

THE BABBLER

Newsletter of BirdLife Zimbabwe

February–March 2021 No. 158



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Photo © Celesta von Chamier

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Birding Big Day 2020

Ian Riddell

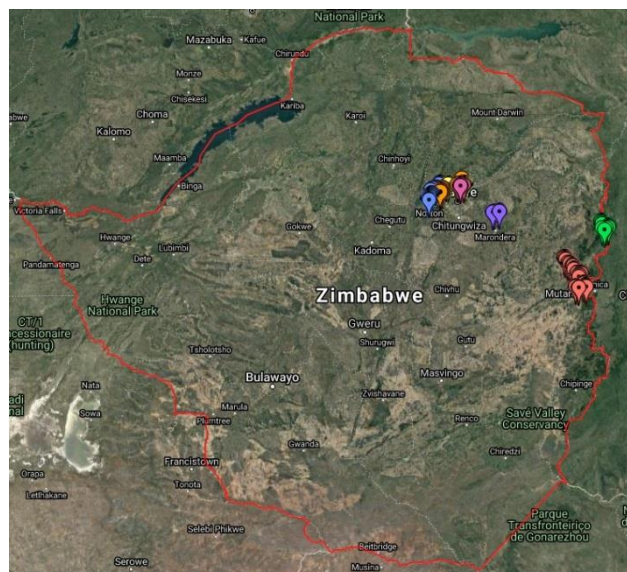
PART I

This year we had 10 teams for BBD, 7 of which used BirdLasser, where we could follow their progress online. All teams did 24 hours, to tie in with SA and the BirdLasser event, restricted to 00h00 to 23h59 on Saturday 28th November.

BirdLasser is southern Africa's foremost smart phone app primarily used for SABAP2 atlasing, an "easy way to record your African bird sightings and share with friends, your community and contribute to conservation."

The BirdLasser teams covered the plateau from Harare to the eastern highlands (see figure opposite), and recorded 321 species with 929 records. The other three teams birded Bulawayo, Chimanimani and Umfurudzi. A spreadsheet is available on our BLZ site for those who would like to explore the results in more detail (see under Conservation> Surveys & Reports).

Congratulations to the winning team, *Osborne Ospreys* who birded Vumba to Osborne Dam and saw 211 birds.



The seven BirdLasser teams birded Harare, Marondera & parts of the eastern highlands

Links:

<https://www.birdlasser.com/events/bbd2020zim24> (click in the **Position** box to show or hide the birds on the map; hover your mouse over any drop pin to see the species).

Results – Birding Big Day 2020

Table 1. Overall list ranking on number of species

Position	Species	Team name	Leader	Area
1	211	Osborne Ospreys	J-M. Blake	Mutare
2	143	2-Gig Plovers	R. Chirimuta	Harare
3	123	Rosewood Morganites	T. Wood	Honde
4	121	Black Tits	A. Karimanzira	Harare
5	113	The Bunny Huggers	J. Brebner	Bulawayo
6	106	The Wild Goose Chase	D. Wiggins	Harare
7	97	Illeagle Chicks	E. Shadwell	Harare
8	83	Zimbabwe Mountain Guides Chimanimani	T. Mudhluyi	Chimanimani
9	74	Louw Toppies	I. Louw	Umfurudzi
10	63	Golden Warblers	G. Bester	Marondera
		The teams that used BirdLasser		

PART II – THE ORNITHOLOGICAL RESULTS

334 species were recorded (321 on the BirdLasser leader board).

Common Ostrich?!. Ok, that would have to be a Chivero bird, seen in the game park from the Bird Sanctuary.

White-breasted Cormorants were seen by more teams than I would have expected, in Bulawayo, by 4 Harare teams and also at Marondera. The African Darter, being quite threatened on the highveld by fishing nets, was only seen the Osborne Ospreys, and presumably at Osborne Dam.

The Goliath Heron was only seen by the 2-Gig Plovers at Kent Estate dam. The only White-backed Night-heron came from Hippo Pools, Umfurudzi.

The 2-Gig Plovers was the only team to find White Stork, at Kent Estate, and unfortunately no numbers... Saddle-billed Stork was found at Chivero by the Illeagle Chicks and Marabou Stork at Kent Estate, where they also had Glossy Ibis. The only Hadedda Ibis appeared in the Mutare area, seen by the Osborne Ospreys.

Umfurudzi produced Fulvous Duck, a nice record, but 2-Gig Plovers and Osborne Ospreys got Comb Duck, but 2-Gig Plovers were the only ones to find Spur-winged Goose.

Two teams saw White-backed Vulture, 2-Gig Plovers at Kent Estate and The Bunny Huggers in the Bulawayo area. Bulawayo also produced Yellow-billed Kite, along with Illeagle Chicks at Chivero Bird Sanctuary. The Wild Goose Chase was the only team to find African Cuckoo Hawk, at Chivero. Moving to the far east and the Lesser Spotted Eagle, only seen in the Honde Valley. They also got Ayres's Hawk-eagle and Martial Eagle, though the latter was also found at Kent Estate. The African Crowned Eagle was seen at Kent Estate, another nice record for that area, and others were seen in Mutare and Chimanimani. Brown Snake-eagles, however, we also found in Honde Valley & Chimanimani and Palm-nut Vulture, being an Aberfoyle special, was only recorded from there, whilst Augur Buzzard was found in the Mutare area. Chivero also produced an Ovambo Sparrowhawk

Peregrine Falcon was seen in Chimanimani and Lanner Falcon at Kent Estate, but Eurasian Hobby and Lesser Kestrel were only found in the Mutare area.

Red-necked Spurfowl sightings were confined to Honde, Mutare and Chimanimani, Red-chested Flufftail to Honde and Buff-spotted Flufftail to Mutare area. Umfurudzi produced African Finfoot and Kent Estate the Common Ringed Plover, but the White-fronted Plover was restricted to Mutare area, presumably Osborne Dam. Two teams got Pied Avocet, which I presume was at Chivero. 2-Gig Plovers got Temminck's Courser and Collared Pratincole came from Chivero.

