



THE BABBLER

Newsletter of



BirdLife Zimbabwe

The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

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Committee	MASHONALAND (Code 04)	MATABELELAND (Code 09)
Chairperson	Tony Alegria 0772-438697 tonyalegria47@gmail.com 490375 (h)	Cecilia Hubbard 0772-433733 ceilhubbard@yoafrica.com 285666
Vice Chairperson	Dave Rockingham-Gill 882412 (h) rgill@zol.co.zw 0774-605314	John Brebner 0782-781108 brebnerj@acolchem.co.zw 242634
Secretary	Ken Dixon 0772-324301 lynnken@mango.zw	Marina Jackson 0778-021818 mjackson@gatorzw.com 230264
Treasurer	Debbie Wiggins 0772-252651 wigpd2015@gmail.com 882851 (h)	Jean Cranston 0733-005574 cranston@gatorzw.com 242921
Members	James Ball 0772-310351 jameszwe@gmail.com 481351 (h)	Karen Learmonth 0772-231819 afspec@yoafrica.com 240055 (h) 244990 (w)
	Alison MacDonald 0772 264758 alimac1@gmail.com	
National Membership Secretary	Carolyn Dennison 0772-210240 747567 (h) CarolynDennison@birdlifezimbabwe.org	
Babbler Editor	Ian Riddell 0772-117054 gemsaf@mango.zw	

National Office

Office hours: Monday to Friday 8.30 – 4.30 **until further notice**
35 Clyde Road, Eastlea, P O Box RVL100, Runiville, Harare, Zimbabwe
Telephone: 04 – 481496
E-mail: birds@zol.co.zw

Website: www.birdlifezimbabwe.org also www.facebook.com/BirdLifeZimbabwe

Chief Executive Officer
Finance/Administration Manager
Conservation Officer: Special Species
Environmental Education
In charge of IBA/KBA's
Messenger:

Julia Pierini
Sylvia Muzavazi
Fadzai Matsvimbo
Innocent Magunje
Togarasei Fakarayi
Vengai Dengu

Useful Contacts:

Rarities Committee: Ian Riddell gemsaf@mango.zw 0772-117054
Ringing Programme: Julia Pierini JuliaPierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org 0772-894562
BLZ Library: piumosso@zol.co.zw 304298; 481496
Special Species: Peta Ditchburn specialspecies@blz.co.zw 0775-940714, 09-244596
Mashonaland South: Margaret Parrock 068-22005 or her daughter Coralee 0772-739370
Eastern Districts: Peter Gwidibira 0773-524844 pgwidibira@gmail.com
Mashonaland East Natural History Society: Chairman Peter Hadingham 04-497035
Secretary: Colin de Beer 0279-23931 jcdb1936@gmail.com
Honeyguide production: Julia Duprée daliadupree@gmail.com 09-246269

SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE NOW!

Please pay promptly and avoid constant reminders!

BirdLife Zimbabwe's membership year is from April to March, but you can join any time.

Even if you don't attend meetings and outings, your membership is really important and supports our goal to protect biodiversity and conserve birds and their habitats through education, lobbying decision-makers and interaction with international organisations.

In addition, your involvement with data collection through atlassing and submission of records is invaluable. As a member you get the newsletter, *Babbler*, every two months and two issues of *Honeyguide*, our internationally acclaimed journal, every membership year. All for a very reasonable annual fee.

Especially in these difficult economic times, donations towards any of our projects are always much appreciated and you may consider mentioning BLZ in your will!

Please note: Council agreed not to increase the fees for the 5th year. However a number of our members prefer their newsletter, *Babbler*, in printed form and it was decided those members be requested to pay an extra \$5 per year to assist with the costs of printing and distribution. This publication is now much improved and more interesting with colour pictures.

Individual/Family members (incl. children under 17)	US\$ 25.00
Pensioners (65 & over), Students	15.00
Youth Club	5.00
Schools (high density)	25.00
Schools (private), Educational Institutions	50.00
Rest of Africa	40.00
Rest of World	50.00
Corporate members	*75.00

* If you would like recognition on our public forums, choose the \$200 Corporate Plan. To learn more about corporate sponsorship and BLZ projects, write to JuliaPierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org

Payment can be made direct to the BLZ office at 35 Clyde Road, Eastlea, Harare or by deposit into **BirdLife Zimbabwe at NMB Bank, Borrowdale branch, Account No. 260092014** or **BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland, Chisipite branch of CABS, Account No. 1002399955**.

It is VERY IMPORTANT please that you include YOUR name on the deposit slip so it appears on the bank statement AND advise Carolyn Dennison by e-mail or phone, or your payment may not be recorded.

Paynow online!

BirdLife Zimbabwe is now a verified merchant of Paynow (www.paynow.co.zw, a secure online payment platform) so that we are able to receive donations and payments online. There is now a 'donate' tab on the BLZ website home page: www.birdlifezimbabwe.org where donations can be made and we are currently setting up a tab called: 'Shop with us' where products (e.g. calendars, shirts etc.) can be purchased. On the website membership page, over and above using the traditional bank details to pay subs, old and new members will be able to pay their subs by clicking on the Paynow tab at the bottom of the page. **This is especially important for our members outside Zimbabwe.** For more information email: juliapierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org

Please contact me, the national membership secretary, for all membership-related issues – new, renewals, payments, change of details, queries CarolynDennison@birdlifezimbabwe.org
And look on our Facebook page for great pictures and recent bits of birding news - www.facebook.com/BirdLifeZimbabwe and our informative website www.birdlifezimbabwe.org

Branch Activities

Mashonaland Branch

BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ) Mashonaland Calendar of Events: APRIL 2016

Saturday 2th April 2016	Marlborough Vlei Walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 3rd April 2016	Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Saturday 9th April 2016	Harare Botanic Garden	Meet at 07.00 a.m. Meet at Main Car Park, Sandringham Drive; bring a few dollars for entry and folding chair
Sunday 10th April 2016	Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Sunday 17th April 2016	Monavale Vlei Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Thursday 21st April 2016	In search of the African Pitta	Meet at 5.30 for 6.00 p.m. Presentation by Tony Wood, Avondale Sports Club
Sunday 24th April 2016	Outing to Bel-in Stud, Gwebi	Meet at 6.30 a.m. Meet at Julia's, 78 Broadlands Road, Emerald Hill to share transport. Bring folding chair, drink and snacks

BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ) Mashonaland Calendar of Events: MAY 2016

Sunday 1st May 2016	Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Saturday 7th May 2016	Marlborough Vlei Walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Saturday 14th May 2016	Greystone Park Nature Preserve	Meet at 07.00 a.m. Meet at Preserve, Halford Road off Gaydon Lane. Bring drink, snack and folding chair
Saturday 15th May 2016	Monavale Vlei Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Thursday 19th May 2016	Do birds have senses?	Meet at 5.30 for 6.00 p.m. Presentation by Innes Louw, Avondale Sports Club
Sunday 22nd May 2016	Haka Park, Msasa	Meet at 06.30 a.m. Turn left just after the Pick 'n Pay complex, 500m from the traffic circle; meet at entrance boom to Park. \$3 entrance fee for BLZ members, \$5 others. Bring folding chair, drink and snacks

For further information please contact Tony Alegria, tonyalegria47@gmail.com 0772 438697(h) 490375

Evening Meetings are on the **3rd Thursday** of each month 5.30 p.m. for 6.00 p.m. The venue is the Avondale Sports Club on Brighton Road between Sam Nujoma Street Extension and Upper East Road. There is a cash bar (*note the ticket system has been discontinued*) and a security guard. A minimum donation of \$1 per person at the door please.

Directions to regular venues:

CABS Northridge Park – From town drive along Borrowdale Road, turn right into Whitwell, next right into Ridgeway North, next right into Northend Road and first right into Northridge Close. Drive to the end of the road and go through a security boom into Northridge Park.

Marlborough Vlei – Meet at the bottom of Princess Margaret Road, off Harare Drive and follow the road round to the left. Park on the short road midway along the bottom of Princess Margaret.

Mukuvisi Woodlands – Turn off the Chiremba Road into Ford Road (opposite Queensdale shops) cross over Longford Avenue and bear left down to the T-junction on Blatherwick Road. Turn right and the gate is about 150 metres on the left. Bring a reasonable tip for the guard, taking into account the value of your vehicle! Don't forget refreshments for after the walk when we record the number of species.

Chivero and Rainham Dam – Meet at Prince Edward School car park on Josiah Tongogara Ave.

Monavale Vlei – Meet on the B.S Leon side of Fenella Drive.

Matabeleland Branch

Dates not confirmed at the time of going to press. Members will be advised of activities through Matland Musings. Any inconvenience is regretted.

Other Areas

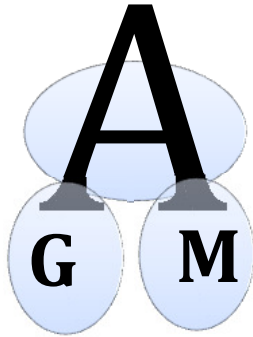
Mashonaland South – Margaret Parrock 068-22005 or 0773-263673

Eastern Districts – Monthly outings are on the last Sunday of the month and depart at 7.30 a.m. from the Mutare Museum. Spare binoculars and field guides are available. Members with a vehicle are encouraged to attend and fuel can be provided. Contact Peter Gwidibira 0773-524844 or pgwidibira@gmail.com for details.

Lowveld – contact Clive Stockil 0772-219204 or clive@chilogorge.com

National

BirdLife Zimbabwe 2016 Annual General Meeting



This is still planned for Saturday 21st May at Kyle Recreational Park

Please attend this event and find out what your Society has been up to over the past year. This will be an interesting area in which to do some birding over the weekend.

Further details will be sent to all members by email

LET'S ALL HAVE LUNCH TOGETHER TO CELEBRATE ALEX MASTERSON'S 80TH BIRTHDAY – all BLZ members are invited to participate

One of our most revered, knowledgeable and best-loved members, Alex, turns 80 on 6th April 2016 and is treating himself to a fantastic birding holiday in Ghana to mark the occasion. When he returns, BLZ Mashonaland are marking this big occasion by inviting all BLZ members to share a celebratory lunch with Alex at the restaurant in Harare Botanic Gardens which is run by the caterers who supply food at Chapman Golf Club.

