



MIKE BUCKHAM

nest-boxes for lovebirds

The Zambezi Mopane Woodlands eco-region of southern Africa provides habitat for a range of bird species, including the Near-Threatened Lilian's Lovebird, which roosts and nests in cavities in mature mopane trees that are so tall they are known as 'cathedral mopanes'. The woodlands also provide food in the form of seeds, fruits and flowers.

Mopane woodlands are disappearing, however, as their wood is increasingly in demand for timber and charcoal, and their ongoing demise has greatly affected cavity-dwelling bird species. In Malawi, Lilian's Lovebirds were found mainly in Liwonde National Park and the surrounding communities because of the prevalence of mopane woodland. Even here, though, logging in the communities has meant that the species is now restricted to the park.

In June 2021, the Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi (WESM), in collaboration with the World Parrot Trust, placed 60 artificial nest-boxes in Liwonde National Park to explore

their potential as a conservation tool for threatened lovebirds in areas where nesting trees have been lost. Half were placed in roosting sites and the other half in non-roosting sites. The boxes were installed at an average height of eight metres above the ground and facing south-east, as the natural cavities occupied by Lilian's Lovebirds face in that direction.

Seven months after setting up the nest-boxes we began monitoring them. Initial results indicated that 42 per cent of the boxes monitored contained mopane leaves and showed signs of occupation by small mammals such as squirrels. By July 2022, when the second monitoring was conducted, the number of boxes being used had increased to 62 per cent.

However, there has been no sign of occupation by Lilian's Lovebirds. This is not unexpected, as the species is sensitive to change within its environment and the birds can take time to adapt to new situations. The research will continue, with the next step being to install cameras and camera traps to



TIWONGE GAWA



SASCHA DUECKER

ABOVE WESM research assistant Tamara Chirwa is responsible for data collection and identifying natural cavities within the sites.

TOP Patrick Katundu, a professional climber from Mulanje Outdoor Adventure, places a nest-box in a tree.

ABOVE, LEFT Listed as Near Threatened, the Lilian's Lovebird population is made up of 6000–15 000 individuals.

better monitor bird activity. This is the first experiment of its kind in the region for this species and is likely to run for several years before showing positive results.

TAMARA CHIRWA, TIWONGE MZUMARA, SASCHA DUECKER AND ROWAN MARTIN

what's in a name?

PETREL

French explorer Louis Adulphe Delegorgue, when writing about his voyage to the Cape in 1838, described how petrels followed the boat in order to pick off the water's surface any morsels that had been thrown overboard.

He wrote, "Here is a bird", a Dutch sailor might have said to his friend during one of the first voyages to these parts, "that walks on water. What man in the world can do the same?"

"If the Bible does not lie," the other might have replied, "I know of one."

"Who is he then?"

"Saint Peter the fisherman."

'These are "little Peters", whence comes "petrel".'

From Latin *Petrellus*, a diminutive form of Peter.

White-faced Storm Petrel *Pelagodroma marina*
'A marine bird that races over the open seas.'

Pelago/droma (Greek: πελαγος *pelagos* = sea, high seas + δρομος *dromos* = running, racing)
marina (Latin: *marinus* = marine)

EDDIE GERMIQUET



JJ HARRISON/CREATIVE COMMONS