African Olive-pigeon, Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon, Lemon Dove, Tambourine Dove and Blue-spotted Wood-dove were nice eastern highlands finds the three teams in that area, along with other 'area specials' like Livingstone's Turaco, African Emerald Cuckoo, Burchell's Coucal, Scarce Swift, Narina Trogon, Half-collared Kingfisher, White-eared Barbet, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, Pallid Honeyguide, Green-backed Woodpecker, African Broadbill, Square-tailed Drongo, Cinnamon-breasted Tit, Yellow-streaked Greenbul, Sombre Greenbul, Stripe-cheeked Greenbul, Olive Thrush, Orange Ground-thrush, Red-capped Robin-chat, Cape Robin-chat, White-starred Robin, Swynnerton's Robin, Barratt's Warbler, Yellow-throated Woodland-warbler, Chirinda Apalis, Cape Grassbird, Wailing Cisticola, Singing Cisticola, Red-winged Warbler, Roberts's Warbler, African Dusky Flycatcher, Cape Batis, Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher, Mountain Wagtail, Cape Wagtail, Gorgeous Bush-shrike, Black-fronted Bush-shrike, Olive Bush-shrike, Malachite Sunbird, Bronzy Sunbird, Olive Sunbird, Dark-backed Weaver, Red-faced Crimsonwing, African Firefinch, Grey Waxbill, Magpie Mannikin, Cape Canary, Cabanis's Bunting and Cape Bunting.

Back on the plateau, Marondera and Umfurudzi had African Wood-owl and the latter had Rufous-cheeked Nightjar. Common Swift and African Black Swift were only seen in Mutare area and Bulawayo had Horus Swift.

Honde and Umfurudzi gave us African Pygmy-kingfisher, but I still have doubts about the claimed Woodland Kingfisher from Mukuvisi Woodlands. Bulawayo was the only place for White-fronted Bee-eater, whilst Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters were found in Harare,

Mutare and Umfurudzi. European Roller was found by 2-Gig Plovers and Trumpeter Hornbill at Honde and Umfurudzi. Whyte's Barbet was recorded quite widely, by three Harare teams and at Mutare and Chimanimani.

The African Golden Oriole was only found by one Harare team, The Wild Goose Chase, but White-necked Ravens were found by all three eastern highlands teams. Miombo Tit, however, proved elusive and was only noted by Osborne Ospreys, whilst the Groundscraper Thrush was found by Illeagle Chicks and Golden Warblers in Marondera. The Miombo Rock-thrush was seen at Mukuvisi, and at Chimanimani and Mutare. The White-throated Robin-chat can be tricky to find but The Bunny Huggers in Bulawayo and the Osborne Ospreys got it, and Bearded Scrub-robin was seen at Umfurudzi and Honde. That other miombo bird, the Southern Hyliota, was only found in Mutare.

The Yellow-bellied Eremomela was only found by Osborne Ospreys, who, along with 2-Gig Plovers, were the only teams to get Green-capped Eremomela.

The African Dusky Flycatcher was claimed for Mukuvisi but I have rejected that in favour of Spotted Flycatcher, leaving the only records of the Dusky in Chimanimani and Mutare.

Striped Pipit was seen by Osborne Ospreys and Tree Pipit by Zimbabwe Mountain Guides Chimanimani.

Magpie Shrikes are rather local around Harare, but noted by 2-Gig Plovers at Kent

Estate, otherwise they were seen at Bulawayo. Retz's Helmet-shrike was only found at Umfurudzi. Common Myna is now found widely and one Harare team ticked it, along with The Bunny Huggers and Osborne Ospreys, who also got Meves's Starling. All four Harare and the Marondera team found the Miombo Blue-eared Starling.

The Collared Sunbird was found at Umfurudzi, Mutare and Honde.

The Red-billed Buffalo-weaver was restricted to Bulawayo, as was the White-browed Sparrow-weaver; they also got the only Scaly-feathered Finch.

Cuckoo Finch was only found in Honde and Violet-eared Waxbill in Mutare and Bulawayo. Orange-breasted Waxbill was only seen in one Harare team and also at Marondera and Mutare, whilst Cut-throat Finch only occurred at Bulawayo.

The most common birds were the White-browed Robin-chat, Tropical Boubou and Bronze Mannikin, seen by all teams. 90 species were only seen once. The rest of the spread can be seen on the excel file on the BLZ website.

It was a pity there were no teams in the lowveld, the west, or the Zambezi Valley across to Kazungula, where many other species occur. Still, I'm sure that all those who participated had fun and got to see some great birds.

In October 2020, BirdLife Zimbabwe and Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority teamed up to conduct a Blue Swallow Survey in Nyanga and Honde Valley

Blue Ambassadors of the Eastern Highlands

By Shingirai Sakarombe, BirdLife Zimbabwe

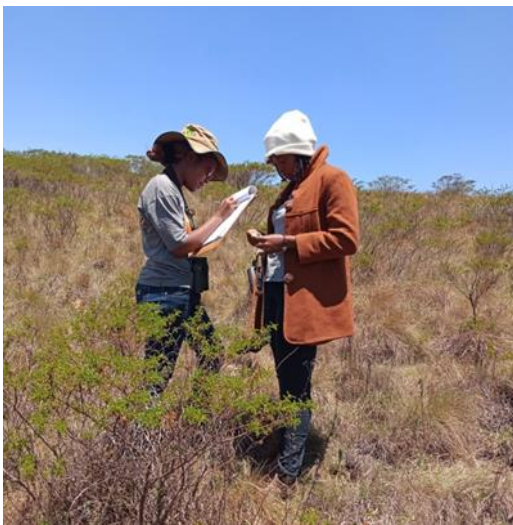
A handsome, easily identifiable swallow, the Blue Swallow (*Hirundo atrocaerulea*) is fairly rare because of its restricted habitat requirements and its individual preferences and behaviour. It is an intra-African migrant and can be seen during summer in Zimbabwe in the Eastern Highlands from Nyanga to Chimanimani Mountains. Its requirements include open montane grassland, where it can feed during flight, and suitable holes or dongas, uncluttered by vegetation, in which it can nest. Because of its particular habitat and nesting requirements, suitable environments are limited and are

rapidly diminishing with the spread of commercial forestry, agriculture and the encroachment of invasive plant species e.g. pine and wattle.

