

BABBLER

The Newsletter of



BirdLife Zimbabwe
The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

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Very many thanks are extended to Mr Graham Speedy for his generous donation which has covered the print run required for this issue of *The Babbler*.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

***The Babbler* 102**

To celebrate the 100th edition of the Babbler, a colour magazine was published with articles and photos and this included adverts to cover the costs. The same format was used in Issue 101. These issues were well received by the membership and a wider readership and Council is very appreciative of the contribution made by Julia Pierini and Celesta von Chamier to those Issues.

However, Council has decided to revert to the original style of the Newsletter. There are practical reasons for coming to this decision: although Issues 100 and 101 reached a wider audience, they raised problems as to content and distribution; also, Council considers that the original style of the Newsletter is more appropriate and relevant for the membership of BLZ. There are, in addition, legal reasons for coming to this decision which relate to the legal status of BLZ as a Private Voluntary Organisation, on which Council received legal advice.

Regrettably, Julia Pierini has resigned from the position of Editor. Council is very grateful to her for editing *The Babbler* over the past year and for all her enthusiasm. In her place, Council is pleased to announce that Fiona Greiffenberg has agreed to take over. Fiona has been a member of BLZ for a number of years and is familiar with the organisation and its publications.

The Harare Garden Bird Survey

This HGBS is well under way, being in its 13th week as of 19th September, with 54 participants. More accurate results are obtained the greater the number of participants, so if you are not already taking part, please consider joining this very worthwhile project, and encourage others to do so too. The HGBS is also open to non members, so do invite your families, friends, neighbours and colleagues to join in. Email hqbs@blz.co.zw for full information and to register. It is not too late!

Field Cards

Although regular BLZ outing sightings are always recorded, very few cards beyond that are received by BLZ Office. Members who go on any trips are encouraged to complete field cards. Even if only one interesting bird is seen this record is valuable to the organization, as are all records. All members have been sent a field card by email or hard copy. Contact birds@zol.co.zw if you have not received a card, or to submit one.

African Bird Club

Join the African Bird Club and support bird conservation in Zimbabwe. The US\$30.00 annual subscription, which is payable at the BirdLife Zimbabwe Office, is retained for projects with the approval of ABC! You will receive their publication *Bulletin of the African Bird Club*.

Dorothy Wakeling

OBITUARY

Brian Frederick Peters 1950 - 2011

A long-standing BirdLife Zimbabwe member, Brian will be remembered by so many for being the hunter accompanying BirdLife trips to Rifa Camp. He won people over by his friendliness and hospitality.

Less well known were his efforts to bring birds and nature as a whole to schools at Eiffel Flats and each year he ran courses for children at Rifa.

He supported me wholeheartedly in my efforts to secure funding from the joint partnership of Rio Tinto (now RioZim) and BirdLife International to put a Bird Awareness Programme into schools in the Eiffel Flats and Renco catchment areas. The project concluded with a fascinating Rifa visit for Eiffel Flats. Renco schools had a memorable Malilangwe camp, a fitting finale attended by pupils, teachers, Dorothy Wakeling, Jonathan Stacey (BLI Representative) and myself. Brian in no time at all had

children spooing and whistling bird calls. At night he regaled the adults with amazing stories of local and exotic fishing and hunting expeditions. No one will ever forget these evenings where an atmosphere of warm camaraderie prevailed.

Through his cheerful and enthusiastic interpretation of the wilderness he inspired many to appreciate it more fully and some to conserve Zimbabwe's stunning wildlife. His grandson may follow in his footsteps; at the age of three he could recognise several bird calls.

To his wife, Alison, daughters Gemma and Kirsty and their families we extend our deep sympathy.

Leslee Maasdorp (former BLZ Education Manager)

ERRATA CORRIGE

BABBLER 101

On page 16 the article entitled "Walk at Mabukuwene" was written by Jenny Brebner and not by Adele Edwards.

FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES

Contact a committee member if you need transport to any of the events. **Members, non-members and beginners are welcome** – don't worry if you do not have a pair of binos – there is usually an extra pair at most outings. There are no BLZ charges for any bird walk or evening presentation. However there may be entry fees (e.g. National Parks) or a tip required depending on the location. Remember to bring chairs and refreshments.

MASHONALAND BRANCH

Evening Meetings are on the 3rd Thursday of each month. 5.30pm for 6.00pm. 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.