We will get together between 11.30 and 12 o'clock at the restaurant on Sunday 15th May 2016. Festivities begin at 12 o'clock. The meal will cost \$20 per person which will include wine for the tables. The restaurant only provides cool drinks so take your cooler box with all your boozy drinks. As we have to pay in advance, please book your meals and pay the \$20 per person to our Treasurer, Debbie Wiggins, or any member of the BLZ Mash Committee by Thursday, 5th May.

We feel it is fitting to recognise Alex's contribution to birding and ornithology in Zimbabwe by such an event. Over the years he has benefitted the birding community and the birds in many ways; writing articles for *Honeyguide*, serving as President of BirdLife Zimbabwe, representing the organisation legally, giving amusing and instructive presentations to members, nurturing enthusiasm for birds in both black and white communities, sharing his encyclopaedic knowledge of Zimbabwe's birds and at all times being friendly, approachable and ready to assist those protecting our wildlife and habitats.

We would welcome anyone who wishes to share their memories of Alex to do so, either verbally at the lunch or, if preferred, by email to any Committee Member, in which case the material will be read out by the Chairman. This material may be used in the *Babbler*.



"How many birds can be seen in a single day? Bird race totals for a single party of birders have always pushed the limits, but how about for the global community? This year, thousands of people around the world will try to make 14 May the biggest day of birding the world has ever seen.

Last year's inaugural Global Big Day had almost 6,100 species—can we reach 7,000 species this year? 369 were reported from Zimbabwe—can we crest 400 this year? 500? With your help, we can.

On 14 May 2016, will you be a part of the Global Big Day?

For more info: juliapierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org or go to ebird.org/globalbigday to learn more.

RECENT REPORTS AND SIGHTINGS

National

World Wetlands Day 2016

Wetlands for our Future: Sustainable Livelihoods

BirdLife Zimbabwe, the Conservation Society of Monavale, Mukuvisi Woodlands, Community Water Alliance in conjunction with the Ministry of Environment, Water & Climate, Environmental Management Agency and City of Harare celebrated 2016 World Wetlands Day on Friday 5 February 2016 on Budiriro 3 Vlei (Harare) which lies west of Harare City Centre. The theme for 2016 describes that our wetlands will support our ongoing livelihoods into the future. How does this happen? The meeting on Friday answered this question and a number of others too!

What are sustainable livelihoods in a city such as Harare? All sustainable livelihoods are dependent upon a sufficient supply of water.

Where does Harare's water come from? The Greater Harare Conurbation is located in the very source of its water, the Upper Manyame Catchment Basin headwater wetlands. Cast your eyes around you as you drive around Harare's suburbs and you will see grassy open spaces. These are vlei or wetland ecosystems or headwater wetlands which create the Mukuvisi and Marimba Rivers which feed into the Manyame River. The Manyame flows into Lake Chivero downstream of the city. The water is treated and pumped back to its residents.

What is the condition of these headwater wetlands? Most of these wetlands are becoming more and more degraded due to human impacts such as monoculture agricultural practices; building construction developments; topsoil removal and sand mining; industrial and domestic pollutants. Wetland biodiversity is critical to water source. It is called Healthy Wetland Nature.

What are the results of these impacts? Less water is flowing into the supply lake downstream; it is polluted and requires considerable funding to clean it; there is ongoing siltation which means there is less storage space in the lake; the wetlands critical functions are disturbed; the water table is lowered; houses suffer when built in wetlands and constant repairs become a liability to homeowners. We have created a man-made water security crisis. We have eroded our natural capital ... the essential free services of nature. Less water is available to us to support our sustainable livelihoods!

Can we rehabilitate our source of water? Yes, we can if we do so straight away. The research coming from the case study of Monavale Vlei has proven that wetland restoration is successful. The model is available to share. Wetland biodiversity can be restored over time.

Wetland restoration can become a solution to our water insecurity issues if all stakeholders work together. Planning for housing and development on wetlands can be reconsidered with options to relocate to high ground beyond the City or to other towns; home gardening can be enhanced through conservations and vertical gardening techniques.

Wetlands store carbon and water. They help us and our livelihoods during times of climate change.

Wetlands and water are inseparable twins ... we need them to support our sustainable livelihoods now and into the future.

January Waterbird Count Results – I. Riddell

We had about 120 forms returned for the January Waterbird Count with at least 106 participants. Some of these involved sites counted twice by different teams on different dates.

I must thank Cecilia Hubbard and John Brebner and their team mates who made the long trek from Bulawayo to Hwange National Park, whilst Gavin and Marjorie Blair filtered down from Victoria Falls; the Longs, being stationed locally, didn't have as far to travel but covered some pans in the course of other work. 5 pans had 'nil counts', being dry, and the drought this season no doubt affected other pans where low species diversity was apparent. The 6th 'nil count' pan, Big Toms, contrarily, was unreachable by the Blairs on the 12th February due to muddy roads after heavy local rains! 69 sites were covered in Matabeleland.

Around Harare 18 sites were counted but quite a few regular ones were not covered as their '*I am the one!*' was not around to do them! Chiredzi teams were motivated by Marc Ribiero to count 5 sections of Mteri Dam; thanks Marc and your efforts to involve more teams in a co-ordinated July count to cover more areas is a great idea. Kariba was low but Cher McAdam covered the Nyanyana shoreline and Natalie Adamson did the Bream farm so only 2 counts came from Kariba this time. Innocent Magunje managed 3 Chivhu/Gutu sites and got Chivhu Primary School involved in counting Chikomba Dam at The Range. Nottingham Estate at Beitbridge had a count but it was apparent from the many strange birds and numbers there that their learner birder still has some way to go. This great effort shouldn't go unrewarded and if anyone should visit this dam please help their boat driver with further training – it would be a shame to lose such keenness.

To all others I haven't mentioned, your efforts are much appreciated and we look forward to your participation in future counts.

The birds... full results will appear in *Honeyguide* so just some basics here. About 160 species were recorded, this including 'official' waterbirds as well as those extra species associated with wetlands. Some 23 735 birds were counted, including those estimated. The highest number of a species goes to the Red-knobbed Coot with 921 counted at Aisleby. Also counted there were 793 Red-billed Teal, 586 Little Grebe and 472 Cattle Egret. 4 437 birds was the total on that card! Manyame usually produces high numbers like this but unfortunately wasn't counted this January – the Rushforths had boat troubles on site, but thanks again for trying Di!

2 **Black-necked Grebes** was found at Salt Pans Dam, Hwange and 1 was claimed for Biri Dam. The closest **African Darters** were to Harare was Mazvikadei Dam, otherwise they were found at Wamba, Mandavu, Highacres and Mteri dams. 2 **Pink-backed Pelicans** were claimed for Kariba. The **Hadeda Ibis** is of erratic occurrence around Bulawayo so 4 at Aisleby is a good record. The highest count of **African Black Ducks** was 10 at Connemara Lakes, Troutbeck. 2 **Cape Shovelers** were seen at Aisleby. Are **African Marsh-harriers** increasing? 8 were counted from the eastern highlands, Harare region, Bulawayo and Hwange this season. 9 **Ospreys** were distributed between Hwange, Mazvikadei, Chinhoyi, Harare and Mteri. **Black-winged Pratincoles** are usually confined to Hwange and a high count of 150 came from Salt Pans Dam. **Long-toed Lapwings** at Mandavu and Manzimbomvo Pan, Hwange are unusual and noteworthy. Single **Green Sandpipers** appeared at Kariba and Hippo Pools. A **Caspian Tern** was at Mandavu Dam. 3 **African Skimmers** on the Nyanyana shoreline of Kariba were the only ones, though Victoria Falls and the Zambezi Valley weren't covered this season. The **African Grass-owl** was found at Wamba and Carswell (Double Ro).

Lake Chivero is an Important Bird Area and Ramsar site, located 30 km west of Zimbabwe's capital, Harare. The severe economic problems that have been experienced in Zimbabwe over the past decade, and the lack of management of the area on the part of local authorities has resulted in an increase in fishing activities on the lake. Daily permits are available from Zimparks while fishing cooperatives have been allowed to fish using nets on the lakes. The excessive use of nets, together with a corresponding decrease in available fish stocks, has resulted in declines in the waterbird population. The African Darter, at one time numerous, is now extinct on the lake. Abandoned nets with unsuitable mesh sizes have been left in the waters resulting in severe negative consequences for waterbirds. Diving birds are particularly affected by the gill nets. See photo of Reed Cormorant. Finding nets with drowned birds...and fish has become a daily occurrence. BirdLife Zimbabwe's policy and advocacy work to address the situation with the local authorities in conjunction with the Lake Chivero Stakeholders Association is on-going.



On behalf of BirdLife Zimbabwe, I would like to thank Dave Rockingham-Gill for co-ordinating our organization's African Waterfowl Census for so many years with such dedication. His enthusiasm and interest have been the driving force behind the project and although he is handing over the reins to Ian Riddell – gemsaf@mango.zw We trust that he will continue participating in the counts and contributing to the census.

Grateful thanks, Dave!

Julia Pierini

African Waterbird Census at the Southern Areas Sewage Treatment (SAST), 30 January

On 30 January at 10 a.m. on an overcast and chilly morning BLZ Matabeleland chairperson Cecilia Hubbard and three youth members turned up for waterbird counting at SAST settling ponds. In spite of the bad weather and the very tall reeds around the ponds, a total of 90 birds were counted and recorded. Some species seen include African Sacred Ibis, Little Grebe, Red-billed Teal, African Jacana, Yellow-billed Kite and Black-shouldered Kite, just to name a few. A great time was had by all and the youth members learned a lot in terms of identifying birds by their calls and the unique features they possess. We spotted two Otters near one of the ponds; that was an unexpected sighting that is quite unforgettable!



Melissa Pondayi

BIG BIRDING DAY 2015

Ian Riddell



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.

Big Birding Day 2015 was held over the weekend of 28-29th November.

16 teams took part this year (Table 1), which was 2 more than 2014, covering Bulawayo (3), Esigodini (2), Harare (5), Hwange (3), Kadoma (1), Mana Pools (1) and Victoria Falls (1). The eastern highlands and lowveld were not represented this

year but, Victoria Falls and Hwange brought in some 'specials'! Six teams chose the 36 hour category (Table 2), of which 1 (Calvert) concentrated on the garden, and 10 the 24 hour category (Table 3).