In the last week of October 2020, a team of five BirdLife Zimbabwe Early Career conservationists (three from Harare and two from Chimanimani) took a 9-day trip to the Nyanga National Park (an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area/Key Biodiversity Area) to conduct a Blue Swallow survey in the park and the surrounding areas. The team was joined by the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management

Authority Terrestrial Ecologist for Nyanga National Park, Kundai Dube. Cognisant of the difficulty of traversing the montane grasslands, the preferred habitat for Blue Swallows and the rugged terrain of the Nyanga Mountains, the team made an early start every morning to cover as much ground as possible in search of the Blue Swallows. It was quite an exhilarating experience, having to trek across valleys, streams and rolling hills that represent the habitat of the Blue Swallows.

The first two days of the trip took us to the foot of the Nyangani Mountain and the upper part of the Pungwe River. Our first two Blue Swallows were encountered on the hill



Kundai Dube (Nyanga Ecologist) and Abigail Karimanzira (BirdLife Zimbabwe) recording details during the Blue Swallow Survey in October 2020

overlooking the Pungwe River west of the Nyanga Experiment Potato Field. Several Blue Swallows flying and swooping down the valleys were recorded in different isolated areas. On the way back, having passed through the magnificent Nyamaziwa falls, the team recorded a flock of seven Blue Swallows along the loop

road linking Mare Camp and the foot of Zimbabwe's highest mountain. The next day, a cursory check was made of the savanna grasslands around Udu Camp, including the open grassland bordering Nyanga Village and the National Park. Some sightings were recorded although the area is not as well-populated as the montane grasslands near the foot of Nyangani Mountain and in the watershed of the Pungwe River. The following day, the team ventured to the Gairezi Bridge East of the Nyangani Mountain. A number of sightings were also recorded during the long and torturous drive down the Kwaraguza Road, with frequent stops to look into the sky, peer into the valleys and listen out for calls. It was exhausting work but the breath-taking beauty of the montane grasslands was truly inspiring.

Outside the National Park, the survey team drove further up to Troutbeck, Connemara and into the privately owned potato farms. The survey ended with a visit to the Honde Valley and a day-long hike up Gleneagles where the Blue Swallows soar!



Blue Swallow habitat: the exquisite montane grasslands of Nyanga

The Montane Grassland ecosystem of Nyanga

Without doubt, the flagship feature of the Nyanga area is the fragile mountain grassland ecosystem which extends from the foot of the Nyangani Mountain down a chain of hills and a network of deep gorges and valleys to the Gairezi confluence with Chihwe stream and Nyafaru/Magadzire communities in the east. To the west of the Nyangani peak, the grasslands that are characterised by patches of indigenous woodlands in the valleys extend as

far as Nyazengu, occurring further west and coming to an abrupt end at the Pungwe Gorge and the National Park Border with Erin Forest and the Wattle Company Estate in the South.

The problem of invasive plant species in Nyanga is, putting it mildly, alarming. The extent of the problem requires a collective approach to halt and reverse the spread of the pine and wattle in the Nyanga National Park. This needs to happen as the montane grassland

ecosystem is not only habitat for range-restricted and endemic species but a watershed area that provides life-giving water for communities and farmers in the valleys below. The United Nations Decade of Ecosystems Restoration (2021-2030) presents us with an opportunity to

scale up restoration efforts that will breathe new life into degraded ecosystems, not only in Nyanga but countrywide. The time to look after Nature is now to ensure a sustainable Future for us all!

ENDANGERED

Blue (Mherepere) Swallows

BLUE SWALLOWS: KEY BIRD SPECIES OF **THE NYANGA AREA**
An INTERNATIONAL "IMPORTANT BIRD AND BIODIVERSITY AREA" (IBA)
25% of global population breeds in Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands

#1 THREAT = HABITAT DEGRADATION

- Encroaching wattle and pine plantations • Agriculture • Fires •

Where do Blue Swallows live?
High wet grasslands. Nest in holes in the ground (dongas, old antbear holes)



Non Breeding
Breeding

Migratory species – nests in Zimbabwe (September – April)



Eastern Sawwing Little Swift Palm Swift Blue Swallow



©A Caddick



©R Peek

What can we do?

"CONSERVE THE GRASSLANDS"

- No pines/wattle/gum trees
- No crops in pristine grasslands
- No fires
- No overgrazing
- Make artificial nest holes
- Know your area – where do Blue Swallows nest?

Other advantages of conserving these areas:

More water in streams

Conserve other birds, plants and animals



BirdLife International ABC Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Commission

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To learn more about BirdLife Zimbabwe's Nature conservation programmes and to support them:

www.birdlifezimbabwe.org or email: birds@zol.co.zw

Branch News

Mashonaland

Bird outings around and about Harare

Ken Dixon

LAKE CHIVERO BIRD SANCTUARY, Sunday 22nd November 2020

Reappearance of Vanellus spinosus, the Spur-winged Lapwing

Yes, two were seen in a similar spot to where the rare visitor first appeared last year. No one can be sure whether it has returned or whether it stayed unnoticed during the winter. Just be careful how close you approach as the mud is treacherous and almost sucked in Jean-Michel as he was photographing the birds.

I am sure these are returning lapwings, but the important question is whether anyone is going to monitor their breeding attempt and survival of the chicks this season – Ed.

