

BABBLER

The Newsletter of -



BirdLife Zimbabwe
The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

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Matabeleland Committee ☎

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SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL

BirdLife Zimbabwe membership year runs from April to March. Some of you have still not paid your subs. We do not want to lose members, so please contact your branch committee chairperson if you are having difficulty and we can 'make a plan'. Please make sure you renew your membership.

Ordinary (Individual and Family) members and Schools 10 units per annum

Senior Citizens, Students & Juniors	5 units	“
Corporate members	30 units	“
Members outside Zimbabwe	Africa US\$20	“
	Other US\$30	“

Country district members can deposit units directly into BLZ – please contact Hazel for the details.

Birds and People

Address to the 12th Pan-African Ornithological Congress by Dr Nigel Collar,
BirdLife International, Cambridge. UK

Eggs for breakfast, turkey salad for lunch, *coq au vin* for dinner, everyday speech from ‘lame-duck president’ to ‘cloud cuckoo land’ (even ‘auspicious’ means, at root, ‘from good birdwatching’), product and team-sport logos conveying speed and strength, national treasures on currency, insulation and comfort of bedding – our use of birds sits at the root of our lives and we can parse it into three broad categories, broadly running in chronological if overlapping sequence: (1) association and inspiration, (2) semi-sustainable services and (3) intolerable exploitation.

Into the first category falls their use in symbol, myth and art reflected across many cultures: Horus the falcon of Pharaonic creation, the swan-morph of Zeus in his union with Leda (beloved of painters and since Leonardo, commonly depicted as consensual), pelican, phoenix, dove and goldfinch (Christian symbols, the first two probably mistaken for flamingos), parrots (embodiments of the New World’s earthly paradise) and the sounds used by composers since notation began.

Into the second fall their more practical values to human society: quills for writing, flights for arrows, feathers for status and insulation, songster pets (an ancient trade), ornamental and competitive pets (junglefowl and pigeons), domestic foodstuffs (junglefowl and pigeons), subsistence and sport falconry, cormorant-fishing, hornbill ivory, coalmine canaries, vultures for body disposal and the great environmental service of insect control.

Into the third, pack the nightmare histories of human exploitation at its most unrestrained: the destruction of the Great Auk, Passenger Pigeon and ancient seabird colonies of the Pacific (all for food), astonishing slaughter for 19th-century feather fashions (herons, hummingbirds and birds-of-paradise especially), the millennia-old, never-ending saga of European songbird killing, appalling industrial-scale poultry farming, gangland syndication of the birds’-nest soup trade, nation-to-nation violence over guano and disgrace of the global wild bird trade.

For all this, birds still offer us a lifeline: we use them as indicators of environmental health, as scientific models that teach us about ourselves and as objects of simple wonder. When these elements combine they bring us the

inspiration and instruction we need to manage our planet in the interests of all its inhabitants.

BLZ will hold a **Strategic Planning Workshop** on 21st & 22nd March 2009.

This is held every 3 years to plan the way forward for the Association and members are invited to submit their ideas to the president (ken@sa.co.zw) and the vice-president (piumosso@zol.co.zw), who will forward an abridged copy of the 2005-2008 Plan and the last 6-monthly progress report, on request. The head of the BirdLife Africa secretariat, Dr Hazell Thompson, has agreed to attend the workshop and he will present the BirdLife Africa Regional Strategy and ideas on how BLZ can produce a strategy that complements the regional one. The RSPB will be represented by Dr Chris Magin.

BirdLife South Africa 80th AGM and Bird Fair – 18-22 March 2009

Phalaborwa is immediately adjacent to Kruger National Park and the Olifants River and has approximately 85% of South Africa's raptors occurring in the region, including Taita Falcon, Martial Eagle and Tawny Eagle, African Hawk-eagle and Bateleur, as well 5 species of vulture and many owls such as Verreaux's Eagle-owl and Spotted Eagle-owl, Pel's Fishing-owl and African Scops Owl and African Barred Owlet and Pearl-spotted owlets. The Phalaborwa Bird Club will host this event and activities include birding courses on photography, ringing, raptor identification and trips to local birding spots. BLZ members may wish to take this opportunity to join our neighbours and can find more information on www.birdlife.org.za and click on 'Events'.

OBITUARY – Major John F R Colebrook-Robjent

Africa's foremost oologist, John Robjent, died on 17 November 2008 in Lusaka, Zambia – he had been ill for some time. John was born in 1935 and during the war years lived in London where, as a small boy, he began collecting eggs in Hyde Park. At school in Cheshire, John's headmaster encouraged pupils to take advantage of the school's estate and discover natural history, and John's passion for birds was nurtured and sustained. He repeatedly won the annual nature notebook competition and learned to write meticulous notes, a habit which continued for life. John arrived in Zambia in 1966 seconded to the Zambian Army, but after a couple of years went tobacco farming and studied the birds in the Choma area and other parts of Zambia intensively. He was the first to describe the nests and eggs of many species and was particularly enthusiastic about brood parasitism. He had an enquiring mind and was of the old school in that financial reward was not the most important aspect, but to find out things, and he was fascinated by genealogy. John's contribution to the information on Zambian birds' eggs and breeding habits was unparalleled. His connection with Zimbabwe was with Michael Irwin, with whom he exchanged bird study skins for eggs and

specimens when Michael was at the Natural History Museum in Bulawayo. John's egg collection, which has enormous scientific value, will be going to the Natural History Museum in Tring.

ACTIVITIES

Please diarise these events now, as it is easy to forget as the weeks go by.

Those members who have not signed an indemnity form please remember to do so at any outing, where a committee member will have these with them.

World Wetlands Day Commemoration – 2 February 2009

BLZ members are encouraged to attend this occasion, which is expected to start at 1000 hours on 2 february 2009.

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism selected Monavale Vlei as a venue for the celebrations of the World Wetlands Day under the theme "Wetlands and Catchment Management" with the slogan "Upstream-downstream: Wetlands connect us all". The theme was altered to suit local conditions but it still carries the same message as the international one sent by Ramsar. The Conservation Society of Monavale (COSMO) is hosting this event with BLZ and E-Africa and other organisations and government departments such as EMA and National Parks are taking part. Wetlands Day is not well known to most of the general public in Zimbabwe and to this effect, the national organising committee on environmental events is publicising this event through the public electronic media and the Ministry of Environment and Tourism will be called to ratify the Ramsar Convention.

Rueben Njolomole

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Please contact a committee member if you need transport to any of our outings. Beginners are most welcome – don't be put off if you think everyone else knows more than you – we all start somewhere and it is most rewarding to be able to put names to birds seen often but never really looked at closely!

Sunday 1 February and 1 March: Mukuvisi Woodlands 6:30 a.m. Directions:

Turn off Chiremba Road into Ford Road (opposite Queensdale shops) and continue down to Blatherwick Road (T-junction). Turn right and the gate is about 150 metres on the left. Bring chairs and refreshments and a reasonable tip, in cash or kind, for the guard who will be on hand to unlock the gate to let cars in and out – taking into account the price of a loaf of bread and the value of your vehicle!

Sunday 8 February and 8 March: Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary 6.30 a.m.

You may see Osprey, Lesser Jacana and Common Moorhen, Allen's Gallinule, European Honey-buzzard and Golden-backed Pytilia in addition to the more common water and woodland birds. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre, Samora Machel Avenue West. Anyone wanting a lift please contact a Committee member.

Sunday 15 February and 15 March: Monavale Vlei Walk 7:00 a.m.

Meet on Fenella Drive, (BS Leon side) for a walk with members of the Monavale Vlei Residents Association. Remember your gumboots if the rains have been good.

Saturday 7 February: Komani Estate 6.30 a.m.

BLZ carries out an annual survey on this property, so meet at the Ashbrittle Service Station to join us for this extra outing.

Saturday 21 February: Domboshawa 7:00 a.m.

People have asked that we visit Domboshawa. There is a charge of US\$1 (or equivalent – which could be any amount by then!) but this venue is well worth a visit and we will be longer than we usually are on a Saturday morning walk so you will not be back early for shopping! Meet in the car park at Sam Levy's Village near the entrance to Mimi's Café, where cars can be left and transport shared. Bring chairs and refreshments.

Saturday 21 March : Haka Game Park 7:00 a.m.

Although this venue is not far from the Mukuvisi Woodland some different birds can be seen here. Meet at the gate.

Sunday 22 February: Stapleford Farm 6:30 a.m.

This is always a popular outing as the enthusiastic raptor specialist Neil Deacon has local knowledge of this venue, which consists of acacia bushveld as well as open grassland, sandveld and small kopjes, so there is a chance of seeing some more unusual birds. Meet at 78 Broadlands Road, Emerald Hill and don't forget chairs and refreshments.

Sunday 22 March: Mazowe Springs 6:30 a.m.

