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Issue 101 Aug/Sep 2011



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Dear Members and Readers,

I must confess that winter has never been a favourite time of the year for me but only because I don't do cold! In reality, it's a fascinating season. Our traditional migrant birds have flown overseas, a lot of the others are not breeding and therefore not displaying but if you take the time to look closely, there is a lot of action going on in the bird world around us. Read on to discover all about it and more....eg about the sightings of Thick-billed Cuckoo in a garden in Harare in June and Western Banded Snake-eagle in the Mavhuradonha Mountain Wilderness Area in March/May as well as about our recently launched Harare Garden Bird Survey. Thanks again to all our advertisers and authors. You are all key to our success! The next issue is due out at the end of September. If you would like to send photos, articles and/or if you would like to advertise, please email by 10 Sept. Sit back & enjoy the read, folks!

Julia

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Message from Dorothy Wakeling

The AGM was great success with 51 birders attending, enjoying each other's company and the birding on the shores of Lake Manyame at Hideaway.

Honorary Life Membership of BLZ, our top award, was bestowed upon Alex Masterson for his extensive contributions to ornithology and dedication to BirdLife Zimbabwe over more than 60 years! This is long overdue and well deserved! Thank you to Alex!

The Council was re-elected and will continue to focus on our birds and their survival. Worldwide, habitats are shrinking and human threats are escalating causing bird populations to decline. This is certainly the case in Zimbabwe and is of concern to BLZ. This year Dr Chirara and his staff will work more closely with Council's Research and Conservation Committee on the creation and implementation of further Threatened Species Action Plans. All our endeavours require funding for their implementation. International donors have traditionally funded major IBA related programmes, but securing further funding is becoming increasingly difficult. It is now important to fundraise locally, so tiered Corporate Membership Packages have been drawn up. We hope to persuade the business



community, by becoming corporate members of BLZ, to be more responsible for the survival of our environment. Read more in this issue of *Babbler*, from Celesta von Chamier and Julia Pierini, on fundraising and the promotion of BLZ through the new look website and *Babbler*. Issue 100 of our newsletter has received wide acclaim! Much appreciation goes to Julia and Celesta. The issue of *Honeyguide* Vol.57(1) is outstanding! Thank you to Dr Brian Marshall and Julia Dupree for your editorial work! So we have a busy year ahead, saving our birds and fundraising, in addition to birding!

Dorothy Wakeling



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Errata Corrige Babbler 100

Page 15 - photo is of Gabar Goshawk, not Ovambo Sparrowhawk
Tailfeathers - sighting of Eastern Nicator was 1 May 2011 not 2001

Mashonaland

Reflections on the Hideaway Weekend

AGM JUNE 2011

by Helen Lewis

True to its name this place is a real “hideaway”. Probably well known among the fishermen in the Mashonaland area this delightful camp set on the shores of Lake Manyame was like paradise for those of us intrepid explorers who crossed the border from Matabeleland to venture into Shona turf for a fabulous weekend of birding.

It was a truly magic experience – as we arrived we were met by the nostalgic call of Africa - African Fish-eagles in abundance - and the rest of the time spent at this lovely camp followed the same

magical pattern. Waterfowl abounded and White- faced whistlers were found in large flocks all around the dam. Some notable sightings were Saddle-billed Stork, African Purple Swamphen, Purple Heron – in fact the heron population was out and about in their diversity and numbers from the little Squacco Heron to the majesty of the Goliath who sat serenely on the edge of the lake surveying his domain for quite some time.

A trek into the nearby farmlands had its reward for me – my first sighting of the lovely little Red-capped Lark. What a handsome little chap he is!



Judy Ross admiring the Sunset



Sadly, an early morning walk to the eastern end of the lake revealed many bundles of fishing net at the edges of the lake which we carried back to the camp to burn later. I have a photograph (inserted below) of an immature Fish-eagle with a strand of net around his wing. It seemed that he was not hampered by this and was able to fly, but the horror of the thought that this net could trap him and that many other birds could also be maimed and die a painful death at the mercy of this twine was very sobering.

My question is “What can we do to stop this?” Unfortunately, all good things come to an end and we had to begin the long trek back to Bulawayo. However, it was a lovely couple of days and a “hideaway” well worth a visit, especially by all the Shonas who have such a beautiful “bird dam” right on their doorstep.

✂

Shocking photo of immature African Fish-eagle with twine on wing

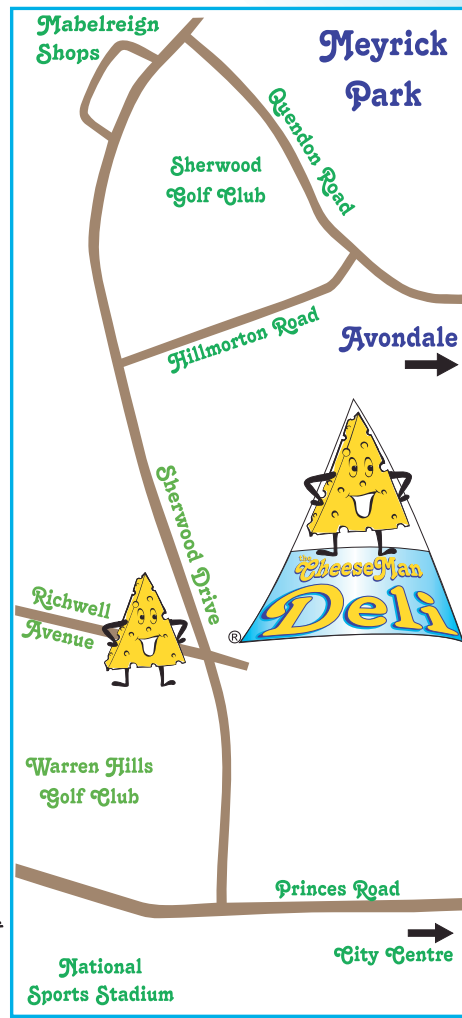
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Objectives

Previous garden bird surveys have tended to be general and included everything seen from a garden, whether the bird had anything to do with it or not. Now we want to be more specific and gather data on birds that have adapted to and use gardens; we have enough information on general city birds, the Pied Crow being a special case and a good example. The survey starts on 27th June and will run for one year, or 52 weeks since recording will be based on weekly observations rather than monthly.

The city Garden habitat: with deforestation of the surrounds the interior is tending to become a forested island and an important habitat in its own right, albeit a separate derived one. What birds are adapting? Well, many already have and are common garden birds – as Michael Irwin puts it, "... populations that have given up living in natural ecological situations". We have high population densities relative to the 'outside'; how many Purple-crested Turacos and White-browed Robin-chats are there in the city 'forest/woodland' compared to the narrow fringing riparia and limited thickets in the districts?

What birds to include: this is very important in the context of our new direction! We want to specifically focus on gardens and not the city generally as previously. Thus, if you live opposite a vlei, a sports field, an expanse of miombo woodland such as Mukuvisi or Haka, or some other non-garden habitat do not include birds from those environments unless they actually use or enter your garden. We do not want an Abdim's Stork that landed 50m away in a field or square appearing in your garden! If a bird is across in your neighbour's garden, which can be viewed as an extension of the garden habitat, it is ok to record it. The 'ticking' habit is fairly ingrained, what with the past Atlas project or Bird Birding Day, but it is not the focus of this survey to act as a 'catch-all' for all and sundry! Use the Comment box for any 'funnies' such as the Marabou Stork Tony Wood mentioned above his house for the first time or rather send it to Field Observations, where it is of interest and not likely to be ignored or overlooked on your garden bird form.