Sadly, there were only 7 of us present for this exciting event and to identify and count the wide variety of waterfowl on the exposed shore line about 300-400m from the highwater mark. The 40 or so elegant Pied Avocets were the highlight, I suppose, but Black-winged Stilt are also very attractive. On the water there were rafts of Red-billed Teal with the occasional Cape Teal among them, White-faced Duck, lots of

Little Grebe and Egyptian Goose. Grey-headed Gull both flew above and congregated on the shore. Kittlitz's Plover ran busily along the water's edge and Wood Sandpiper and Common Sandpiper, Three-banded Plover and a couple of Common Greenshank dropped in from time to time. Throughout, the strident calls of African Fish-eagle filled the air and at least 6 sat on the stumps near the lapwings. Among the many hirundines were Barn Swallow, Sand Martin, Brown-throated Martin and Banded Martin while African Palm-swift and Little Swift populated the higher reaches. On the shore, we found Rosy-throated Longclaw and African Pipit.

During the walk from the main lake to the Marimba inflow through miombo woodland lots of common species like weavers, sunbirds, bulbuls, warblers and cisticolas were seen or heard. Southern Red Bishop, now in full breeding plumage appeared in the reeds. Raptors apart from fish-eagle were scarce except for a Black-chested Snake-eagle and a Black-shouldered Kite. Our final count amounted to 92 species.

GREYSTONE PARK, Saturday 12th December 2020

A lovely sunny morning after a night of rain meant the birds were about and active. 7 members wandered happily around the reserve remarking on the various methods being tried to rid the area of the intrusive poplars and cherry trees. The birds, on the other hand, were content to enjoy the spring-like atmosphere.

Although the dam was still empty the Southern Red Bishops and Yellow Bishops, Red-collared Widowbirds and White-winged Widowbirds, Little Rush-warbler, African

Stonechat and Village Weaver were present in the reeds. Regular specials like Red-throated Twinspot, White-browed Scrub-robin and Purple-banded Sunbird also put in an appearance. Overhead were African Palm-swift, Little Swift and White-rumped Swift, Lesser Striped Swallow and Grey-rumped Swallow plus a Long-crested Eagle. A Lizard Buzzard called now and again.

We logged 74 different species, a number that will rise as the dam fills.

MANA POOLS NATIONAL PARK Love(birds) in the Air!

By Abigail Karimanzira

Birding is always a gratifying experience, especially in an area known to host rare,

endemic and special species. But as the planet grapples with its 6th mass extinction, as young

ornithologists in Africa, we are acutely aware that without urgent conservation action, future generations may not derive the same enjoyment as species will have gone extinct. Therefore, in an effort to learn more about a threatened species of the Zambezi biome (*and to offer budding conservationists an opportunity to become involved in the nature conservation sector*), BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ) in partnership with Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Authority is undertaking a Lilian's Lovebird survey in Mana Pools National Park (MPNP) Key Biodiversity Area (also a Ramsar Site and a World Heritage Site) with the support of the African Bird Club.



Abigail and Nobesuthu at the seminar on Lilian's Lovebirds at MPNP

The Lilian's Lovebird is a small parrot that is listed as Near Threatened in its region of occurrence. In Zimbabwe, the species occurs in the middle to lower Zambezi Valley. Their habitat is mature Mopane, Acacia woodland and riparian fringing forest and at fig trees (*Ficus* spp.). The birds are highly sociable and roost in flocks in natural tree holes in Mopane. However, it appears that the numbers of lovebirds across its range have been reduced due to habitat loss, flooding of feeding grounds, poisoning of water holes and illegal trading of live birds. Concerns have been raised by Tiwonge Mzumara-Gawa, BirdLife partner in Malawi (Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi, WESM) following surveys conducted in Zambia and Mozambique – thus making the

outcome of the survey in Zimbabwe very important.

On 15 November 2020 the BLZ team travelled to MPNP for an initial 8-day Lilian's Lovebird survey. The team comprised of Abigail Karimanzira (Team Leader), Ronnie Chirimuta, Jimmy Muropa and Shingirai Sakarombe. They were joined by MPNP ecologist, Nobesuthu Ngwenya who assisted in facilitating the survey. The purpose of the survey is to determine population numbers, distribution and habitat viability within the park with the prospect of conducting a closer study of the ecological requirements of this highly localized species and identifying conservation actions that need to be implemented if necessary.

The team explored a number of woodland and riparian forest areas and the floodplains of the park. A total of 20 sightings were recorded with each sighting comprising an average of 30 lovebirds, except in one, which counted more than 300 birds. Most of these sightings were within the Lilian's Lovebird foraging areas, whilst a few were at their roosts. At that time of the year, the team noticed that the lovebirds were mostly to be found foraging on the flowers and pods of the Apple-ring Acacia tree (*Faidherbia albida*) in the floodplain along the Zambezi River. Among the threats recorded during the survey were habitat loss from tree mortality, (the team sighted several patches of fallen Mopane trees) and as a result a lot of competition with other species and mammals that utilize the same tree holes as habitat (e.g. Meves's Starling, hornbills and bush squirrels) and the premature drying up of the seasonal pools in the park due to insufficient rains in the last few years.

While at Mana Pools, the BLZ Team took part and presented at a seminar on 20 November, organized by MPNP ecologist, Nobesuthu Ngwenya, with the scope of educating and raising awareness on Lilian's Lovebirds with ZimParks rangers and other stakeholders. The seminar was a success with participants taking a keen interest in the research. A second survey will be conducted in 2021 to monitor the species' breeding success and to explore areas that were not covered in the November 2020 survey.

See also Tail Feathers, p.17

THREATENED

Lilian's Lovebirds

MAJOR THREATS:

- **HABITAT LOSS** - Deforestation for agriculture
- **EXPLOITATION** - nest destruction for live bird trade
- **DAMMING OF ZAMBEZI** - flooding of feeding grounds
- **POISONING OF WATERHOLES** - Illegal pest control and poaching

Lovebirds get their name from the strong bond which forms between a male and female. Pairs of lovebirds spend much of their time close together, regularly preening each other's feathers. They are in fact monogamous (they have only one mate during a breeding season, or throughout the breeding life of a pair).

