

Bird population monitoring in Botswana

It is widely acknowledged that birds are very useful indicators of biodiversity and the state of the environment. This is due to several reasons: birds occur in all habitats, often reflect trends in other animals and plants, and are sensitive to environmental change. Importantly, birds have a real connection with people and their lives. Birds, if monitored, can therefore be used to report on the status of Botswana's biodiversity to the Convention on Biological Diversity. The evidence collected from monitoring birds can help conservation decision-makers to influence politicians to find suitable biodiversity management solutions and hence a healthy environment for us and future generation. BirdLife Botswana's (BirdLife Partner) work to date has been mainly focused on monitoring and conserving globally threatened birds in Botswana. This means that common birds have been ignored in bird conservation and monitoring practices in Botswana. There may be declines of common bird populations without our knowledge as to why, yet such declines might indicate a fundamental flaw in the way Botswana treat their environment. Therefore, BirdLife Botswana has introduced a Bird Population Monitoring (BPM) Scheme, formerly Common Bird Monitoring Scheme, for Botswana. The scheme is aimed at demonstrating that birds are useful in showing changes in the overall condition of our environment. The BPM scheme will develop a Wild Bird Index for Botswana showing bird population trends over time and will use these trends to set conservation priorities, to report on biodiversity changes/state of the environment in Botswana (and to contribute to the African/global effort). The scheme runs twice annually ? in February and November - and offers exciting birding opportunities from areas that are hardly visited. The BPM scheme calls for people with the inclination and who are willing to increase their basic knowledge of birds in Botswana to take part voluntarily. It is designed to accommodate as many participants as possible; the more there are the more robust it becomes. As a key feature, Bird Population Monitoring Scheme is a small effort which needs to be sustained over a long period. Your count is very important and it will contribute to global bird data. Potential recruits should contact the nearest BirdLife Botswana branch to register for the scheme and to be allocated a transect to start counting annually. They will be given information about how to count along the transect and a form on which to record the counts. All those who take part in the scheme are requested to return their completed forms to the nearest BirdLife Botswana branch or send them back by post. To learn more about the scheme visit www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw or e-mail blb@birdlifebotswana.org.bw or call 3190540. BirdLife Botswana is grateful to the supporters of this scheme who are the Global Environment Facility Small Grant Programme (GEF SGP) in Botswana and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), a BirdLife International Partner in the UK. Photo: Pete Hancock