

# THE BABBLER

Newsletter of BirdLife Zimbabwe

August–September 2020 No. 155



*Roger MacDonald*

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### **BirdLife Zimbabwe**

The BirdLife International  
Partner in Zimbabwe



## News from the AGM 2020

What a pleasure it was to escape from the city into beautiful bush surrounds to attend the 39<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting (AGM) of BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ) at Gosho Park, Marondera, at the end of June 2020. The meeting took place around a warming wood fire in a relaxed, informal atmosphere. Arrivals were welcomed with tea, coffee and a variety of toothsome eats. Thank you to all who contributed.

There was a good attendance despite Covid-19 restrictions in place. The support of the members who made the journey to Gosho to help make this year's AGM a success is much appreciated. Thirty-six youth members from Mashonaland, Chimanimani and Matabeleland camped out for two days and nights at Gosho Bush Camp and much fun was had by all. Accolade must go to the CEO for her sterling efforts to nurture, promote and teach our youth about the value of Nature Conservation.

Neil Deacon, President of BLZ, chaired the meeting, which this year was aimed at informal discussions around what BLZ actually does, which is to promote the conservation of our biodiversity and natural ecosystems. Contrary to the impression of some, BLZ is not just a birdwatching club but has evolved into a dynamic, fully-fledged, locally registered NGO whose programmes focus on the conservation of the environment to ensure a sustainable future for nature and people in Zimbabwe.

After twenty years of support, the core funding received by BLZ from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds came to an end in March 2020. A major re-structuring exercise was needed to ensure the sustainability of the organization. All permanent office staff, including the CEO, took voluntary retrenchment from permanent status, and have signed new fixed term contracts based on projects. However, besides from the usual fund-raising activities, there is need to appeal for assistance with core funds to support the organization and its programmes that are not presently covered by projects e.g. environmental education.





There is lots going on in and outside of the office. BLZ is currently overseeing projects in the following fields:

1. TRACE – Harare Wetlands Trust Advocacy Project – Phase 2, project co-ordinator Julia Pierini. This project aims to save Harare’s headwater wetlands from development and cultivation, and in so doing preserve Harare’s vital water supply.
2. Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) and Local Empowerment and Engagement Programmes. Project officer Toga Fakarayi. There are projects active in the Chimanimani Mountain and Driefontein Grasslands IBAs.
  - a. A small project in Chimanimani took place after the area was hit by Cyclone IDAI in March 2019. Emergency funding was used to establish a nursery of indigenous trees in Chimanimani to restore degraded areas through tree planting, and to enhance and support community livelihoods in the form of bee keeping and supply of citrus trees at household level.
  - b. The project in Driefontein Grasslands (Ramsar site) is funded by Darwin and is a model to demonstrate the viability of alternative sources of income (piggyeries, poultry production and beekeeping) in reducing pressure of human activities on the wetlands, and thus conserving this important ecosystem
3. African Bird Club (ABC) has awarded a small grant to Shingi Sakarombe for the population status and habitat assessment of Blue Swallows in the Eastern Highlands and Nyanga Lowlands/Honde Valley IBA. In addition, ABC will support a study by Abigail Kurimanzira to investigate the status, distribution and viability of Lilian’s Lovebirds in the Zambezi Valley and its surrounds.
4. Conservation of Endangered Species includes five projects centred around the protection of vultures under the management of Fadza Matsvimbo. Four of these involve setting up Vulture Safe Zones (VSZ) – areas in which all species of critically endangered vultures are safeguarded from a variety of threats including poisoning, traditional medicine trade and the illegal wildlife trade. Additional threats to Vultures include on-going habitat loss and food shortage as a result of land use change.
5. 2020 SPRING ALIVE: Education continues in our schools with a focus Migratory Bird Species, directed by Ronnie Chirimuta. BLZ also takes part in programmes to engage with school children to promote the beauty and value of nature in the field. We aim to extend this to online engagement.
6. The Verreaux’s Eagle Survey in the Matopos had kicked off this year despite Covid-19 challenges and National Parks being closed. To date, fourteen nests are active with birds re-building, eleven pairs are incubating, and three chicks have hatched and are being fed.