Congratulations to the *Bunny Huggers* with 161 species in 36 hours, and to *Whet* who clocked up 152 species in the 24 hour category. Both these teams covered Bulawayo where stormy weather was an issue. *Vic Falls Turacos* only got 123 birds before being seriously 'stormed out' and had to curtail their count to attend to damage to their house! Commiserations are due to Gavin and Marjorie who I'm sure could otherwise have added many more western specials. It was good to have *Peterhouse* dipping into the (broiling) delights of Mana Pools, the only school team to take part. What has happened to Falcon College, who used to do so well in the past, and to any other schools for that matter? It all comes down to 'drivers' and though much needed, this sort of teacher would appear to be in short supply!

RESULTS — 2015 BIG BIRDING DAY

Table 1. Overall list ranking on number of species

Position	Species	Name	Leader	Category	Location
1	161	Bunny Huggers	M. Jackson	36 hour	Bulawayo
2	152	Whet	C. Hubbard	24 hour	Bulawayo
3	148	Dodo's	A. Masterson	24 hour	Harare
4	140	Shadwigs	D. Wiggins	24 hour	Harare
5	134	Bhejane Trust	S. Long	24 hour	Hwange
6	134	Hot Spotters	R. Dennison	24 hour	Harare
7	128	Imvelo Safaris	S. Sibanda	24 hour	Hwange
8	123	Jusan	J. Duprée	36 hour	Bulawayo
9	123	Vic Falls Turacos	G. Blair	24 hour	Victoria Falls
10	109	Migratory Three	P-A. Ditchburn	36 hour	Hwange
11	99	Peterhouse	P. Raynor	24 hour	Mana
12	93	Charama Chicks	R. Paice	24 hour	Kadoma
13	86	Louw Toppies	I. Louw	36 hour	Harare
14	62	Macdonald	G. Macdonald	36 hour	Esigodini
15	57	Three Wondering W's	L. Wilson	24 hour	Harare
16	¹ 52	Calvert	G. Calvert	36 hour ²	Esigodini

¹ 1 species disallowed

² includes garden category

Table 2. 36 hour category

Position	Species	Name	Leader	Category	Location
1	161	Bunny Huggers	M. Jackson	36 hour	Bulawayo
8	123	Jusan	J. Duprée	36 hour	Bulawayo
10	109	Migratory Three	P-A. Ditchburn	36 hour	Hwange
13	86	Louw Toppies	I. Louw	36 hour	Harare
14	62	Macdonald	G. Macdonald	36 hour	Esigodini
16	52	Calvert	G. Calvert	36 hour	Esigodini

Table 3. 24 hour category

Position	Species	Name	Leader	Category	Location
2	152	Whet	C. Hubbard	24 hour	Bulawayo
3	148	Dodo's	A. Masterson	24 hour	Harare
4	140	Shadwigs	D. Wiggins	24 hour	Harare
5	134	Bhejane Trust	S. Long	24 hour	Hwange
6	134	Hot Spotters	R. Dennison	24 hour	Harare
7	128	Imvelo Safaris	S. Sibanda	24 hour	Hwange
9	123	Vic Falls Turacos	G. Blair	24 hour	Victoria Falls
11	99	Peterhouse	P. Raynor	24 hour	Mana
12	93	Charama Chicks	R. Paice	24 hour	Kadoma
15	57	Three Wondering W's	L. Wilson	24 hour	Harare

The full Ornithological Results...

...will appear in *Honeyguide*. 356 species were claimed and one, the Northern Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer griseus*, whilst not altering the ranking above, was disallowed. This was claimed for Esigodini and would represent quite a range extension from Hwange National Park, which, as far as we know from published data, is its most southerly limit in the west. If it is thought to have

reached Bulawayo we definitely need to hear about it from you Matabele birders! However, there are still difficulties in differentiating this from the Southern Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer diffusus* in the field and it is not as obvious as field guides would have you believe, so detailed descriptions and photographs are needed.

The African Darter was only recorded from Victoria Falls. This bird is now all but eradicated from Harare waters by fish poaching and netting but does this deplorable situation apply in Bulawayo?

White Storks were noted by one Bulawayo team, two Hwange teams and at Mana Pools where a paltry single was seen! The Black Stork from Migratory Three at Hwange, but all three Hwange teams saw the Woolly-necked Stork and the Saddle-billed Stork, and the latter was also seen at Mana Pools. Apart from the expected Hadedda Ibis at Victoria Falls and Mana Pools more interesting localities were Bulawayo and Esigodini, where seen by one team each.

Cape Shovelers and Maccoa Duck were noted by Bulawayo, presumably at Aisleby.

Five species of vulture were noted and these were restricted to Hwange, Victoria Falls, Mana Pools and Bulawayo. Migratory Three team in Hwange was the only one to report the Cape Vulture. A nice record, and the only one of the Bat Hawk, came from the Bunny Huggers, whilst team Whet saw the European Honey-buzzard, both in Bulawayo. The Ayres's Hawk-eagle is a nice bird to see but only the Migratory Three in Hwange and Peterhouse in Mana Pools were lucky enough to find it. Peterhouse were also the only team to find the Western Banded Snake-eagle. The Bateleur was noted by two teams in Hwange, and Peterhouse in Mana Pools were fortunate to note a cream-backed male amongst their records!

Lesser Kestrels were seen by three Bulawayo teams and one Hwange team but only Imvelo Safaris in Hwange saw Dickinson's Kestrel.

Despite the dryness and heat in Mana Pools Peterhouse nevertheless managed to find Harlequin Quail and they were the sole viewers of Crested Guineafowl. The only crane seen was the Grey Crowned Crane, in Hwange, where noted by two teams.

Hwange was the only area to produce the Kori Bustard and Black-bellied Bustard whilst the Red-crested Korhaan was seen there and at Victoria Falls.

The Pied Avocet was more widely found by three teams in Bulawayo and Harare, but only team Dodos gave us a number of 37 birds. Imvelo in Hwange noted Black-winged Pratincoles and Vic Falls Turacos ticked off Rock Pratincoles.

Whiskered Terns and African Skimmer were only found in Hwange.

Bradfield's Hornbill is a special of Hwange and this was their only locality, but the Southern

Ground-hornbill was noted by three teams in Hwange and also at Mana Pools.

Other specials are the miombo birds. Whyte's Barbets, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Miombo Tit, Green-capped Eremomela and Miombo Blue-eared Starling were restricted to Harare.

A bird that appears poorly known and hardly ever recorded or reported is the Bushveld Pipit. Team Whet noted it in the Bulawayo area where the only records are from the Atlas and earlier.

That 'invasive' bird, the Common Myna demonstrates its increasingly common status in Bulawayo where three teams recorded it!

Apart from being seen by four Harare teams the Thick-billed Weaver was also found by the Bunny Huggers in Bulawayo where it has recently established itself as a breeding bird.

The Lesser Masked-weaver was only found by the Kadoma team and it great to welcome them to the game this year!

Harare failed to find the Black-eared Seedeater this year so it is just as well that one of the Hwange teams filled the gap and Jusan in Bulawayo did the same with the Cape Bunting, presumably finding it in the Matopos.

Table 4. Frequency of records

No. of species	No. of records
216	5 or less
100	6 to 10
36	11 to 15
4	16

The four most commonly found birds were the Red-eyed Dove, Dark-capped Bulbul, Arrow-marked Babbler and Laughing Dove, being recorded on 16 cards (Table 4). 78 species were only recorded once.

I'm sure that everyone enjoyed their birding this year, even if the weather made conditions less favourable in some areas. We had one Corporate member join in this year – Imvelo Safaris. If I am correct I believe one of their guides got some of their safari clients to join in the fun! Well done to Imvelo and this is a great idea for other safari members if you have the right sort of client. It seems to me that the participation of other Corporates in the future would be a good way for them to get in some birding experience. No teams managed to get sponsorship this year but this is an important way Corporates could get involved in BirdLife.

BirdLife Zimbabwe organised a TAXONOMY SEMINAR that was conducted by

Dr Moira Fitzpatrick (DPhil), Regional Director of the Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe (Bulawayo), in conjunction with Meg Coates Palgrave on 12-13 March 2016 at St George's College Lecture Theatre,

Harare. Many thanks to Moira, Meg, the 35 participants who took part but above all to Penny Raynor whose drive and enthusiasm made it all happen!



Mashonaland

Carswell (Double Ro) waterbird count, 31st January, 2016

7 of us (Neil and Erin Deacon, Ken Dixon, Alex Masterson, Ian Riddell, Stuart Wood and I) went to Carswell for a waterbird count. Some the birds in this report will be very common but haven't made it into *Babbler* reports for this farm before.

Four White Storks were nice (none with a ring), 50 Abdim's Storks and some 70 Marabou Storks (none with a tag), all at the effluent ponds next to the mushrooms.

At the dam we saw a White-faced Duck with 10 ducklings (total of 44). Among the raptors we saw 3 Wahlberg's Eagles, a Steppe Buzzard, an African Marsh-harrier and an African Grass-owl (last seen on Monavale Vlei in 2013). Two Natal Spurrows sat in a tree near the dam waiting for the grass to dry. (Talk among us was that Red-necked Spurrow used to live here). 4 African Crake, 3 Red-chested Flufftail, a Common Sandpiper, Cape Turtle-dove, Laughing Doves and an African Green-pigeon were recorded. 4 Black Coucals, and for me the European Roller was a bonus as I don't see them often. Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird,

Red-breasted Swallow, Brown-throated Martin and an Eastern Saw-wing. Fork-tailed Drongo, Pied Crow (heard), Dark-capped Bulbul, Sedge Warbler, Willow Warbler, African Paradise-flycatcher, Red-backed Shrike, House Sparrows nesting in the stock pen feed shed). Thick-billed Weavers had nests in the Typha reedbeds. Village Weavers, Southern Masked-weavers, Southern Red Bishops, Yellow Bishops, Yellow-mantled & Red-collared Widowbirds were all in breeding plumage.

Of interest we never saw a Reed Cormorant or a kingfisher. There were also two crocs. Next visit should be to other habitats on the farm.

Other reports in *Babbler* Nos are 4, 21, 37, 45, 60, 73, 84 and 120.

Our thanks to Robin Gilmour for having us; we missed you.

As we left the farm and turned left to Harare a person was selling a little brown puppy on the side of the road.

