

FAMILIAR CHAT

September 2005



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

IF ANYONE CAN **Canon** CAN

September 2005

Dear Friends

There is lots of lovely reading in this issue and once again thanks to all contributors. Any long or short pieces of news are gratefully received – please keep them coming.

Due to the small amount of rainfall last rainy season and the long dry winter, there is very little greenery about and we are all hopeful of some rain – sooner rather than later. There is still an abundance of birds about I am always fascinated at the variety of species that live in or are regular visitors to our gardens.

Did you know that many birds are much better songsters than most humans and this is despite the fact that they lack vocal chords. Rather, birds produce sounds in a structure called the syrinx, which mammals lack. This structure is suspended in an air sac at the base of the neck, and sounds are produced by exhaled air causing vibrations of thin membranes within the syrinx.

Our branches in Maun and Kasane are being revived –thanks to Glen Stephen and Trish Williams. If any members are visiting Kasane, Maun or Francistown (Guy Brina) please contact the local branch as I am sure they would love to include you in any event that might be happening.

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

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*Chris Toye participating in the Adventure Challenge.
to raise funds for Bird Life Botswana.*

Scoop - Scops in Cyprus

Mary Lane Jones

The notice in the local paper went something like this: "Anyone interested in birding please meet at 10 a.m. at the Visitor Centre by the Dolphin Restaurant, Troodos. Beginners especially welcome.....Birdlife Cyprus".

Troodos is the centre point of the mountainous heart of Cyprus, with skiing facilities for winter visitors. It was also on our agenda for that day anyway. Where birds are concerned, we are eternal beginners but had heard that Cyprus had a few interesting endemic species and lies underneath many migratory routes. Also it would be good PR and interesting to meet up with a few local Birdlife members.

We made an early departure from the rented studio in a village house, which had quickly become home and headed for the hills. It was interesting to climb and find the vegetation and spectacular scenery changing fairly rapidly. Then at last we came to the pine trees (*pinus nigra*) and a cool crisp air greeted us, as did the wind whistling through the pine trees (remember that sound?).

At 10 am we met up with Jane Stylianou and husband, Aristos. Another couple meandering in the car park was quickly persuaded by Jane to join us. We were amazed that no one else turned up. Jane, an avid birder and committed BirdLife ambassador, told us a bit about BirdLife Cyprus: how it now combined two former ornithological clubs - one largely ex-pat and the other Cypriot.

She explained that the ad in the newspaper was a 'test-run' as part of a drive to increase their current membership of between 200 and 300. We were grateful Jane was happy to spend time with us although we were not 'local' therefore not potential members! Jane works for BirdLife in the Nicosia office and organizes events. She went on to explain that in a climate of economic growth leading to over-development and erosion of natural habitats, they were trying to make people aware of conservation. The attitude of many Cypriots can be 'if it flies, shoot it': She further added that when birding in Cyprus it is more helpful to have a book of Middle Eastern birds rather than European birds, given Cyprus's position on the 'edge' of the eastern Mediterranean.

The variety of species is very large owing to the diversity of the island. In the area we were that morning, the most common birds were **pallid swift**; **hoopoe** (just like ours), **short-toed treecreeper**, **olivaceous warbler**; **Cyprus pied wheatear** (endemic); **Jay** (very different from the English version); **Coal tit**; **blackbirds** (abounding!); **Serin** (finchlike).

We saw quite a lot of bird activity but underneath and amidst the pine vegetation and sharp shadows, identification wasn't easy. However Jane was there to help and guide us. We were not allowed to leave until we had all seen and heard the Cyprus Wheatear. Eventually we saw and heard one. It sounds like a cicada!

Soon it was back to the well-stocked Visitor Centre and to see a resident hoopoe's nest in a tree nearby. Luckily we saw one of the hoopoes entering it.

Now it was time to say goodbye to our newly found friends. Jane made my day by affirming that what I had heard during the night was indeed a **scops owl**. They are very common here apparently, with a slightly different sound from ours, but unmistakably Scops.

We have since heard from Jane that this Sunday walk is now to be advertised as a monthly event starting in September.

If you are going to Cyprus do get in touch with Jane at birdlifecy@cytanet.com.cy or visit their website: www.birdlifecyprus.org

When to look for Birds

Kenneth Newman

The Majority of our birds are with us all the time, but a few are seasonal migrants. Birds generally are most active during the mornings from dawn until about 10.00, and in the evenings from about 16.30 till last light. During the middle of the day they rest or at least are less active, even when feeding young and during hot weather. The exceptions are the high-flying eagles and vultures, but even these are most active during the first half of the day.

Nocturnal birds, owls, nightjars and dikkops are most active between dusk and midnight, longer when the moon is bright. Nightjars do most of their feeding in the first hour or two of darkness and can often be seen flying around at dusk.