The provincial branches of BirdLife Zimbabwe are responsible for organizing bird watching activities for members, i.e. bird walks, outings and monthly talks. In view of the restructuring of the exercise mentioned above, the time seems ripe for the provincial branches to become more autonomous in order to separate “nature conservation” from “Bird Club” activities. The National Office will continue to administer BLZ membership.

Russell Clark has stepped down from Council. Russell’s advice and guidance in the finance field for many years is very much appreciated.

David Scott has been welcomed onto the BLZ Council. David has much experience in finance

and works with several other prominent NGO’s. Dr Richard Hoare also agreed to come onto Council. Richard is a veterinarian with a PhD in human/elephant conflict. His career has involved work in many countries and his experience and broad perspective with regard to nature conservation is expected to impact positively on the work BLZ strives to achieve.

To end the meeting, Penny Raynor gave a fascinating talk on bird pollinators, especially relevant at a time of year when the gorgeous red, yellow and orange blooms of aloes are dangling in clusters atop stiff flower stalks. An entertaining bird quiz followed.



Grateful thanks must go to Penny for her warm hospitality throughout the weekend, and in particular, for taking the time to organize various nature walks to share her extensive bush knowledge about Goshu. A born teacher, Penny paid particular attention to the youth. Her enthusiasm and encouragement are inspirational.

*Photos: Dave Dell*

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### ***Corrections to the summer International Waterbird Census report in The Babbler No. 154***

The Pasi Dam data shows errors. The White-faced Duck count should be 38 and not 3. The 22 African Finfoot is wrong – this should be 22 African Jacana! Apologies for the mistakes, which are also reflected in Table 2, and will be corrected in the 2020 report.

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## **Branch News**

### **Mashonaland**

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## **Bird outings around and about Harare**

Ken Dixon, Innes Louw & Catherine Shadwell

### **MONAVALLE VLEI Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2020**

Seven of us gathered on Fenella Drive for the monthly walk led by Jimmy with assistance from Moses and Shelta. It was never going to be wildly exciting thanks to the drought and the fire but it was good to get back to the vleis, meet old friends and take some exercise. In the event we logged 56 species.

Burst pipes in a few spots meant there was more municipal water on the vleis than most residents have in their homes in our sorry city. The usual widowbirds and bishops were present but only the Yellow-mantled Widowbirds showed any yellow. Grey-rumped Swallows cavorted around us, African Wattled Lapwings called, flocks of Orange-breasted Waxbills and Red-billed Queleas rose and dived back into grassy clumps, and crows cawed overhead. A Black Sparrowhawk was perhaps the most

exciting raptor but we also saw Lizard Buzzard and Gabar Goshawk.

I was surprised to see that the adjoining Sherwood golf course had been mowed for the first time for 4 years. This may be an attempt to forestall the planned takeover of Harare's sports clubs grounds for housing and to provide a little extra income for corrupt officials. Parts of the Ramsar site are also under threat. While strolling through the mown grass we were delighted to spot not one but three Groundscraper Thrushes enjoying the 14<sup>th</sup> fairway.

It was pleasantly warm as we did the count at the end of our visit. 56 was a good tally for the end of June, we thought.

**Ken Dixon**

## Greystone Park Preserve, 11<sup>th</sup> July 2020

8 birders arrived, all expecting a cold blustering morning, but the clear blue skies made it a warm winter weekend for a great 2 hours+ of birding, here in this denuded local dog toilet (Beware land mines!!), but still a great birding spot. The dam was dry, as expected, repaired from the major storm a few years ago, and ready for rain this coming season. Thank you to those involved in the reparations. Much of the conversation focused on the removal of exotic poplars and cherry trees over the lockdown period as part of a strategic plan for the preserve. Opinion was divided but over time indigenous trees will replace them. The majority of birders thought the operation to be too draconian, leaving too few bird-attracting trees, though poplars do little to attract birds.