In Zimbabwe, Lilian's lovebirds occur in the Middle Zambezi below the escarpment from the Angwa and Hunyani Rivers westwards to Binga and Msuna although much suitable habitat has been lost within the Kariba Basin. They are often found in woodlands of mopane trees but also inhabit Acacia woodlands on flood plains, forest bordering rivers and lakes, and in fig trees.

This brightly coloured lovebird has a gregarious nature and is usually observed in small groups, although sometimes up to 100 may gather. These large flocks only occur during winter, however, when the birds are not breeding.

HOW TO HELP:

Record sightings,
roost and nest sites
and report to:

Abigail Karimanzira

Contact details:
Email: karimanziraabigail@gmail.com
Cell: +263 771 868 706

or **BirdLife Zimbabwe**

Contact details:
Email: birds@zol.co.zw
Phone: +263 24 248148



**Endemic
Distribution**

Classified as Near Threatened (NT) on the IUCN Red List, and listed on Appendix II of CITES, the total population of Lilian's Lovebirds has been significantly reduced by habitat loss and exploitation. Like many other lovebirds, this stunning bird is captured for the local and international cage-bird trade. In addition, the cereal-eating lovebird is considered a pest by farmers, and is persecuted as a result. (Lilian's lovebirds feed primarily on grass seed, particularly millet and sorghum seeds, which is picked off the ground, or plucked from the ripening heads of plants).



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MONA VALE VLEI, Sunday 20th December 2020

Just 3 of us arrived at 6.30 for the monthly stroll round this protected area, which had not yet had its fair share of the rain, rain that seems to be deluging Bulawayo and environs. However, it was bright and sunny and there was lots of activity. The vlei birds are in breeding plumage now and showing off to prospective mates: Red-collared Widowbird, Yellow-mantled Widowbird and White-winged Widowbird, Yellow Bishop and Southern Red Bishop. On or from the reeds and bulrushes we saw or heard Little Rush-warbler, Lesser Swamp-warbler, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, African Reed-warbler and Great Reed-warbler and Senegal Coucal. On the savannah were Levaillant's Cisticola, Croaking Cisticola, Red-

headed Cisticola, Zitting Cisticola and Rattling Cisticola, and Orange-breasted Waxbill, Blue Waxbill and Common Waxbill. The usual pair of African Black Duck flew down the stream and Swainson's Spurfowl and Helmeted Guineafowl were seen. Species expected but not encountered were Black-shouldered Kite, Black Coucal, flufftails and crakes. Not enough rain yet. A Diderick Cuckoo harassed the weavers; the Red-chested Cuckoo had been calling all morning. The lone raptor was a Little Sparrowhawk.

On the edge of the golf course we saw Yellow-fronted Canary and Streaky-headed Seedeater and a Reed Cormorant. The final count was about 50.

Mashonaland East

Mashonaland East Natural History Society MARONDERA
November/December 2020 Newsletter

What was going to be a busy November for us fizzled out somewhat as circumstances for most of our little group changed. Our much-awaited outing to Domervale in Macheke was eventually postponed to a suitable time in 2021. We struggled to put together a team to participate in the Birding Big Day at the end of November. Our team of four (Jo Denton, Jen Mitchell, Jenny Milne and myself) called the Golden Warblers started out at Rakodze. We saw a good number of waterbirds at each of the dams visited. We checked on a couple of spots around Marondera town for birds previously noted there. Sadly, we came up emptyhanded. We finished our count at Borradaile Trust. I thought our total of 66 species was a fair effort. Thanks to the team for participating. I failed miserably with trying to use the BirdLasser app to record our participation and observations. Clearly more training is required.



Gez didn't fail and his records have synced with the BBD site (see report above), though the total is 63 rather than 66. There is an error on the site list, which records Fiscal Flycatcher and this should no doubt be Common Fiscal – Ed.

Phyllis and Pete Banks were spoilt rotten and taken off to Kavinga for a few nights by their son Gordon to see the African Pittas. They had a fabulous trip and managed a few close up sightings of the magnificent bird.

Louis Jacobsz is still doing his best to raise the baby Helmeted Guineafowl in the Trust. He has lost a number of babies and juveniles to dogs and cats, which has been most frustrating. Fortunately, he is persevering. I suspect one or two cats could soon go missing!

I was out at Grasslands recently collecting cattle manure for composting. I saw 5 or 6 male Pin-tailed Whydahs on the same anthill. I thought this was a bit unusual as I have seen how a single adult male dominates the bird feeder in my garden.

I was very fortunate to have 6 nights with all my family on a houseboat on Kariba at the end of December. We boated around Changachireri, Tashinga, Elephant Point and Gordon's Bay. We saw some lovely waterbirds. Most notable were the African Fish-eagles, African Spoonbills,

African Sacred Ibis, Egyptian Goose (hundreds), lapwings (mostly White-crowned Lapwing), Marabou Stork, White-breasted Cormorants, Yellow-billed Stork, White Stork, Black Stork, Saddle-billed Stork, Goliath Heron, Water Thick-knee, African Openbills, African Jacanas and egrets (mostly Great Egret). Sadly, the game viewing was generally poor although we did hear lion one night; they sounded reasonably close by.

While safeguarding the vehicle and trailer at Saucey Sue's in Lion's Den, I had a close-up encounter with a Common Myna. While we may detest these birds, they are actually quite pretty.

One of our newer members living in Borradaile Trust, Dave Baxter, has been identifying birds in his garden by their calls

only. I think he has reached something close to 40 species in just a few months. Well done Dave and keep adding to that tally.

Peter Hadingham reported having an excellent family holiday to the Matopos and Bomani Lodge in the Hwange National Park over the Christmas period. Game viewing and birding was spectacular. Rainfall has been excellent in that part of the country and water was pretty much everywhere.

The MENHS AGM, which is usually held in January each year, has been postponed until the current lockdown measures are relaxed.

Lastly, I pass on best wishes for 2021 from MENHS members to BirdLife Zimbabwe members. May your birding experiences be memorable.