David Rockingham-Gill, 4 Fernleigh Road, P.O. Borrowdale, or rgill@zol.co.zw

BLZ Mash Branch visit to Haka Park, Saturday 12th February 2016

How lucky we are to have this attractive, well-maintained facility so near to us all in Harare and only \$3 entry for BLZ members. 10 of us were there this weekend to enjoy a relaxing, energising walk through varied habitats on a beautiful, warm sunny morning accompanied some of the way by a snorting, cavorting, testosterone-bloated Wildebeest.

Attracted by the call of a Black-headed Oriole, we first took a stroll through some miombo woodland leading to the vlei. Here we saw Amethyst Sunbird, Whyte's Barbet and our first party of White-crested Helmet-shrikes. Over the vlei were European Bee-eater, a Black-chested Snake-eagle and several Pale-crowned Cisticolas, heard but not seen, while Rufous-naped Lark, Red-

faced Cisticola, Croaking Cisticola and Levallant's Cisticola and African Wattled Lapwing called from the grass. In the reeds along the stream we found African Stonechat, Yellow Bishop and Southern Red Bishop, Yellow-mantled Widowbird and Red-collared Widowbird and half a dozen Grey Go-away-birds. While we were in the stream bed Julia received a photo of an African Pygmy-kingfisher on her phone taken by Zacharia who was patrolling in a different area of the park. As usual, the dam was disappointing, revealing only Common Moorhen, Reed Cormorant, Black Crake and African Jacana. However, 2 Brown Snake-eagles and about 30 Amur Falcons caused some excitement as they flew over us.

In the woodland on the far side of the dam we had an interesting, noisy encounter with a

BLZ Mash Branch walk around the Ballantyne dams, Saturday 12th March, 2016

It is good to see water in all three dams after recent rains and at least one Common Moorhen has returned or reappeared. Our group, which was a healthy mixture of BLZ members and local residents involved in the sprucing up of the area, enjoyed a pleasant stroll on the newly-trimmed paths around the dams and identified 39 different species.

The trees near the Ballantyne dam contained African Yellow White-eye, a Cardinal Woodpecker, Southern Masked-weavers and plenty of Red-eyed Doves, while in the reeds there was a Common Fiscal and the first of many rather faded Southern Red Bishops. A Gabar Goshawk flew past and African Palm-swifts overflew.

BLZ Mash Branch visit to Ewanrigg, 17°41'36''S., 31°20'04''E. 28 February 2016

The official group of 8 BLZ regulars, 3 prospective members, 2 Americans and an Australian, saw very little from the shelter of a gazebo in pouring rain. I heard African Goshawk, Yellow Bishop, Red-collared Widowbird and Amethyst Sunbird mentioned but that was all. Fortunately, David and Penny, late as usual, continued the vigil as you will read below – Ken Dixon.

Penny and I, out until about 10h45, were the only ones there. Some BLZ members had been and gone by 08h45 because it was raining. At about 09h00 the weather cleared and we battled through wet grass to the dam (built 1958/59) which was very muddy.

Not ½ full, it had one male Little Grebe. Over the water were about 30 active Village Weaver nests and in the reeds were about 20 Orange-breasted Waxbills. Senegal Coucal, Red-chested Flufftail and Swainson's Spurfowl were heard. Barn Swallows and Grey-rumped Swallows were sitting on lines. About 10 Yellow-throated Longclaws were the commonest bird about. 1 Copper Sunbird,

Levallant's Cuckoo, but little else, so we walked back to the denser miombo nearer the parking place. Our final hour was punctuated by bursts of activity when calls were picked up by our sharp-eared leaders. Most memorable was the Spotted Eagle-owl being mobbed by Dark-capped Bulbuls and Fork-tailed Drongos and constantly changing perches to avoid them. One splinter party was lucky enough to come across Spotted Creeper in company with Miombo Tit, Black Cuckooshrike, Chin-spot Batis, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, and Yellow-throated Petronia.

The final count was 69 species, a satisfying total for all.

Ken Dixon

Blair dam also had Southern Red Bishop and there were Little Bee-eater, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow, Pin-tailed Whydah, Golden Weaver and Common Waxbill. There were plenty of Abdim's Storks on an adjacent lawn.

On to Staley where a Lesser Honeyguide called from the gums and Red-collared Widowbirds buzzed around the Mexican Marigolds.

It was while we were gathered for the count at a small Water Lily sprinkled dam that the Common Moorhen we had been hoping to find finally made an appearance. We must thank and congratulate the committee who are returning this facility to its former glory.

Ken Dixon

a Variable Sunbird, Yellow Bishops, Red-collared Widowbirds and Pin-tailed Whydahs were seen (but no Southern Red Bishops).

Up in the more formal garden we saw Amur Falcons flying overhead catching flying termites, 3 Natal Spurfowl sitting in a dead tree keeping out of the wet grass, 4 Whyte's Barbets, Black-headed Oriole, Bar-throated Apalis, White-bellied Sunbird and Amethyst Sunbirds in a cigarette bush, and a Golden Weaver with a nest and chicks. Heard were Purple-crested Turaco, Flappet Lark, and Black-crowned Tchagra. In all 39 species and 20 Vervet Monkeys.

Other bird notes can be found in *Babbler* 62, 66, 68, 74, 77, 83, 89, 94, 100 and 105. The QDS is 1731C2.

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Harold Basil Christian was born in Port Elizabeth in 1871 and educated at Eton; in the Boer War he served in the Imperial Light Horse and was at the Siege of Ladysmith. His brother EWAN (rigg is a hill) who was with Rimmington's Guides, died of wounds at Paardeberg. Until 1910 Basil was at

Kimberley with de Beers. In 1914 he bought Shannon (707 acres Subdivision A of the Meadows). He set about developing a garden of alpine plants which did not thrive, but the discarded aloes did. In 1916 he started planting aloes in a big way. In 1920 he married, but it only lasted till 1923.

7 acres of aloes were in place by 1943. He died in 1950 leaving Shannon and his by now world famous aloe collection in trust to the Natural

Resources Board. In 1960 it was formerly gazetted as a National Park.

Harry Davis, who married Edmay Longden, curated the place from 1950 to 1971 and expanded the garden from 7 to 60 acres. In 1971 it had 34, 282 visitors. See M.J. Kimberley, 1972. Harold Basil Christian (1871-1950) of Ewanrigg (1916-1972) in *Excelsa* No 2.

David Rockingham-Gill rgill@zol.co.zw

Birdlife at Hippo Pools Wilderness Camp

Most birds come down to the camp in the morning for food, water and shade. The African Crowned Eagle occasionally comes to ambush the Vervet monkeys and on one observation a Dickinson's Kestrel was seen preying on a Foam-nest Frog, taken from its nest at the top dam. A Little Sparrowhawk was also seen feeding on a Foxy Emperor butterfly in one of the big Wing-pod trees at the campsite. The Familiar Chat that was nesting on the banks of the road lost three chicks to Rock Monitors. In fact, most ground nesters in camp are failing due to predators such as monkeys and Monitor Lizards.

The African Finfoot is now feeling safe and comfortable after the African Fish-eagle narrowly missed it in February 2010 when the Mazowe River water was dirty and it was probably too desperate for something to eat after unsuccessful fishing! After that the African Finfoot disappeared for three years, only coming back in 2014. This year they raised a chick which was seen in March [see photograph below].

Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters and Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo were seen along the Umfurudzi River on a bird walk. Umfurudzi River has shallow waters which is why Giant Kingfishers, Pied and Half-collared Kingfishers, storks and Green-backed Heron visit the shallow pools. Three-banded Plovers are also very common in this river. Surprisingly, on my last visit there on 25 February, the river was completely dry and most water birds moved down to the Mazowe River; that explains why we are now have over 100 Reed Cormorants roosting on the reed island in front of the chalets.



African Finfoot with chick
Penny Rockingham-Gill

A good sighting of an African Pitta, last seen in 2005, just a few metres away from the campsite was a complete blessing after such a long time! Our specials and permanent residents, Narina Trogon, African Finfoot, African Broadbill, Livingstone's Flycatcher, Black-throated Wattle-eye and White-backed Night-heron are always around and not difficult to find. Pel's Fishing-owl was heard twice across the river.

This year's waterbird count rewarded us with new species seen for the first time like African Openbill,

Yellow-billed Kite and Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo. Other birds appearing on our waterbird count list are Half-collared Kingfisher, African Jacana, African Pied Wagtail, Black Stork, Water Thick-knee, Reed Cormorant, Black Crake, Greater Painted-snipe, White-faced Duck, Three-banded Plover, Black-crowned Night-heron, Green-backed Heron, Common Sandpiper, Cattle Egret, Malachite and Giant Kingfishers and lastly the African Fish-eagle.

Tadious Ndadziira

BLZ Mash Branch visit to RIFA, Friday 4th to Tuesday 8th March, 2016

Unfortunately, the planned Mash Branch visit scheduled for the following weekend had to be cancelled but 9 of us, not wishing to forgo this gem of a trip, opted to join the Marondera group of 11 stalwarts led by the charismatic Penny Raynor. This was an excellent decision as Rifa was at its beautiful best and showed us about 180 species of birds but very few mammals due to recent rains

and abundant food and water in the area. I say 'about 180 species' as wrangling over the authenticity of a few sightings continues. Sadly, apart from a lone jumbo spotted on the way in, the only elephant we saw were two carcasses of poached individuals abandoned where they were killed and stripped of tusks and meat, the latter hopefully by surviving vultures and other predators.

Our group of 4 came in by the back road (not to be recommended) and immediately spotted 4-5 Arnot's Chat among the abundant White-browed Sparrow-weavers in the mopane. We reached the camp at 2 p.m. and introduced ourselves to Dave Winhall and Elspeth Baillie, our hosts, and the other members of the party. Our first treat, apart from the tea and cakes, was a flock of some 350-400 (extrapolation from photo by Bas) White Storks wheeling overhead on their journey back to northern Europe [*I counted 436 ±20 from photos; there was another 640 ±4 over the escarpment below Marongora on the 5th: Ed.*]

After tea we drove out to the Bream Pools for our initial session and were rewarded by Goliath Heron, Allen's Gallinule, numerous African Jacana, crocs and hippos and an African Cuckoo sitting low in a bush opposite us and repeatedly diving into the hyacinth. Moving on to the Hot Springs which had no hot water, we saw Blacksmith Lapwing and White-crowned Lapwing, Yellow-billed Stork and Saddle-billed Stork and a party of 30 Egyptian Goose with one Spur-winged Goose. 2 Grey-headed Parrots flew over and Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters and White-fronted Bee-eaters sat on the line; not a bad start. In fact the count was 98 species in less than 2 hours.