Thursday 20th October: Penduline Tits and nests likely to be found in the garden for the Harare Garden Bird Survey by Alex Masterson

Thursday 15th November: A presentation on Birding in Hwange by Nick Hart

Extra Evening Meeting Thursday 6th October 2011 at 5.30 p.m. for 6 p.m. at Prince Edward School Sixth Form Study Centre Lecture Theatre. Nancy Jacobs is visiting Harare to undertake research on Rud Boulton at the Atlantica Research Station. Nancy is an historian of Africa at Brown University, USA, who is completing a book on people and birds in 20th century Africa. She has been researching Boulton for a chapter on the international politics of ornithology during the cold war. She looks forward to discussing her preliminary findings with those who remember Rudyerd Boulton and to hearing reminiscences about him. This promises to be a fascinating lecture. Please let others know about this event.

"Rudyerd Boulton and the Atlantica Research Station in Harare: An American Dream of Science and Conservation in Africa"

Before he moved to Southern Rhodesia in 1959, Rudyerd Boulton was a field ornithologist of middle Euro-American origins who became a leader of expeditions to Africa, a connoisseur and collector of modernist art, a Northern Liberal on matters of race, and a Washington spymaster. He also married three very different women who were his partners on these personal and professional journeys. His retirement in the Central African Federation was dedicated to his vision for US engagement in a multi-racial independent Africa. Specifically, Boulton aimed to foster science in the service of conservation. The dream floundered on several problems: his misreading of CAF politics, money troubles, his own impractical nature, and the inevitable sorrows of aging. The story of the Atlantica Station is more than

a small chapter in Zimbabwean local history; it is a story of a mid-twentieth century American vision of Africa and of one man's efforts to realize that impossible dream.

Outings

Birding is very rewarding in October / November as we look out for the arrival of Palaeartic and Intra African migrants. Noting the dates of arrival of migrants and observing population densities is important as these may be altering due to changing weather patterns and other impacts along the way.

Saturday Outings

Saturday 8th October and 12th November 7 a.m. Rainham Dam. Meet in the Prince Edward School car park on Josiah Tongogara Ave

Saturday 26th October National Botanic Gardens 7.00 a.m. Meet in the car park

Saturday 19th November Haka Park, Msasa 7.00 a.m. Meet at the Park entrance.

Sunday Outings

Sunday 2nd October and 6th November 6.30 a.m. Mukuvisi Woodlands Turn off the 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 a reasonable tip for the guard, taking into account the value of your vehicle! Don't forget refreshments for after the walk when we record the number of species.

Sunday 9th October and 13th November 6.30 a.m. Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary Meet at Prince Edward School car park on Josiah Tongogara Ave

Sunday 16th October and 20th November 7.00 a.m. Monavale Vlei Meet on the B.S Leon side of Fenella Drive

Sunday 23rd October 6.30 a.m. Christon Bank Botanical Reserve. Meet at CABS Head Office Northend Rd Borrowdale

Saturday 26 and Sunday 27th November. Big Birding Weekend. 24 or 36 hour. Details to follow.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

2 October: walk on NUST campus

Back in February we went for our first walk on the NUST campus. 61 species were recorded and we only covered a small part of the available area. We will be undertaking another walk in October and hopefully Professor Peter Mundy and some of his students will join us. Meet outside the main entrance to NUST, on Cecil Avenue, at 6:30 a.m. For more information contact Gaynor Lightfoot on phone home (evenings) – 241008, email dorisdog@yoafrica.com.

10 - 13 October: WEZ Hwange Game Count

Many of our members are also members of WEZ and will be participating in the annual game count in Hwange National Park. WEZ will be providing participants with a field card and a special species form to be completed at their allocated pan during the period of the 24 hour count; these forms will be passed on to BLZ. If you are lucky enough to be taking part in the count do also keep a separate record of your sightings for the entire trip and let us have these on your return.

21 October: Talk on New Zealand birds

Summer's back with those lovely, long, lazy evenings. Meet at The Boma, Hillside Dams, at 6:30 p.m. for a few drinks and / or a meal and enjoy listening to our favourite resident kiwi, Vince Pegg, talk about New Zealand birds. For more information contact Adele Edwards on phone mobile – 0712366917, home (evenings) – 882242, email admin@dambari.com

28 – 30 October: Summer Dassie Census

Because of a clash of events we had to delay our proposed follow up dassie count but we haven't given up on the idea! Participating teams will meet at Nungu Farmhouse on the evening of Friday 28th October prepared for early starts on both Saturday and Sunday. (Sunrise = 05.00) For more information phone Cecilia Hubbard on (w) 287692 or 0772433733 or John Brebner on (h) 242634

26 – 27 November: Birding Big Day

This event is growing in popularity and we hope to have even more teams, from all around the country, taking part this year. Basically the aim of the day is, working in teams of a maximum of 4 people, to record as many species of bird as possible with a continuous 24-hour period, within a 50km radius of your chosen centre point. You can be as serious or as light-hearted about this as you like. Even if you have other commitments over the weekend, as several of us in Bulawayo do have, you can still work your Birding Big Day around them. Raising sponsorship is optional but has certainly proved a successful fund raiser for the various branches in the past. We hope to circulate sponsorship forms and further details and information before the end of September. For more information phone Adele Edwards on 0712366917, home – 882242, email admin@dambari.com

COUNTRY DISTRICTS

Mashonaland South (Kadoma) – Contact Margaret Parrock on 068-22005 or her daughter, Coralee on 0912-739370.