However, the remaining vegetation was still home to 42 species spotted on our walk. Near the Gaydon Lane end of the dam our attention was drawn to an incessant robin-type call from the understorey, which kept us all guessing and

speculating for quite some time. Eventually the most persistent searcher caught sight of a White-browed Scrub-robin, probably a youngish one still waiting for breakfast at 7.30 a.m. We saw a probable parent a bit later in its usual spot above the dam, also singing but out in the open ignoring junior's pleas.

Our list gradually grew as we advanced. Chin-spot Batis, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, 4 species of sunbirds, Little Bee-eaters, and a Steel-blue Widowfinch in full plumage were amongst those seen. The 'resident' Brown-hooded Kingfisher below the dam wall was not present and nor did we come across the Red-throated Twinspots. A Lizard Buzzard called and various common species appeared. There was some discussion on a few swallows (martins?) flying overhead; we finally settled on Grey-rumped Swallow and Lesser Striped Swallow. The possibility of a single Common House-martin definitely remains a bit iffy. (It does pay to look skywards on these walks). For the mid-year waterbird count we were fortunate to have a Black-headed Heron fly directly overhead – sole tick this July 2020!

The physical aspect of the reserve dominated; it has now changed dramatically twice, first after the hurricane damage and now with the tree chopping. It's a tribute to the local committee that the facility is open to the public and still an interesting, varied walk.

This was our 'first Saturday morning' bird walk since early March and we hope to continue in this vein, adhering to Covid-19 regulations.

**Ken Dixon & Innes Louw**

## EWANRIGG BOTANICAL GARDENS, 12<sup>th</sup> July 2020

Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> was warm and sunny too and attracted a large number of visitors to the gardens, which, as ever, bear witness to enthusiastic management and maintenance. The main bank of aloes has finished flowering but the *excelsa* are yet to bloom and the beds at the top of the hill are putting on a magnificent show and are worth a visit on their own with an array of sunbirds. Our collective list comprised Variable Sunbird, White-bellied Sunbird, Amethyst Sunbird, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Copper Sunbird, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird and Western Violet-backed Sunbird.

The latter were eventually spotted in an *Erythrina* near the restaurant and water features, from which they occasionally jumped into an adjoining *Terminalia* sp. Raptors included Lizard Buzzard, Gabar Goshawk and African Goshawk, Black-chested Snake-eagle, Shikra and a lone White-backed Vulture. Other specials were Red-throated Twinspot, African Wattle-eye, three Yellow-breasted Apalis (*see photo below*) and Swallow-tailed Bee-eater.





At about 10.30 we reassembled at a picnic spot where chefs Dave Dell and Rob Rees lit Skottle braais and served up delicious egg and bacon rolls, the eggs courtesy of Paula Dell (surplus from the BLZ AGM) followed by toast and marmalade. I counted 18 lucky brunchers who had seen 62 different species and were reluctant to leave the company after so long in isolation. Ewanrigg is definitely worth a visit in the near future and cost a mere \$45ZWL, the price of a toll on the day. Half-price for Seniors!  
**Ken Dixon & Catherine Shadwell**

## Mashonaland East

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*Mashonaland East Natural History Society MARONDERA*  
*May/June 2020 Newsletter*

Another two months has gone by since the last newsletter. There is not much to report on from Borradaile Trust as a few of our MENHS members are confined to the Trust premises and our usual birding outings have been restricted somewhat.

It was very sad to lose one of our founder members in Peter "Jacko" Jackson in May. Peter was a very active member of MENHS. He was a knowledgeable birder who was particularly good at identifying birds by their calls. He loved the outdoors and had a keen interest in animals, trees, plants and fish. We are going to miss his presence and wry sense of humour. I, personally, will certainly miss not being able to tap into that tremendous knowledge he possessed and was so willing to share.

A few weeks before his untimely passing Jacko looked me up to listen to my bird call app. He wanted to confirmed that the owls he had heard somewhere in the Macheke area that day were in fact Verreaux's Eagle-owls, which they were.

Sue and I seem to have befriended a pair of White-browed Robin-chats that reside somewhere in our garden. We have had a few occasions in May and June that one of the birds actually comes into the kitchen through the back door and calls us. We usually startle the poor bird when we walk into the kitchen not really expecting him to be in the house. We put birdseed and bread in the bird feeders in the garden but we have not noticed them actually feeding from the feeder. They seem to prefer

roving the lawn finding their own worms or other insects to eat.