This is a new venue so it will be interesting to explore. Meet at Wingate Park Golf Club, where you can leave your vehicle and share transport. Bring chairs and refreshments as John and Pammy Whaley have invited us to their garden afterwards.

Evening Meetings – 3rd Thursday of each month 5:30 for 6:00 p.m. Please note change of time:

Members agreed at the Mashonaland AGM to change the time for these meetings to make it easier for some members to come straight from work, as it is neither pre nor post-dinner. The venue is the **Avondale Bowling Club** on Brighton Road between 2nd Street Extension and Upper East Road. There is a cash bar and hopefully a security guard!

Thursday 19 February – How members can be involved in IBA Monitoring

Kanisios Mukwashi, the IBA Monitoring Project Manager, will discuss how we can assist with IBA monitoring, the information required and the format. This project runs until 2011 – we would like as many members as possible to get involved and contribute to our knowledge of birds and their habitats.

Thursday 19 March: Nightjars of Zimbabwe

Tony Alegria will talk to us about these nocturnal birds.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

8 February: Morning walk at Fortune’s Gate. Meet 8.00 at Sally & Dave Simpson’s house, 11 Munn Road Fortune’s Gate (go up Fortune’s Gate road, take second left Greendale road, first right Derwent Road and next left Munn road). Take morning tea, chairs etc. Ring Judy 67085(w), 242943(h), 011-419335(c).

21 February: Matabeleland Branch AGM. 10.00 am for 10.30 start. At the home of Russell & Chantelle Edwards, 23 Fleming Drive, Burnside, followed by braai or picnic lunch. Bring chairs and tables and all your own eating and drinking gear (and food and drink!). (One way with fewer potholes is from Burnside road, turn left into Whitestone way, left into Lourie road, right into Hoopoe Hollow, left into Fleming drive). Ring Adele 882242(h)/011-608893(w)/011-366917 (persevere!) Or Julia 246269.

15 March: Black Eagle & Dassie Surveys - Briefing. Inungu Lodge, Matopos at 9.00 a.m. Bring morning tea, picnic lunch, chairs & tables. Briefing should be over by lunchtime and after lunch it is suggested that teams check out their Black Eagle territories and the locations of their Dassie sites. Ring Cecilia 287692(o)/240127(h) or Julia 246269.

27-29 March: Weekend at Cawston Ranch. Subject to confirmation nearer the time. By kind invitation of Peter Johnstone, to enable us to progress the bird checklist. Limited places – it may be necessary to give preference to the original teams to facilitate continuity of this project. Ring Judy 67085(w), 242943(h), 011-419335(c) or Julia 246269.

Aisleby:

Visits to Aisleby will be arranged on a flexible basis and on demand. Ring Julia on 246269.

COUNTRY DISTRICTS

Mashonaland South (Kadoma) - Contact Margaret Parrock on 068-22005 or her daughter, Coralee on 068-23644 for details of any outings, which are by arrangement.

Other Areas - those members in the other areas who go out birding – please send me a ‘write-up’ (it doesn’t have to be very long!) with what you have seen and where – we all want to know what’s happening in the rest of Zimbabwe! *Ed.*



REPORTS

12th Pan-African Ornithological Congress 7-12 September 2008

Three of us travelled to Cape Town for this event – Chip Chirara, Fadzai Matsvimbo and me. We were met at the airport by members of the Cape Bird Club (ex Gatooma) who put us up in a hotel for the night. The next morning we went to Goudini Spa, Rawsonville, near Worcester, 120km north of Cape Town. There was unseasonal snow on the mountain tops. On registration we were given a programme of abstracts, in which were all the names and addresses of the participants from all over the world.

At the conference we met Rick Nutall (President of BirdLife SA) – originally from Banket, Peter Steyn – once from Falcon and Bulawayo (an ex-president of the Rhodesian Ornithological Society), Chris Magin of the RSPB in UK, Neil Deacon of our Falconry Club and two graduate students from Bulawayo. Obviously PAOC1 (1959) in Livingstone and PAOC6 (1985) in Francistown were better attended by our members because they were much closer to home. Time was tight so one had to pick a hall and go and sit through all the lectures given – there were 5 halls where lectures were held at the same time. In Livingstone there were no concurrent sessions. Terry Oatley of *Robins of Africa* fame opened this conference (he went from Durban to the Livingstone congress on his motorbike) and mentioned Mary Patterson and Michael Irwin of *A checklist of the birds of Southern Rhodesia* fame, (who were also there – one is now living in the lowveld and the other in Dandaro in Harare). Terry mentioned that academic science has eliminated amateur birders; that some parts of Africa are well researched like the Cape and that profound gaps exist where, for example perhaps in the D R Congo there is no specimen from 100,000km²; and that as conservation has replaced research, a balance should be found.

Some of the lectures I went to included:

Big birds on South African farms Road counts have proved to be an effective method of monitoring these species and 370 routes in 7 provinces were surveyed by volunteers such as bird club members, farmers and schools. Results showed trends in numbers of threatened species in different regions, particularly where land use has changed.

The conservation of Chaplin's Barbets (Zambian Barbet) *Lybius chaplini* and mature fig trees in agricultural landscapes by Lizanne Roxburgh (President of BirdLife Zambia) was the best talk I went to by far. These threatened barbets (est. 3700 birds) are restricted to a small area of Zambia (7700km², north of Kariba) and depend on *Ficus sycamorus* fig trees for food and nest holes. The fig has to be 60 years old to produce suitably-sized dead branches for nest holes and the trees are in agriculturally-desirable areas, where they are being eliminated. (Sir Drummond Chaplin 1866-1933 was

administrator of Southern Rhodesia (1914-1923) and Northern Rhodesia (1921-1923) and worked to federate the two Rhodesias). We should watch our barbets and their trees (see Global Wildbird Indicator Species Project)

Indications of quantifying **Maize crop damage by Grey Crowned Cranes *Balearica regulorum*** (7500 birds in South Africa) are that seed treatment does seem to act as a deterrent to feeding by cranes and the costs are negligible.

The South African population of Wattled Cranes *Bugeranus carunculatus* (200 birds) has decreased by 40% over 20 years. The first egg in known nests is allowed to hatch and the second egg is collected to try to rear the chick.

Lynda Chambers from Australia introduced **Climate Change and Birds**. The majority of zoological bases are from bird studies, timing of breeding, migration, population sizes, changes of rainfall influencing waterbirds in wetlands etc... Assessing the impact of climate change on species requires good quality historical species information like breeding records and distributional data. (Our Society has 45 years of nest record cards and field cards)

Yossi Leshem said the **Great Rift Valley** is a unique geological phenomena stretching from Turkey to Mozambique along 7200 km over 22 countries. It constitutes a migration route of global importance through which hundreds of millions of birds pass from Europe – Asia to Africa and back each year. His proposal was for a huge Important Bird Area (IBA) under UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. He said this needs real decision-makers like Jimmy Carter, to help.

The delegates passed a resolution to save **Lake Natron** in Tanzania from a proposal to mine soda ash by Tata Chemicals Limited of India. 75% of the world's Lesser Flamingos *Phoenicopterus minor* are on Lake Natron and it is Africa's most important Lesser Flamingo breeding site.

The end of Day Two saw me at the Birds of Prey Working Group discussion networking BLZ Mashonaland branch's proposal to **monitor raptors** in the Umfurudzi Safari Area, while Campbell Morn was plugging White-headed Vultures *Aegypius occipitalis* in the Kruger National Park.

We went birdwatching in the **succulent Karoo** on the Wednesday, led by Penn Lloyd and saw many endemics and near endemics, including: Cape Spurfowl, Ground Woodpecker, White-backed Mousebird, Southern Black Korhaan, Black Harrier, Blue Crane, Pirit Batis, Cape Penduline-tit, Cape Bulbul, Karoo Eremomela, Layard's Tit-babbler, Cape White-eye, Karoo Prinia, Namaqua Warbler, Rufous-eared Warbler, Cinnamon-breasted Warbler, Karoo Lark, Spike-heeled Lark, Ant-eating Chat, Tractrac Chat, Pale-winged Starling, Southern Double-collared Sunbird, Cape Weaver, Black-headed Canary, White-throated Canary and Lark-like Bunting and we finished a wonderful day with cheese and wine offered to us by beautiful women!

Lectures continued on the Thursday and Friday. I went to **Vultures in Tanzania** by Neil Baker. These large raptors are all declining slowly while the human population expands at more than 2.5% per annum, or doubles every 25 years.

Claire Spottiswoode – a marvel from Cambridge University – was talking on **Host-specific adaptation in African brood parasites**, using data collected over 40 years in Choma, Zambia by John Colebrook-Robjent. She said parasitic birds eggs are not perfect matches, that they are ? larger than host eggs, generally more rounded and have thicker shells than host eggs. I told her that I think the Steel-blue Widowfinches *Vidua chalybeata* males in my garden in Harare seem to watch the eggs of their females that have laid in Red-billed Firefinch *Lagonosticta senegala* nests, from high singing perches.