If in doubt, leave it out: good advice from the Atlas days! Some species are identification nightmares for the novice and even more experienced birdwatchers – non-breeding widowbirds, weavers and sunbirds, glossy starlings, cisticolas (though not likely in most gardens if you are following the rules above), etc. Don't be shy to ask for help!

Michael Irwin will be perusing your forms and hopefully adding interesting birds or snippets to *Babbler*. The form should be sent to the Garden Bird Survey Co-ordinator as soon as possible after the end of the four week period, to P O Box RVL 100, Runiville, Harare or delivered to the BirdLife Zimbabwe offices at 35, Clyde Road, Eastlea, Harare or e-mailed to hqbs@blz.co.zw. For forms, queries, and if you want to participate, please contact Tony Alegria talegria@zol.co.zw or Ian Riddell e-mail gemsaf@mango.zw



Mashonaland

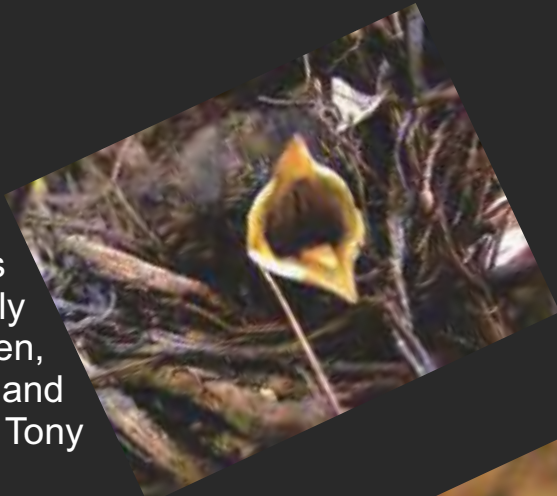


In Your Garden

Harare Garden Bird Survey
The Harare Garden Bird Survey was launched on 27 June. It will

BIRDS OF ZIMBABWE

last a year so if you haven't started ticking off the birds you see on a weekly basis in your garden, get cracking! Forms and info available from Tony



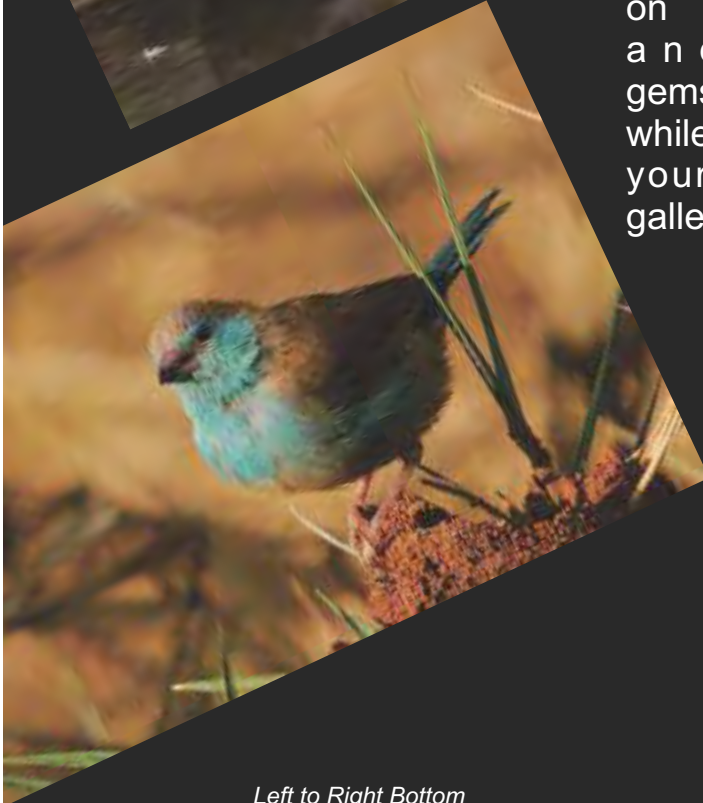
Left to Right Top
Brown-hooded Kingfisher by James Ball
Gabar Goshawk by Russell Clark
White-browed Robin-chat nestling by Robin Rind
Crested Barbet by C. v.Chamier

Mashonaland

gardens



on talegria@zol.co.zw
and/or lanon@gemsaf@mango.zw. And
while you're at it, send us
your photos for our
gallery!



*Left to Right Bottom
Speckled Mousebirds by C v. Chamier
Blue Waxbill by Nick Hart
Black-collared Barbet by Nick Hart*

Mashonaland

On 1st July 2011 at about 8.45am 3 White Storks were seen at Monavale Vlei. The western half of the Vlei had recently burnt (28th June) and it is in this area that they were foraging. Thanks to Jon Pilch two of these White Storks were caught on camera. Again, at mid-day the following day, Steve Davies and I saw 14 White Storks near the confluence of the Avondale and Marimba Streams. They were foraging together with several Black-headed Herons. It seems that the abundant locust numbers were attracting them. Has anyone seen White Storks overwintering elsewhere in Harare lately? Another feathered friend was a Black Stork seen flying about as we enjoyed the White Storks.

Jimmy Muropa (Monavale Vlei Scout)
cosmo@yoafrica.com

Editor's Note: Rosie Mitchell has reported seeing about 8 White Storks in Chikurubi at the end of Pringle Road on 2 July. They were attracted by a fire.



White Storks in

Jimmy's Corner



La Rochelle

by Simon Herring



La Rochelle Hotel in the lush Imbeza Valley, Penhalonga (in the mountainous eastern border area, some 280km from Harare and 20km from Mutare) was formerly the African stately home of Sir Stephen and Virginia Courtauld who lived there from 1953 to 1971.

(La Rochelle was left to the people of Zimbabwe at their death). They were philanthropists who contributed significantly to Zimbabwe. The grounds of the Hotel contain many exotic and also indigenous plants, and as a result the birdlife is very varied. The Hotel bird List was compiled by Dale Hanmer and Bill Chadder between 1990-1992 and lists 162 bird species (Time to update the list, folks! The challenge is on!-Ed). The vegetation is varied - from thick riverine woodland and scrubland, to forest, and the property includes a dam. The sunbirds, attracted by the aloes, are plentiful, and the garden is home to both Red-throated and Green Twinspots. The Hotel is also a great base for daily forays to the Bvumba and Nyanga - why not treat yourself?

Contact: larochellezim@gmail.com or Tel 263 (0)772-306560





Mashonaland

Visiting Bvumba

By Colin de Beer & Vee Hadingham
Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird by C.v.Chamier

Seventeen members from our Mashonaland East Natural History Society visited the Bvumba from 26 to 30 May. We stayed in Buks Conradie's House on the Western slopes of the mountain.

The venue is about 21km from Mutare. The last 5.5kms is a dirt road which had been worked on recently but was still quite rough in places. There are 2 forests in close proximity to the house, one of about 50 hectares right next to it, and a larger one of 250 hectares about half a kilometre to the north. The altitude is 1790m. Conditions were not ideal; chilly, windy and overcast. Early morning temperatures ranged from 9° C to 13° C. We saw 75 different bird species which included most of the Bvumba specials, although not in numbers because of the thick forest vegetation and their secretive habits. Peter Magosvongwe the local guide is very knowledgeable, not only with birds but also trees and I believe butterflies as well. It was with his expert assistance that we ticked so many of the difficult to find Bvumba specials. He is doing a lot of work protecting the local habitats and is also organizing courses at the surrounding schools to promote conservation. The first morning (Friday) was chilly but birding in the forest near the house was sheltered and it warmed up a little during the day. Birding in the forest to the north in the afternoon was difficult and dark in the overcast conditions.