I saw a Senegal Coucal for a few seconds on two consecutive days in the garden. Malcolm Moodie confirmed seeing a coucal in his garden about the same time. The coucal's visit was short and sweet and he hasn't been seen again.

The African Green-pigeons I reported on in the previous newsletter left the Trust for a while and came back for a couple of weeks to finish off the red Hawthorn berries. They seem to have gone now, as we have not seen them for a while.

The African Hoopoes are back in the Trust. I thought it may be a bit early for them to be back but apparently it is not unusual to see them at this time of the year. I have recently seen a few pairs around the Trust.

Pete and Phyllis Banks reported seeing a pair on Common Mynas in their garden in Mimosa Crescent in Marondera. The presence of the Mynas upset the other birds. By the time Pete fetched out his catapult, the Mynas were gone and happiness was restored. They have also had a number of Red-winged Starlings in their garden. The ones nesting in the Trust at the Cloisters' verandah seemed to have departed for now. Jo Denton reported seeing several of them around her neighbours' cottage in the Trust.

There are quite a number of Pied Crows hanging around the Trust. It is not unusual to see crows here but the numbers seem to be on the increase. I don't believe the Trust has a lot more rubbish lying around. Early one morning I noticed the crows arriving from the west and settle in the Kenyan coffee shade tree. There

must have been around thirty crows. A crow arrived from the east and flew around the tree a few times and then they all flew off in a westerly direction. I had the impression he was taking a roll call and then instructing them where to go for the morning's excursion. It begs the question, do crows have a leader?

A few residents have suggested that the crows have chased nesting Spotted Eagle-owls away. Despite doing a few evening checks I never verified a neighbour's claim that she had an adult Spotted Eagle-owl with a few youngsters occasionally roosting on her house roof. However, one of her neighbours said she had seen them.

Other snippets of information during the last two months that I found quite interesting are a confirmed sighting of fourteen Purple-crested Turacos in one flock in the new development area within the Trust. Jenny Milne rescued a Red-eyed Dove from a failed Little Sparrowhawk attack in her garden. Sue was watering her garden and a raptor later identified as a Little Sparrowhawk successfully killed a little bird a few meters away from where she was standing. Steve Krynaux and I both saw the sparrowhawk with the unidentified bird in a tree in his garden. I saw two Tropical Boubous at our feeder at the same time. That may not be unusual but I have never seen two Boubous together. The Groundscraper Thrushes are back near the bowling green area. Pat Lister regularly has the Miombo Blue-eared Starlings in his garden. A few uncommon birds seen in the Trust include White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Black-shouldered Kite, Whyte's Barbet and Cinnamon-breasted Buntings and Golden-breasted Buntings. Jenny, Sue and I have heard this loud squawking noise at dusk but have no idea what it might be.

We have done a few walks in the Trust premises during the last two months. We have started a little later than normal and although our walks are never more than ninety minutes we have included all birds seen during that day. We generally see around twenty species of birds on the walks and then another ten or so later in the day. Participants are few and we all find it enjoyable. We decided to record all the birds we saw in the Trust during the month of June and the tally came to fifty. I thought that was quite good until I heard Stuart Wood saw over a hundred birds in a single day's outing somewhere in the Domboshawa area. Well done Stuart.

We received a donation of an old edition of *Sasol Birds of Southern Africa* book in excellent condition from a resident. Our ad hoc committee decided to hold onto the book and bring it to outings for members to use, if need be.

We are unable to plan too far ahead as we are still in lockdown in Borradale Trust. National Parks are now open and I believe some people recently had excellent birding at Ewanrigg. We have an invitation to the Spar bird sanctuary in Harare once lockdown is over. Thanks to Andries Kloppers for organizing that for us.

Trust residents were unable to attend the BirdLife Zimbabwe AGM in Goshu Park at the end of June. I believe that was a successful weekend. Thanks and well done to Penny Raynor and Jen Mitchell for all your inputs into the planning and hosting.

As usual, I am open to suggestions on where to go when regulations permit. To those of you outside the Trust, please share your birding experiences during the next month or two.