Helpers enhance multiple components of breeding performance in the co-operatively breeding Karoo Scrub-robin *Cercotrichas coryphoeus* was discussed by Penn Lloyd, Manager of the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology.

Derek Pomeroy of **Uganda** talked about **bird populations** and said although Uganda's birds were generally doing well there was a decline in Palaeartic migrants, aerial species and some raptors and grassland birds but that farmland birds, particularly those requiring trees, have increased significantly despite tree felling.

Danaë Sheehan of the RSPB, spoke of the **Global Wild Bird Indicator Project**, using common and widespread species to assess the impact of environmental change on worldwide bird populations. She said Botswana and Kenya were already monitoring their birds and she offered workshops and material support (maybe BLZ members should take part?)

Michael Perrin spoke about **niche separation of African parrots** and simply broke the different species down into 3 – small birds (40g – Lovebird size), medium (120g – Meyer's Parrot size) and large (250g – Grey-headed Parrot size).

My last lecture was Les Underhill on **SABAP 2** (South African Bird Atlas Project 2). He said the last project, SABAP 1, was 15 years ago (1987-1992). Since then the Animal Demography Unit have done a frog atlas and a reptile atlas and are now working on butterflies as well as birds. He maintained SAPAB 2 was a global leader in bird monitoring and their website is updated every 3 hours. There was a large gap in our understanding of each other at Les' lecture – he said I could stop making notes in my exercise book as everything he said was immediately available electronically. He does not know until, and if, he reads this that at the time of writing I have no computer and consider it a good day if I have electricity!

The whole conference was dominated by South Africa with nearly 100 delegates and they put on a wonderful programme. There were two little shops doing business – books (books@netbooks.co.za) and a ringing material

company. The Cape weather of rain, wind and chill confined us indoors at dinner tables much more than PAOC6 in Francistown, where we continued chatting under trees. Naturally we were missing some old friends – and made new ones. I do hope when the proceedings are published they make good natural history reading because some of the abstracts use very long words!

....And then there was shopping in Worcester, where you can get anything you like..... How normal!

David Rockingham-Gill

Presentation to the 12th PAOC by **Dr Chipangura Chirara and Fadzai Matsvimbo -**

The population status of Wattled Cranes *Bugeranus carunculatus* in the Driefontein Grasslands in Zimbabwe: Is there a real decrease in the number of Wattled Cranes?

BirdLife Zimbabwe has been carrying out annual surveys of Wattled Cranes *Bugeranus carunculatus* in the Driefontein Grasslands of Zimbabwe since the year 2000. Driefontein Grasslands, an Important Bird Area, is home to Zimbabwe's largest population of Wattled Cranes. The birds are categorized as "vulnerable" according to the IUCN threat criteria. The Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Act of 1975 declared the species "specially protected". Data on Wattled Cranes were collected through ground surveys in the Chivhu, Felixburg and Mvuma areas. One aerial survey was carried out in November, 2005. Surveys carried out in October 2000 recorded 123 Wattled Cranes, of which 116 were adults and 7 were juveniles. The 2002 ground survey recorded 107 Wattled Cranes. A survey conducted in September/October 2004 yielded 138 Wattled Cranes. This was the highest population record since 2000. The number of Wattled Cranes started to decline in 2005. In 2005 aerial and ground surveys were carried out in November. The 2005 surveys showed a 30% decline in the numbers recorded from the previous survey. This was attributed to human disturbance due to the increased number of gardens in wetlands that are used by Wattled Cranes as breeding and foraging grounds. More and more land in the Driefontein area was converted to agricultural land during the land reform programme that was started in 2000. In the 2007 ground surveys, 70 Wattled Cranes were recorded. This was a 20% decline compared to records of the 2005 survey.

Agricultural practices on the wetlands and grasslands could be seriously impacting on the population of Wattled Cranes.

National

The last two months of 2008 were very busy as staff worked hard to finish off all outstanding work for the year. The national office faces a busy period during the first three months of 2009 as we finalise our last quarter for the working year. BLZ has a tight budget this year but we have managed to

continue activities within the limits approved by our donors. The organisation needs to do more fund-raising for those projects that have ended, like the Driefontein and Eastern Highlands Projects and for core costs.

The Director will attend a two-day African Regional Committee Meeting in Lagos in Nigeria during the month of February. ARC needs to consider Africa's input to global council who are meeting in May. The IBA Project Manager attends an annual planning and review meeting in Tunisia in March.

Two members of staff, Fadzai Matsvimbo and Innocent Magunje attended a bird ringing training workshop in Zambia in October/November 2008. This was organised and sponsored by the African Ringing Scheme (AFRING). There are plans to organise a ringing workshop with professional ringers during the first half of the year.

Dr. Chip Chirara - Director

Important Bird Areas (IBA) Monitoring Project report

Site level monitoring continues in all important bird areas. IBA monitoring teams from Nyanga Mountains, Stapleford Forest, Chimanimani Mountains, Robert Mcllwaine Recreational Park and Hwange National Park have already submitted monitoring data from their areas. Follow ups will be done for the rest of the IBAs to ensure that the desired data and information is obtained. Those visiting IBAs and wanting to participate in the monitoring project can collect the forms from BirdLife Zimbabwe offices.

The issue of resuscitating Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary has been discussed with the responsible authority. The Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (PWMA) have demonstrated their commitment to the matter by deploying patrol rangers around the area more often. However the Authority is facing a huge challenge of staff turnover due to the prevailing economic environment.

A policy on the control of invasive birds in Zimbabwe has been produced by the Parks and Wildlife Management Authority. Their position is to reduce or remove the invasive species when and where they occur in all areas of Zimbabwe. The approach to the recent invasions of the Common Myna in some parts of the country is to come up with an Indian Myna Control Strategy document that will be discussed with PWMA for implementation. The Common Myna has the potential to cause havoc on key species in IBAs and other areas throughout the country. Control of the invasive bird at this stage is vital.

A draft Biodiversity Monitoring Training Manual has been completed. The training manual will strengthen biodiversity monitoring capacity of government agencies and the civil society in view of IBA conservation. The final copy will be distributed to stakeholders in due course. A draft communication and advocacy strategy has also been produced. The strategy is a working document for delivering the communication materials and advocacy interventions in the implementation of the IBA monitoring project in Zimbabwe.

A draft Memorandum of Understanding (mou) document submitted to the PWMA is being reviewed by their legal section.

Kanisios Mukwashi, IBA National Project Manager

Blue Swallow Survey November 2008

The Blue Swallow Survey was carried out between 13 and 21 November 2008. The areas surveyed were Stapleford, Nyanga, Honde Valley and Chimanimani. Five teams took part in the survey. The participants included staff members, officers from the Parks and Wildlife Management Authority and BLZ members. Collaboration with the Parks' officers is part of the plan to resuscitate the Ornithology Research Unit. Areas left out of the survey were Banti Forest, Bvumba and Gairezi mainly due to lack of people and no interesting results from previous surveys. Fire is one of the major threats to the grasslands in most of the areas surveyed. The issue of invasive plant species, especially the Wattle and Pine, still goes on unabated in Rhodes Nyanga National Park. These invasive plants continue to invade the grasslands. Cultivation, cattle grazing, gold panning and bush encroachment on the grasslands were mainly recorded in the Chimanimani area. Most of the places surveyed are Important Bird Areas because of the occurrence of the Blue Swallow (*Hirundo atrocaerulea*). The Blue Swallow survey greatly contributes to IBA monitoring as an indication to the changes in the habitat.

Results

Area	No of Blue Swallows
Stapleford forest	0
Honde valley -Gleneagles estate	5
Nyanga :Sanyatwe	4
Nyanga : Juliasdale, Claremont	21
Nyanga: Rhodes Nyanga national park	57
Chimanimani	14
Total	101

The Nyanga area had the highest number of sightings, as in the previous survey. No Blue Swallows have been recorded at Stapleford in the last few years. In addition to the birds, observers recorded five nests. Two nests were recorded in Chimanimani at Sawerombi, on the Border Timbers Estate. The other two were recorded in Nyanga National Park close to Nyamuzihwa falls. One nest spotted in Juliasdale had three eggs. Many thanks to all the people who made themselves available for the survey.

