

BIG BIRDING DAY 2014

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PART 1

Big Birding Day 2014 followed the dates for Southern Africa this year and was held over the weekend of 29-30th December. The aims were:

- To identify as many bird species as possible
 - a) in either a continuous 24 or 36 hour period, and
 - b) within either an area with a radius of 50 km or your garden.
- To have fun and enjoy ourselves, while at the same time increasing awareness of our wonderful bird life and introducing more people to the joys of birding.

OPTIONAL: To seek sponsorship to raise much needed funds for BLZ. While not compulsory teams are encouraged to find sponsors.

The rules remained the same as previous Big Birding Days, or Birdwatch's, as they have been termed in the past.

14 teams took part this year, 5 around Harare, 4 around Bulawayo, 2 each in Hwange and Chilo Gorge/Gonarezhou respectively and 1 at Victoria Falls. The eastern highlands and Zambezi Valley were not represented, evident from the lack of birds particular to those regions. However, Victoria Falls and Gonarezhou brought in some 'specials'! 9 teams chose the 24 hour category, of which 1 (Magora) concentrated on the garden.

Congratulations to the *Stork(s) Raven Mad*, the only team to bust the 200 species mark in 24 hours, and to team Shadwell who got 163 species in the 36 hour category. But I'm sure everyone had fun, which is the main purpose of the exercise.

RESULTS — 2014 BIG BIRDING DAY

Table 1. Overall list ranking on number of species

Position	Species	Name	Leader	Category	Location
1	207	Stork Raven Mad	T. Wood	24 hour	Harare
2	180	Chilonatics	D. Newmarch	24 hour	Chilo/Gonarezhou
3	163	Shadwell	C. Shadwell	36 hour	Harare
4	158 ¹	Vic Falls Turacos	G. Blair	24 hour	Victoria Falls
5	154	Bunny Huggers	M. Jackson	36 hour	Bulawayo
6	147	Mahenye Malkohas	J. Laing	24 hour	Chilo/Gonarezhou
7	143	Sinamatella Trio	S. Long	24 hour	Hwange
8=	119	Two Old Ducks	J. Cranston	24 hour	Bulawayo
8=	119	Migratory Birds	P.-A. Ditchburn	36 hour	Hwange
10	109	Hot Spotters	R. Dennison	24 hour	Harare
11	105	Dodo's	A. Masterson	24 hour	Harare
12	92	Louw Toppies	I. Louw	24 hour	Harare
13	64	Magora	P. Mundy	24 hour ²	Bulawayo
14	43	Three Chickens	J. Ross	36 hour	Bulawayo

¹ 1 species disallowed

² includes garden category

Table 2. 36 hour category

Position	Species	Name	Leader	Category	Location
3	163	Shadwell	C. Shadwell	36 hour	Harare
5	154	Bunny Huggers	M. Jackson	36 hour	Bulawayo
8=	119	Migratory Birds	P.-A. Ditchburn	36 hour	Hwange
14	43	Three Chickens	J. Ross	36 hour	Bulawayo

Table 3. 24 hour category

Position	Species	Name	Leader	Category	Location
1	207	Stork Raven Mad	T. Wood	24 hour	Harare
2	180	Chilonatics	D. Newmarch	24 hour	Chilo/Gonarezhou
4	159	Vic Falls Turacos	G. Blair	24 hour	Victoria Falls
6	147	Mahenye Malkohas	J. Laing	24 hour	Chilo/Gonarezhou
7	143	Sinamatella Trio	S. Long	24 hour	Hwange
8=	119	Two Old Ducks	J. Cranston	24 hour	Bulawayo
10	109	Hot Spotters	R. Dennison	24 hour	Harare
11	105	Dodo's	A. Masterson	24 hour	Harare
12	92	Louw Toppies	I. Louw	24 hour	Harare
13	64	Magora	P. Mundy	24 hour	Bulawayo

Table 4. Special Species

	Area	Team
African Fish-eagle	Bulawayo	Bunny Huggers
	Chilo/Gonarezhou	Chilonatics
	Harare	Mahenye Malkohas
		Dodo's
		Hot Spotters
		Louw Toppies
	Shadwell	
Stork Raven Mad		
Hwange	Migratory Birds	
	Sinamatella Trio	
Victoria Falls	Vic Falls Turacos	
African Pygmy-goose	Bulawayo	Three Chickens
	Harare	Dodo's
Bateleur	Chilo/Gonarezhou	Chilonatics
	Hwange	Mahenye Malkohas
		Migratory Birds
Black Kite (incl. Yellow-billed Kite)	Bulawayo	Bunny Huggers
		Magora
	Hwange	Two Old Ducks
		Migratory Birds
Victoria Falls	Sinamatella Trio	
Common Ostrich	Harare	Vic Falls Turacos
	Hwange	Stork Raven Mad
Grey Crowned Crane	Hwange	Migratory Birds
		Sinamatella Trio
Martial Eagle	Chilo/Gonarezhou	Migratory Birds
		Mahenye Malkohas