Keep on twitching,  
**Gez Bester**

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## Mashonaland West

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Kadoma and district birders continue avidly with weekly outings to our many varied places of different vegetation and water areas. We are welcomed everywhere and since Covid-19 lockdown, movement of traffic and humans has diminished. But our avian friends are unaware of disease or disturbance and are always there for us – everywhere you look and listen. Locally, the Green Wood-hoopoe and Red-faced

Mousebird have increased in numbers. The Crowned Lapwings are more audible on grassy areas.

### *Pasi Dam*

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...which also supplies Kadoma with water, is always a good spot to visit. Below are three different days with birds of significance.



21<sup>st</sup> March: 19 White-faced Duck, 3 Comb Duck, 7 African Jacana, 4 African Wattled Lapwing, 3 Great Egret, 6 Red-billed Teal, 1 pair African Pygmy-goose.



**Hamerkop at Pasi Dam and (below) fishing nets from Devon Dam in June. All photos Ruth Baldwin-Paice**



14<sup>th</sup> May: 33 African Jacana, 6 Egyptian Goose, 6 African Sacred Ibis, 1 Grey Heron, 4 Blacksmith Lapwing, 4 African Wattled Lapwing, 2 Great Egret, 1 African Fish-eagle, 1 Reed Cormorant.

13<sup>th</sup> June: 1 pair Black-chested Snake-eagle (overhead), 1 pair Egyptian Goose, 2 Great Egret, 4 Little Egret, 1 Hamerkop, 1 African Spoonbill, 34 African Jacana, 1 African Fish-eagle, 1 pair African Pygmy-goose, 2 pairs Temminck's Courser – dancing and twirling beside us along dry ground.

#### Suri Suri dam

20<sup>th</sup> June: Surrounding the dam are tall fir trees. The African Fish-eagle, (probably female) is busy rebuilding/furnishing the same nest as last year. We shall monitor incubation and the result. Photos were taken. Also seen: 5 White-

breasted Cormorant, 57 White-faced Duck, Giant Kingfisher and 9 African Spoonbill. The dam had good rain inflow so the water level is well risen.



27<sup>th</sup> June: 1 pair Egyptian Goose, 2 Great Egret, 4 Reed Cormorant, 2 White-breasted Cormorant, 9 African Spoonbill, 160 White-faced Duck, 3 African Wattled Lapwing. On our return journey at 12 noon, we stopped alongside some old tobacco lands. It was warm and sunny, the short grass had African Pipit, Red-capped Lark, and Capped Wheatear, all in variable numbers, busy scurrying about feeding on seeds and insects.

A thrilling morning of 30<sup>th</sup> May, Ruth and I were sitting beside a small pan of water, surrounded by grasses, dry flowers and clods of mud. The clean water attracted such a variety of birds and not far from human habitation. A total of 31 species and some notables: Swainson's Spurfowl, Yellow-throated Longclaw, 5 Crowned Lapwing, Flappet Lark, Yellow-bellied Greenbul and Terrestrial Brownbul, Southern Masked-weaver, Cape Turtle-dove, Laughing Dove, Emerald-spotted Wood-dove, Red-eyed Dove, Namaqua Dove, Yellow-fronted Canary, 2 pairs Steel-blue Widowfinch, 1 pair Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, 1 pair Golden-breasted Bunting, Chin-spot Batis, grey headed weaver, Black-headed Oriole, African Yellow White-eye, Orange-breasted Waxbill, Jameson's Firefinch, Blue Waxbill, Cut-throat Finch.

Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> July was a 2-hour trip to Chinyika Ranch, Sebakwe area, Kwekwe.

Six of us enjoyed a thrilling day. A bird/game hide was recently constructed with a wide, flat, water pond quite near edge of bush to



encourage wild life. Many pairs of Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, also Red-billed Firefinch, Blue Waxbills, Cape Turtle-dove, Dark-capped Bulbul, Terrestrial Brownbul, Arrow-marked Babbler, Grey Go-away-bird and African Paradise-flycatcher were all near and loving the clean water.