By Fadzai Matsvimbo

From the **library** – here are some more useful [ornithological and conservation websites](#):

African plants - aluka African plants

www.aluka.org

Angolan birds

www.birdsangola.org

Avian influenza

<http://www.who.int/csr/don/2005-08-18/en/index.html>

Bird flu	www.birdlife.org/news/news or www.grain.org.go/birdflu
BirdLife's work on E U policy	www.birdlife.org/eu
Birds of Swaziland	http://www.naturalhistorysociety.org.sz/Birds.htm
BLI	www.birdlife.org
BLI Revisions to Red List Categories	www.birdlife.org/action/science/species/globalspecies_programme/whats_new.html
EBAs	www.birdlife.org/datazone/ebas
Ethno ornithology Research & Study Group newsletter	http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/Ethnoornithology
IBAs	www.africa.birdlife.org/datazone/sites
Malimbus online	http://www.malimbus.free.fr
Mondi wetlands project	info@wetland.org.za
Most threatened Birds	www.birdlife.org/datazone/species/index/html
RSPB	www.rspb.org.uk
South African crane working group	www.ewt.org.za/cranes
Vulture study group	www.ewt.org.za
Wellbeing through Wildlife in the EU	www.wellbeing.birdlife.org
World migratory bird day	www.worldmigratorybirdday.org
Zambian ornithological society	www.birdlife.org/worldwide/national/zambia/index.html

Dorothy Wakeling - Librarian

Mashonaland

Blue Swallow Survey – Gleneagles 1832B2 & Honde Valley 1832B4 – 14-17 November 2008

Three o'clock in the morning is a daunting time to be up, unless you're an insomniac like the others in our party, but we wanted to get from Harare to Aberfoyle in time for an early start! **Amur Falcons** before Brondesbury Park and **Long-crested Eagle** at Rusape (1832A3) & Sanyatwe (1832B3) were the most interesting sightings before the descent into the Honde Valley. After off-loading at the Eastern Highlands Tea Estate guest house we began the *long, sinuous trek* to Aberfoyle – yes, I'm afraid it's merely 6.2 km as the raven flies and about 24 km as the writhing, insane tapeworm wriggles by road.

From Aberfoyle we took a stroll across the golf course and through forest and tea to the north, chalking up some usuals like **African Firefinch**, **Blue-spotted Wood-dove**, **Narina Trogon**, **Red-capped Robin-chat**, **Square-tailed Drongo**, **Olive Sunbird**, **Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird**, **White-eared Barbet**, **Dark-backed Weaver** and the like. Further along the Gleneagles road a **Scaly-throated Honeyguide** called. We had stopped off at Wamba Dam on our way but none of our visits on this or other days revealed the **Anchieta's Tchagra** but **Thick-billed Weavers** occur there in large flocks and **Burchell's Coucal** calls were heard, even if we never got a satisfactory look at the birds; the calls from these and **Senegal Coucals** were so variable in speed and content, even from the same bird, that we regrettably de-listed them! Another special that didn't make the list was the **Pallid Honeyguide**

but was the bird calling at the dam this special or just the **Lesser Honeyguide**? There I was standing further back in the marsh, not remembering the distinction whilst the others were practically under the incessantly calling creature and they never even noticed! Well I never... The **Palm-nut Vulture** was also elusive and only appeared at Aberfoyle before or after our daily visits.

Up in the uplands of Gleneagles we had luck with a different selection of birds. The **Blue Swallows** were pretty sparse and we found 1 male & 2 females where Richard saw them last year, and a pair back at our vehicle later; they were only a kilometre apart and it's unclear whether the same or different birds were involved. Nearby Mataka Hill, where they have been seen in the past, was devoid of them but did produce a pair of **Malachite Sunbirds**, **Cape Robin-chat** and **Yellow-bellied Waxbills**. The previous day we had about 8 **Cape Longclaws**, an **African Crowned Eagle**, **Peregrine Falcon**, a 'ringtail' harrier, a **White-backed Vulture**, **Cape Grassbird** and **Wing-snapping Cisticola** all on the hill with the swallows. Desperate though the valley below was for rain, it was a relief that the big, black storm atop Nyangani swung around us to the north and didn't catch us on the open hilltop! On the way down, in a narrow strip of forest running down a gully, a **Yellow-throated Woodland-warbler** was a wonderful sight.

The distance from our lodgings and Aberfoyle meant we had to cancel the plan of birding around the Aberfoyle forests, but the guest house was a productive alternative and unexplored territory. We got a few sightings of **Green-backed Woodpecker**, heard the **African Broadbill** and **Grey Tit-flycatcher** and a **Pale Batis** was right outside the back door. One evening we glimpsed a **Barn Owl** in the gloaming and heard the **African Wood-owl**. On the last morning we explored a forest patch over the hill from the guest house and added **Gorgeous Bush-shrike**, **Barratt's Warbler**, heard another **Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon** that was so close, yet unseen, it was ridiculous, and had wonderful views of a **Grey Cuckooshrike**. Tony had yet to get a visual of an **African Emerald Cuckoo** and scrambled up hill and through thicket to no avail – maybe next time! Our return journey detoured via the **South African Cliff-swallow** breeding site at Headlands, and yes, some 35 birds were a delight to Richard, and his 3rd lifer on the trip.

But very special thanks must be extended to Nick & Sue Fawcett who invited us to use their guest house and especially to Sue for zooming us up and down the mountains in her Landrover, donating to us her time and fuel. We hope to see you again and I think wistfully of those fantastic looking Nyamingura forests we saw on our last morning, nestling at the very base of Nyangani and awaiting our exploring boots – and Tony, never mind that there may not be paths, who needs paths!

Ian Riddell

Monavale Vlei - Sunday 21 December 2008

My natural reaction to an invitation to spend 2 hours walking over uneven ground mainly under water, through fast growing grass which has already obliterated most of the paths, is to politely decline. However, when the call comes from Jimmy Muropa and the venue is Monavale, one has to accept. And, as usual, it was the right decision. We saw almost 70 species of birds and I'm sure Jimmy, later, increased this to nearer 80. A friend, who bravely accompanied us, more attracted by the flowers, took 40 photos representing the abundant plant life and from Dorothy learnt the facts concerning the acquisition of this fascinating area.

The vlei is alive with birds and flowers like the Vlei Lily. Yellow-mantled Widowbirds were everywhere and in just one small area 2 Yellow Bishops. The Southern Red Bishops and Red-collared Widowbirds abound, now in breeding plumage like the Pin-tailed Whydah. The reeds resound with the calls of African Reed-warbler, Little Rush-warbler and Lesser Swamp-warbler as well as the deep-throated Great Reed-warbler. But the day's special was the pair of Carmine Bee-eater passing through among the European Bee-eaters, identifiable by its different call. Just as unexpected was a Cinnamon-breasted Bunting clinging to a tall rank grass stem. A Marsh Owl was disturbed by our passage, leaving its roost in the grass and flying right by us. In the previous week, Dwarf Bittern, Kurrichane Buttonquail and Black Coucal had been observed but were not seen on Sunday. Great venue, good company. Thanks Jimmy.

Ken Dixon

Proceedings of the Mashonaland Branch AGM - 15 January 2009 - Chairman's Report for 2009

We had to move the evening meetings from Old Hararians, but Avondale Sports Club has allowed us to use their premises and we have been holding the evening meetings here since October. Thanks to Linda Fussell for organizing Avondale club. A decision as to where we will hold evening meetings in the future will be made in early March by the new committee.

The outings have continued and we are getting some good turnouts, especially at the Mukuvisi Woodlands and the last Sunday of the month. We need to ensure that all members have signed the indemnity form – preferably before something happens.

Red Data List meetings are held every two weeks and that project is making progress. A Red Data List should make an appearance soon!

Dave Rockingham-Gill and Neil Deacon have started a raptor survey at Hippo Pools and some initial visits have been made. A number of nests have been located and some lucky members went for nice strolls in the hills in December. Hopefully Mashonaland members will get involved in this survey during the year.

Mashonaland Branch was not involved with the Mukuvisi open days this year but Birdlife were represented by personnel from the office.

Travelling around the BIRD SANCTUARY shoreline and Bird Island at LAKE CHIVERO, by boat, revealed hundreds of meters of fishing net and three large fishing parties. Trees are being cut down, especially on the termite mounds and the Sanctuary will only be a sanctuary in name in the near future.

Mashonaland had some teams in the Big Birding Day – I hear Matland branch are not too happy! (*See report under Matabeleland – Ed*)

A number of Mashonaland members took part in the Blue Swallow Survey recently. A good number of Swallows were seen and some nests were located. Chip Chirara and his team will be looking at the results and BirdLife must now decide how we are going to proceed. (*See report – Ed*)

The IBA monitoring project will need involvement from the membership this year. The February evening meeting will be about this project.

Details of the visits we made this year are written up in *Babbler*. However we are very grateful to everybody that allowed us on to their properties and came to speak to us or helped Mashonaland Branch over the year. Special thanks to our speakers – Ian Riddell on Hwange birds, Dr Chip Chirara on Blue Swallows and later in the year on the three conferences he attended – the Pan-African Ornithological Congress (PAOC) in Worcester, South Africa; Argentina World BirdLife Congress and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Congress in Spain. Tony Alegria talked on Astronomy for Beginners. Now we have something to do when most of the birds are asleep. Alex Masterson spoke about 'Birdy people' associated with Zimbabwe 1850 – 1950 and Neil Deacon on raptor monitoring in Zimbabwe.