Gez Bester

Mashonaland West

From a very hot/ dry October 2020 to wet, wet, wet! The rains have continued ever since into January 2021. Kadoma to date (13th January) has recorded 670mm of rain, so our rivers and dams are flowing strongly and many small tributaries filling for the first time in many years. The vegetation growth is phenomenal, wild flowers, grasses, shrubs and trees loaded with new growth. What rich natural vegetation surrounds us.

Naturally, our avian friends have been confined and restricted because of the continuous dull, wet days. Of course, the water birds will be celebrating! Likewise, our outdoor visits and walks are curtailed.

But about town and garden the birds have continued to show and call their presence. House Sparrow, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Tropical Boubou with their familiar diet, Red-eyed Dove and Laughing Dove, Southern Masked-weaver and Spectacled Weaver, Grey-headed Bush-shrike and Black-backed Puffback, Fork-tailed Drongo, White-bellied Sunbird, Red-faced Mousebird, Crested Barbet, Black-collared Barbet and Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird.

Our faithful White-browed Robin-chat, cheerily singing with first daybreak, and comforting good evening calls. Of course the Dark-capped Bulbul forever about, in control of any dispute. The Common Myna pair have nested and raised young in the same palm tree as 2019. The African Paradise-flycatcher returned and nested in the same frangipani tree as before. The Green Wood-hoopoes are nesting in the same hole in the apex of the house roof.

The Black-headed Heron, with nests high up in the gum trees and silky oak trees opposite the police camp, is active and feeding fledglings. The guttural "kwaak" continues night and day.

15th January SA news: 1300 immature Cape Cormorants were rescued off Robben Island. The chicks had been abandoned by their parents, probably because of a lack of sufficient seafood such as pilchards and anchovies. The birds are being reared by marine specialists.

Let us continue to be aware of our biodiversity and the survival of all wild life and birds for us, and generations to follow, to enjoy.

Margaret Parrock

BirdLife Zimbabwe Youth Club Outing to the Midlands Black Rhino Conservancy in Kwekwe

10 BirdLife Youth Club members organised a Black Stork Survey at the Midlands Black Rhino Conservancy in Kwekwe over the weekend of

18-20 September. The trip was organised as a survey of the Black Storks, the area is an Important Bird Area due to the presence of

breeding pairs of Black Storks. However due to circumstances beyond our control the trip

turned out to be an ordinary Birdwatching expedition.



The group left Harare on a Friday at midday but due to a series of tyre punctures and burst tyres (which culminated in new tyres being bought) the group only arrived in Kwekwe after 8 p.m. Thankfully Ashton Goronga, who was our guide and host for the weekend, was still waiting for us and accompanied the group to the campsite. Arriving late turned out to be blessing in disguise as on the way to the camping site the Spring Hare and a Spotted Eagle-owl were seen. The majority in the group were not aware of such a unique animal as the Spring Hare.

At the campsite a delicious meal of sadza was prepared. Whilst eating, Freckled Nightjar, Barn Owl and African Barred Owlet were heard calling. The “Bow-wow” puppy-like call of the Freckled Nightjar was quite amusing and by the end of the weekend everyone could recognise it.

The group woke up early the next morning for a bird walk on the dam and the surrounding woodland. African Fish-eagle, Pied Kingfisher, Water Thick-knees, Common Sandpipers and Wood Sandpipers, Common Greenshank and White-rumped Swift were observed on the dam. In the woodland, Brubru, Chin-spot Batis, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Southern Black Tit, Retz’s Helmet-shrike and the Green-capped Eremomelas were observed.



After the early morning walk, the Youth Club members had breakfast then got into Ashton’s Land cruiser, intending to search for the Black Storks. On the way, a White-backed Vulture was seen soaring high in the sky. Ashton had indicated that before visiting the Black Stork nesting sites we would pass through a grassland section where Kori Bustards and korhaans are regularly seen. Luck was on our side and we managed to see the majestic Kori Bustard. Other birds seen during that drive include Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, African Green-pigeon, Namaqua Dove and Red-faced Mousebird.

Ashton’s Land cruiser developed a tyre problem and we could no longer visit the Black

Stork nesting sites. This was such a disappointment as the entire trip was centred on the storks. As there was nothing to do the dejected group walked back to camp and on the way observed a Wood Pipit.

Later in the day the group of BLZ headed to the nearby wetland and woodland. On this walk African Jacana, Yellow-throated Longclaws, Violet-backed Starlings, Pale Flycatcher and several Scarlet-chested Sunbirds were observed.



After supper there was a bird call identification challenge. First up was Harare (Onwell and Shingie) vs Chitungwiza (Leeroy and Osborne). It was an interesting challenge that ended in Harare defeating Chitungwiza 6-4. In the battle of the girls, Abigail thoroughly

defeated Benhildah 7-3. The last challenge of the night was the battle of the Vlei Scouts, Ronnie representing Marlborough Vlei and Jimmy representing Monavale Vlei. Both gentlemen were each asked to identify 10 bird calls. This was tightly contested affair that ended 0-0. In the scouts defence they were asked to identify bird calls such as that of the White-backed Vulture.

The next morning a walk was conducted around the woodland near the campsite, seeing Southern Black Tit, Pale Flycatcher, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Green-capped Eremomela and White-crested Helmet-shrike. Mocking Cliff-chats were seen on the rocky section in the area. A Wahlberg's Eagle, Marabou Stork and 2 White-backed Vultures were seen soaring high in the sky. Just as the group was about to leave the camping site for Harare, 2 Black Storks flew past the campsite; there was euphoria when the birds were seen.

Whilst driving out of the Conservancy a lifer for everyone in the group was the Southern White-crowned Shrike. At the Police camp in Sebakwe, White-browed Sparrow-weavers and numerous Marico Sunbirds were seen.

In total 117 bird species were observed over the educational and fun-filled birding trip to the Midlands Black Rhino Conservancy.