Saturday morning we travelled over the mountain to Leopard Rock and because it was cold and the wind whistled down the fairways we headed for the more sheltered areas. All 19 people in the party had excellent views of the White-starred Robin, perched on a horizontal branch on the edge of the fairway with thick vegetation behind. He hopped onto the ground and back to the perch several times collecting insects; the "stars" on the forehead clearly visible when food was located!

Birding on the immaculate Leopard Rock Golf Course was very rewarding, especially as the aloes were in full bloom and were being patronized by many sunbirds, in particular the Malachite and the Western Olive. Permission to walk on the course is necessary from the Golf Manager, Mr. Rocher, and there may be a charge involved. It was a new experience for some of us to visit Tony's quite famous and talked about Coffee Shop at the top of the mountain, with a welcoming fire to warm us up. We enjoyed the superb selection of cakes in huge slices; deliciously rich and boozy – despite the cost of \$12.00 a slice!! Tony was in great form and highly entertaining!

On the way back we stopped over for a short walk [we were a little worn out by now] at the Hillside Golf Course in Mutare which is also a very worthwhile place for birding and have seen Black-fronted, Gorgeous Bush-shrike and a Bokmakierie here on a previous visit, and Grey Waxbills on this occasion. The Grey Waxbills were in a party with Blue Waxbills on the edge of the tar road leading to the Residential Complex near the club house. They were very relaxed and feeding on both sides of the road, unruffled by the group of 15 people watching them.

Our Bvumba list includes – Red-necked Spurfowl, Common Quail, Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon, Blue-spotted Wood-dove, Tambourine & Lemon doves, Livingstone's Turaco, Crowned Hornbill, White-eared Barbet, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, Square-tailed Drongo, Terrestrial Brownbul, Yellow-streaked, Sombre & Stripe-cheeked Greenbuls, Cape Robin-chat, White-starred & Swynnerton's Robins, Chirinda & Yellow-breasted Apalis, Roberts's Warbler, Cape Batis, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher, Black-fronted & Olive Bush-shrikes, Meves's Starling, Malachite, Bronzy, Collared & Western Olive Sunbirds, Dark-backed Weaver, Red-faced Crimsonwing, Red-throated Twinspot, Yellow-bellied & Grey Waxbill. ✂

Hippo Pools Ringing Excursion

Photo and text by Nick Hart



Narina Trogon @ Hippo Pools

Ten of us arrived at Hippo Pools on Saturday 25 June, after stopping at Amm's Mine near the Umfurudzi gate to see the Black Storks and Lanner Falcons. On the drive from the gate to Hippo Pools camp we saw a Racquet-tailed Roller.

That afternoon Tadeus, the local guide, took some of us for a walk to see the nearby African Hawk-eagle nest. The eagles were around but didn't come down to the nest whilst we were there.

On Sunday, the ringing kit was brought out and the nets were put up around the campsite. The most interesting birds caught were two Bearded Scrub-robins and a male Black-throated Wattle-eye. The best birds seen that day were a male Narina Trogon, Livingstone's Flycatcher, a Bat Hawk and a large mixed flock including Common Scimitarbill, Golden-tailed Woodpecker, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Red-headed Weaver, both Retz's and White-crested Helmet-shrikes and an immature Thick-billed Cuckoo, which was begging for food from its foster-parent, the Retz's Helmet-shrike.

On Monday morning, a short walk with Tadeus produced a lot of paradise-whydahs in non-breeding plumage, but the exact species will unfortunately remain a mystery! A few pairs of Red-throated Twinspot were also seen. On the drive out of Umfurudzi we saw Racquet-tailed Roller again, this time a pair. It was a lovely weekend, with brilliant weather, and I'm sure it was enjoyed by everyone! ✂

Who am I? Guess This Bird & Win



If you know which bird this is, then you might just win

a hamper full of stuff good for you from Spar Julius Nyerere. The birds were



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photographed by C. v. Chamier in Zimbabwe during the dry season. Thank you from *Babbler* to Spar! Send your answer no earlier than August 22nd, 2011 to juliapierini@yahoo.com

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*Nick Hart
See cover Photo
for his work*

Taking pictures of birds is a fairly specialised field of photography. The bird is often small and far away, so a decent zoom is usually necessary. Ordinary compact cameras just don't have the quality or zoom capabilities required to take brilliant bird photographs so the vast majority of professional photographers use Digital SLR cameras. They are more expensive, but DSLR cameras produce better quality images. The big advantage with DSLRs is that they have interchangeable lenses, ranging from a very low zoom such as 10mm, through to a very high zoom such as 800mm. A good lens for bird photography should have a zoom of 400mm or more, but lower zooms can also work – you just have to get closer to the subject! Canon and Nikon are today's two leading DSLR and lens manufacturers. Other companies include Olympus, Sony and Pentax. Canon and Nikon are probably your best bet when looking for a camera – they have their own lens range, and many of the smaller companies make lenses to fit them. When using very high-zoom lenses, you will find that a tripod will be invaluable. It may be a bit awkward to carry, but it eliminates camera shake brought on by hand-holding the camera. The higher the zoom, the more pronounced the effects of camera shake. An alternative to a tripod is a monopod which, as the name suggests, has one leg instead of three. A monopod is less awkward to handle, but on the other hand doesn't offer the same stability as a tripod. Additionally, if you are serious about photography, a very useful purchase for your computer is photo-editing software such as Adobe Photoshop. Once you have all the equipment (which may vary depending on your budget and interest level), you need to practise! A knowledge of the camera's manual settings will help considerably, so I will discuss some of the basics in future articles.

Nick's Fix on Pics





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Birding Kariba

by Tony Alegria

The very informative presentation in March 2011 entitled "Birding in Kariba" was delivered by Ian Riddell. He began by giving us a few details of the Kariba dam itself i.e. the dam wall was closed on 2nd December 1958 and the filling stage lasted till 1963. This has produced a vast expanse of water roughly 290 kms long creating a shoreline of 2164 being the approximate distance from Harare to Cape Town. The average operating level at the dam wall is 485 metres and the dam has an average depth of 29 metres with a maximum of 93 metres. The area covered by water is some 5364 square kilometres.

The filling of the dam created habitat loss: running water; emergent sandbanks; marginal climax communities of *Phragmites* and *Typha*; the 'evergreen' riparian forest belt on the Zambezi and tributaries and vast areas of mopane and deciduous woodlands whose remnants are presently fringing the lake. However in the process, new habitats were created: Wide expanses of open water; wind-blown *Salvinia molesta* mats and 'sudd' communities [now reduced from some 20% to 1% of surface area]; emergent drowned dead trees; *Panicum* foreshore and marginal weeds on land and water and man-made clearings.

As a result some ten species disappeared from the area: African Skimmer; White-browed Robin-chat; Cape Wagtail; Rufous-bellied Heron; Golden Weaver; White-breasted Cormorant; Spectacled Weaver; Little Bittern; Yellow Wagtail and Red-faced Cisticolas. However, after a period of time, they all returned except for the Cape Wagtail. Donnelly and Donnelly 1983 (*Honeyguide*) recorded 342 species on the Zimbabwean side (1967-71) 34 palaeartic migrants and 36 intra-African migrants whilst Roberts' CD-ROM listed some 450 species.