What would we do without places to visit or people to lead outings – in January Alex Masterson took us out into the swampy areas around Harare. In February we visited Tavistock farm and March was supposed to be Craighall farm. As it turned out we did not visit Craighall as it was very near the first elections. We were advised to cancel the visit to Kutsaga Research Station as this was around the time of the second election. July was to the Gilmour's Double-Ro Ranch. A small group went to Hippo Pools for the annual birding weekend over the last weekend of September. Richard Dennison, Ken Dixon, Innes Louw and Ian Riddell all led outings at one stage or another. Thank you!

Ann Paxton passed away during the year. Ann organized OH Bowls club for our evening meetings for a number of years and she will be sorely missed.

Graham and Jennifer Carter have left the country. They will be badly missed! Jennifer has edited the *Babbler*, looked after the accounts and we have held all the Mashonaland Committee meetings at their house.

Richard Dennison is standing down. He has attended nearly every 4th Sunday and Lake Chivero outing and has organized most of the outings. His knowledge of all the places to visit will be sorely missed. Fortunately he will still be leading the Lake Chivero outings and we will see him on many of the

outings. Both Jennifer and Richard had done more than ten years on the committee. Many thanks to both of you!

I have enjoyed the birding this year and that would not have been possible without all the work done by the committee and all the support from the membership. I will not be chairman for 2009 but will be on the committee (if elected).

David Dalziel

Mukuvisi Woodlands Report - 2008

The Mukuvisi Woodlands are an excellent place, so close to Harare but with wonderful woodlands and special birds. There was very little wood chopping and large areas were not burnt this year. One only has to look at the Cleveland Dam area to see how quickly trees can be removed. All the staff at Mukuvisi has done a fantastic job over the years but there will be more and more pressure on the area as the years go by. Unfortunately the river is constantly being poisoned by the factories upstream and by sewerage from broken pipes on the small tributary (Chiraura River).

We have had over twenty people attending the walks in some months and that is great as it allows better coverage. When it is cold or raining the numbers drop but we have done a walk every month. 176 species have been seen this year with a high of 117 in December.

I can e-mail a complete list of all the birds seen every month to anyone interested and I will mention a few highlights. We usually split up into three or more small groups and the area is well covered. One group usually goes to the bird hide and that is where we see most of the water birds mentioned. We are still seeing African Black Duck frequently and they are often seen at Cleveland Dam as well. Are they the same birds? The Long-crested Eagle was often seen around the nest area and they and the Wahlberg's Eagle were seen in their nests. The Mukuvisi Woodlands support a good variety of small raptors and many were seen over the year. The Swallow-tailed Bee-eater and European Bee-eater did the usual changing of the guard. In April we had European and in May, Swallow-tailed. The Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters then leave in August / September and the European return – all very neat. Most of the Mukuvisi specials are still to be found. Spotted Creeper, Miombo Blue-eared Starling and Whyte's Barbets are often found and we still see Miombo Tit, White-breasted Cuckooshrike and Southern Hylia. There was one record of a Miombo Rock-thrush, seen in September and a record of Southern Black Tit – the first for five years. Most years someone, usually one of the game scouts, spots a Narina Trogon, usually in December. This year some of us were lucky to see a male Trogon for a few seconds before he flew off – followed by a herd of eager bird watchers.

If you are trying to think of a worthwhile resolution for 2009 – make it that you will do at least one Mukuvisi walk.

Dave Dalziel

LAKE CHIVERO BIRD SANCTUARY – January to December 2008

The 2007/2008 rainy season was above average, as the rainfall in Hillside was 110% of Harare's average. Wader space never appeared at the lake edge although there was a little in the pond in October and November. The thick drowned vegetation in the pond did die back to a certain extent so that some dabbling and diving space was created there.

The fish and wood poaching has steadily escalated as Harare's human population ranges further out of town in its search for food and firewood. Poachers continue to brazenly net from the Sanctuary shoreline, collect vegetation and use the bird hide as a shelter during our walks. (In fact at this last outing in January we discovered the benches in the hide had been used to make a fire on the floor, which is charred). We have noticed a significant reduction in the population of fish-eating birds and birds breeding on Bird Island. The salt treatment of jacaranda trees was ineffective and was replaced by herbicide treatment in spring. The small herd of impala is being seen less frequently. We also continue to see or to pick up the spoor of Vervet monkeys, clawless otter, bushpig, duiker, antbear, porcupine, cane rats, crocodiles, pythons and other reptiles.

Species Count The annual species count was 190, which was low and 20 less than last year. The total number of species recorded since 1992 rose by 3 to 324. These additions to the total species count were: African Wood-owl – 2 seen in March and 1 in October at Harare Safari Lodge; European Roller – 1 in January; Red-backed Mannikin – 2 in February.

In my opinion the other **highlights** were:

Shore and Water Birds – Little Grebe – 60 seen in September and 70 in October; Black Heron – 3 in January, 4 in March and 1 in November; Rufous-bellied Heron – 1 in November; Black-crowned Night-heron – 4 in May; Abdim's Stork – 90 in February; Saddle-billed Stork – 1 in May and December; African Openbill – 33 in November; African Spoonbill – 4 in June; Red-billed Teal – 80 in November; Southern Pochard – 30 in October and 150 in November; African Rail – 1 in May, July and October and 2 in June; Red-knobbed Coot – 2 in October; Greater Painted-snipe – 1 in October and November; Curlew Sandpiper – 1 in October.

Raptors – Black Kite – 1 in January; Black Sparrowhawk – 1 in June; Dark Chanting-goshawk – 1 in July.

Other Birds of Interest – Spotted Thick-knee – 2 in October; Black Coucal – 1 in December; African Pygmy-kingfisher – 1 in March and December; Brown-backed Honeybird – 1 in May; Flappet Lark – 1 in January and February; Thrush Nightingale – 1 in January; Garden Warbler – 2 in March; Southern Hyltiota – 2 in

April and June; Olive-tree Warbler – 1 in November; Retz's Helmet-shrike – 8 in June; Wattled Starling – 70 in August; Lesser Masked-weaver – 2 in October and December.

The large congregations of Red-billed Teal and Southern Pochard in November were pleasing, especially so for the Southern Pochard which has been scarce in recent years. The Bearded Scrub-robin has not been seen since the winter of 2007. The 70-odd Wattled Starling appeared to have been attracted by the good amount of weeping boerbean blossom that appeared in mid winter.

Thank you to those of you who have continued to support the Sanctuary by attending the outings in these troubled times.

Richard Dennison

Monavale Vlei Bird Species Count 2008

2008	3 rd Sunday	Monthly Total	2007 3 rd Sun	2007 Monthly Total	2006 3 rd Sunday	2006 Monthly Total
Jan	52	117	58	121	48	116
Feb	53	113	69	118	58	114
Mar	52	115	53	112	52	115
Apr	45	110	53	109	Holiday	107
May	25 *	90	40	91	54	85
June	45	91	39	91	49	90
July	45	87	53	91	35	86
Aug	50	98	53	93	48	92
Sept	40	103	55	97	41	92
Oct	47	108	57	101	36	101
Nov	64	112	73	109	48	104
Dec	71	126	52	116	52	106

* Very cold and windy

Total Species Seen

09/2005 -12/2006 = 147
 2007 = 156
 2008 = 165

Highlights of 2008

Vlei Specials Observations: (number of times seen) Great Egret 1, Little Bittern 2, Dwarf Bittern 6, Streaky-breasted Flufftail 40, African Crake 76, Striped Crake 4, Black Coucal 72, White Stork 20, Abdim's Stork 111, Marabou Stork 9, Kurrichane Buttonquail 12, Crowned Lapwing 129, Blacksmith Lapwing 5, African Wattled Lapwing 28, Marsh Owl 69, Yellow-throated Longclaw 219, Cuckoo Finch 63, Yellow Bishop 147, White-winged Widowbird 28, Yellow-mantled Widowbird 271, Red-collared Widowbird 209, Orange-breasted Waxbill 268,

Pin-tailed Whydah 213, Black-throated Canary 248, Streaky-headed Seedeater 225.

Warblers: Great Reed-warbler 78, African Reed-warbler 144, Lesser Swamp-warbler 72, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler 205.

Raptors: Yellow-billed Kite 5, Black-shouldered Kite 273, African Cuckoo Hawk 59, Wahlberg's Eagle 41, Long-crested Eagle 175, Black-chested Snake-eagle 29, Steppe Buzzard 2, Lizard Buzzard 46.

Kingfishers: Pied Kingfisher 2, Giant Kingfisher 1, Malachite Kingfisher 12, Brown-hooded Kingfisher 13.

Unusual sightings: Black Stork 4, Red-billed Teal 2, Yellow-billed Egret 1, African Wattled Lapwing 28; Spotted Thick-knee 1; Southern Carmine Bee-eater 6; Eastern Saw-wing 2, Giant Kingfisher 1; African Grey Hornbill 1; Green-winged Pytilia; Cinnamon-breasted Bunting 1.

