such as Newman's Birds of Botswana or SASOL Birds of Southern Africa for the trainees to use in the field.

Consequently we are appealing to all members of Birdlife Botswana to donate their old field guides to the Maun Branch for this purpose. We all have older editions of these guides that we don't use any longer as they have been superceded by newer, better volumes, so please check n your bookshelf! Of course it doesn't matter if the book has been used in the field and is a bit tattered - this is what field guides are for!

If you are able to assist, please contact

Pete Hancock in Maun

Tel:6862481 / 6865618 or

Kabelo Senyatso in Gaborone

Tel : 72168229 or 3190540

To arrange for collection of the books

Many thanks!

Slaty Egret Study Underway

Pete Hancock

The Slaty Egret, although confined largely to the Okavango Delta in Botswana is probably quite well known to members of Birdlife Botswana. It is highly sought after as an addition to any serious birder's life list, quite apart from the fact that it is an elegant and beautiful bird to boot.



In the field the Slaty is best distinguished from its close relative, the Black Egret (the two were once considered to be the same species), by its all yellow legs. The vinous/brown throat of the Slaty is not always that obvious, although in young birds it extends right down onto the belly. The Slaty Egret does not have the habit of the Black of 'Mantling' its wings over the water when fishing.

A Birdlife Botswana team is currently conducting a baseline study on the Slaty Egret, in conjunction with the Department of Wildlife and National Parks and would welcome information on the ecology and distribution of this little-studied species. The study runs for the whole of 2005, so if you see

any Slaty Egrets during this time, please note the date, the number of birds present (at each sighting), as well as the locality, preferably with GPS co-ordinates (Set the datum on your GPS to WGS 84, and the position format to decimal degrees e.g. S19.12345 E023.56789). In addition, information on breeding birds would be most valuable – there is only a handful of nesting records from the past, and it is not known where the current major breeding sites are located.

The information gathered will be used to plot a detailed map showing the distribution of the Slaty Egret in the Okavango Delta Ramsar site, which is also an Important Bird Area. The key breeding areas will be documented so that they too can be incorporated in the Okavango Delta Management Planning process. Other ecological information will contribute towards an understanding of the actual and potential threats to this special bird. Researching its ecological requirements is the first step towards protecting and conserving it.

Please send all information to
Pete Hancock.
P.O. Box 20463,
Maun
(pete@info.bw) or to
Kabelo Senyatso,
Private Bag 003 #348,
Mogoditshane,
Gaborone
(blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw)

THE AFRICAN WATERBIRD CENSUS IN BOTSWANA
WINTER 2004 AND SUMMER 2004/2005

Stephanie Tyler

A record number of over 115,000 waterbirds was counted during the summer with over 94,000 of these being in the **Okavango Delta**. As members will know the exceptionally high floods of 2004 in the **Okavango** filled **Lake Ngami** and resulted in much water still on the upper floodplains in December.

In the southeast counts were generally low except at **Bokaa** and **Mogobane Dams**. **Bokaa Dam** produced the highest count since monitoring started in 1991 with Chris Brewster noting over 4,000 birds. These included

17 Great Crested Grebes,
14 Yellow-billed Storks,
390 Red-knobbed Coot,
300 Black-winged Pratincoles,
45 Ringed Plovers, a Black-tailed Godwit,
and a Ruddy Turnstone.

Gamoleele Dam held low numbers of birds but among them

14 Great Crested Grebes.

Of note were two Black-necked Grebes,

39 South African Shelduck,

36 Maccoa Ducks found at **Jwaneng S.P.** by the Goldsworthys and Harold Hester and also,

30 South African Shelduck and 103 Yellow-billed Ducks at **Bathoen Dam**.

Mogobane Dam produced a record of 1703 birds with

328 Red-knobbed Coot and

384 Southern Pochard counted by Harold and the Tylers being record were high counts for this dam.

In the east only a very small area of both **Letsibogo Dam** and **Shashe Dam** was covered, respectively by Chris Brewster and Peter D'Arcy, because of the very high water levels making access extremely difficult at both and no boat being available at Shashe Dam.