Since Kariba filled up a number of new birds have been seen e.g. Denham's Bustard, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Marsh and African Grass-owls. The Long-toed Lapwing were first seen in August 1994 and have been seen in five different locations. These probably can be seen in protected inlets where there is a lot water weed. When the lake has been low, some of the following species have been seen: Little Grebe, African Pygmy-goose, Hottentot and Red-billed Teals. Thanks Ian for a most enjoyable and thought provoking presentation. ✨



Roosting and nesting waterfowl
by C vChamier

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Mashonaland

For all branch activities, contact a committee member if you need transport to any of the events. M binos – there is usually an extra pair at most outings. There are no BLZ charges for any bird walk depending on the location. Remember to always bring chairs and refreshments.

August 2011

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
1	2	3	4	5	6	Mukuvisi Blatherwick Rd
8	9	10	11	12	Rainham Dam	Lake Chivero
15	16	17	Mash Talk & Social	19	Gosho	Gosho
22	23	24	25	26	27	Mukuvisi Main Gate
						Monavale Vlei
						Ngomakurira
						28

Non-Members and beginners are also welcome to all of our meetings and activities

Mashonaland Talk & Social @ 5.30 for 6.00 pm The venue is the Avondale Sports Club on Brighton Road between Sam Nujoma Street Extension and Upper East Road. There is a cash bar and a security guard.

Mukuvisi Woodland Blatherwick Rd @ 7am (Aug) and 6.30am (Sept). Turn off the Chiremba Road into Ford Road (opposite Queensdale shops) and continue down to Blatherwick Rd (T- junction). Turn right and the gate is about 150 metres on the left. Bring a reasonable tip for the guard, taking into account the value of your vehicle!

Mukuvisi Woodlands Main Gate @7am. Meet in car park(just off Glenara Ave South) down Hillside Rd on the right.

Rainham Dam @ 7am. Meet in the Prince Edward School car park (in front of office to the right) on J. Tongogara Ave

Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary @ 7am (Aug) and 6.30am (Sept). Meet in the Prince Edward School car park(in front of office to the right) on J. Tongogara Ave.

Branch Calendar

Members, non-members and beginners are welcome – don't worry if you do not have a pair of or evening presentation. However there may be entry fees (e.g. National Parks) or a tip required

September 2011

Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
1	Varden Away Trip from Friday Through Monday	3	Mukuvisi Blatherwick RD	Return from Varden	6	7
8	9	Rainham Dam	Lake Chivero	12	13	14
Mash Talk & Social	16	Greystone Park Preserve	Monavale Vlei	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28

Monavale Vlei @ 7am. Meet on the BS Leon side of Fenella Drive

Greystone Park Nature Preserve @ 7am Meet in car park off Halford Rd

Ngomokurira @ 7am Meet at CABS, Northend Rd

Gosho Park Big Birding Day (overnight) @ 10.30am

Meet at Gosho Park, Marondera. Access is along the main tar road to Mutare and the turn off to the left onto a single tar road is just after the Peterhouse School entrance. The last km is dirt.

BLZ Mashonaland Away Outings:

2-5 September 2011 Weekend trip to James Varden's Mavhuradonha Wilderness \$USD 35 pppn incl. accom (thatch-ensuite chalet + cook + walking guide). Contact juliapierini@yahoo.com. +263 (0)772 894562

23-26 September 2011 Chipinge - New Year's Gift (Tea Estate).

Contact: Tony Alegria: talegria@zol.co.zw or +263 (0)4-490375.

Mashonaland South (Kadoma)

Contact Margaret Parrock on +263 (0)68-22005 or her daughter, Coralee on +263 (0)772-739370.

Eastern Districts

Monthly outings are on the last Sunday of the month and depart at 7.30 a.m. from the Mutare Museum. Spare binoculars and field guides are available. Members with a vehicle are encouraged to attend and fuel can be provided. Contact Peter Gwidibira +263 (0)773-524844 or pogggroup.gwidibira38@gmail.com for details.

Matabeleland

Saturday 13 August : Walk at Hillside Dams

The weather will be warmer, we haven't been to the Dams for a while, the area is looking good, and the birding is always worthwhile – so do join us. Meet in the car park by the lower dam at 7:30. There will still be time to dash off and do some shopping afterwards or, if you are not in a hurry, to linger over a cup of tea in pleasant surroundings. For more information phone Adele Edwards on (h) 882242 or 0712366917.

Weekend 26-28 August : Shashi Camp

We've booked the WEZ camp at Shashi, near Fort Tuli . It is sure to be an interesting and entertaining weekend. Provisional plan is to leave on Friday afternoon and return late Sunday. Self catering. Accommodation in the dormitory blocks or bring your own tent. Cost \$10 per person plus a share of the camp cost. Details to follow in a Matland Musings or for more information phone Cecilia Hubbard on (w) 287692 or 0772433733

9 - 11 September : Summer Dassie Census

Believe it or not we all enjoyed the Dassie Census so much we have decided to do it again! Several people suggested we repeat the census later in the year when there is less vegetation, and presumably better visibility. So we are going to give it a try. Of course while it will be warmer we will also have to get up a lot earlier to be in position before dawn. For more information phone Cecilia Hubbard on (w) 287692 or 0772433733 or John Brebner on (h) 242634

23 & 24 September : LBJ Identification with Alex Masterson

Alex Masterson will be spending the weekend in Bulawayo and will share with us some of his expert knowledge of LBJs. He will start with a power point presentation on Friday evening, while on Saturday we will have the opportunity to put into practice in the field some of our newly acquired skills. Please check nearer the time in Matland Musings or with Julia Duprée for details of venues and start times. For more information phone Julia Duprée on 246269

Other Areas

Those members in other areas – we are always interested to hear what is happening in your bit of the country. Please send in what you have seen. -Editor

Matabeleland

Ducks and Geese

by Adele Edwards

Despite the chillier evenings a good crowd of about 25 members and friends turned out for our talk at Hillside Dams on 13 May. White-faced Duck calling from the lower dam added appropriately to the atmosphere. As always the staff at The Boma made us most welcome and provided an enjoyable meal. Adele Edwards gave a presentation on the order Anseriformes which is made up of 4 families. The screamers (3 species) are found only in South America and are odd-looking birds with a body like a goose but a head and beak like a chicken. The Magpie Goose is monotypic and found only in northern Australia. The whistling ducks are represented in Zimbabwe by 3 species: White-backed Duck, White-faced Duck and Fulvous Duck. The fourth family, the Anatidae, is the largest group with 148 species, including swans, ducks and geese, and has a world-wide distribution. In addition to showing some examples of the birds from this family, and talking about some of their common characteristics, Adele also shared some facts and trivia about ducks. World-wide hybridization between Mallards and native species of duck is a cause for concern; in South Africa hybridization has been recorded between Mallards and African Black Duck and Mallards and Yellow-billed Duck. One of the distinctive characteristics of the Anseriformes is that they undergo a full simultaneous moult of their flight feathers which can leave them flightless for a period of up to 2 months. Ducks have several features which enable them to live on water such as: a uropygial gland which secretes an oil which makes the feathers water repellent; air sacs inside their bodies, and specially adapted feathers which trap air, which help them to float; and webbed feet which don't have any nerves or blood vessels so they can swim for long periods in ice cold water. Ducks are said to display the most aggressive sexual behaviour of all bird species and amongst only 3% of bird species to have a penis. (In most species both male and female have a cloaca). However probably everyone's favourite story was when, after discussing migration and movement, Adele told us of how in 1992 a consignment of bath toys, 29000 yellow plastic ducks, were wash off a ship in mid Pacific, and how after 15 years and a journey of 17,000 miles, which included a trip through the Arctic circle, some of these toys washed ashore in the UK and on the Atlantic coast of the USA.