For dinner we must acknowledge Robin Gilmour's delicious chicken stew, our last proper meal for 4 days as we (except Carla) braaied the rest of the time to accompany Richard's sadza and relish.

On Saturday, after a light breakfast, we split into 2 groups, one to drive to Long Pan and the other to walk down to the Zambezi via the elephant grass, dry mud and riparian woodland. One cluster of *Faidherbia albidas* was alive with birds; Burnt-necked Eremomela, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Willow Warbler, White-crested Helmet-shrike and Violet-backed Starling. On reaching the river we were rewarded by the sight of all the egrets, Common Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper and Marsh Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilt, Grey Heron, Rufous-bellied, Black and Goliath Heron, Malachite Kingfisher and Pied Kingfisher and Grey-rumped Swallow. As we made our way back along Barbel Channel we looked for but didn't find Yellow Wagtail [*2 were on the floodplain adjacent to 'New Marsh' (west of Hot Springs) on the 4th, this is the 'best' place to look for them: Ed.*] and there were no Southern Carmine Bee-eaters on the Chipandaure cliffs, only a few White-fronted. Back in the camp were Jacobin Cuckoo and Levillant's Cuckoo, Böhm's Spinetail and Lesser Honeyguide.

In the interval between birding sessions, Penny organised a good fun, impromptu quiz from which we all learned something from others. Later, after it had cooled down a tad, we drove to Sunset Point and either walked along the bank or made an early

start on sundowners. Most of the birds we had seen earlier at the river were still in attendance and gave good views to those who had missed them.

Rain during the night made Sunday morning's drive to Mhenza Pan interesting which we all reached without incident. The water was muddy but did not deter the abundant African Jacana and their young. Richard and Freedom tried to flush birds from the reedbeds but managed only one Lesser Moorhen. Perhaps the best sighting was 2 African Pygmy-goose which flew in to join the White-faced Duck, Comb Duck and Little Grebe and the African Openbill and Saddle-billed Stork. On the way from this pan to Nyachuru 1, a brunch break was enforced in the heart of the Mopane woodland when one of the vehicles became stuck in the mud. This gave us an opportunity to find Arnot's Chat, lots of noisy Southern Grey-headed Sparrows and 5 Lilian's Lovebirds. A flock of putative Lesser Spotted Eagles and a definite African Hawk-eagle flew over as the Maronderans chomped their bacon and egg rolls. Nyachuru 1, which, by the way, means 'termite mound', held no ducks but the Barn Swallows were having a field day feeding on the dragonflies and we could see Black-winged Stilt and hear Woodland Kingfisher. It was a relief after all the horror stories from anti-poaching patrols to see fair numbers of White-backed Vultures rising above us, a sight which was repeated at Nyachuru 2. A Martial Eagle was seen there too, an African Hawk-eagle and a possible Booted Eagle along with 8 Steppe Buzzards. No Barn Swallows here but a lone Common House-martin and a couple of Wood Sandpiper. Between Nyachuru 2 and 3 we passed 6 Spur-winged Goose in a marshy area. The pan itself had 20 White-faced Duck, African Openbill, and Egyptian Goose with more White-backed Vultures overhead.

In the late afternoon a group of us took a walk to Mopane Pan in search of the Dwarf Bittern. We missed out on that one but nailed lots of others; Klaas's Cuckoo and African Emerald Cuckoo, Bearded Woodpecker, Double-banded Sandgrouse, Böhm's and Mottled Spinetail, Grey Go-away-bird, Eastern Nicator and another Grey-headed Parrot. At the Chipandaure cliffs and on the walk back we saw Long-tailed Paradise-whydah, Crowned Hornbill and Grey Hornbill, Steel-blue Widowfinch, African Golden Oriole and Mosque Swallow. The post-supper count had now reached 160.

Monday morning dawned cool and clear. From the previous night, various species were reported; African Scops-owl, Hadedda Ibis, Crested Francolin and hyaena and Side-striped Jackal. The light was perfect for our walk at Jecha (=sand) Point, a luxury fishing camp on the Zambezi just off the main road at Chirundu. This was a very productive venue where we were greeted by our kind hosts, Nic and Iona Coetzee, on the well-watered lawns of their

lodge. African Mourning Doves scratched around our feet and Water Monitor slipped in and out of the vegetation. Of interest was a small bushy tree which contained many weavers' nests, Village Weaver on one side and Lesser Masked-weaver on the other. In the course of our stroll along the river bank, I identified at least 60 species, most of which we had seen before but not in such good light. A memorable sighting was 4 different bee-eaters on one short section of power cable; Carmine, White-fronted, European and Blue-cheeked and Little Bee-eater was on the bushes below.

New species for the trip were Cut-throat Finch, White-bellied Sunbird, Lanner Falcon and Diderick Cuckoo. It was the heat that eventually brought an end to a most satisfying morning's birding. On the way back we saw 2 African Hawk-eagles and our first Pied Crow.

The really keen returned to the Bream Pools for a static watch after lunch and then at 1630 some drove and some walked to Long Pan for a final birding session and sundowner or just a protracted final sundowner. A few of us walked with Dave and Elspeth to New Pan where we flushed Green-backed Heron and Black-crowned Night-heron and saw an African Hoopoe. Meanwhile, at Long Pan those not yet birded-out noted Goliath, Squacco and Black-headed Heron,



Comb Duck and White-faced Duck and Great Egret and Little Egret.

At the 'Last Supper' our count reached 178 species, an impressive score but we shall also carry away many happy personal memories of old and new friends, unforgettable experiences and a thoroughly enjoyable few days. Our sincere thanks go to the organisers and our hosts and their helpful staff.

It rained again during Monday night but by the time we were ready to leave the track had dried out enough for us to slither away.

Ken Dixon

Comment: I was on a separate trip which overlapped with BLZ on the night of the 4th. Our special animal was a leopard crossing the main road below the escarpment at 14h30, just after we had stopped when a Thick-billed Cuckoo flew over! From Mhenza there was much dark muttering as I viewed the thunderstorm over Chirundu and in the village the drains were flooded and flowing. We should have taken the back road to save getting stuck – thank goodness we finally managed to winch ourselves up the slippery slope and that the road had dried out 2 days later for BLZ! We did see Lesser Spotted Eagle at Long Pan, as well as a young Ayres's Hawk-eagle as few times – was this the 'Booted', which has yet to be recorded at Rifa? We missed the Lesser Moorhen which our group was desperate to see but had 3 Dwarf Bitterns around Mopane Pan; such is birding. A rufous form Common Cuckoo at Sunset Point on the 4th. Ed.

AN INVITATION TO THE RESIDENTS OF HARARE TO JOIN BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE IN THE LATEST GARDEN BIRD SURVEY AND BECOME CITIZEN SCIENTISTS.

Outside the city limits deforestation is taking place and making it more difficult for birds to move between the suburbs and the surrounding woodlands as the distances between them are increasing. The fact that residents have planted many trees and water their lawns has made Harare a unique habitat – an oasis. Harare appears to have become a habitat that more and more birds are making their home and BLZ wants to prove this by conducting a Harare Garden Bird Survey.

However, a garden bird survey needs to be done properly so the information collected forms a baseline for future surveys, so we want a huge effort on everybody's part. This means that all suburbs must be covered by as many birders as possible. The northern, eastern and western suburbs will probably be covered OK, but we have very few members who live in the southern suburbs. To get better coverage we would like those who work in that part of town to send data from their workplaces and surrounds. We hope they will treat their workplace as their second garden and complete the

Survey forms for those as well. In fact, the "Avenues" need to be covered in this way too!

A similar exercise took place in 2011-12 but problems both technical and human resulted in incomplete data and it was deemed impractical to get the results analysed. However, the exercise aroused much interest and stimulated participants. We shall publish any interesting findings in the near future. We fervently hope that those who sent in forms last time will help us again and will be joined by many new observers.

You don't have to be an expert, you don't have to have a huge garden, you don't have to be a member of BirdLife. All you need is a love of birds and a desire to know which species visit your garden. Keeping a regular record will make you more observant and sharpen your skills and enable BirdLife to discover which species occur most often, which are becoming more common and which are disappearing. We shall do this by comparing the results of the 2016-7 survey with those carried out in 1992.

You will be amazed how many different species visit even small urban yards. The survey is planned to last, in the first instance, for one year and will commence on 1st May 2016. Help will be available from a local member if you are struggling. At the conclusion of the data-gathering a full report will be compiled and emailed to participants.

If you are keen to take part in this exciting project please email Tony Alegria, chairperson of BirdLife Mashonaland, on tonyalegria47@gmail.com. He will send you a registration form and an information sheet giving you clear directions on how to conduct the survey. You will now be ready to start listing the birds living in and visiting your garden.

Matabeleland

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO THE BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE, MATABELELAND BRANCH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD SATURDAY 20th FEBRUARY 2016 AT THE GAZEBO, QALISA, SUBURBS, BULAWAYO

Good morning and welcome to our Guests, and welcome to all old and new members. I thank you all for taking the time to attend this meeting.

I will not say much regarding branch surveys as they will be individually reported on during this meeting. Apologies have been received from Julia Duprée who co-ordinates the Garden Bird Survey. Her report will be read to this meeting by Marina Jackson.

There will be no report on Aisleby, as Sandy MacAdam has resigned from BirdLife Zimbabwe. As far as I am aware she has continued to carry out the survey, with results being sent to Colin Baker in Harare. When received, a copy of Colin's report will be sent to all members. As Aisleby is one of our city's phenomenal birding 'hot-spots', members are encouraged to attend the forthcoming regular outings.

African Waterfowl Census is now being handled by the National Office. I have not received the country's final figures for January 2016, but can tell you that I am aware of our Branch members covering a total of 61 water bodies within Matabeleland. A total of 8373 birds were recorded. What is of concern is every form, bar two, listed the site counted as 'dry'. My thanks to all who took part.

I have no information for Birding Big Day as all entries go through to Ian Riddell at the National Office – he assures me results will be published in the next issue of *Babbler*.

Matabeleland Membership currently stands at 82 members, and 5 Corporate memberships totalling 87.

Attendance by members at our walks, talks and outings has been steadily increasing throughout the year. It has been pleasing to note that Youth members are now attending most events, and their participation is welcomed as we certainly need some 'younger blood' in our Society. Their eagerness to learn and their enthusiasm certainly awakens how much we more seasoned bird-watchers take for granted.