	Area	Team
	Hwange	Sinamatella Trio
Red-billed Oxpecker	Chilo/Gonarezhou	Chilonatics
		Mahenye Malkohas
	Hwange	Migratory Birds
	Victoria Falls	Sinamatella Trio
Saddle-billed Stork		Vic Falls Turacos
	Chilo/Gonarezhou	Chilonatics
		Mahenye Malkohas
	Harare	Stork Raven Mad
Secretarybird	Chilo/Gonarezhou	Chilonatics
	Hwange	Migratory Birds
Southern Carmine Bee-eater	Bulawayo	Two Old Ducks
	Chilo/Gonarezhou	Chilonatics
		Mahenye Malkohas
	Hwange	Migratory Birds
	Victoria Falls	Vic Falls Turacos
Southern Ground-hornbill	Chilo/Gonarezhou	Chilonatics
		Mahenye Malkohas
	Hwange	Migratory Birds
		Sinamatella Trio
White Stork	Hwange	Migratory Birds
Yellow-billed Oxpecker	Hwange	Migratory Birds
		Sinamatella Trio

PART II – THE ORNITHOLOGICAL RESULTS

388 of the 389 species claimed (treating the Black & Yellow-billed Kites separately) were allowed, the one suspect bird being a Swamp Boubou claimed around Victoria Falls (though not altering the ranking above). As Hustler *et al.* (1990. Second report of the OAZ Rarities Committee. *Honeyguide* 36(3): 113-117) have stated, the Tropical Boubou “taken from the Victoria Falls westwards becomes increasingly white on the underparts as the range of the Swamp Boubou is approached suggesting some gene flow between them.” The Swamp is also only recorded from papyrus around Kazungula. However, the call should help and according to G. Blair, they heard the call of the Swamp in thick vegetation, and it is a call they know well from Chobe, etc.! This provides an ID challenge and the potential for mis-identification of this species pair and this record cannot be fully corroborated at the time of writing. However, this also presents a challenge for birders in that area to prove a range extension below the Katombora Rapids (or not?) with detailed and careful notes on all aspects of sightings. We look forward to something in *Honeyguide*!

Remaining with Victoria Falls, the African Hobby *Falco cuvierii* was the only rarity recorded on this exercise and specials for the area included Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola*

nordmanni, Rock Pratincole *Glareola nuchalis* and Schalow’s Turaco *Tauraco schalowi*.

Other specials from other areas included Brown-headed Parrot *Poicephalus cryptoxanthus* and Green Malkoha *Ceuthmochares aereus* from Gonarezhou, but as ‘specials’ is such a subjective term, other interesting birds are dealt with below.

In the ‘invasive birds’ category mention can be made of the Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*, recorded in both Bulawayo and Hwange.

Black Herons *Egretta ardesiaca* were only recorded by two Harare teams and at Victoria Falls, whilst Rufous-bellied Heron *Ardeola rufiventris* was recorded by the Chilonatics at Gonarezhou. There was a fair showing amongst the stork family, and apart from the White *Ciconia ciconia* and Saddle-billed Stork *Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis* in Table 4, the Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* was seen by teams Chilonatics and Migratory Birds in Gonarezhou and Hwange respectively.

The Maccoa Duck *Oxyura maccoa* was only had by the Bunny Huggers, presumably at Aisleby.

Vultures were confined to the National Park areas whilst one Harare and Hwange team collared the African Cuckoo Hawk *Aviceda cuculoides*. The Stork Raven Mad team was the

only one to record Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* and Lesser Spotted Eagle *Aquila pomarina*, though one may have rather expected them ticked in Hwange. The only harrier seen was the Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*, in Harare and Bulawayo, and though not unexpected it was nonetheless nice to have Dickinson's Kestrel *Falco dickinsoni* recorded from Gonarezhou.

Red-billed Spurfowl *Pternistis adspersus* was a Hwange special and to this could be added Bradfield's Hornbill *Tockus bradfieldi* and Southern Pied Babbler *Turdoides bicolor*, with Red-crested Korhaan *Lophotis ruficrista* recorded by both Hwange teams and Victoria Falls.

