

**Project Title: Assessing the Breeding probability of Slaty Egrets in and around the Barotse floodplain IBA, Zambia**

**Background**

September 2017, BirdWatch Zambia (BWZ) was awarded a capacity development small grant under BirdLife International’s young conservation leaders program. The grant supported a team of early career conservationist working for BirdWatch Zambia (the BirdLife International Partner) to undertake an ambitious series of surveys to ascertain the breeding probability of the Vulnerable Slaty Egret, *Egretta vinaceigula* in Zambia’s Barotse floodplain IBA and the Liuwa National Park.



**Project Objectives**

Project Objectives	Indicators/measures of success
Identify all breeding colonies on the Barotse floodplain and initiate studies to assess the breeding performance of the Slaty Egret on the Barotse floodplain	New maps showing area utilised by the species Public reports documenting work on the project and new information collected about the species At least one paper in a scientific journal containing new information collected about the species
Improve local knowledge on threats to the species and impact of human disturbance through awareness talks	Locals aware of their roles in the conservation of the Slaty Egret
Train at least 2 local species monitors to sustain data collection	At least 2 locals participating in field assessments and able to collect data with minimal supervision
Prescribe measures to safe guard breeding, foraging and roosting sites of the Slaty Egret on the Barotse floodplain	Document of prescribed measures to safe guard key areas utilised by the species attached to final report and shared with the Department of National Parks and Wildlife, the custodians of all wildlife in Zambia.

**Project Implementation Approach**

The project is being implemented in partnership with the department of national parks and wildlife (DNPW) as well as the International Crane Foundation (ICF). The research team in

composed of representatives from BWZ, ICF and DNPW and data from the project is jointly owned by the 3 institutions. The strength of this partnership is built on the foundation of these 3 institutions' work in waterbird monitoring on the Kafue Flats which has been sustained for well over 2 decades.

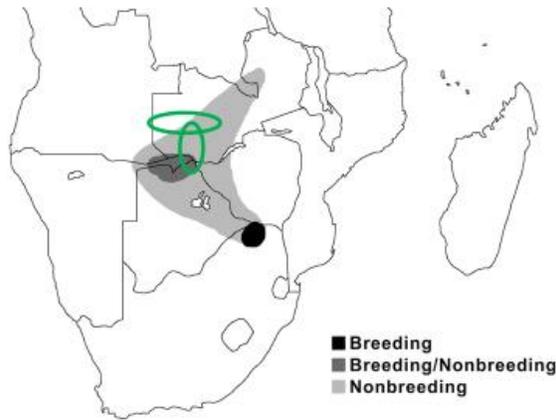
### Research Method

The project team is using the data point count methods for water hole searches to document habitat type and species present at water holes. The water holes are on 5km transects established during the baseline surveys. 50% of the transects were initially randomly selected while the other 50% was along established tracks/loops especially within the national park due to regulations regarding off road driving. The team either walks or uses the vehicle to move along transects depending on the nature of the terrain on that transect. All transect start and end points are Georeferenced, the same is done with the water holes along the transects. Birds are spotted using binoculars and/or spotting scope. In addition to Slaty Egret presence/absence data, general waterbird data is also recorded. In addition, habitat details and various parameters are also recorded as indicated in the form below.

### Waterbird Data Recording Form

Observer	Habitat Description	
Location	Dominant Plant Species	% of major habitat in 200m radius
Date	1	Herbaceous emergent vegetation: %
GPS	2	Open water/floating plants: %
	3	Exposed mud/sand/rock: %
Field Observation	4	Floating Vegetation: %
Current Surface Water Depth: cm.	5	Shrubs: %
	6	Total= 100%
Human influence affecting area:	Wetland Permanency (circle one): Permanent                      seasonal	
NOTES:		

The collected data is then analysed against the known suitable breeding habitat of the Slaty Egret to establish possible points at which the species maybe breeding in Zambia. So far it seems as though Liuwa, Busanga and Simungoma (shown below) are the most likely breeding sites. However, it is necessary to have some follow-up surveys in the areas before the data can be declared conclusive.



In addition to bird and habitat description data, the project team has also documented threats to the habitats around the Barotse. It is worth noting that agriculture expansion for rice farming was listed as the most critical from the data of the November and March surveys.

The preliminary findings so far are now feeding into the development of a proposed 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the project which is to be submitted in October this year for possible funding. Proposed highlights of the anticipated 2<sup>nd</sup> phase are shown below;



## Plans ahead;

- Expand search area as habitat is extremely fragmented
- Liuwa – north-west of range and Simungoma South west
- Movement patterns – Kafue basin link
- Improve citizen science
- Look-out for relationships
- Strategic partnerships
- Fundraising and sustainability planning
- Documentation
- Publicity