Walk @ Mabukuwene

by Adele Edwards

Namaqua Dove by C.v.Chamier



Bright, sunny day. Thirteen members and two visitors. Forty two species.

It was a gorgeous sunny wintery day, almost warm enough to dispense with jackets and jerseys. By ten o'clock, six of us had arrived and were sitting, lizard-like, on the old sleepers up at the kiosk. Trying to peer through the branches to see if there was anyone else coming to join us, one of the girls commented that all she could see was a big brown dog with a lady on the end of the lead! Eventually, thirteen of us had gathered and the group

comprised eleven members and two visitors – one from BLZ Mashonaland, Anne Louw, (the lady on the end of the lead and her chocolate Labrador dog) and Cath Lawson from Save the Rhino International in London. We split into three groups and set off in different directions.

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Two other members arrived an hour or so later and did their own spot of bird watching in and around the kiosk and the look out.

Fortunately, for me, I had the two youngest members of the group in our team so had two pairs of young, keen eyes and bucketsful of enthusiasm. Apart from the ever present Dark-capped Bulbuls, our first sighting was a solitary male Namaqua Dove sitting on the telephone lines in the middle of a chattering flock of Common Waxbills. At one stage we were crouched trying to peer through the thick undergrowth at what might be making all the racket in the leaf litter when a flock of Helmeted Guineafowl noisily exploded into the air, making hearts race! The old Hamerkop's nest on the path from the gravesite is looking derelict and has obviously not been occupied for some time. Peering over the gravesite wall, we watched as a group of Bronze Mannikins had a great time, splashing madly in one of the birdbaths. Near the gnarled old figtree where we'd seen Spotted Eagle-owls last time we'd done a walk there, we found a pile of what looked like dove's feathers. Some unfortunate had met its end. We had a very close look at a lovely Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird bouncing around in a small cabbage tree overhanging the path which delighted the girls as it was their first sighting of one.

Although the bush is still very thick, the caretaker has cleared the paths and slashed well along the sides, so walking was easy. It was great to see that all the birdbaths dotted about were filled with fresh water. Several other folks were out walking so it was wonderful to see the place being utilized. Obvious absentees from our final list that came to mind were African Hoopoes, Southern Black Tits, Yellow-fronted Canaries, Blue Waxbills, Black-headed Orioles and the other sunbirds although a last minute glimpse of a female Scarlet-chested Sunbird was verified by several bino wielding birders. ✨

Dassie Count

by Jenny Brebner

Rock Dassie J. v. Chamier



There's a rosy pink hue staining the western horizon and, as we watch, it fades to a pale lemon yellow. Natal Spurfowls vent their disapproval at something disturbing them in the undergrowth. Yellow-bellied Greenbuls grumble away as a Black-collared Barbet gives voice some way off. The melodious call of the Black-headed Oriole can be heard above the sound of a Southern Yellow-billed

Hornbill "kori kori-ing" from the top of the paper tree behind us. Also perching on the paper tree are two fluffed up Dark-capped Bulbuls sitting huddled together against the morning chill, busily and noisily discussing something of importance. A dog baboon's aggressive "WHAHOO" is echoing along the hills from a long way off. Southern Black Tits chatter close by accompanied by a lone Chin-spot Batis. A small group of Arrow-marked Babbler chortle past and in the distance, we can hear the eerie piping of a Grey-headed Bush-shrike. Two raucous White-necked Ravens soar overhead, possibly sussing us out to see if we've unpacked the biscuits yet. In the glow from the rising sun, a lone aircraft's vapour trail leaves a perfect, shiny gold line across the gap in the kopjies from where the sun will eventually appear. The tops of the kopjies to the west take on that gorgeous golden glow which one only experiences in the Matobo Hills; the glow slowly moving down, reaching into the valley. As the

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sun finally pops up from behind the huge range to the east, blinding still sleep-filled eyes and throwing a champagne light through the gap, the first dassie emerges to greet the day. We quietly discuss where else in the world we would rather be.....

It's Dassie Counting Weekend. As part of the Black Eagle Survey, this is the one event of the year that is compulsory for the teams in the survey and one which everyone moans about. All the teams pitched up on Friday after work. The Nungu Guesthouse was bursting at the seams while tents of every shape and size mushroomed in the surrounding grounds. After a brief chat about the events for the weekend and a quick recap on how to identify the two species of dassies we were to count, everyone got on with the business of having supper. A stunning milky way meandered across the magnificent star-studded sky overhead. There's nothing to beat a clear Matopos evening. Most teams organized their rations and baskets for the following morning before turning in for a fairly early night in anticipation of their early morning rise. Shortly after we turned in and were just dozing off, a group of Thick-tailed Bushbabies



Verreaux's Eagle by
C v. Chamier

startled us with their loud calling close to our tent.

The alarm master roused us at 4.45am with a cheery "Rise and shine!". Everyone was out and about in no time, muffled up to the eyebrows against the frosty morning chill. It was like a Le Mans start as vehicles were fired up and there was a bit of a tussle to see who could get to the narrow gate first and everyone was off!

All teams were back by six in the evening, most having spent the day after their morning's count checking on their eagle nest sites. Chat around the fire was rather more subdued as stories about the day were recounted and it wasn't long before everyone was abed, once again to be disturbed by the Bushbabies having another raucous choir practice. When the alarm went off the next morning, it was greeted by groans all across camp. The second morning of the dassie count is definitely not greeted with as much enthusiasm as the first. Vehicles left in dribs and drabs, even the engines sounding rather unenthusiastic, with more grumblings about being late.

Our second counting spot requires a short walk and a short climb from where we park the vehicle. Once parked, we set off laden down with chairs, telescope, binos, bird books and the essential basket of munchies and flask of coffee. We staggered along the narrow, uneven path through a thick reed bed. Once we'd plonked down our chairs and got the telescope set up in readiness, we eventually paused to survey the breathtaking vista before us. Where else in the world would we rather be? Nowhere, absolutely nowhere!



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Travelogue

by Ian Riddell



On 20th March we crossed the Limpopo River flats just before the river enters the sea outside Xai Xai in Mozambique. This is the first time I've been that far south in Mozambique and the main road to Maputo crosses 9 km of marshy habitat on a levee. It's quite amazing and extensive habitat with many bridges (to allow flood waters through) and the really interesting wild bit is in the middle, with some 'farming' to the north and south. It teems with all sorts of waterbirds from waders to ducks and herons and would be well worth exploring; a Fulvous Duck with 8 chicks was crossing the road and the Fan-tailed Widowbird was good to see since we don't get it in Zimbabwe except at Kazungula. But on this day I

was especially lucky to see a Eurasian Bittern flying towards the road for about half a minute before it turned, dropped back into the grass and disappeared – a most fortuitous lifer and one that would probably never have been found otherwise. I was impressed by the size and bulky build of this rare bird which doesn't appear to have been recorded in southern Mozambique for some time.

Common Mynas were seen in the streets (or should that be street!) of Nata in February, May and June, with more than six on the last date. This may be known to the Botswana bird club but was news to me and I wonder how long they have been there?