A Little Bittern and an Osprey at Letsibogo were bonuses.

Rainwater at the old Francistown Sewage Ponds had attracted over 200 birds. At Nata Delta Chris Brewster also counted

over 1000 Greater Flamingos and

over 1000 terns, both Whiskered (250) and White-winged (ca. 1,000) as well as

240 White Pelicans,

six Crowned Cranes,

140 Grey-headed Gulls and

63 Caspian Terns.

The pans along the Nata to Gweta road were dry and no pans in the southern Makgadikgadi system were checked.

There were counts throughout the **Okavango Delta** with some 96,075 waterbirds seen. Wetlands surveyed included large areas in Moremi Game Reserve, the Maunachira River to Gcobega Lediba, the drying floodplain from Mohembo to Seronga and on to Eretsha, the Okavango River from Mohembo down past Shakawe (including the Ngarange Channel) and the Okavango near Sepupa. Observers covered parts of the Boro and Gomoti Rivers, the Kunyere/Xudum/Matsibe floodplain, the Khwai River to the west and east of North Gate, the Kanana/Pom Pom area and the Thamalakane and Boteti Rivers. Chris Brewster counted Lake Ngami over four days during Christmas. He found huge numbers of birds at the drying lake (58,550) with of particular significance,

5,200 White Pelicans,

980 Greater Flamingo,

20,000 Red-billed Teal,

4,750 Comb Duck,

500 Caspian Plovers,

4,200 Black-winged Stilts,
 1000 Black-winged Pratincole and
 240 Whiskered Terns.

Throughout the Delta a total of

234 Slaty Egrets was seen, including one day-time flock of 63 birds.

The Okavango River above and below Shakawe Lodge produced 3,828 birds including

102 Pygmy Geese,

13 Allen's Gallinules and

three late African Skimmers.

The Thamalakane and Boteti Rivers to the south of the Delta produced over 14,000 birds of 68 species.

Of particular note were

1,666 Fulvous Duck,

543 White-backed Duck,

1,150 Southern Pochard,

a Turnstone and a Curlew and

four Whimbrel,

three or four Ospreys and

23 African Skimmers.

The Chobe River was much less productive than in the dry season, as water on the floodplain was quite restricted. However, there were at least 6,559 birds between **Mowana Lodge** and **Ngoma Bridge** and on to **Lake Liambezi**. About 12 km of river was unchecked because of rain and the difficult wet black cotton soil northeast of **Satau**. Highlights included

two African Crakes,

three Black-tailed Godwits,

three White-fronted Plovers and over

2,000 Collared Pratincoles.

Counts of 118,394 waterbirds at wetlands in Botswana, summer 2004/2005

Site	No.	No. sp	Site	No.	No.sp
SE BOTSWANA	8440	62	OKAVANGO DELTA	96075	97
Bathoen Dam	198	12	Okavango River	3,238	48
Bokaa Dam	4,717	47	Floodplain Gowa-Eretsha	5,842	53
Gaborone Dam	NC		Kunyere/Xudum	2,568	49
Gamoleele Dam	186	17	Xakanaxa-Gcobega	1,075	42
Jwaneng S.P.	648	21	Other sites Moremi GR	5,034	56
Maokamatshwane D	NC		Gomoti River	1,559	46
Mogobane Dam	1,703	29	Boro River	1,430	47
Ngotwane Dam	99	14	Other sites south	1,100	39
Phakalane S.P.	202	19	Kanana/Pom Pom	608	37
Ramotswa S.P.	NC		Khwai River 21 km	780	32
Tsholofelo S.P.	687	28	Khwai west	1,502	48
			Boteti Xobe-Chanoga	10,836	67
E BOTSWANA	1,041	44	Boteti R. Xobe- Tham.	1,226	33
Letsibogo Dam	323	34	Thamalakane R. 35 km	1,974	40
Shashe Dam	451	33	Sepupa/Philipa	769	31
Serowe S.P.	61	8	Lake Ngami	58,530	73
Francistown old S.P.	206	12			
			NE BOTSWANA	6,761	63
MAKGADIKGADI	4,079	40	Kasane S.P.	202	22
Nata Delta	4,029	40	Chobe Kasane-Ngoma	1,814	51
<i>Nata to Gweta pans</i>	48	3	Chobe Ngoma-Liambezi	4,745	50