Matabeleland

Mat' land Chirpers Report for the 10th of October 2020 Green Birding Day

By Mthabisi Bafana Charles Khumalo

EVENT:

Green Birding Day (Clean-up campaign/Birding/Networking event), at the Bulawayo Central and Centenary Park

GROUPS REPRESENTED:

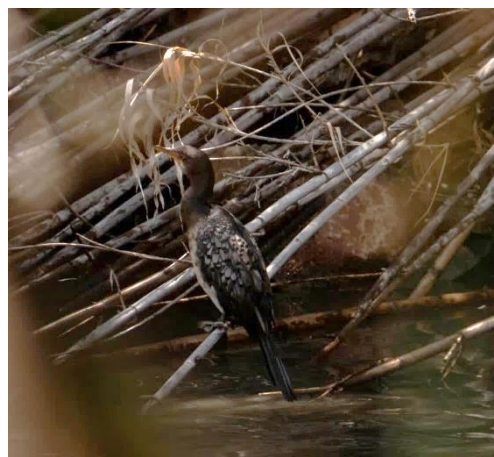
BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE (MATABELELAND YOUTH)
BULAWAYO CITY COUNCIL
KEEP BULAWAYO CLEAN
MATABELELAND SUSTAINABILITY ORGANISATION
ROTARACT CLUB OF MATOBO
GREEN HUT
DO IT FOR THE KIDS (DIFTK)
GREAT ZIMBAWE UNIVERSITY
ISILWANE NATURE RESERVE

The Green Birding Day is the BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ) Matabeleland Youth (Mat' land Chirpers) initiative that is meant to encourage environmental stewardship amongst the youth in the region. On Saturday the 10th October 2020, the BLZ Mat' land Chirpers collaborated with the above-mentioned groups in the debut Green Birding Day event. It was a sunny, low wind, humid day, a wonderful atmosphere at the Bulawayo Central and Centenary Park after a rainy week.



The event kicked off with opening remarks from Mr Magagula (BCC Conservation Department), highlighting the importance of keeping the environment clean from waste materials and how this benefits us as the inhabitants of the land in the end. He also spoke about conservation of the natural environment and wildlife, how our activities impact the environment and that unsustainable practices could prove costly in present and future times. Mr Magagula shared with us some of his past experiences with nature and birds in particular, mentioning that the Southern Ground-hornbills that used to frequent his home area back in his youth days are now rare in the area, and also how he regrets going out to hunt and killing a Kori Bustard.

We had almost 50 youth and adults, both students and professionals, from nine organisations mentioned above, who took part in the Green Birding Day. The main goal of cleaning up the park whilst birding and encouraging growth of the bird club was achieved. We managed to collect waste that filled over 20 bin bags, that is a Mazda B1800 truckload. Although we only managed to cover about 80% of the area in the Central and the Centenary Park, we hope that next time we will take more time and have more people to help.



The attendants were divided into four groups and each group was assigned a portion of the area to clean up and go about birding at the same time, members of the BLZ Mat' land Chirpers were assigned to walk each group and educate the rest of the group about the importance of birding and how to go about it. All the groups were tasked to be on the lookout for two birds, the Common Myna that is an invasive species that's taken over the city and the Pied Crow, which are opportunistic feeders. After a while all the teams gathered and put together their bin bags with the waste from around the park, whilst the BLZ Mat' land youth leaders in the groups put together a list of the bird species that were seen within the park. We hope to carry out biodiversity measures of species richness and abundance estimates for the park next time while also looking out for migrants and the resident Black Sparrowhawks.



Tonderai Shoko of Keep Bulawayo Clean gave a talk promoting their campaign that was on clean-up #DAY 1287 of keeping the city clean. Cinderella, founder of Green Hut and Rotary Matobo also spoke on the two organisations she and her teams were representing. She mentioned that Green Hut Initiative prioritises environmental education and awareness on waste management, that they're open to partnerships with other organisations and clubs with similar objectives and activities, she also reminded us that conservation requires collective efforts and collaborations to make it successful. She also mentioned that it would be a positive outcome if the participants of this activity convene regularly to carry out this campaign again even on a monthly basis. Terry Nesu of DIFTK, also introduced their group and explained their work and how they could fit in and benefit from collaborations with other organisations. We also had a speaker from Isilwane Nature Reserve who extended an invite to everyone to their upcoming hiking event, which will be on the 25th October 2020; this would be an opportunity for BLZ Mat' land Chirpers to come in with birding education and the importance of taking care of the environment.



In closing, Mthabisi Khumalo (Committee member), introduced BLZ, the Mat' land Chirpers, their activities and the aims of the organisation. He stressed the importance of birding, its advantages, and how to go about it, and the important services birds provide to nature and humans, and then gave out a handout on it. He then encouraged attendants to join BLZ. Mthabisi also spoke on behalf of Matabeleland Sustainability Organisation (MSO), highlighting how the inception of the organisation is a necessity to push the nation forward in achieving Agenda 2030 of sustainable

development. The organisation is facilitating their implementation of some of the Agenda 2020 goals in the region, like good waste management, sustainable cities and life on land; therefore this event was a very important call for them. MSO believes that "individual action is not enough" that's why they value Collaboration, Partnership and Assistance.

A great thanks to all the participants and the BCC staff members who took part in the event. Thank you to the BLZ Mat' land Chirpers for organising the event with the BCC Conservation Department and Keep Bulawayo Clean Campaign. We thank the collaborating parties; Green Hut, Matobo Rotary Club, Isilwane Nature Reserve and DIFTK. A great thank you to the Bulawayo City Council Director for affording us the opportunity to carry out this event at the iconic Central Park and Centenary Park. Photo credits to Qhelani Moyo BLZ Mat' land Chirpers member.

BIRD SPECIES RECORDED

Southern Black Flycatcher
Red-headed Weaver
African Paradise-flycatcher
Crested Barbet
Common Myna
White-browed Robin-chat
Dark-capped Bulbul
Jameson's Firefinch
Olive Thrush
Black-backed Puffback
Red-faced Mousebird
African Hoopoe
Tropical Boubou
Reed Cormorant
Grey Heron
Brown-hooded Kingfisher
Pied Crow
Cape Glossy Starling
Black Collared Barbet
House Sparrow
Magpie Shrike
Laughing Dove

I query the inclusion of Olive Thrush, restricted to the eastern highlands. Should this be Kurrichane Thrush? – Ed.