Other birds around camp included Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Black-backed Puffback, White-browed Robin-chat, White-browed Scrub-robin, Ashy Flycatcher and Scarlet-chested Sunbird.



**Left: mammals & Striped Kingfishers at Chinyika Ranch. Top: Temminck's Courser at Pasi Dam and White-fronted Bee-eaters at Devon Dam**

We motored in an open land rover into the ranch, stopping for birds and game. Rattling Cisticola, Grey-rumped Swallow, Lesser Striped Swallow, Pearl-breasted Swallow, African Palm-swift, Natal Spurfowl, 3 Swainson's Spurfowl, 3 African Wattled Lapwing, Marico Sunbird, White-bellied Sunbird, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, White-browed Sparrow-weaver and a pair of Striped Kingfisher very visible on a telegraph pole. Lizard Buzzard, 1 Dark Chanting-goshawk (flew beside us with his dark upper wings), a pair Temminck's Courser, Greater Honeyguide, 8 Namaqua Dove, Yellow-throated Petronia, Green-winged Pytilia, a flock of Orange-breasted Waxbills and Red-billed Quelea, all came to drink at the pan's piped clean water. White-crested Helmet-shrike and African Grey Hornbill were along the roadside. A total of 63 species, all typical of the woodland of the area.

May we continue to enthuse interest and love for our feathered friends.

**Margaret Parrock**

# Matabeleland

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## Birding during *LOCKDOWN*

Count done from 4<sup>th</sup> April to 5<sup>th</sup> May 2020

A challenge was thrown out by BLZ to locked down birders to continue birding in and around their properties while lockdown was in place. Taking the birds out and about in our garden for granted for many months now, it was amazing to take note of what we actually did get to see, hear or witness during this time and enjoy the wonderful, varied avian life around our garden – being one of the lucky ones with a garden!

The day begins. The last trill of the litany bird, the Fiery-necked Nightjar, fades away as numerous domestic cockerels are already well into their daily crowing competition and there is a quick blast of gabbling from the gang of geese across the way, just as the first wild bird tentatively starts the dawn chorus. The lead chorister is most certainly the White-browed Robin-chat and is usually the one to close the day too, although it does, sometimes, have some competition from the Kurrichane Thrush in the evenings. The robin-chat is soon joined by several Dark-capped Bulbuls and Southern Grey-headed Sparrows. A sudden distress whistle from the Kurrichane Thrush along with some excited bulbul jabber, alerts us to Wol, our friendly resident Spotted Eagle-owl having returned from his nightly foray, probably standing on the wall outside the kitchen, making up his mind which of his favoured perches to grace for the day's roost. He'd already called in during the wee hours of the morning, sitting outside our bedroom whoo-ooing softly, making sure we were awake before taking off again!

During the day, all the usual visitors call in and residents are busy about. In the early mornings and evenings, African Palm-swifts swoop out of the palm tree to have a joyous, twittering bit of exercise before zipping back into the mass of palm fronds. A bunch of Bronze Mannikins along with several Cut-throat Finch crowd the feeder while Laughing Doves waddle below, gleaning the seeds as they drop. Several times in the first week, a Spotted Flycatcher was spied hawking insects from the top of the garden tap before departing on its annual pilgrimage. Grey Go-away-birds drop in to "gwaaaaa" noisily; Tropical Boubous fossick