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to many people for helping with the AfWC counts in the summer 2004/05. I would particularly like to acknowledge the large contribution made by Chris Brewster and to thank Mike & Daphne Goldsworthy, Nicky Bousfield, Peter D'Arcy, Harold Hester, Elaine Pryce Lindsay Tyler, Jim Glover & Christine Skinner and Ray & Val Lovett for all their efforts.

An Annotated Bibliography of Botswana Birds

Pete Hancock

Wendy and Remi Borello maintain a comprehensive database of literature on Botswana's birds, and this was published in 1997 in the form of an annotated bibliography.

The database has also been computerised to enable subject searches to be undertaken, and Wendy Borello very kindly compiled comprehensive literature surveys for Wattled Cranes and

Slaty Egrets for Birdlife Botswana free of charge.

The bibliography is an essential item for any serious birder in Botswana particularly those who want to research any aspect of the avifauna with the aim of making a contribution to bird conservation in the country.

At present, there are still copies of the bibliography available from

Russel Friedman Books,

PO Box 73,

Halfway House,

1685,

South Africa

Telephone: 0027 11 702 2300

Fax: 0027 11 702 1403

email: rholdal@rfbooks.co.za

website: www.rfbooks.co.za.

I have negotiated the rock bottom price of R70.00 per copy excluding postage – when you order, please mention that you are a member of Birdlife Botswana

The Bird Club at Moseitlha

Anita Gilbert

“Nestled at the very heart of Madikwe, on the Tweedepoort plateau, close to the Tshwene Hills and the historic Jesuit Mission Station, Moseitlha is a rustic and intimate unfenced bush lodge. The simplicity of open fire cooking, paraffin lamps, safari showers (with hot water heated through a traditional donkey boiler) and partly open, raised wooded cabins lets you escape real life just for a while and appreciate a genuine bushveld experience.” (Quoted from the guest information booklet) Unfenced, rustic and intimate... indeed it was. BirdLife Botswana members converged on Moseitlha Bush Camp in late February to enjoy the rustic, the company of friends and, most importantly, the birds. Our group of 10 birders nearly took over the camp and commandeered a dedicated vehicle and guide. Those present were Marian Stewart, Irene Crona, Alan and Anne Ferguson, Ian and Sue Paddick, Anthony and Anita Vodraska and Harold and Geraldine Hester.

The Bush Camp is in the heart of the Madikwe Game reserve, which is the northwest Province’s most extensive conservation area being over 60,000 hectares in extent. Development of the Reserve and reintroduction of game into the area began in 1992. BirdLife Botswana was invited to do an official count and record of the bird life in the newly established Madikwe Game Reserve. The bird population includes over 340 different species.

Up before dawn, our group was out into the great landscape of the Marico River valley, over rocky hills, plateaus and seasonal wetlands looking for the large and the small, the common and the rare. Birds, trees and grasses were on our list. It was evident that Madikwe had been getting all the rain that had bypassed Gaborone. The grasses were abundant and seeding so that identification was made easier. We may have been one of the first groups to have the 4x4 called to a screeching halt on account of grass spotting. Our driver (and guide) was not only tolerant, but was also knowledgeable of grasses, and enthusiastic about birds. Although we did not exactly snub the elephant, cheetah or lion that we happened across, it was not unusual for the binoculars to be fanned out in other

directions as our stopping provided a moment to spot the more illusive Violeteared Waxbill in the thick under brush. It was delightful to be able to ask for a stop to simply to listen, making identifications by listening to chirps and tweets.

