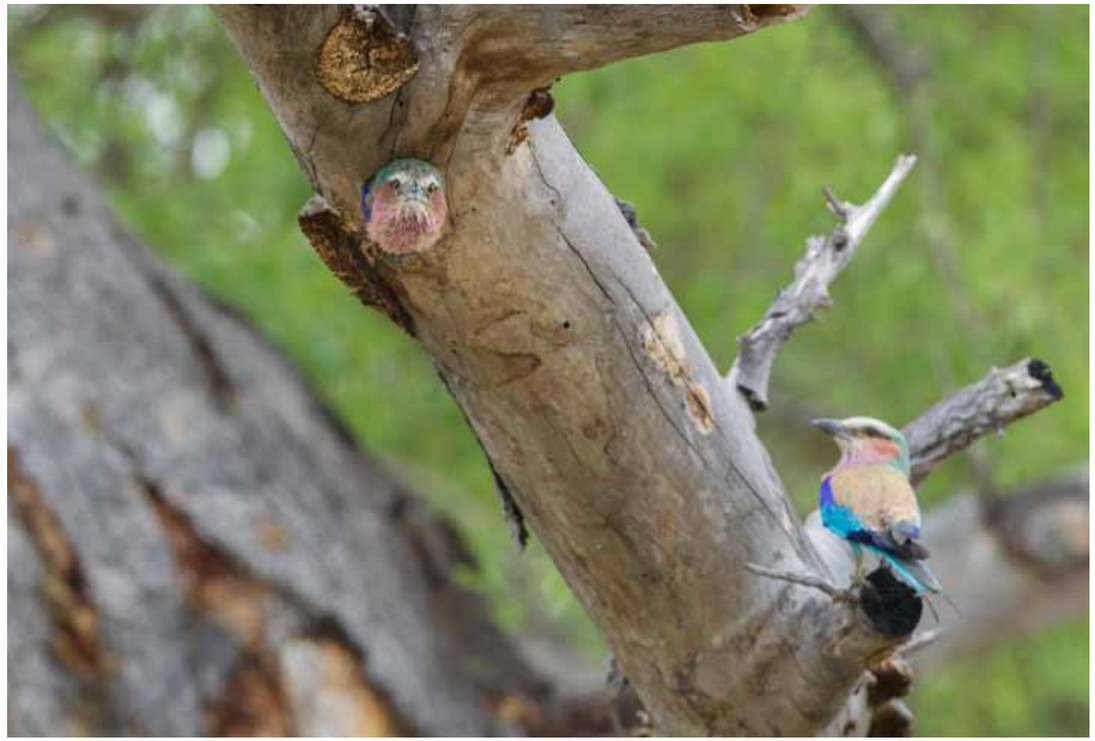
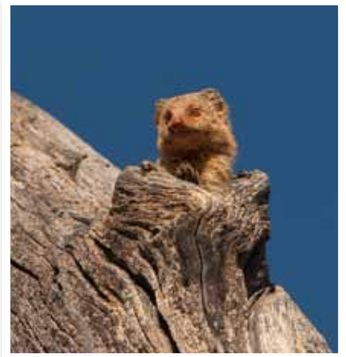
tree fellers



In the open woodlands of northern Botswana, mature trees provide a vital, but ever decreasing source of cavity nest sites for a wide variety of bird species.

The nest holes occur when a branch or the entire tree dies, and the wood within gradually rots away, in the process creating a cavity which can be exploited for nesting or roosting. There are also bird species, such as woodpeckers, barbets and parrots, which excavate their own nest holes with their beaks.

There seem to be more birds that favour cavity nests for breeding than there are available nest holes, and this high demand for property can lead to fierce competition among birds. In the early summer, I frequently see Lilac-breasted Rollers tussling with their Broad-billed cousins at the entrance to nest holes. As the resident Lilac-breasted Rollers begin their breeding cycle before the migrant Broad-billed Rollers arrive they usually manage to take occupation first.



The effect that the deforestation of woodland areas by people harvesting trees for firewood and building materials has on bird species that utilise this natural resource as safe nesting and roosting sites cannot be underestimated.

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above *There are many species -- hornbills, kingfishers, rollers, starlings, oxpeckers and owlets among them – for which cavities in trees, whether formed naturally or excavated by birds themselves, are critical for their nesting success.*

left *Cavity nests are usually fairly inconspicuous but, depending on the size of the entrance hole, they can attract a range of predators such as the slender mongoose, snakes and even the African Harrier-Hawk, intent on pirating the contents of the nest.*

opposite *Dickinson's Kestrel appears to be the only diurnal raptor species that uses tree nest cavities in which to breed. Falcons and kestrels typically nest on any small ledge, a flat area in a tree crown or on top of a disused nest, but in northern Botswana, Dickinson's Kestrel is an exception.*