

HE AIN'T HEAVY ...



The Kori Bustard isn't just a heavy bird – it is **the** heaviest flying bird in the world, and one of the superlatives of Botswana's diverse and varied avifauna. For safari-goers in the know, it is high on the list of 'must-see' birds, and one of the very best places to find it is Nxai Pan National Park. Recently, guides at Kwando's Nxai Pan Camp collaborated with BirdLife Botswana researcher Tyler Ware to conduct a count of Kori Bustards in the park, as the species has suffered drastic declines throughout most of Southern Africa. (Photo: P Hancock)

The birds were counted by Tyler - and interested guests - during daily game drives throughout the park, and the results were analysed and compared with Kori Bustard densities from other populations in the region. Not surprisingly, Nxai Pan has one of the healthiest Kori Bustard populations remaining in Southern Africa, confirming Botswana as one of the last strongholds for the species. BirdLife Botswana and Kwando Safaris will continue to work together to monitor this and other 'birds of conservation concern' as part of their commitment to conserving Botswana's wonderful wildlife.

Guests were fascinated to see displaying adult male Kori Bustards during the counts – they inflate a large throat pouch and cock their tails, making them look even larger. The largest birds are able to intimidate smaller rivals and thereby secure the opportunity to mate with the most females. Interestingly, this results in a selection pressure for the males to become ever larger, so that there is a marked size difference between males and females. This is obviously tempered by reality – there is a limit to just how big an adult male can become! A large one will weigh in at 20 kilograms (almost double that of a female) and if this doesn't sound heavy to you, imagine a six or seven year old child with large, broad wings getting airborne! Lions, Leopards and Cheetahs target Kori Bustards as prey items – another reason for not becoming too large.



(Photo: J Bestelink)

Says Tyler Ware "While the Kori Bustard was the main focus of my research, the time I spent at Nxai Pan was memorable for all the incredible wildlife sightings during the counts, and the helpfulness of the guides who freely shared their knowledge with me. A big thank-you to all the Kwando staff at Nxai Pan Camp".