

Is it a Boeing? No, it's a bird!

The kori bustard is the world's heaviest flying bird. Mark D Anderson tells us more about these threatened giants.



TOP SPOT

WORDS & PICTURE
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If kori bustards were any heavier, they would have to file a flight plan with air traffic control before being allowed to take off. An adult male kori can weigh more than 12 kg! To get its massive body airborne, it makes full use of its 2,5 m wingspan and a long runway.

Kalahari Kentucky. Koris are apparently good eating, and they're hunted both by snaring and shooting. The nickname "Kalahari Kentucky" does not help their conservation plight. But anyone wanting to try Colonel Sanders' 11 herbs and spices on these birds faces a fine of R10 000 or two years' imprisonment – a good enough reason to look elsewhere for one's Kentucky.

A varied palate. A kori will snack on insects, scorpions and lizards, grab a mouse that crosses its path and rob a bird's nest of eggs or chicks. These birds have even been seen scavenging on road kill and fire casualties. They don't mind eating veggies either, and take their greens in the form of grass, leaves, berries, flowers and even acacia tree gum.

Where can I see one? The kori bustard is most commonly seen in large conservation areas, in particular the Kruger National Park and the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. During good rainfall years literally hundreds patrol the Auob and Nossob river beds in the Kgalagadi.

In the Savuti area of Botswana carmine bee-eaters like to perch on the backs of kori bustards from where they hawk insects (so you get two birds for the price of one).

Sadly, kori bustards' numbers are declining – they're now classified as "vulnerable" in the *Red Data Book of Birds*. 