Also in May we stopped at a B & B in the Northern Province of RSA just south of Madikwe Game Reserve, not too far east of Gaborone (where there were more mynas!). The proprietor has been breeding lions until quite recently and we were serenaded for much of the night – like being in Mana. Much as I hate seeing penned beasts I couldn't but be impressed by these males, really big with magnificent manes going black, they were really quite stunning. As we sat in the courtyard to breakfast an equally stunning Crimson-breasted Shrike was hopping around almost underfoot and showing off his finery and voice. It reminded me of our Tuli trip in September 2010 and how some of our group strove and failed to see this bird... it always happens like that! In an acacia a pair of Burchell's Starlings, an adult and a youngster with a noticeable gape, were kicking up a racket, but were most welcome as this was only my second sighting and I had been lamenting not yet seeing them in Botswana – June was a catch-up month and they were seen in various places including another pair in an acacia in another garden to the NE of Madikwe. I was interested that the habitat and behaviour was just like the first two, very noisy in a garden acacia but leaving within an hour or so of sunrise. Had the birds flown in before I got up or did they roost there overnight? On leaving the 'lion spot' I noticed oxpeckers on the cattle and a Pied Crow perched on another; then we passing through ranchland it was frustrating not being able to stop and sort out all those larks flying about; I'm sure there must have been a lifer or two amongst them but all the more reason to visit this interesting area again.

Other interesting sightings were a Red-necked Falcon just south of Nata (May) and a group of 8 Common Ostriches 30 km north of Nata (June) striding across a grassy depression, these probably were wild birds! A Martial Eagle near the west end of the Soutpansberg was great and not far out of Polokwane on the All Days road you will just about always find a flock of Marabou Stork, the attraction being an abattoir.

Important Bird Areas Status Report

by *Kanisios Mukwashi, National IBA Project Manager*

The EU-funded Important Bird Areas (IBA) monitoring project in Zimbabwe is officially ending in October 2011. BirdLife Zimbabwe's role in the project, among others, was to build appropriate capacity among staff in Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, Forestry Commission and Allied Timbers Holdings to monitor protected IBAs. Apart from Protected Areas, Birdlife Zimbabwe has been working with local communities in Driefontein Grasslands, an unprotected IBA, in the monitoring of the site over the past ten years. The monitoring efforts by trained site monitors in IBAs have so far contributed to the production of National Status and Trends reports for 2008 and 2009 and 2010, which is being finalized. These reports have highlighted the issues that surround IBA monitoring and the status of these important sites. The priority habitats that are monitored in IBAs include montane grasslands, wetlands, grasslands, forests, gorges/cliffs, among others. These habitats are home to a variety of globally threatened birds, biome-restricted birds, range-restricted birds and waterbirds. Based on the assessments in 2010, the general condition of protected IBAs was near favourable and the condition of unprotected IBAs was poor. Conservation actions that were undertaken by Protected Areas managers and other stakeholders included updating of management plans for Nyanga National Park and Gonarezhou National park, development of Crane Conservation Action Plan, biodiversity surveys, anti-poaching and law enforcement, education and awareness on biodiversity conservation. These and other actions mainly aim to reduce threats in IBAs. These threats include alien invasive plant species (wattle and pine), sewage effluent pollution, uncontrolled veld fires and overexploitation of natural resources. In this article I have highlighted the status of Nyanga Mountains, which is one of the IBAs that is being monitored in the Eastern Highlands.

Nyanga Mountains lie about 70km north-east of Mutare in the Eastern Highlands, Zimbabwe at coordinates 18°20'S 32°50'E. The core of the IBA is Nyanga National Park, which is 440 km². The site was designated as an IBA due to the presence of globally threatened birds, restricted-range bird species and biome-



Threatened habitat by K. Mukwashi

restricted bird species. The globally threatened birds for the site include Blue Swallow *Hirundo atrocaerulea*, Taita Falcon *Falco fasciinucha* and Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*. The range-restricted birds for the IBA include Roberts's Warbler *Oreophilais robertsi* and Chirinda Apalis *Apalis chirindensis*. The biome-restricted birds include Striped Flufftail *Sarothrura affinis*, Scarce Swift *Schoutedenapus myoptilus* and Red-faced Crimsonwing *Cryptospiza reichenovii*. The major priority habitat in the IBA that is under serious threat is the montane grassland, which provides suitable breeding ground for the globally threatened Blue Swallow. The Blue Swallow is endemic to sub-Saharan Africa and an intra-African migrant which breeds in Zimbabwe, among other African countries. Twenty five percent of the global population of the Blue Swallows breeds in Zimbabwe, in the Eastern Highlands including Nyanga Mountains. BirdLife Zimbabwe has been monitoring the Nyanga Mountains over the past five years. Generally the condition of Nyanga Mountains has been poor since 2008 due to invasions of the montane grasslands by wattle and pine trees as shown above. The shrinking and alteration of the habitat could possibly affect the viability and future populations of the Blue Swallow.



Raptor Surveys in Gonarezhou

by Fadzai Matsvimbo, Conservation Officer

Raptor surveys were carried out in Gonarezhou National Park and surrounding communities. This was done by way of road counts over a period of 11 days (13-23 May 2011). The two Important Bird Areas (IBAs) covered were Save-Runde junction and Limpopo-Mwenezi floodplain and pans. Save-Runde Junction IBA lies within Gonarezhou National Park, whilst Limpopo-Mwenezi floodplain and pans IBA lies in a communal area. A total of 544 raptors of 20 different species were recorded during the surveys. The most numerous group were the vultures, particularly White-backed Vultures. Vultures were only recorded in the National Park and none in the communal areas. The second most numerous species recorded was the Bateleur. The team was first based at Chipinda Pools before moving on to Mabalauta. During our stay at Chipinda the campsite was deserted and it was not strange to wake up to the sounds of elephants munching away at bushes close to the tents. The rangers were helpful as they showed us how to navigate the tough roads of the park. We even had to move around with a machete and an axe for clearing away dead trees along the road. Even so we had three consecutive days of tyre punctures due to the state of the roads. One of our unforgettable scenes was coming across a Black-backed Jackal being chased by a Tawny Eagle. The Tawny Eagle was flying very low, almost landing on top of the jackal. The chase went on for about 50m before the jackal managed to dive into some bushes. The Tawny Eagle perched on a nearby tree and we stayed for another 10 minutes to see what would happen next, but nothing happened. It was indeed an unforgettable sight. The trip was made possible by a grant from the BirdLife African Partnership Secretariat. Hopefully we will be able to continue with this survey in the future. ✂

Bird Awareness Programme in Action

by Rueben Njolomole and Patience Shito

On the 22 June 2011, the Education Officer, Rueben Njolomole, Patience and Maculate, together with Celesta von Chamier, visited Tafara 2 High. The school is a member of BirdLife Zimbabwe. A presentation was made for the 30 students on the importance of the Bird Awareness Programme (BAP) as a means of raising environmental awareness and finding solutions to environmental problems at the school. The students showed a keen interest on the subject, with some questions being raised on the various roles that birds play in the ecosystem. The club was also keen to learn how to make their school a "bird friendly" area so as to attract as many birds as possible to the school grounds. The club expressed their eagerness to tackle any environmental issues they may encounter and work to conserve birds in and around their school. The Education Department will ask birders to take the school for a practical bird identification course at Haka Game Park once permission is granted by the park owners. Bird talks to schools are made interesting by showing the link birds have to their everyday learning activities. One such link is the arrival of Abdim's Storks and the movement of the Inter-tropical Convergence Zone (ICTZ) in Geography. ✂



Editor's Note: BirdLife Zimbabwe recently raised U\$990 for Bird Environmental Education in Schools projects, under which the Bird Awareness Programme falls. The event was hosted and promoted by Celesta & Joerg von Chamier and was organized by Experience Africa Safaris with a presentation from Wilderness Safaris who also offered a fantastic prize for the raffle of three nights at their luxury camp on the Zambezi, Ruckomechi. Chapungu Sculpture garden also donated a sculpture for the raffle. Grateful thanks to everyone who donated, Experience Africa Safaris, Wilderness Safaris and Chapungu for their generosity.