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 0913-524844 or poggroupp.gwidibira38@gmail.com for details.

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. Ed

RECENT REPORTS and SIGHTINGS

National Office

World Bird Festival

Rueben Njolomole, BirdLife Zimbabwe Education Officer

BirdLife Zimbabwe is planning to hold the World Bird Festival with Harare and Norton schools on the first Friday of October 2011. The Education Department is proposing to take the event to Norton at Twin Lakes Primary School. This school has taken the whole school approach in their participation in the Bird Awareness Programme. It is because of this reason that organisers of the mentioned event chose this venue in honour of the school's efforts to spread news on bird conservation.

The World Bird Festival will be commemorated under the theme Vultures: A species worth saving. This is a locally-bred theme that seeks to voice the need to conserve our vultures. This also falls in line with one of BirdLife International's key result areas of raising awareness on vultures during the year 2011. Schools will be asked to present all they know about vultures and how best to conserve them. A small quiz competition has also been scheduled for during this event. All are welcome to commemorate with schools the importance and conservation of vultures.

Crane conservation in Driefontein Grasslands- an update

Togarasei Fakarayi, Projects Officer

The project on the use of scarecrows to reduce crop damage by cranes in Driefontein Grasslands has drawn great interest from many stakeholders in the area. Cranes have in the past been reported to damage crops in Driefontein Grasslands when crops were at their infant stage. An experiment was therefore conducted during the early stages of planting in both dry and wet planting seasons. The aim of the project was to improve crane conservation through mitigating human-crane conflict. The scarecrow methods tested were effective and there were no crop damages recorded in the sampled crop fields where these structures were erected. These methods were conservation friendly as they did

not cause any harm to cranes and the environment. The project has received overwhelming support from local villagers and contributed to improved crane conservation in Driefontein Grasslands.

Besides the human-crane conflict mitigation project, a series of conservation activities took place between November 2010 and September 2011. These include snap ground surveys of cranes, and visits to sites and Site Support Groups. From the snap surveys conducted, interesting sightings of both Wattled and Grey Crowned Cranes were noted. There was improved breeding success of Wattled Cranes during the 2010-2011 wet season. In December 2010 seven pairs of Wattled Cranes each with a juvenile were recorded from the few traditional sites in the area. Six pairs of Wattled Cranes each with a juvenile were again sighted at the end of January 2011. In April 2011, a flock of 15 Wattled Cranes was recorded about 20km north of the Driefontein Mission. Another flock of 24 Wattled Cranes was recorded at Widgeon Pan on 13 May 2011. The local villagers in Markdale and Widgeon areas (North of Driefontein) have reported frequent sightings of this flock with the same total number being recorded. For Grey Crowned Cranes, a flock of 42 was recorded at the Driefontein Mission Farm on 04 November 2010. During the January 2011 and April 2011 snap surveys flocks of Grey Crowned Crane were missing at their traditional sites. It is thought that they might be breeding but this needs further investigation. Flocks of 67+ and 50+ Grey Crowned Cranes were then recorded again at the Driefontein Mission Dam in July 2011 and September 2011 respectively. Also a separate flock of 33 Grey Crowned Cranes was recorded at the Old Driefontein Dam (Shashe) in September 2011. More than 7 juveniles were sighted in the July flock of 67+. Several pairs of Grey Crowned Cranes were recorded in Driefontein Grasslands between December 2010 and September 2011. Of great importance, awareness campaigns on crane conservation extended to three more villages namely Grootfontein, Chinu and Good Hope Dekete in December 2010 were successful.

The final version of the report on the Action Plan for the conservation of Wattled and Grey Cranes was produced in November 2010. BLZ is grateful to Ms Kerryn Morrison for producing this report. Limited funding is the main challenge that is delaying the implementation of this plan and various conservation activities in Driefontein Grasslands and other crane areas in Zimbabwe. Priority conservation activities for Driefontein in the immediate future are:

- To carry out surveys of cranes and frequently monitor all breeding pairs of cranes
- To provide support to and work with local communities on repairing broken dams that are used as breeding habitats by cranes
- To control veld fires through establishing and training fire fighting teams in villages, putting fire breaks around crane breeding sites, and to carry out an education and awareness programme on the control of veld fires.
- To strengthen the existing human livelihoods projects and initiate more income generating projects to reduce pressure on wetland resources.
- Scaling up the scarecrow model project
- Carry out research on foraging behaviour of cranes in a changing climate
- To continue supporting the education and awareness programmes in local schools.

