**Popa Falls Resort (NWR) Bird Survey. ( 8, 9 August 2013 - Mark Paxton)**

**The intention of this report is to record the bird species seen during a brief but thorough two day visit to the area. It also gives a list of birds which should occur in this area, but were not seen.**

**This report will also give some suggestions on how the proposed alterations, improvements and extension of Tourism Accommodation, in particular the establishment of additional cabins on an island section previously left undeveloped, may affect the birds in general and more specifically some threatened and vulnerable species found in the area. It also contains some suggestions on the management of this resort to the advantage of the bird species.**

The entire property was walked on foot during the day and also during the night to ascertain what species are readily seen in and around the resort. A boat was also used to cover the banks and neighbouring islands. Bird calls were also used particularly for Owls and other nocturnal species difficult to detect during the daylight hours and for Warblers and other species which frequent dense habitat and therefore not readily seen.

Informal talks were held with the contractors on site who were extremely helpful and pointed out the proposed sites for the cabins on the island, the boardwalks and much of the other proposed developments and changes to be made.

**Birds Seen: (In order of sighting)**

1. White-browed Robin Chat
2. Terrestrial Brownbul
3. White-browed Scrub Robin
4. Grey Lourie
5. Dark-capped Bulbul
6. White-bellied Sunbird
7. Marico Sunbird
8. Black-backed Puffback
9. Red-billed Firefinch
10. Southern Masked Weaver
11. Lesser Honeyguide
12. Red-eyed Dove
13. Yellow White-eye
14. Giant Kingfisher
15. Yellow-bellied Greenbul
16. African Fish Eagle
17. Cattle Egret
18. Little Bee-eater
19. Black-headed Oriole
20. Reed Cormorant
21. African Skimmer
22. Swamp Boubou
23. Southern Black Tit
24. Bradfield’s Hornbill
25. African Darter
26. Pied Kingfisher
27. Egyptian Geese
28. Hartlaub’s Babbler
29. Shikra
30. Pied Wagtail
31. Laughing Dove
32. Cape Turtle Dove
33. Namaqua Dove
34. Grey Hornbill
35. Emerald-spotted Dove
36. Collared Sunbird
37. Scarlet-chested Sunbird
38. Ashy Flycatcher
39. Black-collared Barbet
40. Fork-tailed Drongo
41. Red-eyed Bulbul
42. African Goshawk
43. African Harrier Hawk
44. Green-backed Honeybird
45. Tawny-flanked Prinia
46. Grey-backed Cameroptera
47. Blue Waxbill
48. Violet-eared Waxbill
49. Red-billed Francolin
50. Violet Wood Hoopoe

The low numbers of birds seen, could be ascribed to the time of year (Winter) when all the migratory species have left the region and bird diversity is generally low throughout Namibia. However the variable type of habitat, with a large amount and variety of fruiting trees as well as the condition of the vegetation indicates that it could and should support a far larger diversity and number of bird species. Only one small bird party was found and the bird numbers were incredibly low. There were no signs of rodents and consequently no Owls were seen or heard. There is however a large population of resident feral cats which is the obvious reason for the low rodent population and also the low bird numbers. There is clearly no boundary control and human disturbance with illegal hunting using traps and catapults is also a contributing factor to the low bird numbers. Although the building operations are undoubtedly a huge disturbance factor, these activities are confined and I do not consider this a reason for low bird numbers

**Additional Birds which should have been seen:** (This list takes into account the time of year, historical knowledge and also the limited but specific habitat types on the property itself and in the immediate neigbourhood)

