

## Final Evaluation Report

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Your Details	
<b>Full Name</b>	Abigail Karimanzira
<b>Project Title</b>	Lilian's Lovebirds in the Zambezi Valley: Assessing availability and habitat status in communal lands of Zimbabwe
<b>Application ID</b>	39464-1
<b>Date of this Report</b>	22 May 2024

**1. Indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.**

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
Determine the availability and distribution of Lilian's lovebirds in communal areas				Lilian's lovebirds were observed in Mbire and Nyaminyami districts within the Middle Zambezi Valley. Due to limited time and resources, approximately 40% of the communal areas in the project area were not visited.
Identify preferred and suitable habitats in communal lands.				Approximately 20% of the observed Mopane Woodlands in the Mbire and Nyaminyami districts are intact, with big cathedral trees suitable for Lilian's lovebird roosting and nesting. Due to limited time and resources, the rest of the communal areas in the project area were not visited, and other areas within the visited areas were not surveyed due to inaccessibility.
Assess the level of threats and species-human interactions.				Again, a full threat assessment was not achieved due to limited time. The significant threats throughout the surveyed areas were habitat destruction owing to land clearance for farming and tree logging for energy. Lovebirds are significant pests in all areas. They feed on grain crops and fruits.

**2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.**

**a). Lilian's lovebirds were sighted in four communal lands and recorded on eBird and Birdclasser platforms.**



Figure 1: Pictures of Lilian's Lovebirds in Mayovhe and Masoka Villages

The project recorded Lilian's Lovebirds in four communal lands within the Mbire and Nyaminyami districts of the Middle Zambezi Valley. Every sighting was recorded on eBird and Birdclasser, free access platforms for information. The presence of the Lovebirds in the surveyed communal lands was recorded and mapped using the two applications, which can also reveal the geographical range and identify hotspots for the species. Additionally, the population of the species was estimated to be approximately 200 in Mola village of Nyaminyami district and 45 in Masoka and Angwa villages of Mbire district. However, population trends still need to be determined in dry and wet seasons.

**b). Raised awareness of Lilian's Lovebird's status to communities and primary, secondary, and tertiary school students.**



Figure 2: Educational campaign with primary and secondary schools students in Masoka village

The project conducted awareness talks with the villagers in Masoka and Mola villages. The villagers were educated on the importance of birds in general, their ecology, and the distribution of the species. The villagers appreciated that they shared a habitat with the species and that it was only endemic to their area, the Middle Zambezi Valley. The project also included an educational talk with Masoka

primary and secondary school students. The talk was interactive, whereby the students were given a chance to talk about what they know about the importance of birds and Lilian's Lovebirds. Understanding the myths and traditional knowledge associated with birds from different areas was very important. Lilian's lovebird posters were distributed in Masoka and Mola schools for students to read in their classes. Additionally, outside the project area, a workshop with Mashonaland Creepers (a BirdLife Zimbabwe youth group), the University of Zimbabwe and other individuals was conducted on the 6<sup>th</sup> April 2024 to raise awareness of the species and its conservation status.

**c). Compilation of identified threats and habitat-specific needs for documentation and sharing with relevant authorities for conservation actions.**

Several threats were observed during the two surveys conducted in the Middle Zambezi Valley. In order of severity, these were habitat destruction from land clearance for cultivation, burning of forests for hunting, persecution, and hunting for food. In a focus group discussion conducted in Masoka village, farmers revealed that Lilian's lovebirds are pests as they feed on their crops. This was also evident in Mola village, and the key informant interviews conducted yielded the same results. One farmer in Tabala village of the Mola community said that lovebirds are more of a problem than the red-billed queleas, which are known to be problem birds with action plans from Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Authority. Farmers in these areas implement several control measures during the farming season to protect their crops. There is a need to explore sustainable control measures where the villagers can protect their crops whilst the birds are left unprosecuted.

**3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.**

The project area, the Middle Zambezi Valley, is a wildlife area with rugged terrain and untarred roads that require high-clearance vehicles. During the first trip, the project team experienced a serious breakdown with their vehicle on their way to Masoka village. They were left with no vehicle to use for the survey, and the situation was made worse by being in a very remote area without reception to make phone calls. Fortunately, the community guide agreed to use his vehicle for the survey, but the team had limitations in fully exploring the sites because the vehicle's 4 x 4 was not functioning. This also led to additional fuel costs that we had to put in his vehicle, which had very high prices due to remoteness. On the second trip, the project had to reallocate funds for vehicle hire as the available vehicle was under repairs. The project reduced survey days from 12 to 10 and opted for cheaper accommodation during surveys to accommodate funds for vehicle hire.





Figure 3: Masoka villagers helping to fix the vehicle after a breakdown.