The Monavale Vlei aspect of COSMO (The Conservation Society of Monavale) is a Site Support Group of BirdLife Zimbabwe. 2008 has been a very busy and constructive year with various studies being completed – 4 hydrology reports have been submitted by students from St John's College and a brief report on fish sampling submitted by UZ. School visits have declined but a training workshop for teachers of surrounding schools was held at the Vlei which was a great success.

A project proposal was submitted to UNDP GEF for 2-year funding to implement certain areas of the Management Plan. This was successful. We are now working on removal of certain alien plant species, environmental and biodiversity awareness with brochures and signage and a tree nursery, and most exciting, putting composting and vermiculture techniques into the community.

Monavale Vlei has been selected as the 2009 World Wetland Day venue. This will be held on 2 February 2009 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. and is a national day and open to the public. Some of you may be willing to lead short walks along the paths. We need crowds of people to attend this event, so please try to come.

D Wakeling and J Muropa

Other Business:

Tony Alegria was elected the new chairman as Dave Dalziel stood down.

Dr Chip Chirara reported on a meeting with National Parks regarding destruction, wood-cutting and fish-poaching at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary. He said the commitment from Head Office was proven but they had no resources for repairing fences etc. and they want BLZ to repair the fence and hide and then work with them. He said it is important members do not seem to be trying to get free entry on regular visits. Parks are trying to resuscitate the Ornithology Unit and had been seen at the adjacent Harare Safari Lodge.

Ken Wilson, President of BLZ, appealed for a new Council Secretary to replace Carolyn Dennison, who has resigned.

Umfurudzi Raptor Monitoring Program: Preliminary and Initial Survey Results.

Our knowledge of density and productivity of raptors breeding in miombo woodland in Zimbabwe is limited to a single study on the African Baza or African Cuckoo Hawk, *Aviceda cuculoides* (O'Donoghue & Hartley, 2002). Yet dry miombo, which includes *Brachystegia/Julbernardia* dominated woodland, occupies around 1.2 million km², and is known to support at least 17 species of breeding raptor. While none of these raptor species are endemic to miombo woodland, the size of their populations may be influenced by this habitat through the sheer magnitude of area it occupies. The aim of the Umfurudzi Raptor Monitoring Programme is to establish the density of raptor nests in an area of *Brachystegia/Julbernardia* Miombo woodland and monitor breeding success to assess the importance of this habitat to conservation of raptors. As one of the primary factors determining raptor diversity and density is the available prey, analysis of prey remains collected from nest sites is traditionally incorporated into raptor monitoring programs.

In the process of selecting Umfurudzi Safari Area as a potential study site a preliminary assessment of its suitability was undertaken in August 2008. In this visit 18 species of diurnal raptor were seen over a 24 hour period, and the nest site locations of Dickinson's Kestrel (1), Lanner Falcon (2), African Goshawk (1), African Crowned Eagle (2), Wahlberg's Eagle (2), Verreaux's Eagle (1) and African Hawk-eagle (1) were confirmed. The latter was occupied and contained a well-developed chick.

Following the location of a further 20+ raptor nests, mostly by Hippo Pools game scouts, the initial survey and verification of nest sites was undertaken in late December 2008. In this survey 21 nest sites were checked, an additional 8 nest sites were located but not checked. Six nests were occupied by Wahlberg's Eagles, 2 by African Crowned Eagle (1 chick fledged in September), 1 by an African Goshawk (2 chicks fledged in October) and 1 by a Lanner Falcon (1 fledged juvenile still at nest site). One nest site, currently occupied by a Wahlberg's Eagle with a young chick, was almost certainly a Bat Hawk, *Macheiramphus alcinus*, nest as typical for this species was located on the top of a hill on a lateral branch of a white barked tree, in this case a Mountain Acacia (*Brachystegia glaucescens*). Wahlberg's Eagles usually build nests in trees right on a watercourse. A few prey remains were found under occupied Wahlberg's Eagle nests, these include Giant Plated Lizards (*Gerrhosaurus validus*), a juvenile hyrax (Dassie) skull and the pelvis of a gamebird, perhaps that of a Spurfowl (*Francolinus sp.*). Prey remains found underneath a Crowned Eagle nest included 2 species of hyrax (*Procavia capensis* & *Heterohyrax brucei*), a partially eaten Rock

Monitor/Leguaan (*Varanus albigularis*) and unidentified vertebrae. The remains of a Sharpe's Grysbok (*Raphicerus sharpei*) killed by Crowned Eagle (C.E.), indicated by a moulted C.E. feather amongst pluckings and bones, were found on the previous trip. The young Lanner Falcon was in the process of eating a bird, perhaps a Coqui Francolin (*F. coqui*), on our arrival at the nest site. An adult Wahlberg's Eagle was observed making a determined effort to kill a juvenile African Grey Hornbill (*Tockus nasutus*), however was disturbed by our approach. The young hornbill flushed from the grass right at our feet and made good its escape.

In December 2008, 19 species of raptor were seen during the course of survey. This brings the total to 26 different diurnal raptors species seen since August 2008 (Table 1). It is encouraging that over the last six months Bateleurs have been seen on every trip to Umfurudzi, including the annual BirdLife Weekend, after their apparent absence for many years (I. Jarvis, pers. comm.) The large diversity of raptors has afforded observers some exceptional sightings of raptors in the wild. In August, an unusual observation was made of an Osprey launching a series of attacks on an African Fish-eagle and finally driving it away. Normally Fish-eagles will dominate Ospreys in any clash. In December, after a tough hike observers were rewarded with long and clear sightings of a pair of adult Crowned Eagle soaring near a nest site. The following day a Crowned Eagle, African Cuckoo Hawk, Verreaux's Eagle, juvenile Martial Eagle, Dickinson's Kestrel and African Goshawk were seen over the course of an hour in more or less one place.

It is anticipated that raptor surveys in Umfurudzi will be undertaken four times annually. Timing of visits will coincide with peak breeding periods for the various raptor species. Peak breeding activity, based on Irwin (1981), is in February/March (Snake-eagles, Bateleur), May/June (7 species, mostly large eagles), September/October (Buzzards, Harrier-hawk, Bat Hawk, Chanting-goshawk, Accipiters, Kestrels, and small eagles), November/December (African Cuckoo Hawk, Wahlberg's Eagle). As there is overlap between fledging of some species and egg-laying of others, data on productivity and occupancy can be collected on each trip. The February/March peak is limited to few species, however as it is out of season for most species, this is the best time to collect prey remains from any nests used the previous season as it minimizes disturbance. Highest period of activity in terms of laying and fledging (winter nesting eagles, falcons) falls in September/October so coincides with the annual BirdLife Weekend held in Hippo Pools. We take this opportunity to emphasize that this program is a Mashonaland Branch project and that all members are welcome to participate in these surveys. We need volunteers. Exact dates that surveys will be undertaken will be advertised regularly in the *Babbler*. Knowledge of raptors is not a prerequisite and there is plenty of scope for observers that feel that they may not meet the physical demands of searching out or verifying nest sites.

Acknowledgements

The following observers have participated in the field and are acknowledged for their contributions: R. Bealey (Z.F.C.), D. Dalziel (BLZ), I. Jarvis and game scouts (Hippo Pools), D. Kennaird (BLZ), I. Louw (BLZ), G. Lowe (BLZ), J. Pierini (BLZ), B. Pissass and I. Riddell (BLZ).

Table 1. List of diurnal raptors seen Umfurudzi (26 species).

I.M.= intra-African Migrant, P.M. = Palaearctic migrant, Susp. Breeding = suspected to be breeding, Hist. Breeding record = historical breeding record.