Migratory birds fall into two groups, local and long distance migrants, and both move seasonally, usually departing in late summer and returning in spring. We call those that migrate within Africa the intra-Africa migrants and those that come from the northern hemisphere, the Palaeartic migrants. Many of these migrants come to us as non-breeding visitors, a few come here to breed. These migrants include birds of prey, shorebirds, small warblers, swallows and many others. When reading about a bird in your fieldguide check whether it is a resident species or a migrant. If the latter you'll know that it's unlikely to be here between May and August.

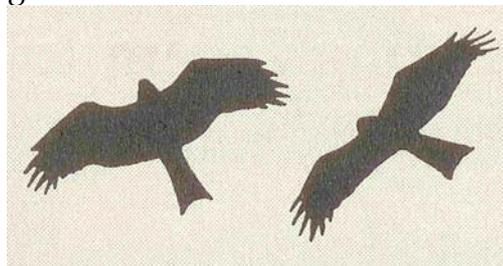
Spring and the Yellow-billed Kites

Harold Hester

This is the time of year we all look forward to: spring. We have enjoyed a rather mild winter, but spring holds out so much promise. The days and nights will become warmer, and we hope for some early rain to settle the dust and start re-filling our dams. Blossoms on the trees start coming out, spring flowers start to bloom and the summer birding migrants return.

One of the most noticeable of these migrants is the Yellow-billed Kite. One day one suddenly becomes aware they are with us again. No trumpet call, no banners, no warnings, there they are silently swooping down over the roads and in the villages looking for a scrap of meat to eat.

How does one recognise a Yellow-billed Kite? Easily! They are large (almost the size of an eagle), all brown, with fanned tails and a yellow gape. What is a gape? The gape of a bird is its mouth and the yellow mark, which almost extends to below its eye. These birds normally fly alone, but can also be seen in large flocks either wheeling in the air or standing quietly on the ground when left undisturbed.



Where do they go? In our winter they fly up over Africa to Europe, the Middle East and Russia. They can't wait to return again to our warm sunny climate. They are normally first seen in Gaborone towards the end of August.

Botswana's National Bird??

This stamp issued in 2004 is part of a series depicting National Birds of Africa, where Botswana had the Cattle Egret. This is a beautiful bird but should it be Botswana's National Bird?



Birdlife Botswana has conducted fairly extensive research into Botswana's National Bird and from the findings has come to the conclusion that the National Bird has not been officially nominated.

Some of the suggested National birds are Kori Bustard, Lilac Breasted Roller, Cattle Egret plus a few others.

Your suggestions and input would be appreciated, together with your supporting reasoning.

The Bird



The reward for perseverance

The perfect shot of Shaulous taken by Pat Carr-Hartley after waiting patiently for hours in the cold at Kubu Lodge from 0600 to 0900 hours.

Top birding spot for this quarter

Pete Hancock

Northern Botswana has many good birding sites, including several Important Bird Areas. However, birding at these sites varies throughout the year, and since some IBAs are very large, the birding also varies spatially. It is quite difficult to choose one particular place, but top of my list at present is Kanana in the Okavango Delta.

Most people have never heard of it, but it boasts the largest 'heronry' in the Delta, and it is absolutely humming with activity at present. It falls within the concession managed by Ker and Downey, and concessionaires Dougie and Di Wright are justifiably protective of the site. Fortunately for BirdLife members, the K & D camp at Kanana is not as expensive as most other camps in the Delta, and, surprisingly, it is still possible to get bookings over the period that the heronry is active.

At present, African Openbills, Great White Egrets, Marabou Storks, Yellow-billed Storks, Grey Herons and Reed Cormorants are all nest-building, mating and incubating, with a few tiny African Openbill chicks having just

hatched. Pink-backed Pelicans are incubating eggs, and a few Rufous-bellied Herons have nests deep in the Gomoti islands where they are not visible. This is one of only three sites in Botswana where the Pelicans breed. Most spectacular, however, is the large number of African Openbills, with over 600 nests present - the sky above the heronry is continually filled with these prehistoric-looking birds coming and going.

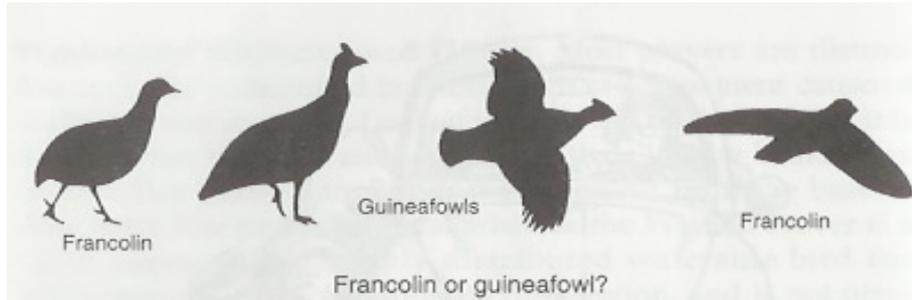
Apart from the heronry, the Kanana concession is pretty good for sightings of Pel's Fishing-Owl, Slaty Egret and Wattled Crane, not to mention lion, leopard and elephant! BirdLife members are advised to contact Ker and Downey at 6860375 in Maun to make bookings - the heronry will peak during October, and then slowly tail off during November and December. If you can't make it this year, plan to do it next September/October - it is one of Botswana's birding spectacles, not to be missed.