about, (one of them has a most peculiar call and it took several days of searching to confirm it actually WAS a Tropical Boubou); marauding squadrons of Red-faced Mousebirds fly in to see what they can find; a Yellow-bellied Greenbul grumbles from the lucky bean tree; a shy White-throated Robin-chat peeks out from the undergrowth; African Hoopoes dither about the lawn piercing away with their bills, often being harassed by noisy Fork-tailed Drongos; African Yellow White-eyes, Red-billed Firefinches and Yellow-fronted Canary delight in the spray of the sprinkler; Red-eyed Doves lie near an orange tree with wings spread, sunning themselves; five Green Wood-hoopoes chortled through, pausing briefly to fossick in the bark of a few trees along their way; a male Miombo Double-collared Sunbird dips into the delicate pink flowers of a parasitic plant growing in the oleander; a couple of Green-winged Pytilia peck about along the path to the compost heap; a brilliant flash of yellow accompanies the melodious sound of the Black-headed Oriole flying by; an Orange-breasted Bush-shrike hops through a bottle brush bush; a flock of Violet-backed Starlings perch at the top of the silver oak, the startling white of the males' breasts and gorgeous iridescent violet of their backs shine brilliantly in the sun; Blue Waxbills nip down to drink from the bird bath and on occasion a Steel-blue Widowfinch pops in for a sip as well. A quartet of Black-collared Barbets are very busy trying to drill holes into the trunk of a dead poplar tree which we were planning to chop down but of course, now won't! One or more of them is always in the tree somewhere while another is busy in a hole they've managed to excavate – the lookouts waiting for the one in the hole to emerge with a beakful of shavings before taking their turn at the hole. The clown-like Crested Barbets are resident again in the garden so their trilling is heard on and off during the day as they fly about and the Brown-hooded Kingfisher perches on the washing line, bobbing its head before turning it to one side to concentrate one beady eye on some tasty morsel. Arrow-marked Babbler make their presence known, usually bothering Wol who's trying to get some shut-eye. One day, however, there was a great



commotion going on and there appeared to be two rival factions of Arrow-marked Babblers having some sort of altercation. The row was tremendous with babblers flying wildly around in all directions, chasing one another, great ruffling of feathers as puffed up birds shouted at each other. What a noise and of course, stirring up all the other avians into joining in the din! The Pied Crow's *caw* grates on and off during the day as they fly overhead and we also get to see a Hamerkop some mornings and/or evenings flying to or from its home, calling as it goes. Overhead flyers also include European Bee-eaters (last seen on 6<sup>th</sup> April), African Grey Hornbills, a Common Scimitarbill and Red-winged Starlings all of which we don't often get in or near the garden, a Gabar Goshawk and horror of horrors, a Common Myna! One morning we bury the desiccated corpse of a Black Sparrowhawk that had, very sadly, electrocuted itself on the ZESA line; the remains of one leg still hangs tenaciously to the line, a grisly reminder of what, once, must have been a beautiful bird.

A few birds are recorded as heard only – the Barn Owl, Fiery-necked Nightjar, an African Fish-eagle, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, African Green-pigeon and Swainson's Spurfowl. Others seen and not mentioned above: Black-backed Puffback, Southern Masked-weaver, Chin-spot Batis, Brubru, Streaky-headed Seedeater, Greater Blue-eared Starling, Black-throated Canary and Scarlet-chested Sunbird. A total of 55 species not counting the dead sparrowhawk!

We hope you all managed to take some time to appreciate the bird life around you and please stay safe everyone.

"Hope is like a bird that senses the dawn and carefully starts to sing while it is still dark" - ANON -

**John and Jenny Brebner**

## **Extract from *Matland Musings* – April 2020**

On a brief sojourn in HWANGE, we had an interesting conversation with Gary Cante. Gary has lived and worked in Hwange for a number of years, firstly as a boy when his father lived and worked in Hwange and has now been employed for some years by FOH mainly in the Main Camp area although he does liaise with those doing work in Sinamatella and Robins. During his time there, he has obviously noticed many changes and can recount many an experience with animals and birds.

Gary's take on his experiences of the predatory nature of the Common Myna is pretty disturbing, having watched their takeover of Red-billed Buffalo-weaver nests, and obviously, they will be predating on other species as well. He has witnessed Mynas waiting patiently for the weavers to complete their thorny nests before moving in, killing off the Red-billed Buffalo-weaver occupants and driving the rest of the weavers off before a pair of Mynas take occupancy of the nest. The rest of the Myna pack will then move off to find other victims. Fortunately, Gary has been given permission to eradicate the Common Myna if and when sighted in the park and has done a good job thus far but there are reports of the birds building up in numbers on the periphery of the park.