1. Little Grebe
2. Purple Heron
3. Grey Heron
4. Black-headed Heron
5. Little Egret
6. Squacco Heron
7. White-Backed Night Heron
8. Rufous-bellied Heron
9. Little Bittern
10. Black-crowned Night Heron
11. Green-backed Heron
12. Hammerkop
13. Spur-winged Goose
14. Comb Duck
15. White-faced Duck
16. Osprey
17. Western-banded Snake Eagle
18. Ayre’s Hawk-eagle
19. Long-crested Eagle
20. Lizzard Buzzard
21. Gabar Goshawk
22. Little Sparrowhawk
23. Black Sparrowhawk
24. Lanner Falcon
25. Bat Hawk
26. Swainson’s Francolin
27. Crested Francolin
28. Black Crake
29. African Jacana
30. African Rail
31. Black-winged Stilt
32. Three-banded Plover
33. Common Sandpiper
34. Common Greenshank
35. Rock Pratincole
36. Water Thick-Knee
37. African Green Pigeon
38. Meyer’s Parrot
39. Coppery-tailed Coucal
40. White-browed Coucal
41. Senegal Coucal
42. Pel’s Fishing Owl
43. Spotted Eagle Owl
44. Barn Owl
45. African Wood Owl
46. Southern White-faced Scops-owl
47. Barred Owlet
48. Pearl-spotted Owl
49. Fiery-necked Nightjar
50. African Palm-swift
51. Narina Trogon?
52. Red-faced Mousebird
53. Malachite Kingfisher
54. Striped Kingfisher
55. White-fronted Bee-eater
56. Common Scimitarbill
57. African Hoopoe
58. Greater Honeyguide
59. Crested Barbet
60. Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird
61. Cardinal Woodpecker
62. Golden-tailed Woodpecker
63. Bearded Woodpecker
64. Lesser-striped Swallow
65. Red-breasted Swallow
66. Mosque Swallow
67. White-breasted Cuckooshrike
68. Arrow-marked Babbler
69. Kurrichane Thrush
70. African Stonechat
71. Red-capped Robin-chat
72. Yellow-bellied Eremomela
73. Green-capped Eremomela
74. Little Rush Warbler
75. Lesser Swamp Warbler
76. Greater Swamp Warbler
77. Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler
78. Long-billed Crombec
79. Yellow-breasted Apalis
80. Neddicky
81. Rattling Cisticola
82. Luapula Cisticola
83. Chirping Cisticola
84. Chinspot Batis
85. Cape Wagtail
86. Crinson-breasted Shrike
87. Magpie Shrike
88. Brown-crowned Tchagra
89. Orange-breasted Bush-shrike
90. Brubru
91. Southern White-crowned Shrike
92. Greater Blue-eared Starling
93. Cape Glossy Starling
94. Violet-backed Starling
95. Burchell’s Starling
96. Meve’s Starling
97. Wattled Starling
98. Red-billed Oxpecker
99. Amethyst Sunbird
100. Southern Grey-headed Sparrow
101. Thick-billed Weaver
102. Red-billed Buffalo Weaver
103. White-browed Sparrow Weaver
104. Village Weaver
105. Spectacled Weaver
106. Red-headed Weaver
107. Golden Weaver
108. Southern Brown-throated Weaver
109. Red-billed Quelea
110. Southern Red Bishop
111. Fan-tailed Widowbird
112. Pin-tailed Whydah
113. Shaft-tailed Whydah
114. Jameson’s Firefinch
115. Brown Firefinch
116. Black-faced Waxbill
117. Green-winged Pytilia
118. Yellow-fronted Cannary
119. Golden-Breasted Bunting

**This report was also targeted particularly towards some specifically vulnerable, endangered or threatened bird species which may be affected by the proposed alterations and developments on the property and the extensions onto the island, namely:**

**African Skimmer.** Sandbanks are essential to this bird for breeding purposes and there are no sandbanks within and in the immediate vicinity of this resort and the birds seen were flying past during feeding forays. The proposed development therefore should not pose any threat.

**Rock Pratincole.** Disappointingly, there were no birds seen during the survey even though a large area of the falls was searched especially to find this bird which although an Intra-African Migrant, should have already been here by now. These birds are entirely dependent on small rock clusters in the mainstream of the river on which they breed. They are particularly sensitive to disturbance from Cormorants, Darters and other rock users, and their eggs are highly vulnerable being laid on bear rock without any form of protection. The proposed extension development of additional accommodation units on the island should not be a threat as this does not include the rocky habitat of this bird.

**Pel’s Fishing Owl.** Although the property still has some ideal nesting and roosting habitat for this highly endangered owl, I could find no evidence of this bird making use of this property for nesting and/or roosting purposes, although they are known to have done so in the past. They are particularly sensitive to human disturbance even though in some cases they seem to adapt to close human association due to absolute necessity. I suspect these owls are not here due to prolonged and uncontrolled human use and disturbance in the area. Having assessed the habitat I would caution against the extensive expansion into the more dense forest patches on the property, as this will encourage the birds nearby to again use this area. The proposed Cabins are in a close cluster and away from the denser forest patches and therefore should not be a threat.

**White-backed Night Heron.** No birds were found during the survey but are undoubtedly in the immediate vicinity and make use of the banks and inlets as hunting habitat. Although these birds are secretive in nature they are able to exist quite well even in relatively disturbed conditions on the Okavango River. The proposed Cabins therefore do not pose a threat.

**In Conclusion:** This little resort was previously considered a birders gem, with comfortable and well-priced accommodation, and well managed. It has been allowed to degenerate into a despicable state of neglect and a prime example of appalling mismanagement. Having spoken at length to the contractors on site, I feel that the proposed developments and particularly the planned cabins and boardwalks on the island section of the property are well thought out and will have a positive effect on the entire property, but only if controlled strictly and managed properly. This piece of property still has the vegetation species diversity to attract and accommodate a huge variety of bird and animal life and under correct management can regain its former reputation as one of the top resorts in the region.