Common Name	Species	Aug	Dec	Comments
Yellow-billed Kite	<i>Milvus migrans parasitus</i>		X	I.M.
African Baza	<i>Aviceda cuculoides</i>		X	Susp. Breeding
African Fish-eagle	<i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i>	X	X	Susp. Breeding
Brown Snake-eagle	<i>Circaetus cinereus</i>	X	X	Susp. Breeding
Black-chested Snake-eagle	<i>Circaetus pectoralis</i>		X	New species record
Bateleur	<i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i>	X	X	
African Harrier-hawk	<i>Polyboroides typus</i>	X		
Lizard Buzzard	<i>Kaupifalco monogrammicus</i>	X	X	Susp. Breeding
Dark Chanting Goshawk	<i>Melierax metabates</i>	X		Susp. Breeding
Gabar Goshawk	<i>Melierax gabar</i>	X		Hist. breeding record
African Goshawk	<i>Accipiter tachiro</i>	X	X	Breeding: 1 active nest
Ovambo Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter ovampensis</i>	X		
Black Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter melanoleucus</i>	X		
Steppe Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		X	P.M., 5 individuals
Augur Buzzard	<i>Buteo augur</i>	X		Susp. Breeding
African Hawk-eagle	<i>Aquila spilogaster</i>	X	X	Breeding: 1 active nest + 1 unconfirmed
Verreaux's Eagle	<i>Aquila verreauxii</i>	X	X	Breeding: 1 nest
Wahlberg's Eagle	<i>Aquila wahlbergi</i>	X	X	I.M., Breeding: 6 active nests
Martial Eagle	<i>Polemaetus bellicosus</i>	X	X.	Hist. breeding record
African Crowned Eagle	<i>Stephanoaetus coronatus</i>		X	Breeding (1 active + 4 nests, 3 pairs?)
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	X		P.M., 1 individual
Dickinson's Kestrel	<i>Falco dickinsoni</i>	X	X	Breeding

Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>		X	P.M. 2 individuals
Amur Falcon	<i>Falco amurensis</i>		X	P.M., 30 individuals
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>		X	P.M., 8 individuals (Dec)
Lanner Falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>	X	X	Breeding (2 active + 1 unconfirmed)
		18	19	

Report prepared by: N. Deacon & D. Rockingham-Gill

Matabeleland

Birding Big Day – 22-23 November 2008

Well, history was made and we in Matland are not best pleased. We were trounced – twice – by those over the border who apparently ignored the etiquette attached to this event. We down here run the thing, we enter the thing, we judge the thing, and we always win the thing. But if the truth were known we were hampered by lousy weather. All was fine and bright up there but not down here. We lost Saturday afternoon and evening due to atrocious storms which blotted out bird sightings and caused us to abandon ship.

The results are below:

Mashonaland reported a Cape Shoveler at Darwendale, unusual for the area. They also reported that a certain team strayed outside their 50 km radius and therefore lost 5 species from their score. In the event it didn't affect the final result.

We had a melanistic Jacobin Cuckoo which was incredibly smart, and a couple of immature Stonechats frolicking around a termite mound which were fun. The Garden team reported amongst other things, a Red-chested Cuckoo and Hamerkop in their suburban bird-friendly garden. The second team for the Garden section unfortunately didn't hand in their sheets.

Congratulations to our competitors and our own teams and thank you to everyone who took part. We had a really good time down here, and our fund-raisers did wonderfully well despite the hard economic times.

There are now requests for us to add another section next year – a 36-hour count! We will deliberate this and discuss it with the rest of the country later.

Team	Score	Leader	Team
Main Section			
Just Plain Cuckoo Mashonaland	193	Julia Pierini	Duncan Kennaird, Jane Rautenbach, David Dalziel

Buzzard Creepers Mashonaland	181	Tony Alegria	Ian Riddell, Ken Dixon
The Three Tittle- Tattlers Matabeleland	176	Cecilia Hubbard	Julia Duprée, Sandy McAdam
Harare Harriers Mashonaland	142	Richard Dennison & Luke Wilson	Ken Wilson
Avian Bunny Huggers Matabeleland	113	John Brebner	Jenny Brebner
Grey-headed Bush Shrikes Matabeleland	109	Tom Cranston	Helen Lewis, Jean Cranston, Bill Lewis
Louw Toppies Mashonaland	98	Innes Louw	Rianna Louw
Garden Section			
Pygmy Geese Matabeleland	35	Felicity Adams	Frank Adams

Julia Duprée

Christmas Bistro – 6 December 2008

What a way to start the festive season! The fame of our annual bistros, originally introduced by Sue Brooks, is such that the 24 available tickets were sold out long before the day – and there was a waiting list! Cecilia was our hostess with the mostest in her charming house, Cecilia was the organiser and Cecilia did all but a tiny bit of the catering. This was a 4-course real 5-star meal, starting with chicken mayonnaise, then roast meats, lasagne, vegetables and all the trimmings, followed by apple pie and ice cream, and ending with a selection of exotic cheeses and coffee. Mouth-watering, yum-yum-yum! Then some bright spark (Jean) came up with the idea that we may not rest on our laurels – or even just rest – after such a superb meal, but would now participate in her competition. Each table of 4 must produce the sound of 2 different birds for the rest of us to identify. Easy-peasy you think? Not so. The first was Helen with a rhythmical clapping of stones followed by the words “cha-cha-cha”. Don’t know? Rattling Cisticola, silly! Next came Rob who fooled us all – we thought he was a Black Cuckoo. No he wasn’t, he was an African Cuckoo, which has a two-phrase version of the Black Cuckoo’s similar three-phase song (if you can call it a song) – did you know that? The best rendition was won by Harry as a Heuglin (yes, it’s got a new name but we want to stay with Heuglin); another intriguing version was Jen’s Heuglin “Horatio, Horatio, Horatio: washyourfeet-washyourfeet-washyourfeet” (actually it may not have been Horatio, could have been someone else); and the most boring was me as a Emerald-spotted Wood-dove which everyone guessed before I’d opened my mouth – you try it after a couple of wines. Two participants won

prizes of home-made mince pies, the idea was excellent and we're tuning up for next year. The evening wound up (for some of us) with a raffle – the prize for which was a wonderfully generous hamper of sweets and biscuits donated by Dick Cottam of Lobels – not only incredibly valuable but it contained all the goodies we can no longer get. It was won by Joyce, lucky thing.

Our thanks go to everyone who put on such an enjoyable event and to Dick for yet another superb raffle prize.

Julia Duprée

Pied Crow Enigma

In November I saw a rather distressing sight in the grounds of the Natural History Museum, Bulawayo. This was a group of three Pied Crows each with a tightly-fitting, red plastic 'flag' around its neck. This 'flag' was in the shape of a long, narrow triangle which stretched from the base of the neck to the tip of the tail. (See *picture below*). Although obviously cumbersome, the crows moved about on the ground and flew up into the jacarandas without too much difficulty. One had mastered the art of putting a leg on each side of the 'flag', dragging it under its tummy to make walking easier. Neither Peter Mundy – who saw the crows – nor anyone else I have spoken to so far can shed any light on this extraordinary happening. Were they deliberately tagged – perhaps in the nest before fledging? For what possible reason? Were they hand-reared and collared for ID purposes to follow their progress once released? Is there some research going on? Hopefully someone will be able to offer an explanation. Watch this space!

Julia Duprée



Some Eastern Highland Records

There is much to be said for the Eastern Highlands as a birding destination, both in terms of variety and quality of species. Two recent trips, to Burma Valley and Bvumba respectively, confirmed this fact and also that Zimbabwe's bush is some of, if not the most, beautiful in the world.

Burma Valley provides a rich scope of habitat – riverine, lowland forest, miombo and broad-leaved woodland and extensive (if now neglected) tropical fruit farmlands. Passing a low-lying stream, which a Giant Kingfisher was loudly patrolling, we began our ascent to the top of a miombo-strewn kopje. On approaching the summit, we encountered a Grey-headed Kingfisher and its very curious juvenile, Southern Hyliota, Pale Batis, a brash but striking pair of Broad-billed Rollers, African Green-pigeon, flocks of Grey Penduline-Tits and a strange, as yet unidentified, cuckoo. The top produced even greater rewards. Confiding Rufous-bellied Tits, both Black Cuckooshrike (with the yellow shoulder patch) and White-breasted Cuckooshrikes, gorgeous Violet-backed Starlings (Plum-coloured) sunning themselves, a beckoning Lesser Honeyguide and Red-headed Weaver all showed themselves. Beached on the crowning rocks of the kopje (the walk was fairly tough!), a party of Boulder Chats flitted amongst us while an African Crowned Eagle thermalled and called above.

The Bvumba trip began on a high note at White Horse Inn when, on alighting from the car, we were instantly met by the distinctive hooting call of the Narina Trogon (a real local of that area). My brother, Benjy, a whiz with calls, immediately summoned it up and so we had a clear view of the male from below, even of its throat transformed into iridescent blue with each hoot. Driving higher into the Bvumba Mountains and stopping at our cottage beneath Castle Beacon, we walked into a forest quivering with birdlife. A male Swynnerton's Robin landed near our feet and rustled about there for some time, as raucous Roberts's Warblers also ventured too close for binocular use. One of my personal highlights was that of a pair of Red-faced Crimsonwings landing in bushes on a rock just across from me – a rare, close sighting as these seedeaters tend to stick to the highest tree-tops. White-starred Robins, clearly in breeding season, responded frenetically to our mimicked calls and buzzed through the trees flashing their "stars". All the while, the ever-elusive Emerald Cuckoo's call rang out from somewhere in the canopy.

In closing, do not write off the Eastern Highlands as a birding destination! Only two examples have been given; other recommendations would be Osborne Dam for thornveld birds and Cecil Kop Pass for miombo specials.