The afternoon presentations proved to be the most popular. However one of the stumbling

blocks is finding 'presenters'. Therefore I encourage any and ALL members – if you have a particular area of interest, and there is possibly 'birding' included somewhere, please volunteer to share this interest with your fellow members. I can say there are NEVER harsh critics in the audience.

Some feedback on what has been happening in BLZ as a whole.

The past year has been a more successful one for BLZ in terms of administration. The position of Director (which is now called Chief Executive Officer), is held by Julia Pierini. She was given the position in April 2015, and I can only say her enthusiasm is infectious. Due to her appointment RSPB has continued to assist with the core funding needed to maintain our National Office. Whilst the sum received from RSPB is generous, it is not enough to maintain all expenses.

She and the few staff that remain at the Office persistently seek funding, and there have been a few successful small grants received in the past few months. However, with Zimbabwe at this time being a country of little or no interest to the international community, the many hours spent compiling an application usually comes to nought. As there is no funding forthcoming from RSPB during this upcoming year for the Black Eagle and Dassie Surveys, at the end of January an application on behalf of our Branch was made to the Bill Burnham Fund, through the Peregrine Fund, seeking funding for them.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Prof Peter Mundy for the tremendous letter of support he supplied, when asked at the very last minute. It will take some time before we know if we have been successful in our application.

The Finances of BLZ in general have been tightly controlled by the CEO and Council and their fundraising efforts have been extraordinary. This enthusiasm and hard work, together with a more cost effective production of publications has meant that subs remain static for the fifth year running. An amazing feat when one considers how one's pocket

seems to empty more quickly these days. Our thanks to Council, all members and everyone who has contributed to holding the purse strings tight and introducing cost-cutting measures – all done in the interests of we members.

For those who do not know, being part of BirdLife International requires BLZ to draw up a Strategic Plan. This Strategic Plan outlines the basic aims and objectives of the society.

This plan is made up of 4 pillars - Pillar 1 – Save Species, Pillar 2 – Conserve Sites and Habitats, Pillar 3 – Encourage Ecological Sustainability, Pillar 4 – Empower People for Positive Change. This Strategic Plan is a 'living' document and needs to be re-visited and amended through its life span. The current plan was drawn up during 2015, and is for the next 5 years.

Top of the list in Pillar 1 – Save Species – are vultures. With the Verreaux's Eagle, Wattled and African Grey Crowned Crane, Taita Falcon and Blue Swallow also being listed within this 'pillar'.

Whilst all the species listed are important BLZ decided that the emphasis should be on Vultures in 2015 as all species of vulture have been uplisted on the IUCN Red Data List from Vulnerable or Endangered to Critically Endangered, a term which means "likely to become extinct".

For we who live in Africa, it is a known fact that as animal poaching escalates, so does the possibility of the extinction of these birds. Many of their deaths have been classified as incidental, as they are not directly poached, but as they are an obvious give away to poaching activity, animal carcasses are deliberately poisoned resulting in huge numbers of vulture being lost after feeding on these carcasses.

This known fact was referred to for the first time ever by any African government officially by our very own Minister of Tourism, Mr Walter Mzembe. Mr Mzembe holds the position of being the United Nations World Tourism Organisation Commission for Africa chairman. On September 14, at the UNTWO General Assembly held in Columbia, Mr Mzembe included vultures in the list of species that are "facing the greatest existential threats". It would seem the 'Vulture Awareness Campaign' (which included BLZ sharing a stand with ZimParks at both ZITF, and the Harare Agricultural Show) has paid some dividends. Perhaps the showing of live Lappet-faced and White-backed vultures on loan from Gary Stafford of Kuimba Shiri at the Harare Agricultural Show in August assisted in making people (unusually including our own Ministers) aware of their importance as a species... and it is time to start action.

Vulture Conservation in Africa is a top priority for BirdLife International and immediately after the BirdLife Council of Africa Partnership meeting (10-13 Oct 2015) various commitments for taking

actions for vultures nationally in >20 countries were made. To this end Masumi Gudka, was appointed on 2nd November 2015 as a Vulture Conservation Manager in the BirdLife Africa Partnership Secretariat. She will therefore be a great asset in supporting the partnership in achieving these commitments and coordinating BirdLife action on saving vultures.

Because of their IUCN status, as well as their ability to fly long distances in a short space of time, reporting of vulture sightings by us 'citizen scientists' are now more important than ever. I therefore encourage all members to make their sightings known to either Peta Ditchburn, our Special Species Coordinator or direct to Ian Riddell at the National office.

I believe Prof Mundy is part of the Vulture Working Group formed in 2015, and he is also interested in, and is using this same information, so perhaps copy him in on your mail. The more heads that get together on this, the sooner a possible solution to their dwindling numbers may be found.

As Council believes our Branch seems to know what it's doing regarding the second listed species in the first or "Save Species" pillar – the Verreaux's Eagle, we have been asked to take responsibility for obtaining information on this species on a National level. We will therefore be sending members a form for completions should they see this species anywhere within our country's borders. The way to meet our expectations for Pillars 2, 3 and 4 of our Society's Strategic plan is mainly through education. Whilst our Branch has not been in a position to be directly active in the field of education, we should try harder to assist in education within Matabeleland in an indirect manner. Educational material and some financial assistance is a must for Cedric Maforimbo of Dambari Wildlife Trust – another Bulawayo based conservation organisation whose funding takes huge strain. Cedric works hard at schools within the Matobo area, and his reports at the end of each term are fantastic, and encouraging. His emphasis on birds during the second term of 2015 produced some fantastic works of art, prose and poetry. Well done Cedric, and thank you.

The BLZ Website continues to be a colourful, easily navigated site, which is kept up to date. If you're not sure what's going on where, or would like to know what's currently going on in your society the information is available on the web page.

For those of you on Facebook – go take a look at the BLZ page. The posts found, especially on a Monday after a weekend of birding are great. Some of the photos are incredible and there are almost always items of immense interest. I will reiterate that often a member may not realise something they have seen is unusual, and a post

on Facebook may just make you aware of how unusual your sighting may have been.

Our thanks are extended to all Branch members who took part in the surveys – without your participation they just wouldn't be. Thanks must also go to Acol Chemicals for the rain record books for the 3 field stations in Matopos. Collecting annual rainfall figures by both ourselves and other conservation groups should hopefully now be easier.

Treasurer's Report for 2015, BLZ Matabeleland Branch AGM, Bulawayo

Although we are closing with a loss in the accounts, we are ending the year with marginally more funds on hand.

Big Birding Day saw a drop in sponsorship to \$40 and the Christmas luncheon brought in \$60. Funds were raised at monthly meetings at Adele Edward's house and Qalisa. At the Church of Ascension Fair an amount of \$35 was raised and a sizeable donation came from Mr Cizek. Other amounts were raised through meals provided through a donation of vegetables from Mr Middleton. Our thanks to Cecilia and Jean for converting this donation into soups.

A number of Black Eagle Survey claims were donated back to the branch and some to the survey itself. We are sad to report that the funding for the Black Eagle Survey that we have received from RSBP in past years will not be available in 2016. However, BirdLife Zimbabwe has channelled the funds from calendar sales in Bulawayo into the survey.

The museum is fumigated several times a year and we share this expense with the museum itself and WEZ. Due to timing, we have not had to pay in 2015 but this amount will be due very shortly – you can see from 2014 that it's quite a large sum.

I am happy to report that an amount of \$500 has been received from the Deposit Protection Corporation as an insurance claim against the

Jean Cranston and all Committee members worked hard at fund raising this past year, and our coffers are in a position for this forthcoming year in which we may continue with surveys and the financial assistance we give to the Natural History Museum in the form of fumigation.

John, Marina, Jean and Christina, I thank you for your unfailing support and assistance throughout this past year. You have all made this year in office a relatively easy task.

Cecilia Hubbard

defunct Allied Bank, and will be reflected in the 2016 accounts. The balance of the amount that was in the account will go through normal insolvency proceedings and is most likely an amount lost.

The assets have once again been revalued to a more realistic replacement value. This saved us a little on the insurance of them this year but adds to the overall loss suffered by the Branch as the impairment is brought in as an expense.

Fundraising is a talent some of us possess and some of us don't. In our economic climate (*how I hate that phrase – if any of you can come up with a different one, please let me know!*) it is extremely challenging and I urge you all to support the members who are making an effort whenever you are able.

I would like to thank the Committee for this year's work and especially Marina Jackson who has done all the running around for banking and liaising with Harare over memberships etc. She took the bulk of the work that the treasurer usually does. Thank you.

As I leave this office, I wish continued success to BirdLife Zimbabwe – the Matabeleland Branch in particular.

C Gillott

For the Income and Expenses Statement 2014-2015 please request a copy from the Treasurer

Verreaux's Eagle Breeding Survey Report to BLZ Matabeleland Branch AGM, held Saturday 20th February 2016 at Qalisa Retirement Village, Suburbs, Bulawayo

March 2015, was the start of the 52nd consecutive year of this survey. 103 nest sites in 66 territories were allocated to 9 volunteer survey teams. A research permit was issued by Parks, which assisted teams greatly by allowing them unlimited access to their nests.

A total of 264 report forms were submitted by these teams. Of the 103 nest sites in 66 territories, teams checked on 108 nests in 74 territories. Teams were asked to check previously active nests first, and the co-ordinators visited 9 additional territories that had not been checked for a number of years.

Of the 108 sites monitored 29 territories were occupied by Verreaux's Eagles. This is an increase of occupancy by 3 territories, compared to 2014, when the number recorded was 26. Of the 29 occupied territories, 15 pairs made a nest rebuilding attempt. Of the 15 pairs who rebuilt, only 11 were confirmed as having made a definite breeding attempt. These 11 attempts resulted in 8 confirmed chicks fledged. At one nest an eaglet was seen once at very young age, and not seen again. The other two attempts appear to have failed at the incubation stage.

This means that the replacement rate per pair for the 2015 breeding season was 0.28. This result

is below what appears to be the norm of 0.35 for the success rate of these eagles.

All nest reports that I have received have been inputted into the data base and scanned but there appears that some years have no reports or very few. We are hoping that these will come to light in the museum archives and as soon as I receive them, I will complete this exercise.