Among the bird sighting highlights was viewing dozens of Paradise Whydah flying together in their up and down motion - like ships on a turbulent sea. When we would spot them resting in a tree, the group would all be facing the same direction...due to the weathervane affect on their great tails. Often flying with them was the Pintailed Whydah, in lesser numbers. In the fading light at dusk we came upon a Secretary bird high a top an Acacia, ready to roost there for the night. A moment later she would have been hidden in the branches and we would have missed her entirely. At one point we had thought we had come upon the yellow form of the Crimsonbreasted Shrike. The bird was very accommodating, letting us have a good look and consult all our books. Eventually we had to conclude that it was instead a very nice example of a Cape Rock Thrush.

The small watering holes, evidence of the sparse rainfall, were lightly populated. We were happy to see a small group of Burchell’s Sandgrouse. Keeping company with the elephants were a lonely pair of Marabou Stork, a few Redbilled Teal, the Three Banded Plover, Egyptian Geese, Dabchick, a Grey Heron, and several Common Moorhens.

There was a respectable flock of the summer resident, Abdin Stork making an impressive sight flying in squadron form; low in the sky as the sun was setting. Most frequently sighted were the usual and expected common summer visitors or residents: European and the Lilacbreasted Roller, the Southern Yellowbilled Hornbill, Red billed Woodhoopoe, the European and the Bluecheeked Bee-eater, the Marico Flycatcher, Redbacked Shrike, Swainson’s Francolin, Guinea Fowl and Ostrich.

Among the predatory birds, we saw the Blackshouldered Kite, Steppe Buzzard, and Brown Snake Eagle. On our night drive, the Barn Owl and Eagle Owl, Pearlspotted Owl

and the Fierynecked Nightjar were spotted. Though we saw several Nightjars swooping through our headlights, it is impossible to identify the species by sight; it was identified by its call.

From the wee hours in the morning to the dark of night, we spent 9 hours a day in a

vehicle scouring the veld from end to end, adding to our list of sightings. The other hours were easily taken up with the adventure of taking a shower, enjoying leisure meals in good company and being horizontal...until the next drive.

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL HORNBILL CONFERENCE
MABULA GAME LODGE, SOUTH AFRICA
7-9 NOVEMBER 2005

The Ground Hornbill Research and Conservation Project and Three Cities Game Lodges, South Africa, and the Hornbill Research Foundation, Thailand, will host the Fourth International Hornbill Conference at Mabula Game Lodge, South Africa, during the period 7-9 November 2005. The scientific programme will cover two days, followed by a one-day workshop for the World Hornbill Specialist Group of IUCN and Birdlife International. The scientific programme will be coordinated by:-

Dr Alan Kemp (ex Transvaal Museum, South Africa),
Prof Pilai Poonswad (Mahidol University, Thailand) and
Dr Christine Sheppard (Bronx Zoo, New York).

- The conference organizers are hoping to raise sponsorship to invite keynote speakers and also to assist delegates from other hornbill-occupied countries and local communities to attend the Conference.
- The main goal of this conference is to provide all people studying or interested in hornbills with an opportunity to share their ideas. The proceedings of the conference results will be made available within six months of the meeting in CD-ROM format.

THEME FOR THE CONFERENCE

The principal theme of the conference is

- The Active Management of Hornbills and their Habitats for Conservation. This will include sessions on capture and marking, genetic analysis, provision of nest boxes, supplementation of food, captive breeding and husbandry, reintroduction and translocation, comparison with sympatric species, and habitat analysis and alteration. However, there will also be a general session to report on new information for other aspects of hornbill biology. A separate one-day workshop by the IUCN and Birdlife Hornbill Specialist Group will focus on population status and viability analysis, so as to identify problems and priorities for conservation action.

GENERAL

Mabula Game Lodge is only two hours drive north of Johannesburg International Airport. It provides full conference and accommodation facilities for at least 120 delegates and their families, set in a malaria-free wilderness that supports the Big Five mammals and many bird species (see <http://www.mabula.com>). Mabula is also home to the Ground Hornbill Research & Conservation Project, an initiative that studies conservation management of the species, harvests surplus chicks from the wild and reintroduces them into parts of their former range. Time will be provided within the conference programme for visits to this project and for game drives at dawn and dusk.