The Lesser Jacana *Microparra capensis* was only seen around Harare and the Greater Painted-snipe *Rostratula benghalensis* at Gonarezhou. Apart from Gonarezhou, the White-fronted Plover *Charadrius marginatus* was reported Bulawayo (presumably Aisleby) where it is fairly rare, whilst the Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* was only noted in Gonarezhou. The Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* was only recorded by two Bulawayo teams and three Harare teams.

Courser are more prevalent away from Harare so both Three-banded Courser *Rhinoptilus cinctus* and Bronze-winged Courser *Rhinoptilus chalcopterus* were only seen in Hwange.

The Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* was only found in Hwange, whilst Harare and Victoria Falls had the White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*.

Amongst the parrots, Gonarezhou was the only place to have the Grey-headed Parrot *Poicephalus fuscicollis*, and naturally the Brown-headed Parrot *Poicephalus cryptoxanthus* which is restricted to that side of the country. And the Mahenye Malkohas lived up to their name by also having the Green Malkoha *Ceuthmochares aereus*... fortunately!, whilst both teams there managed to see Burchell's Coucal *Centropus burchellii* and the Chilonatics also got Mottled Spinetail *Telacanthura ussheri*.

Whyte's Barbets *Stactolaema whytii*, Green-backed Honeybird *Prodotiscus zambesiae*, White-breasted Cuckooshrike *Coracina pectoralis*, Miombo Tit *Parus griseiventris*, Grey Penduline-tit *Anthoscopus caroli*, Spotted Creeper *Salpornis spilonotus*, Miombo Rock-thrush *Monticola angolensis*, Boulder Chat *Pinarornis plumosus*, Southern Hyliota *Hyliota australis*, Red-faced Crombec *Sylvietta whytii*, Green-capped Eremomela *Eremomela scotops*, Striped Pipit *Anthus lineiventris*, Miombo Blue-eared Starling

Lamprotornis elisabeth, Black-eared Seed-eater *Crithagra mennelli* and Cabanis's Bunting *Emberiza cabanisi* were restricted to Harare - a list of miombo specials! The Harare vleis were the sole localities for Pale-crowned Cisticola *Cisticola cinnamomeus* and Rosy-throated Longclaw *Macronyx ameliae*.

Arnot's Chat *Myrmecocichla arnoti*, Red-capped Robin-chat *Cossypha natalensis*, Collared Palm-thrush *Cichladusa arquata* and Bearded Scrub-robin *Cercotrichas quadrivirgata* were ticked in Gonarezhou although the palm-thrush was also shared with Victoria Falls and the scrub-robin with Hwange.

Bulawayo was the only place to record Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*, whilst Yellow-bellied Eremomela *Eremomela icteropygialis* was seen there and at Hwange. Harare, Hwange and Victoria Falls all recorded the Stierling's Wren-warbler *Calamonastes stierlingi*.

Amongst the flycatchers, team Shadwell did well to pick up the African Dusky Flycatcher *Muscicapa adusta*, and Stork Raven Mad had the Grey-tit Flycatcher *Myioparus plumbeus*. The Marico Flycatcher *Bradornis mariquensis* was restricted to Bulawayo and Hwange and the Pale Flycatcher *Bradornis pallidus* to Harare.

The Mountain Wagtail *Motacilla clara* was the only wagtail unrecorded; it was pleasing to see that Bulawayo picked up the Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*.

Both Bulawayo and Hwange got Crimson-breasted Shrike *Laniarius atrococcineus* and both Gonarezhou teams found Gorgeous Bush-shrike *Telophorus quadricolor*.

Two Harare teams recorded Marico Sunbird *Cinnyris mariquensis*, one which always makes me nervous because of possible confusion with the Purple-banded Sunbird *Cinnyris bifasciatus*, which was also found by one team. The Miombo Double-collared Sunbird *Cinnyris manoensis* was also found in Bulawayo and the Variable Sunbird *Cinnyris venustus* restricted to Harare. Well done indeed to Stork Raven Mad for finding that most difficult Western Violet-backed Sunbird *Anthreptes longuemarei*!

Red-billed Buffalo-weavers *Bubalornis niger* were restricted to Gonarezhou and Hwange but both Hwange and Victoria Falls ticked the Northern Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer griseus*. Bulawayo joined Harare and Victoria Falls with the Thick-billed Weaver *Amblyospiza albifrons*, a range extension discovered during Big Birding Day 2013. Team Shadwell noted Lesser Masked-weaver *Ploceus intermedius* for Harare and it would be interesting to know just where this

sparsely distributed (around Harare) bird was seen.

Violet-eared Waxbills *Granatina granatina* were found in Bulawayo and Hwange but only the latter had the Black-faced Waxbill *Estrilda erythronotos*.