On behalf of Matabeleland Branch, Cecilia, the participating teams, and myself, I would like to thank RSPB for their financial support for the 2015 Verreaux's Eagle Breeding Survey, and the Dassie Population Survey.

Fundraising has never been over easy, and with the current downward trend of our city's economy

we thank Council and the BLZ National Office for their support for the forthcoming season. We have already received funding from the Bulawayo sales of calendars. This was unexpected and we are grateful they have seen fit to allow us to keep this portion of national sales.

Cecilia and I would like to thank participating teams for their contribution to this survey. The 2016 briefing will be held in the next few weeks, and new volunteers are welcomed. Should you wish to take part, please do not hesitate to contact myself.

John Brebner

Report to the BLZ Matabeleland Branch AGM, held Saturday 20th February 2016, on the Annual Dassie (Hyrax) Population Census 2015

The dassie (Hyrax) has been confirmed as the main prey base for the Black (Verreaux's Eagle) Eagle, and Matabeleland Branch has conducted an annual Black Eagle Breeding Survey for over 50 years. Continuing our efforts in trying to establish the stability of this prey base is now an integral part of the Black Eagle Breeding Survey and an exercised that not only produces meaningful data, but one which promotes great fellowship among our members.

The 2105 Dassie Population Census took place over the last weekend in May. This was the 23rd Population Census, and the 9th undertaken by our Branch.

By the evening of Friday 22nd May, 1 visitor and 22 Branch members had gathered at the campsite

of Rowallan Park. A briefing was held and teams were handed the site maps and recording sheets for 20 census sites – 18 sites within the National Park and 2 sites on an adjacent commercial farm. On this chilly evening members who had not previously participated in this event were given a warm welcome and partnered with experienced teams.

All teams were off in time to make it to their observation points before sunrise on all three mornings. To those who have not experienced sunrise in the Matopos, it is one of the other reasons we return year after year. All 20 sites were counted and because of baboon disturbance at one site the previous morning one site was recounted.

The overall census results are as follows:

Counts of *Heterohyrax brucei* (Yellow-spotted or Bush Dassie) and *Procavia capensis* (Rock Dassie) by age category

Land Use	Species	Adult	Sub Ad.	Juv.	Pup	Total
National Park	Hb	237	29	58	40	364
1 Commercial Farm	Pc	176	30	29	30	265
Totals	Hb & Pc	413	59	87	70	629

- ADULT – Adult = 3+ years
- SUBAD – Sub-adult = 2years
- JUV – Juvenile = 1 year (born the previous year)
- PUP – Pup = <3 months

The weather conditions on all three mornings were ideal for counting and the overall result is the highest total of animals seen by our members since taking over this survey.

Most teams recorded vegetation as abundant and as it is 23 years later, tree growth is hampering total visibility of some sites. Overall the numbers counted is comparable to those recorded in the earlier years of the Census. It is the highest number counted by Branch members since taking

over this survey and is an increase of 181 animals. The main increase was in the number of j juveniles and pups recorded.

A fun weekend was had and great fellowship enjoyed. All teams are sincerely thanked for their participation, and RSPB, thought the National Office, is thanked for the funding which allowed us to carry out this survey.

Cecilia Hubbard, Dassie Population Census Co-ordinator

Matobo National Park – Raptor Report, BLZ Matabeleland Branch AGM 20 February 2016

We should like to thank everyone who has submitted reports over the year. A total of 109 reports were received for this past season.

Once again, I hope no one expects me to have a vast knowledge of raptors as this is not the case. Jen and I are certainly learning more every year but still find juveniles in particular very difficult.

Raptor sightings reported in 2013 numbered 214 and in 2014, 192, which shows a serious drop off in reports which in turn is quite discouraging. These reports do not include Verreaux's Eagles which are handled separately.

A few interesting points to note are 26 species were recorded. No African Crowned Eagle this year, only two Augur Buzzards. Nice to note a better representation of the smaller raptors this year – 2 African Goshawks, 4 Gabar Goshawks, a Little Sparrowhawk, a Lizard Buzzard, 9 Amur Falcons and one Shikra.

There were also vulture reports – two Lappet-faced Vultures, 71 White-backed Vultures and one White-headed Vulture.

Anyone can submit reports of raptors in Matobo and at any time – not only when out eagling.

John Brebner

Interim report for the BLZ Matabeleland AGM, held on 20 February 2016, on the Matabeleland Garden Bird Survey, January-December 2015

Unfortunately this year I cannot produce a full report on the Garden Bird Survey, in time for the AGM as several of the outstanding sightings sheets came in too late: one for 10 months and another for 3 months I received last week, and the third for 12 months has just arrived (18th February!).

It takes quite a while to finalise and analyse the results, as I believe you will appreciate when I tell you that sightings recorded by participants – of all species seen for each week of each month for the whole year – have to be transferred onto a spread

sheet so that relevant information can be extracted. I check and enter information from a minimum of 530 sheets!!

I'm not complaining, just explaining!

It's a lovely project to organise, very interesting and it's apparent from the reports that our participants are steadily learning more and more about our birds – who they are and their way of life – as time goes on. And their information is sent to Harare for the database, and *Babbler* and *Honeyguide*.

In 2015 the following took part in the survey:

Name	Location	QDS	No. months
Gwen Calvert	Esigodini	2028 B4	12
Tom & Jean Cranston	Burnside	2028 B1	12
Peta Ditchburn	Morningside	2028 B1	12
Laraine King	Esigodini	2028 B4	12
Sandy McAdam	Hillside	2028 B1	12
Judy Ross	Ntaba Moyo	2028 B1	12
Vernon & Shirley Tarr	Ntabazinduna	2028 B2	12
Marjorie & Gavin Blair	Vic Falls	1725 D4	11
Joyce Stinton	Ilanda	2028 B1	10
Marina & Dave Jackson	Suburbs	2028 B1	8
Jenny Brebner	Burnside	2028 B1	2

And there are two newcomers for 2016 who have just started.

Anyone who would like to join in, please contact me on 246269, email on daliadupree@gmail.com or a member of the Committee.

I will circulate the full report in due course to all participants. If anyone else would like to see it, please let me know.

Julia Duprée, Co-ordinator

Bird walk in Riverside, 5 March 2016

Having met up at the required meeting point, twelve birders trekked out on the potholed road to Pete Abbot and Louise Gower's smallholding on the edge of Bulawayo for an afternoon's birding. As everyone disgorge from the vehicles, being

met by our hosts as well as their menagerie of a three-legged and several four-legged furry friends, a very excited African Paradise-flycatcher was heard vocalising from the thick canopy above the seating area on the front lawn. It took several

attempts before anyone actually managed to see the caller.

Although it was still quite warm, we set off for a short walk around the property, stopping now and again to try and pick up the birds that were chirping away in the bushes on either side of the path. A Scarlet-chested Sunbird flew by, shouting noisily as if asking to be identified. Near a small dry stream we stopped a while adding Chestnut-vented Titbabbler, Blue Waxbill and Red-billed Firefinch to the list. A very obliging Diderick Cuckoo was flitting about across the other side and we could hear Black-collared Barbets hooting as well as Crested Barbets trilling. Several White-winged Widowbirds were seen in the mealie patch, the males displaying their bright yellow puffs at the back. En route back towards the house, a Shikra was spotted perched in a tree and very kindly stayed put so that most of the birders could admire it before it swooped away. Three Red-faced Mousebirds noisily flew into the top of a huge nkaya tree while Southern Grey-headed Sparrows and Dark-capped Bulbuls rummaged around in the lower branches. Through the orchard and past a large open area being prepared for an entertainments venue, we didn't get to add much to our list although we could hear several birds, once again having difficulty in trying to find the pesky birds hiding away in the thick foliage. Several Pied Crows were flying very high away to the west and a few European Bee-eaters flew into sight vocalising as they do on the wing. On our way back to the house Streaky-headed Seedeaters as well as some chattering Village Weavers were helping themselves to the seed from the maize tassels, balancing precariously on the

stalks swaying back and forth. Dark-capped Bulbuls were everywhere as were Laughing Doves and Red-eyed Doves. As the afternoon wore on, more and more Grey Go-away-birds made their presence known, lumbering from tree to tree, making a racket.

Sitting out on the front lawn over cups of tea and drinks, an African Paradise-flycatcher was daintily dancing above the water of a lily pond, trying to catch insects as a pair of Black-backed Puffbacks fossicked around in the canopy above us and a Fork-tailed Drongo hawked for insects from another enormous acacia tree. A Senegal Coucal flew quietly in and skulked into a bush across the lawn where apparently it sleeps every night. A delightful pair of Cut-throat Finches, the male striking up a particularly handsome pose, perched together on a palm frond, obligingly staying put for a long while for the photographers. A Swainson's Spurfowl could be heard tuning up just outside the wall where a row of raucous Arrow-marked Babblers sat chattering away. A White-browed Robin-chat yodelled from behind the house, while a Levillant's Cuckoo, an Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, a Brown-hooded Kingfisher, one or two Kurrichane Thrushes and a Miombo Double-collared Sunbird added their voices to the evening's avian choir. Once it got dark, Pearl-spotted Owlets started calling close by us as we enjoyed a braai and a Barn Owl was also heard.

All in all, 49 species were seen. Our thanks go to Pete and Louise for their kind hospitality and to the participants on the outing.

John and Jenny Brebner

How Mine Barn Swallow Roost, 15 March

I work out of town and have the option to pass near How Mine most evenings. Throughout the summer I have been thinking '*I must stop to check if there is any activity at the roost*' – but the days have slipped by without me doing so. Perhaps in part I lacked incentive; I doubted there would be much happening, as with the very hot, dry weather we have been having, I have seen very little swallow activity on my evening drives. But last week we finally got a reprieve and enjoyed some cool, wet weather. Despite the lateness of the season (the swallows traditionally arrive early in November and leave by end February), on several occasions I saw flocks of swallows dashing around and swooping after insects. So finally last evening two colleagues and I set off to see what was happening. And how glad we were that we went.

The sky was clear, though there were a few large storm clouds on the horizon, when we arrived at the viewing point shortly before 6 p.m. The signs put up by BLZ several years ago are still intact and readable, though somewhat faded. The signs

include a map showing the migratory path followed by the Barn Swallows, and pictures of some of the raptors that predate on the swallows. I have visited the roost on a number of occasions and never cease to get a thrill from the sights and sounds. But it is extra special to be with someone who is visiting the roost for the first time. Tafadzwa and Sydney were gazing around as if to say 'and why are we here?' until I told them to look up. Above us the sky was a mass of swirling black dots – thousands and thousands of gathering Barn Swallows.