**More pics from the
Lilian's Lovebird
survey – see page 9**

Above. Abigail Karimanzira
presenting at the Zimparks seminar
on 20 Nov 2020



Useful Contacts:

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Mashonaland South: Margaret Parrock 068-22005 or her daughter Coralee 0772-739370
Eastern Districts: Sue Fenwick 0779-408557 ingram.sue@gmail.com
Mashonaland East Natural History Society: Chairman Peter Hadingham 024-2497035
Secretary: Gez Bester ges.bester@gmail.com
Honeyguide production: vacant

BLZ MEMBERSHIP

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, *The 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!

Due to the instability of the local currency at present, subs are listed in USD, but may be paid in Zimbabwe Dollars at the Bank Rate on the day

Students	1.00
Youth Club Members (Unemployed)	1.00
Youth Club Members	5.00
Individual/Family members (incl. children under 17)	15.00
Pensioners (65 & over)	10.00
Schools (Government)	10.00
Schools (private), Educational Institutions	50.00
Rest of Africa (payable in forex)	40.00
Rest of World (payable in forex)	50.00
Corporate members	*100.00

* 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 details. Please deposit into BirdLife Zimbabwe account at **NMB Bank, (Borrowdale Branch) Account No: 260092014** or BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Branch, CABS (Chisipite Branch) Account No: 1002399955 or **Ecocash** – Merchant Code No. **22084**. You can **also** pay your subscription online with **Paynow**. Look on the BLZ website on the membership page www.birdlifezimbabwe.org/joinus, and click on the Paynow tab at the bottom of the page. This is especially important for our members outside Zimbabwe. You could **also** come to our office at 35, Clyde Road, Eastlea in Harare.

Some members are not informing us when they pay their subscription and when members deposit into the banks, the name shown on the statement is often only the first name and therefore we may not know who you are.

Therefore, it is **ESSENTIAL** please that you advise us by e-mail of your transaction, or your payment will not be recorded. Please notify Sylvia sylvia@zol.co.zw phone 024-2481496 and Paula Dell paula.dell@strachansphoto.com when you have made your payments – and for all membership-related issues – new, renewals, payments, change of details, queries.

And look on our Facebook page for great pictures and interesting birding news -

www.facebook.com/BirdLifeZimbabwe. You can find out about us, and projects you as a member can get involved with, on our informative website www.birdlifezimbabwe.org

Branch Activities

Friends of the Vumba is a community initiative that employs 3 trained scouts to protect the wildlife – tracking for snares and arresting poachers of game, birds and wood. We also support an education outreach into the schools in the area, mostly focussed on birding but more recently extending into wider environmental issues such as WESSA's Water program, rubbish health awareness, alien tree harvesting and indigenous tree planting.

Directions to regular venues (Google Earth co-ordinates):

CABS Northridge Park -17.777494, 31.090782. 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 -17.742715, 30.990416. 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 -17.851935, 31.092010. 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 tip for the car guard. Don't forget refreshments for after the walk when we record the number of species. The **public car park** is off Hillside Road, -17.835393, 31.089111.

Prince Edward School car park -17.818721, 31.036462. Josiah Tongogara Ave.

Monavale Vlei -17.806770, 31.010579. From Quendon Road turn into Lyndhurst Road, at bottom follow right hand bend, take first left and second right to BS Leon roundabout. Second exit is Fenella Drive. Meet on Fenella Drive.

Haka Park -17.843391, 31.143369. From the traffic circle at the Mutare Road/Harare Drive intersection, continue 500m and turn left, follow the road (770m) to the Haka sign and boom on the left. If entering through the boom on Harare Drive (-17.828473, 31.140253; 1.9 km north of the circle) make your way to the meeting point. \$400 entrance fee for BLZ members, \$500 others.

Greystone Park -17.746184, 31.127215. From Rolf Avenue/Harare Drive traffic circle, turn east onto Gaydon Road. After 2 km turn right into Halford Road and preserve is 200 m on left.

Mashonaland Branch

BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Calendar of Events: FEBRUARY 2021

No programme has been received from the committee. Activities will be advised via email and added to the Google Mashonaland calendar.

BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Calendar of Events: MARCH 2021

For further information, please contact Innes Louw, innes.louw@ames.co.zw or hararebirdwalks@gmail.com 0776 190795

Other Areas

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

Eastern Districts – Second Saturday of every month **The Vumba Walk**. These vary from the Upper to Lower Vumba areas and occasionally may extend into Penhalonga, Burma Valley, and even Chimanimani. Many birding enthusiasts join us although it is not officially a birding walk. They are usually hosted by either a Vumba resident or a commercial venue such as Tony's Coffee Shop, Forest Hills Lodge, White Horse Inn or the Botanical Gardens and the walks will often traverse private properties not always accessible by the public. Contact Sue Fenwick 0779-408557 ingram.sue@gmail.com for more details.

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

Are you using the **BLZ Mashonaland Calendar of Events** on your smartphone?

On your Google account on your computer, click the Google Apps icon (9-dot square) and click **Calendar**. Under My calendars, on the left, tick the box for BLZ Mashonaland Calendar of Events, or try this [link](#).

On your phone go to your calendar – mine is called S Planner – and tap on *More* (yours might say something else but it is your calendar menu) and then *Manage calendars* or whatever yours says. Under Device, the phone, my Samsung has *My calendars* – make sure that is on/ticked, further down it has my Google account – turn on all relevant items and the BLZ Mashonaland Calendar of course. There may be a box/switch to sync your phone with your Google account and this must obviously be on.

Phones and their menus are different but hopefully you can work it out...
...and always have events easily available on your phone.

*Please send contributions for The Babbler 159
Apr-May 2021 any time before the 15th Mar.*