#### **4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefited from the project.**

The local communities were involved through the awareness campaigns conducted with Mola primary and Masoka primary and secondary schools and villagers. Additionally, the project team managed to meet with farmers from Masoka and Angwa villages in a focus group discussion, which was mandated to understand their concerns about Lilian's lovebirds. In Mola village, four farmers were interviewed. The project team met with the chiefs and village headmen in the surveys, who supported the initiative with information. The local communities have benefited from the capacitation of Lilian's lovebird knowledge of its ecology and conservation status. The communities are looking forward to continuing to work together to find effective and sustainable solutions to protect their crops during the farming season. Additionally, the project team consulted safari operators in the Middle Zambezi Valley for insights on Lilian's Lovebird sites within communal areas.

#### **5. Are there any plans to continue this work?**

The project aims to survey the remaining communal areas in the Middle Zambezi Valley to understand the availability and habitat suitability of Lilian's lovebirds across the entire range in Zimbabwe. The key informant interviews with farmers revealed that Lilian's lovebirds are present mainly between February and May when their crops mature; hence, the lovebirds are probably drawn to the abundance of food. The project will continue by conducting a seasonal survey to understand the population trends in dry and wet seasons and working with communities to develop solutions for crop management.

#### **6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?**

The project's activities and immediate outcomes were shared on BirdLife Zimbabwe's social media platforms (Facebook and X). Below are links to the first and second survey Facebook reports.

<https://www.facebook.com/100070134764465/posts/pfbid0m8Na6o4Abs8JN4m88Ud7uAPhcwyBzcjRiHxTcZu2aCac3zjE7wTwaPLBsnoLoGi8l/?app=fbl>

<https://www.facebook.com/100070134764465/posts/pfbid0U68X6rTZnidUJooJkNzjHptbWcZg3fBSKSKn34zGFwwJ4Pg2CPHxfG2abZztJyfXl/?app=fbl>

An overall project report highlighting the project's activities, results, challenges, and next steps will be published in the BirdLife Zimbabwe newsletter, the Babbler. The Babbler is widely distributed and can be accessed on the BirdLife Zimbabwe website: [www.birdlifezimbabwe.org](http://www.birdlifezimbabwe.org). The report will also be shared with other Lilian's lovebird researchers, BirdLife partners in Southern Africa and the World Parrot Trust.

The project will submit a project thesis for publication in the Honeyguide, a peer-reviewed Journal for Ornithology.

## **7. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the critical next steps?**

The important next steps for the project are:

- Mapping of Mopane woodlands in the entire species range and identifying key areas for conservation action.
- Collaborating with communities, Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Authority and other relevant organisations such as the Forestry Commission and Ministry of Agriculture to develop a species conservation action plan.
- Collaborating with BirdLife partners in Zambia, Malawi, and Mozambique to conduct a joint species survey on distribution and abundance to assess population trends.
- A breeding success survey in Zimbabwe should be conducted, and the results should be compared with those of studies done in Malawi.
- Monitoring of populations in both communal and protected areas

## **8. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during the course of your work?**

The project produced posters to distribute in schools in the project area and t-shirts that were shared with a few schoolchildren and the village headmen. The Rufford Foundation logo was included on both the posters and t-shirts.

During the educational campaigns and talks, the project team always mentioned The Rufford Foundation as the project's funder. Additionally, the project team included a session to raise awareness among university students about The Rufford Foundation's small grants during a talk.

## **9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.**

**Peter Makhusa, Matabeleland Youth Conservation Society**

Assistance during field surveys and data collection

**Ronald Chirimuta, Educational Officer, BirdLife Zimbabwe**

Assistance during field surveys and data collection

**Karen Chiro, BirdLife Zimbabwe**

Assistance during field surveys and data collection

**Shamiso Munhuwei, Biology Student at the University of Zimbabwe**

Assistance during field surveys and data collection

**Student Muroyiwa, Community guide, Mola Village**

Guiding services during fieldwork and facilitating meetings with village headmen and villagers for interviews and discussions

**Mackenzie Zirotu, Community guide, Masoka Village**

Guiding services during fieldwork and facilitating meetings with village headmen and villagers for interviews and discussions

**Chrispen Chiparushe, Manager, Matusadonha Conservation Society**

Provided support with information on Lilian's Lovebird occurrence in the communal areas.

**Tiwonge Mzumara Gawa, Lecturer, Malawi University of Science Technology**

Provided technical assistance.

**10. Any other comments?**

We are grateful to The Rufford Foundation for funding this project, which made the project activities possible. We also extend our gratitude to BirdLife Zimbabwe for the technical assistance and provision of field equipment. As a Rufford Foundation grantee, I had the opportunity to attend the Namibia Rufford Grantee Learning 5-day event in September 2023 at the Cheetah Conservation Centre in Otjiwarongo. The workshop was eye-opening, enhanced my research capacity and allowed me to network with different researchers across Southern Africa.