At about 6:05, as usually happens, it was as if someone had given a signal and the birds started to fall from the sky, settling to roost in the trees along the river. For the next 20 minutes they continued to pour passed us. It was impossible to estimate numbers. Each time I thought 'they must all be in now', I would look up and see the sky still full of dots, often in multiple layers, like planes circling round an airport waiting to be cleared for land. There was a definite pattern to their flight,

with birds always coming in from the northeast. There could be no hesitation as they settled on their perch; and if a bird did miss its landing there was no turning back, they had to fly past and make a wide circle to come in again from the same direction. The only time the pattern was disturbed was when a raptor shot through the flock causing chaos. They were too fast for us to be able to identify any of them positively, though for the first time I actually saw a raptor flash past with a swallow in its talons. As time passed the number of birds coming in dwindled, while the noise from the roost grew louder and louder as birds jostled for position.

As we stood absorbing the spectacle we pondered unanswerable questions. How could one count the number of birds at the roost? Where had the birds been all day and how far had they flown? Dambari Field Station, where we work, is probably only 5km from the roost as the swallow flies but we have seen few swallows there, and we had not seen more than 50 swallows on the 15km drive to How Mine. How many kilograms of insects had this flock consumed on this one day? Where would this particular bird be in one month / three months' time? We came away determined to read up on the subject and learn what we could, but regardless the spectacle was well worth seeing.

Adele Edwards

Birding while on the African Waterfowl Census: Hwange National Park, January 2016

Being in Hwange National Park for the January waterfowl count was an amazing experience this year, being a fabulous time of the year to visit the park, especially as the migrant bird species gather in numbers. Unfortunately, although most of the park looked lovely and green with the bush quite thick, there has not been much rain and grass cover is not looking too great. Also many of the natural rain water pans held little or no water so waterfowl, generally, were not as numerous as in previous years. However, we still had a busy time and managed to cover 43 water bodies with Stephen and Sue Long helping out, covering eight sites.

Mandavu dam, which we managed to palm off on Stephen and Sue to count, was seething with waterbirds as always but we stopped by a couple of times to try and boost our species count. Both White-winged Tern and Whiskered Tern were there in numbers and watching them take off in alarm, we realised a larger tern was swanning around. We were delighted to be able to eventually identify it as a Caspian Tern, none of us having ever seen one! AND we managed to get a passable photo of it as it rested amongst a group of Black-winged Stilts, terns and a mixture of other waterbirds. A Grey-headed Gull also joined in the fray and was harassing some of the smaller waterbirds. We watched an Osprey quartering the dam and had a breath-taking view of it as it plummeted down at speed, landing with a rather ungainly splash before emerging with a decent sized fish in its talons. Salt Pan in the Robins area was quite a lot drier than previous January counts and again, waterbirds were not as numerous although we did have a busy time counting. There were only two Pied Avocets and hardly any pratincoles this year. There were plenty of the smaller waders, which had us flummoxed for a bit and of course loads of Ruffs. As the water was low, it was easy to telescope the opposite bank without having to move around and disturb the birds too much. Doing the count at

Deteema dam from the Mike Edwards hide was delightful. The dam is pretty low but there was some good grass and water weed cover which revealed numerous dabbling ducks. The Egyptian Goose there almost outnumbered the Blacksmith Lapwings! Two Grey Crowned Cranes pecked away behind the wall, dancing now and again, a beautiful Black-headed Heron graced us with its presence and it was some time before we could pick up all the Water Thick-knees calling around the pan.

Everywhere in the park we saw plenty of the migrant raptors, large and small, either flying or perched, and they, too, kept us busy with identification. With several emergences of flying termites we were treated to the amazing bird parties that ensued with birds of all shapes and sizes swooping around at speed, catching the insects on the wing, or the larger and less agile ones darting around the veld and roads picking up their share. There were plenty of Abdim's Storks evident, several Woolly-necked Storks and vultures aplenty, with some beautiful White-headed Vultures amongst them. Rollers, particularly the European Rollers, were out in numbers, with the Broad-billed Roller's harsh querulous call making their presence known. Swallows, swifts and the Southern Carmine Bee-eaters and European Bee-eaters gathered in great numbers in some of the vleis with quite a lot of juveniles amongst them. Four Kori Bustards were plodding the Ngweshla vlei and we came across several groups of Southern Ground-hornbills during our travels. A gorgeous pair of African Golden Orioles gave us a fabulous viewing while they perched on a low branch in a tree feeding a persistently chirping youngster. During counting at Guvalala, we were awed watching a beautiful African Marsh-harrier quartering over the dam, upsetting the storks, making the Egyptian Geese edgy and sending up clouds of noisy Blacksmith Lapwings, with the Little Grebes

ducking under the water and the Red-billed Teal scurrying for the edges of the pan.

During our trip we managed to record 222 species!

John and Jenny Brebner, Cecilia Hubbard and Tony Wharham

Manicaland

Visit to Connemara Lakes, Nyanga 28th January to 1st February, 2016

It was my good fortune to spend 4 nights with Eddie and Jeanette Cross at Glendermere self-catering cottage at Little Connemara from the 28th January to the 1st February, 2016. This gave us the opportunity to reconnect with some of the high altitude Eastern District specials. However, in spite of the drought, the weather was very wet, cool and windy for the first 2 days and it only started to clear on the 30th at 10 a.m. when I managed to start a pentad. Glendermere Cottage is on the eastern side of Lake Corrib, the largest of the 3 lakes, and has a panoramic view of its front garden, the lake and the mountains. The lake edge is about 100m away and the water was rising about 25mm a day.

On the afternoon of the 28th we managed to do a short walk for about an hour during a break in the weather and saw Cape Robin-chat, Wailing Cisticola and juvenile Cape Canary out of the Eastern District specials. There were about 15 of the juvenile Cape Canaries hawking termite alates. However they looked more like adult Forest Canary than adult Cape Canary because of streaking on the front and lack a grey nape. The Forest Canary has a yellow eye stripe and the Cape Canary does not.

The next day we saw both Livingstone's Turaco and Bronzy Sunbird about 10m away through the lounge window. The other Eastern District specials seen during our stay included Cape Grassbird and Malachite Sunbird. We also recorded 10 African Black Duck, Shelley's Francolin and Speckled Pigeon, a close-by Red-chested Cuckoo, Cape Crow, White-necked Raven and Cape Bunting. The total species count was 48.

This cottage may be an option for a BLZ outing as it can accommodate up to 10 guests in 5 two-bed bedrooms. The cost is currently \$100/day for the cottage and \$5/day per guest. The caretaker will cook for \$1 per plate, if required, and a menu is provided. The cottage is split in two with a 2-car garage between the 2 halves. The bigger half has 3 bedrooms, 2 ablutions, a lounge, a dining room and a kitchen while the smaller half has 2 bedrooms, 1 ablution and a lounge-cum-dining room. The address is No. 43, Little Connemara, Troutbeck, Nyanga, the GPS is 18°09'32.45"S 32°47'37.75"E and the booking agent is Gail on email: glendermerezim@gmail.com and cell 077 2287 429.

Richard Dennison

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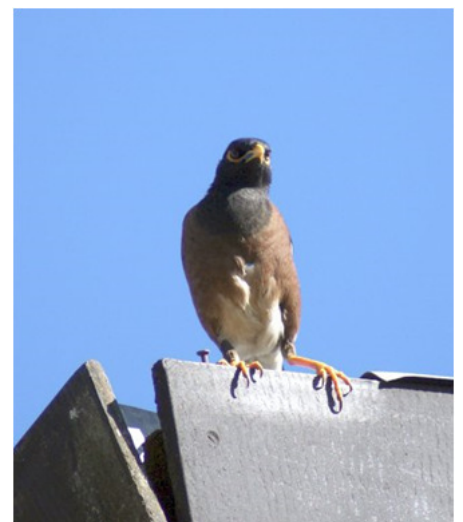


Common Myna's nesting in Gweru

About 5 Common Mynas are nesting in Gweru at the intersection of Moffat Ave. & the A17 (Umvuma Rd) at the Spar shop.

Dr J.E. Fincham

Photos by Phil Reed.



...and talking about tail feathers...

James Ball reports that one of the birds in a resident group of Arrow-marked Babblers in his Mandara, Harare, neighbourhood has a white tail feather. Another group has a bird with a partial white feather.



On 8 March 2016 a group of about 10 White-crested Helmet-shrikes visited the garden for the first time. They weren't reported in gardens in the 2011-12 Garden Bird Survey.

Comment: they do visit Harare and others towns fairly regularly, but more so in drought years. The lack of records in the survey is more than likely a function of the number of participating gardens and their locality.

Helmet-shrikes are present on the edge of Mandara on Chikurubi farm and this group could have wandered from there. Will we see more in town this winter? Join the Garden Bird Survey and let your records make a difference. Ed.

Aerial predators may detect nests by the ultraviolet reflectance of eggs

17 Feb 2016 - 17:10 -- Eduardo de Juana (*HBW Alive*)

Artificial tree nest experiments, in which pairs of pigeon eggs were treated with either an ultraviolet-blocker or a control substance before being exposed to nest predators, have showed that nest predation increased with duration of exposure, and that blocking ultraviolet reflectance of eggs could significantly reduce nest predation. The experiments, in a tropical forest in southern China, used infrared cameras to detect predators, which included Greater Necklaced Laughingthrushes (*Garrulax pectoralis*) and Indochinese Green Magpies (*Cissa hypoleuca*).

HBW Alive Newsletter – No. 21: First Country Reports

Yellow-throated Greenbul (*Chlorocichla flavicollis*), first record for Namibia and Southern Africa.

[**From SARB 17 Feb:** a pair of these birds has been present in the gardens of the Caprivi Houseboat Safari Lodge in Katima Mulilo in Namibia for a few weeks now. What makes this record even more phenomenal is that these birds starting nesting in the gardens about a fortnight ago and are currently sitting on eggs.]

A Pitta Trip report will appear in *Honeyguide* shortly, don't miss it. Congrats to Jono and company for finding a couple at Chitake on 30 November 2015 after missing them at Masoka.



Contributions for *The Babbler* 130 June-July 2016 may be sent to the editor anytime between now and the very latest 14th July 2016.