Whirlwind Travels (May 2011)



Double-banded Courser in
Namibia

The idea of Namibia's sandy landscape has always had me enthralled and so finally my boyfriend, Bryan Pattison, and I decided to set off across the

continent. Our trip took us through the top of the Makgadikgadi area, across the Botswana border to Windhoek, to the coast at Swakopmund and Walvis Bay, up through Etosha to the Caprivi Strip near Popa Falls, then back down through the Okavango Delta and Chobe National Park. The birding was excellent, albeit affected by the flooded conditions experienced in both countries. Our first long stop, in Swakopmund, produced a spread of desert and sea birds, Tractrac Chat, Red-capped Lark, Spotted Thick-knee, at Walvis Bay thousands of Great White Pelicans and Greater Flamingos, Grey Plover, innumerable Kelp and Hartlaub's Gulls, Common Whimbrels, Bar-tailed Godwits, Ruddy Turnstones and Wilson's Storm-petrels. Due to stormy weather and time constraints, we couldn't sit down for long enough to properly examine all the lagoon species here but there must

have been a Common Redshank somewhere in there! No Damara Terns on the coastline either as their breeding season had just ended, inspiring their move up the coast to Angola.

Inland to Etosha's vast plains and sunny weather, we drove a beautiful stretch from Heintie's Bay northwest, passing the stately Brandberg mountain range. A short picnic spot here alerted us to some tall birds walking around in the grassland. Ludwig's Bustard and Ruppell's Korhaan were the nice surprise! Lark-like Buntings, much easier to identify than I'd expected, and Lanner Falcon were roadside favourites too, as was a striking black form male Mountain Wheatear. At Etosha, we aptly camped underneath a Sociable Weaver communal nest, which induced some fear of snakes falling onto our tent! Northern Black Korhaan, Double-banded Courser, Lesser Flamingo, Kori Bustard, Greater Kestrel and Black-chested Snake-eagle were abundant in the Park, with Dusky Lark, Spike-heeled Lark and Shaft-tailed Whydahs also making appearances. An interesting find was a Great Spotted Cuckoo, especially as trees are a scarce commodity in this area. We next camped at Ngepi Camp on the Namibian side of the Caprivi Strip, close to Popa Falls. Birding was tremendous, even though high water levels eliminated our chances of finding African Skimmers and other sandbank dwellers. Lesser Jacana, Brown Firefinch, Little Bittern, Rufous-bellied Heron, Long-toed Lapwing and African Pygmy-goose were easy to find among the reeds and lilies, while Swamp Boubou, Bradfield's Hornbill, Hartlaub's Babbler and African Mourning Dove dominated the riverine woodland around camp. A shy Allen's Gallinule, a Martial Eagle bathing with juvenile and a five-strong group of Black Herons umbrella-fishing were further treats. We did, however, miss the Sharp-tailed Starling and Pel's Fishing-owl. Funnily enough, the White-crowned Lapwing, which is so common along our stretch of the Zambezi, disappears further to the east with this bird being considered a real rarity here. Moving onto the Okavango Delta, we saw a few good mopane species: Western Banded Snake-eagle, Arnot's Chat, African Hawk-eagle and numerous close sightings of Slaty Egret were rewarding.

Our last mega stop was Chobe. The terrain is rugged, a mix of sandy mopane patches and sparse thorn scrub. While we did not spot many extra bird species – in fact, I think Black-bellied Bustard, Crested Francolin and Long-tailed Paradise-whydah may have been the only three – the birding added to the thriving stock of game and space and beauty of the Park make it a must-see. ✂

From the Zambezi to the Kalahari Sands

A recent trip up to Vic Falls and Hwange, after about fifteen years, gave us a perfect opportunity to indulge in some bird spotting. We were not disappointed, managing to see a fair range within the various habitats found in the area. In Victoria Falls, Yellow-bellied Greenbuls and a Grey-headed Bush-shrike were seen near the lodges where we were staying as well as a Bearded Scrub-robin while Marabou Storks circled overhead. There were a few Tropical Boubous, Kurrichane Thrushes, and Fork-tailed Drongos (which seemed to enjoy the company of the warthogs grazing near the lodges) and a bunch of Green Wood-hoopoes. In the Falls area itself, there were Schalow's Turacos, Collared Sunbirds, Tawny-flanked Prinias and a Shikra,



Text and Shikra photo by Debbie Wiggins

which posed for us on a tree not far from the bridge lookout point. The place abounded with African Pied Wagtails enjoying the water covered precipices, a few White-fronted Bee-eaters perched conspicuously and flying around in the upper canopy were half a dozen or so Trumpeter Hornbills. Away from the main spray were some Yellow-breasted Apalises and on the path by the fence running along the road, we saw a Long-billed Crombec and an Orange-breasted Bush-shrike. On our second afternoon there, we went on a Wine Route canoe trip above the Falls, very gentle and sedate but good for bird watching. Being winter though, we missed the summer visitors, but still managed to see a quite a few favourites, such as Pied Kingfishers, Hadeda Ibises, Grey and Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills & some specials, namely a pair of raucous Grey-headed Parrots flying over us, identified by the hint of red, a coucal (in the fading light taken for a Senegal). The best moment was when our Canadian visitor asked 'What's that duck-like bird over there?' and was told 'That's an African Finfoot!!' and so it was, skulking under the overhanging greenery by the river. Next day, the more adventurous amongst us went white water rafting and saw a Verreaux's Eagle, an Augur Buzzard, and an African Harrier-hawk. Meanwhile, those that stayed behind saw Yellow-throated Petronias, White-browed Sparrow-weavers, Hamerkops, and at the nearby waterhole, Yellow-billed Storks and an African Spoonbill.

In Hwange, we stayed here on the edge of the Dete Vlei, with a great view of a waterhole. Not long after arriving, we spotted a Golden-breasted Bunting drinking at the waterhole, as well as a couple of Blacksmith Lapwings. Later, we saw a Wahlberg's Eagle, and also a Tawny Eagle and were thrilled when a Hooded Vulture swooped down to the waterhole for a drink. We also had good sightings of the beautiful Crimson-breasted Shrike, as well as Magpie Shrikes, and a few Southern White-crowned Shrikes. Back in camp, and easily visible during the day in one of the large thorn tree near our lodges were a pair of African Barred Owlets, apparently resident there.

Our drive through the main Hwange Game Park yielded sightings of all three hornbills – African Grey, Yellow-billed and Red-billed – plus we saw a group of six Southern Ground-hornbills just before entering the park itself. Other good sightings were Red-billed Spurfowls, Purple and Lilac-breasted Rollers, a Cardinal Woodpecker, and an African Scops-owl. A new one for us was a Capped Wheatear, which was sitting on some elephant dung, and waited patiently while we clicked away with the camera!

June 2011 ❧

Birds of India & Tigers too!