PS. See the latest Africa Geographic (September, 2005) which has a short article featuring Ker and Downey, with mention of the heronry.



Photo by D. Wright

Helpful notes on identification of Francolins



Francolins – With francolins, as with most other birds, get to know those that are in the region where you are birding: it is unlikely that there will be more than three or four species. Become familiar with the jizz and calls of those around you. Outside of national parks francolins tend to be shy, running or flying off at the first sign of a human, and one's opportunities of examining them are few in such circumstances. However, even when a francolin is running away it is usually possible to note its leg colour, and that's halfway to identifying it.

Swainson's is perhaps the most common and widespread of them all. Told by its black legs and red facial and throat skin, it is sometimes confused with the **Rednecked Francolin** which also has red skin around its head but has red legs. If one looks at the distribution maps for these two species it will be seen that their ranges are virtually exclusive, the Rednecked being more easterly while Swainson's extends westwards into Namibia. The voices of these two birds are not dissimilar, being a series of harsh crowing sounds, but the Rednecked is the less harsh of the two.

Crested Francolin is the most distinctive of all from its habit of holding its tail cocked like a bantam chicken. Its markings too are distinctive: reddish legs, a dark crown, white eyebrow, a well-spotted throat and upper breast. Its squeaky 'beer and cognac' call is usually heard well before dawn. This is a bushveld species, being absent from grasslands, karoo and much of the arid west.

Throughout the Kalahari and much of Namibia the **Redbilled** is the common francolin. This bird of the semi-arid regions is tame and approachable in most areas. The red bill and legs, and the yellow ring about the eye, are diagnostic.

The **Natal Francolin** occurs as far north as Zambia. Red legs and a red bill with a yellow base, plus habitat are the best guides for identifying this species. Coveys of up to ten birds are found on wooded riverbanks, rocky hillsides and in wooded valleys where their loud cackling call is heard particularly in the mornings and evenings.

Orange River Francolin occurs in the southern Transvaal, Orange Free State, Northern Cape, Botswana and northern Namibia. This is a variable species, being palest in the west. This francolin could easily be confused with the Redwing Francolin but their ranges are mutually exclusive.

Coqui Francolin are partridge-like in their behaviour in that they don't run away but freeze, and only flush when about to be stepped on. Note the sexual differences (sexual dimorphism) . In nature reserves, on encountering a motor car, they walk extremely slowly and may take several minutes to cross the road. The common call of the Coqui Francolin, usually heard long before the birds are seen, is a squeaky 'Be-kwik,be-kwik,be-kwik' while the male also has a shrill, crowing call given in descending cadence.

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): P2000
- Professional - Rangers, guides and students (Babbler and Familiar chat): P60.00
- Life - P2000
- Students under 18 studying in Botswana – P15
- 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 (please PRINT): _____

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 addresses 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

Geoff Williams
Private Bag K4
Kasane

BIRDLIFE BOTSWANA COMMITTEE MEMBERS 2005

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Vice Chairman				
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	Chris Brewster (Rarities)			cbrewster@botsnet.bw
	Guy Brina	P. Bag F12 Francistown	2412913	gltm@botsnet.bw
	Glen Stephen	P. Bag 114 Maun	6801052	glens@dynabyte.bw

Birdlife Botswana
Gaborone Calendar of events for 2005

Date	Event	Remarks
Sept 4	8.00am Walk Bokaa dam	
Sept 13	Committee mtg	
Sept 20	No talk	
Sept 17	Annual dinner	MS to organise, Tim Crowe
Oct 2	6.30am Walk Notwane	CB
Oct 18	Committee mtg/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.

Birdlife Botswana: Maun Branch

Maun Calendar of Events September 2005 – March 2006

25 September	Day trip to Lake Ngami	Meet at The Cyber Bush Camp at 06.30
12 October	Meeting and talk Madagascar Birding: Gavin Ford	Audi Camp Conference Centre: 19.00
16/17 October	Weekend outing to Ikoga/Sepupa, Western Delta Panhandle	Details supplied at 12 October meeting
16 November	Talk and slide show: Flamingo Project: Graham McCulloch	Audi Camp Conference Centre: 19.00
End November	Birding Big Day	(Details to be announced)
Jan 18	Meeting and talk (Details to be announced)	Audi Camp Conference Centre: 19.00
22 Jan	Bird count along Thamalakane River, Maun	Meet at Maun Lodge 06.00
15 February	Meeting and talk (Details to be announced)	Audi Camp Conference Centre: 19.00
18/19 February	Weekend outing to Ghanzi area	Details of camp site to be announced
15 March	Meeting and talk (Details to be announced)	Audi Camp Conference Centre: 19.00
18/19 March	Weekend outing to Qudum and Matsibi areas	Details of camp site to be announced