Emma Holland

(Many thanks Emma for this account – please will other 'country district' birders follow suit! What about the Lowveld, Marondera, Midlands and Kariba areas? Ed)

I have just read *Babbler* No.85 (Dec 08/Jan 09) with great interest. It truly is a bumper issue and full of interesting information on our birds and those who care to take note of them. I would like to comment on the article on the **Southern Ground-hornbill**, with regard to the statement that it has been documented for the first time that this species will breed in granite kopjes. In the sixties of the past century, Ground-hornbills nested regularly in a cleft of a kopje near Concession, situated less than 100m off the main tarred road, just past the turn-off to the bulk grain silos. This site was later abandoned – I think sometime in the late seventies. I was given to understand that this nesting site had been in use for many years.

Rolf Chenaux-Repond

A well-known bird ringer from Cape Town recently visited RIFA with BLZ members. He reports “On Monday 8 December 2008 I over-nighted at the Bubi River Lodge on my return to South Africa. I did a birding walk during the early evening and was horrified to find that a pair of **Common Mynas** had taken up home in a disused nest of a Red-billed Buffalo-weaver in a tree in the fore-court of the petrol station at the Lodge. I notice in the latest Sasol that these birds are way out of their distribution range and must have recently moved their way northwards into Zimbabwe. I am not sure if you are aware of this movement, but I thought it necessary to report on it.

I had very good viewing of a Great Spotted Cuckoo, as well as a large flock of Cut-throat Finches. Village Weavers were busy building nests around the buildings. Good sightings of a Woodland Kingfisher, Red-billed Quelea and Magpie Shrikes”.

Peter Nupen

Geoff Lowe has submitted the following:

Some Reports of the Common Myna (Indian) In Zimbabwe 2007/2008

The Common Myna is an invasive exotic bird species and may be controlled (see National Parks policy). It poses a threat to some of our indigenous bird species. It is extending its range northwards from South Africa through Zimbabwe, Botswana and Mozambique.

In January 2007 a pair of Mynas was seen attempting to breed in a Buffalo-weaver's nest in a marula tree near West Nicholson. Also in January 2007 a single bird was seen near the roadside close to Colleen Bawn by L and J Stanton. On 25 October 2007, I saw a small flock of 7 Mynas at the Bubi Village near the Lion and Elephant Motel. These birds were feeding on the

bare ground near the national road and also frequented the baobab trees in front of the service station where there were Red-billed Buffalo-weavers at their nests. According to D. Pell the first Myna was seen near here in about April 2005. On 26 October I observed a further flock of 4 or 5 birds at Fauna Ranch homestead about 20 km towards Masvingo. These birds were feeding on the ground in a well-grazed cattle paddock near the ranch homestead. C. Nkomo sighted two birds at Manama Mission, Gwanda district on 19 December 2007 and also in December 2007, G. Canter of Covenant Farm, Esigodini reported a pair of Mynas. These birds appeared to feed amongst the dairy cattle.

During 2008 the birds at Bubi Village were observed by a number of people and they appear to be established there. The flock now numbers more than 10 to 20 birds. Mynas were seen entering the Buffalo-weaver nests on 16 August 2008 in the baobab trees near the service station at Bubi Village. There were no Buffalo-weavers present at that time. At dusk on 24 September I heard Mynas calling at the Zimbabwe side of the Beitbridge border post. I suspect that these birds were going to roost. P. Evans reported a pair of Mynas at Mary Ellen farm, near Turk Mine in the Bubi district, which were present on 18 November 2008. One of these birds was collected. The same person also saw a single bird at the same location in mid December of 2006. This bird was shot.

It is interesting to note that most new sightings of Mynas have been during the rainy season and this may be when they disperse. Secondly, they have become established in the dry southern parts of the country and may occupy Buffalo-weaver nests. Many of the birds reported were eliminated. Many of the above sightings were forwarded to me by Julia Duprée of Bulawayo.

The range expansion of the Myna within Zimbabwe and the impact the Myna will have on our birds is being monitored by a BLZ task force dealing with this species and is interested in all Zimbabwean sightings.

Please could members of BirdLife or the public send any reports of sightings of Mynas, including the following information if possible to: Geoff Lowe at wildfire@mweb.co.zw or telephone/ fax 04 -332087 -

- the number of birds seen; where seen – locality, the date and time; when first seen; their behaviour, especially inter-actions with other birds, breeding, resident?

TAIL FEATHERS

In January 2009 near the CFU building in Adlynn Road, Marlborough, I saw a Purple-crested Turaco perched on a wire along the road, s/he was having a hard time balancing and his/her tail was wagging through 180 degrees, very fast.

Also in January 2009 I have seen Abdim's Storks roosting on electric light poles on Edinburgh Road, Pomona, Harare.

David Rockingham-Gill

Being a **'Birder's Wife'** has its ups and downs, but life is seldom boring! The bird watching day starts at an indecent hour – some say the best time of the day – at 6.30 a.m. in summer and 7a.m. in winter, only because one can't see

anything other than owls before that! Whether you decide to accompany the spouse or not on these outings, you are rudely awakened by a premature cup of coffee and a "Have I got sandwiches?" and "Where are my car keys?" etc. so you might just as well accompany him as you are now wide awake!! Once your eyelids have been pried open, the outings that you do decide to go on can be quite fun and educational and if the birds the experts see can be spotted, a lot can be learned about identifying numerous birds, although there are still a lot of LBJs and by the time binos are adjusted and "What's that bird?" said, it has taken off! Then there is a lot of speculation from the experts – that is if they hear you!! Some of these outings involve prolonged walks through long sometimes dry grass, seeds getting stuck in every crevice of one's body, ticks in the rainy season, stumbling over rocks with branches and bushes slapping and scratching, to look at a raptor's nest – alas more often than not empty – but not to be defeated, detective work is done around the base of the tree searching for clues as to when it exited, which can take a whole morning in the boiling sun, so one has to be in robust health for such forays! Road kills have a special attraction to the avid birder and often whilst being driven along a country road, the car will scream to a halt, the spouse jumping out only to inspect an unfortunate squashed bird and on occasion, the smelly corpse will be brought home for closer examination. Deep freezers should be checked regularly, as what one might think is frozen food wrapped up in a bit of newspaper or plastic is, when opened, a deep frozen kingfisher or other bird found on the ramblings, waiting to go to the Natural History Museum. After about a year though, they are quietly binned!! Being a "birders spouse" has a definite "up side" too, with the opportunity of seeing some of the most beautiful parts of Zimbabwe, places that are little known and not always easily accessible without permission from farmers and landowners. A huge variety of birds are seen on the outings to the Botanical Gardens, especially when the aloes and trees are flowering, and are spectacular. What a pleasure it is to mix with people of like mind and love of nature and the bush. I feel immensely privileged to be a 'Birder's Wife.'

Penny Rockingham-Gill

Michael Irwin's suggested collective nouns for extinct birds:

A termination of Teratorms;
 A clubbing of Great Auks
 A downfall of Pink-headed Ducks
 A conclusion of Carolina Parakeets
 A passing of Passenger Pigeons
 An extermination of Eskimo Curlews
 An extinction of Dodos
 An elimination of Elephant Birds
 A massacre of Moas

A submergence of Labrador Ducks
 A demise of Drepanids (Hawaian Honeyeaters)
 A disappearance of Paradise Parrots
 An extirpation of *Upupa antaios*
 A hopelessness of Huias
 A decline of Corncrakes
 A disappearance of White-winged Flufftail
 And a departure of anything else you can think of!
 Or an up and coming of Laughing Doves if you are thinking of successes!
 And there could even be a conquest of Quelea -
 And what garden is not without a topping of Toppies?

A Suffolk police investigation into the disappearance of fish worth thousands of pounds has been called off after a heron was found to be the culprit. Police were called in after 27 Koi carp and 7 large goldfish vanished from a home pond. Officers suspected a raid by thieves and issued a witness appeal which asked if locals saw "anything suspicious" or if they had been offered similar fish. But the appeal was recalled soon after when they found the heron was to blame!

NOTICEBOARD

SECRETARY

The Council is still looking for an honorary secretary with immediate effect. This person is also a full Council member so can take part in resolutions made at this level. He/she will be required to take minutes at monthly meetings and have access to their own computer, e-mail and printer and be fairly easily contactable. This is an interesting role and I am sure there is somebody out there who would enjoy it and wants to help. Some knowledge of birds is preferable! Please contact Ken Wilson on 334186 or Dorothy Wakeling on 304298 / 0912-376506 or Carolyn Dennison on rolly@zol.co.zw

FIELD CHECK LISTS

A reminder that an updated Field Card with the changed bird names is now available by e-mail on request from birds@zol.co.zw or in printed form from the BLZ office or Carolyn Dennison at rolly@zol.co.zw. A list of Southern African birds with the old and new names is also available for those who have the older field guides.

Recording bird sightings is interesting and enjoyable. BLZ would like to know about your observations, so please send completed cards, with QDS or identifiable area, by e-mail to chip.chirara@blz.co.zw or hard copy to BLZ, 35 Clyde Road, Eastlea, Harare. Also, please look out for the species mentioned as endangered, threatened or special and notify Chip and Ian Riddell (gemsaf@mango.zw) if you see them, indicating the date, number and place.