Another thug of the bird world is the Egyptian Goose. Over the years, Gary has noticed more and more pans being devoid of waterfowl, particularly with young at certain times of the year and that there is always a pair or more Egyptian Goose commandeering the pan, hassling other birds. There are several pans that used to teem with waterbirds and where breeding used to occur. Is the build-up of Egyptian Goose responsible for this decline? We certainly saw at least two Egyptian Goose, sometimes many more, at each pan we visited during our recent three-day visit in the Main Camp area, and with so much water and green about the pans, we had expected to see plenty of other waterfowl but saw hardly any.



## Global Big Day, 9 May 2020

328 species seen, 61 checklists

Follow the link below to see fuller results on the  
eBird site

[https://ebird.org/region/ZW?yr=BIGDAY\\_2020a&m=&rank=mrec](https://ebird.org/region/ZW?yr=BIGDAY_2020a&m=&rank=mrec)

### *Top eBirders*

#### **BY SPECIES / BY CHECKLISTS**

1	Jean-Michel Blake	135
2	Alison Randell	124
3	Gary Douglas	114
4	Sara Gardiner	103
5	Ian Riddell	101
6	Stephen Long	91
7	James Varden	90
8	Doug Macdonald	89
9	Ronnie Chirimuta	68
10	Daniel Landman	49

### *Top States/Provinces*

#### **BY SPECIES**

		Species	Checklists
1	Matabeleland North	210	23
2	Harare	155	24
3	Bulawayo	134	8
4	Manicaland	131	5
5	Midlands	22	1

## Useful Contacts:

CEO/Ringing Programme: Julia Pierini [JuliaPierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org](mailto:JuliaPierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org) 0772-894562  
Rarities Committee: Ian Riddell [gemsaf@mango.zw](mailto:gemsaf@mango.zw) 0772-117054  
BLZ Library: [piumosso@zol.co.zw](mailto:piumosso@zol.co.zw) 2304298; 2481496  
Special Species: Peta Ditchburn [specialspecies@blz.co.zw](mailto:specialspecies@blz.co.zw) 0775-940714, 029-2230075  
Mashonaland South: Margaret Parrock 068-22005 or her daughter Coralee 0772-739370  
Eastern Districts: Sue Fenwick 0779-408557 [ingram.sue@gmail.com](mailto:ingram.sue@gmail.com)  
Mashonaland East Natural History Society: Chairman Peter Hadingham 024-2497035  
Secretary: Gez Bester [ges.bester@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://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.

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

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# 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.

**Avondale Sports Club** -17.785100, 31.041972. Brighton Road, Harare between Sam Nujoma Street Extension and Upper East Road. There is a cash bar and a security guard.

*NOTE: it is uncertain which outings will take place but they are presented here just in case restrictions ease. Updates will be sent via email.*

## Mashonaland Branch

### BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Calendar of Events: AUGUST 2020

<b>Saturday 1<sup>st</sup></b>	<b>Marlborough Vlei walk</b>	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
<b>Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup></b>	<b>Mukuvisi Woodlands walk</b>	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
<b>Saturday 8<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Haka Park</b>	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
<b>Sunday 16<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Monavale Vlei walk</b>	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
<b>Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup></b>	<b>Lake Chivero Recreational Park</b>	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Meet at Well Woman Clinic, diagonally across from Health Point Centre, 18 East Road, Belgravia.		

## *BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Calendar of Events: SEPTEMBER 2020*

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<b>Saturday 5<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Marlborough Vlei walk</b>	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
<b>Sunday 6<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Mukuvisi Woodlands walk</b>	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
<b>Saturday 12<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Andrew Du Toit</b>	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
5 Dulverton Close, Glen Lorne or meet and park at St. Michael's School off Ridgeway North between Whitwell Road and St. Michael's Lane.		
<b>Sunday 20<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Monavale Vlei walk</b>	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
<b>Sunday 27<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Dodington Estates</b>	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Meet and Parking at St. Michael's School off Ridgeway North between Whitwell Road and St. Michael's Lane.		

For further information, please contact Innes Louw, [innes.louw@ames.co.zw](mailto:innes.louw@ames.co.zw) or [hararebirdwalks@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:ingram.sue@gmail.com) for more details.

**Lowveld** – contact Clive Stockil 0772-219204 or [clive@chilogorge.com](mailto: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 156  
Oct-Nov 2020 any time before the 15<sup>th</sup> Sept.*