

1. PROJECTS: Lowveld/Kruger National Park Large Bird Project

The Lowveld/Kruger National Park Large Bird Project has several components and focuses on the implementation of monitoring and conservation actions focused on the large bird species occurring in the region.

- The Ground Hornbill Project is sponsored by Rand Merchant Bank

The focus of the EWT's Ground Hornbill work is in the Kruger National Park and coordinated by Scott Ronaldson. The Ground Hornbill populations are carefully monitored and threats specific to each area addressed. In the Lowveld/KNP, where the bulk of the country's wild populations of Ground Hornbills are found, the main threat is not habitat loss as such, but more likely the loss of suitable breeding sites through the loss of large trees. To address this hypothesis, the Lowveld/KNP Large Bird Project was initiated in the beginning of 2008. The aim is to ensure the survival of Ground Hornbills, their natural habitats and associated biodiversity, by:

- Furthering an improved understanding of Ground Hornbill biology to secure viable populations of Ground Hornbills;
- Ensuring that there is effective and efficient coordination of Ground Hornbill conservation activities outlined in the Action Plan from the Population and Habitat Viability Analysis (PHVA) report
- Securing viable habitat and promoting the sustainable utilisation and conservation of the savannas,
- Ensuring adequate legislation and enforcement for the species and its habitat;
- Identifying and mitigating human-induced threats; and
- Encouraging participation and cooperation of communities and institutions.



Ground Hornbill *Bucorvus leadbeateri*

Interesting facts about Ground Hornbills:

1. Unmistakable, turkey sized bird with a conspicuous red face and throat with a large black bill
2. Their toes are distinctively arched

3. A ground hornbill can live up to 50 or even 60 years
4. Ground hornbills nest in large natural cavities in huge trees or on cliff faces between 4 and 5 m off the ground.
5. Male Ground Hornbills are very territorial and will often go into attack mode when they see an intruder; this includes seeing their own reflection in a window. This often leads to windows being broken and ground hornbills being very unpopular.
6. They are carnivorous birds and will eat grasshoppers, worms, frogs, lizards, snakes and even tortoises.
7. Ground Hornbills do not drink water, but rather get moisture from the food they eat
8. Ground Hornbills are strong flyers but are seldom seen flying as they fly very low.

➤ **Saddle-billed Stork Population Survey Kruger National Park**

The aim of the Saddle-billed Stork Population Survey project is to monitoring the Saddle-billed Stork population by:

- Obtaining photographs of as many of the individual birds as possible
- Education and public awareness programme
- Creating and updating an electronic identification database (population register)

The Saddle-billed Stork Photographic Survey in the Kruger National Park started on 1 September 2009 and will run for a full calendar year. Side-on photographs of all the birds, from both the left and right angles, will be used for unique identification.



Facts about Saddle-billed Storks

- Endangered in South Africa
- Population estimated less than 100 individuals in SA
- Limited distribution in north-eastern low-lying areas of SA
- Normally found in pairs along water sources
- Easily identifiable by large size, black and white plumage and yellow “saddle” on the bill
- Male has dark eyes and small yellow wattles at base of bill, female has yellow eyes
- Uniquely identifiable from front pattern of the black band across the red bill
- Territorial behaviour with no seasonal migration



Saddle-billed stork *Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis*

This survey forms part of a research project that will be conducted over the next three years on the population status of Saddle-billed Storks, one of Kruger's rarities, and one of the “Big Six” birds. The Kruger National Park is a very important saddle-billed stork conservation area. Due to its size, habitat and pristine status, it is one of the few areas where the species can exist protected from human activity under near natural conditions. Before any further monitoring or conservation initiatives commence for the protection of saddle-billed storks, it is important to have information on the current state of the population.

Pel's Fishing Owl Survey

The Birds of Prey Working Group Manager, André Botha, coordinates this project. The Pel's Fishing Owl *Scotopelia peli* is listed as “vulnerable” in the Red Data Book for Birds and the South African population is considered to be less than 60 breeding pairs. More than half of this population is believed to occur within the Kruger National Park along the Limpopo-, Luvuvhu-, Sabie- and Olifants rivers. It is important to do regular surveys of this species' range in South Africa to establish long-term population trends and implement appropriate strategies to address aspects that could threaten this species. The Birds of Prey Working Group aims to address this need by implementing an annual survey of this species range within the Kruger National Park along the Limpopo-, Luvuvhu-, Sabie- and Olifants river working with Project partners such as SAN-Parks (within the Kruger National Park), KZN Wildlife, land-owners and other NGO's\



Pel's Fishing Owl *Scotopelia peli* – Picture by André Botha