In February this year I spent 3 weeks in central India visiting 3 National Parks in search of tigers (the birds were an added bonus). It was winter so the forests were dry with a few small streams and the vegetation varied between tall teak trees with bamboo and scrub undergrowth and open de-forested areas which used to be villages and now become swamps in the Monsoon season. On our first drive in open Jeeps at 6 a.m., freezing cold and wrapped up in anoraks, beanies, blankets and hot water-bottles, we saw our first tigress chasing a spotted deer, really beautiful and so exciting! Then we were able to ride the Park's patrol elephants as close as 10 metres to her two 20 month-old cubs who just lay in the sun watching us. Altogether we saw 12 tigers, one leopard, 2 wild dogs, 2 jackals, mongooses, a flying squirrel, flying foxes (large fruit bats), four different types of deer, (males with beautiful antlers), a large blue-black antelope called a Nilgai, some huge Gaurs which are bovines with heads like bisons and lots of Langur monkeys and Rhesus Macaques. All so new to me and so interesting. Our guides, a Swede and an Indian, were avid birders so were delighted to find 8 enthusiasts in our group of 16. Altogether we counted 127 species, some of which we don't see in Zimbabwe are: Painted Storks with pink and black wing markings, Sarus Crane (tallest flying bird), Black-necked Stork (tallest stork), Crested Serpent-eagle, Pond Heron, Bar-headed Goose, Painted Spurfowl, Indian Roller, Racquet-tailed Drongo, very rare Black Redstart, Greater Coucal, Sirkeer Malkoha, Eurasian Eagle-owl, Mottled Wood-owl, Brown Fishing-owl, White-browed and Citrine Wagtails, Scarlet Minivet, Thick-billed Flowerpecker (unwittingly spreads the parasite mistletoe), tiny Silverbills, Rufous Treepies, Blue-capped Rock-thrush and Red Junglefowls, crowing and looking exactly like our bantams! Other birds we saw were similar to ours; storks, egrets, spoonbills, lapwings, sandpipers, a Greater Painted-snipe, herons, osprey, francolins, hornbills, orioles, barbets, flycatchers and colourful kingfishers (Stork-billed, White-throated and Eurasian), shrikes, sunbirds and many others. Egyptian, Long-billed and White-rumped Vultures [Indian White-backed] are slowly increasing in numbers since the banning of Diclofenac which is an anti-inflammatory drug used on cattle. No Hindus kill, eat or bury cattle so the vultures feed on the carcasses and die. We spent our last 3 days at the Taj Mahal in Agra – what a spectacular and beautiful monument. It was built in 1650 by the Shah Jahan where his wife, and later himself, are buried. It is made of white marble with words of the Koran inlaid in black opal and decorated with inlaid flowers using corneleum, jasper, lapis lazuli, malachite and turquoise and took 22 years to complete. We found Indians to be extremely hospitable, polite and charming. Nothing was too much trouble and it was really a wonderful experience. ❀

Photo of Common Myna by Nick Hart





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Tailfeathers

For the uninitiated, Tailfeathers is a collection of interesting sightings throughout Zimbabwe.

Marico Sunbird at Mukuvisi Woodlands QDS1731C3

On 3rd of July 2011 at about 07h30. I was birdwatching at the Administration Block and garden area of the Woodlands, close to the game lookout over the dam, and very close to the Hide Acknowledgement Board and Aviary, when I saw a male Marico Sunbird from about 4m, low down in some scrubby acacia trees. I had 8 X 42 binoculars and Roberts Bird Guide by Hugh Chittenden. The noticeable feature was the size, nearly that of the Scarlet-chested Sunbird and not that of the little Purple-banded Sunbird which is much the same size as the Variable Sunbird that I had just seen a few moments before. The last time I saw a Marico Sunbird was at Pamuzinda, near Selous in 2010. I later linked up with Dave Dalziel and the bird-watching party at the other end of the Woodlands, and he told me that the Marico Sunbird had been seen in the National Botanic Gardens, Harare. I write this note just to alert people of the presence of the Marico Sunbird at the Mukuvisi Woodlands, and to alert birdwatchers that the Marico Sunbird seems to be extending its range northwards.

D.V. Rockingham-Gill rgill@zol.co.zw

Bird Sightings at Mavhuradonha Mountains Wilderness Area (IBA 19), Zimbabwe

On a couple of safaris in March and May of this year 2011, I have had sightings of Western Banded Snake-eagles. Both times they have been calling, circling and displaying. In October of 2010 I also saw an immature bird perched in an open canopied tree beside a stream in the wilderness area. The altitude is at approximately 1200m asl. I am wondering if there have been breeding records from this area before? Two birds were seen at Kopje Tops Lodge which is also a site that we frequently see raptors such as African Hawk-eagle, Brown and Black-chested Snake-eagle, African Crowned and Martial Eagles. I believe that as the wilderness area is a protected area from the Zambezi Valley (650 m asl) via the Musengezi and Tingwa River systems to the Highveld altitudes (1200+ meters), that this forms an important corridor for such raptors and their prey species. Also of interest was when we had the rain on the 1st and 2nd of June this year, I heard a Klass's Cuckoo calling in the morning. The rain was very tropical in nature, with thunder, lightning and very heavy rain for that time of year. The weather had also been fairly warm in general preceding this rain. So I am wondering if this cuckoo was always there as a non breeding altitudinal migrant, and thus not normally vocal, or it got confused with the weather pattern – there had been a strong influence from the west – and was brought into the area by the conditions and as it felt like still being summer, it decided to call? Information on these observations would be helpful.

James Varden james@vardensafaris.com



Crowned Eagle by C v. Chamier

TAILFEATHERS CONTINUED

Immature Thick-billed Cuckoo Harare June 2011

On Monday 6th June around 13:30, we noticed a medium sized bird on the front lawn of our house in Alexandra Park in Harare. From a distance, it looked like a raptor, but it was strange that it would be hopping around the lawn. To our surprise, we managed to walk fairly close to it. As we watched it, we noticed that it had a broken wing. We caught it and put it in an old bird cage and then proceeded to try and identify it so that we could feed it. We decided that it was probably a cuckoo, but we were not sure which one. We left it in the cage inside our house overnight, but unfortunately on Tuesday morning we found that it had died. On Thursday we managed to get J. Pierini's contact details and organized to meet with her and D. Dalziel to get a positive I.D. Eventually it was identified as an immature Thick-billed Cuckoo which is very rare in Harare and has no recorded sightings in the month of June. **Andy & Louise Pascoe**



Immature Thick-billed Cuckoo C v. Chamier

Palm-nut Vulture in Mana Pools

We first saw the Palm-nut Vulture in January 2011 and then again on June 12 in the same area. It was seen swooping over the water hyacinth on the first stream after Long Pool and then it landed on an *Faidherbia albida* branch. We have also seen one several times along the beach at Rio Savanne (just north of Beira, Mozambique) – the last time being the beginning of July 2011. **Peter Buttress**

Miombo Rock-thrush at Umwindsidale, Harare 07 June 2011 Time: 9.30am

This morning I spotted a pair (male & female) of Miombo Rock-thrushes along the gravel road section of Luna Road, Umwindsidale (Harare). Initially I spotted a male flying between the trees and perching on a branch for a few seconds, where I was able to properly identify it. After a few minutes and few steps, I

saw the female on a branch on a tree just next to the road, about 12-15 meters from me. Plenty of time to observe and enjoy her. Then I heard an unknown call for me from a far away (±50 meters) acacia tree, and spotted the male again, this time he was singing. He sang for about three minutes, then he flew to the top of a tree next to the one where the female was perching, about 15 meters from me. They stood there for another couple of minutes then flew away. In total, I was able to observe them for more than five minutes. I had seen another male - far away and for a few seconds only - in the same area last year in September or October. **Western Violet-backed Sunbirds (Harare 19 June 2011)** were spotted down Haslemere Lane in Umwindsidale. **Enrico Leonardi**



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