PASSPORTS AND VISAS

A valid passport is required for travel. The Visa entry requirements for South Africa vary according to your country of origin. Please contact your South African and Namibian Embassies for details.

LANGUAGE

The language for presentation and posters will be in English.

If you are interested in attending this conference please contact Kabelo Senyatso - email kabelosenyatso@yahoo.com.

Membership Details

Membership is due in *January of* each year, as the subscription runs from January to December.

Rates

- Resident - entitles you to both Babbler issues and the quarterly Familiar Chat (per family): P120.00
- Corporate - (4 families): P5000
- Professional - Rangers, guides and students (Babbler and Familiar chat): P60.00
- Life - P2000
- Schools/Clubs - nil
- SADC Region - P150
- Overseas (and outside SADC) – P200

The following details are required:

I/We/Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms: _____

wish to become members of BirdLife Botswana

Address: _____

Home/Cell Phone: _____

Work phone: _____

Email: (**PRINT** please) _____

I acknowledge that my family dependents, invitees and I take part in the BirdLife Botswana organised events entirely at our own risk. I, in my personal capacity and as representative of my spouse, children, dependents, and invitees hereby keep BirdLife Botswana, its committee, members and agents indemnified and hold them harmless against all loss, injury, or damage to person or property from any cause (including negligence) arising as a result of our participation in events organised by BirdLife Botswana.

Signed _____

Date: _____

Please make your cheque payable to 'BirdLife Botswana'

Please return this form with your subscription to the address's given below:

The Secretary (membership)
BirdLife Botswana
P/Bag 003
Suite 348
Mogoditshane
Gaborone, Botswana

Pete Hancock
PO Box 20463
Maun

or phone Pete to
collect 6862481

Guy Brina
Private Bag F12
Francistown

or phone Guy to
collect 2412913

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Birdlife Botswana
Calendar of events for 2005

Date	Event	Remarks
April 3 Gab	6.30am Walk Otse	MGG
April 12 Gab	Committee mtg	
April 19 Gab	Talk	Bruce Hargreaves - The derivation of bird names
May 1 Gab	8.00 am Walk Modipe	HCH
May 10	Committee mtg	
May 14	AGM	W Tarboton
May 17	No meeting	
June 4	8.00am Walk	
June ?	World Environment Day	DMc to organise
June 14	Committee mtg	
June 18/19	Quarterly camp	Darnaway Farm
June 21	Quiz	Jo Taylor
July 3	8.00am Walk Gabane	MB to organise
July 12	Committee mtg	
July 19	No Talk	Presidents Day
August 7	8.00am Walk Phakalane	Tea at Gem Nursery, MS
August 9	Committee mtg	
August 16	Talk: Cheetah Conservation	A M Hauser
Sept 4	8.00am Walk Bokaa dam	
Sept 13	Committee mtg	
Sept 20	No talk	
Sept 17	Annual dinner	MS to organise, P Funston?
Oct 2	6.30am Walk Notwane	CB
Oct 11	Committee mtg	
Oct 18	Talk	HCH to arrange speaker
Oct 21/23	Quarterly camp	Nnwane Dam
Nov 6	Little big birding day	HCH to organise, Tea at Gem Nursery
Nov 8	Committee mtg	
Nov 15	Talk	MG/DG to arrange speaker
Nov 26	Birding Big day	
Dec 4	6.30 am Walk	Surprise walk with DMC
Dec 13	Committee mtg	
Dec 20	No talk	

1. Gaborone Bird walks start at 06:30 October to April and 08:00 May to September. Meet at the museum.
2. All Gaborone talks take place at the Botswana Accountancy College at 19:30.
3. Francistown Branch will hold their meetings on the second Thursday of each month, meetings will take place at the Supa-Ngwao Museum. The museum is located at the corner of the first turn to the left as you travel from the Bulawayo roundabout towards the light industrial area.