IBA Monitoring Project Report

Kanisios Mukwashi, IBA National Project Manager

The Project "Instituting effective monitoring of Protected Areas (IBAs) as a contribution to reducing the rate of biodiversity loss in Africa" commonly referred to as "The IBA project" is officially coming to an end on the 19th of October 2011. An End of Term Evaluation of the IBA monitoring project was conducted in August/September 2011 in selected countries implementing the project, i.e. Kenya, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The objectives of the evaluation were to; identify strengths and weaknesses in implementation of the IBA project; assess level of achievement of the intended impact and potential for sustainability; capture lessons in project design, implementation and management; and make recommendations regarding specific actions that might be taken in future projects. A comprehensive report will be shared with BirdLife partners in due course.

The Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, Forestry Commission and Allied Timbers Holdings authorities confirmed that they are willing to continue with monitoring activities in their areas despite the approaching end of the European Commission (EC) funded project. BirdLife Zimbabwe will continue to

coordinate monitoring activities throughout the country and to ensure that IBA forms are collated, analysed and national status and trends reports produced in the future. If funds are available BLZ also aim to upscale IBA monitoring into other areas, which were not covered under the EC funding. Those who are willing to contribute in gathering of information in IBAs monitoring forms can be obtained at BLZ offices or we can send you a copy by e-mail. For further information please contact Kanisios at kanisios@blz.co.zw.

Mashonaland

RIFA: Notes from the Rifa Vulture Restaurant and Surroundings

Leslee Maasdorp

This vulture feeding facility has been operational for a few decades at Rifa Conservation Education Camp. Recent records of interest are given below.

At a well attended feast in May 2011 a couple of White-backed Vultures mated on the ground next to the feeding mass. They squawked loudly but no notice was taken of them. This may be the first time the courting and mating has been observed on the ground – all other records refer to mating on a branch of a tree.

On 29/6/2011 near the turn off to Vulture Point 981140 a White-backed Vulture nest was seen in a tree. A White-backed Vulture was perched above the nest, perhaps shading the eggs or chicks (Reported by E. Baillie).

The next day, 30/6/2011, at the feeding arena, 115 Vultures, mostly White-backed, fed off Kudu bones. After an hour an immature male lion appeared, chased off the birds, examined the bones and went off later to appear with a mature lioness.

On 17/7/2011 Barwick School recorded 129 Vultures attending a feast (Impala remains). Of these, 123 were White-backed Vultures with 14 seen as immature birds. One of the adults had a broken left leg.

RIFA: Evening Meeting Report 21 July 2011

Jörg von Chamier

On July 21st Jörg von Chamier presented his report to the monthly BLZ crowd at the Avondale Sports Club. About 50 members and guests were present at an evening with electricity! Therefore the presentation of all together 89 photographs went smoothly and with some fun. He reported how BLZ joined forces with some of our Zambian friends for a prolonged birding weekend over Easter 2011, 22nd to 25th April. We met at RIFA, a Camp set up in 1982 by Zimbabwe's Hunters Association; near Chirundu 307 km from Harare as the Pied Crow flies. He introduced by name and photographs the hosts Dave Winhall and Elspeth Baillie and John Osbourne as a guide. Google Earth satellite pictures gave an overall impression of the area before he went through the camp, accommodation and the several walks of the weekend. Some birds got special attention during his presentation. Arnot's Chat, Mosque Swallows, Rufous-bellied Heron, nesting White-fronted Bee-Eaters. A series of photograph showed the set-up of the vulture restaurant, where later over a hundred vultures of different species (Hooded, White-backed, White-headed) but also Marabous and a single Tawny Eagle appeared.

The presentation happened with some humour. An advertisement break (for CDs of Zimbabwean birdsongs and future BLZ outings) was as well included as pictures of a Hornbill Easter Egg, rowdy vultures, a Lester Honeyguide (no decision was taken about Lesser or Greater Honeyguide) and a couple sundowner shots. 173 species were counted on that trip.

Monavale Vlei Report: August – September 2011

Jimmy Muropa, Monavale Vlei Scout, Conservation Society of Monavale. cosmo@yoafrica.com

The green shoots of the grasses are emerging out of the blackness from the July 29 burn. This open landscape provides unusual and interesting sightings. Take Tuesday 30th August as an example – a Side-striped Jackal was spotted near the confluence of the streams! For a couple of minutes I watched in amazement as it wandered about. Later, realising my prying presence it quickly slipped into the reeds. A week later two Duiker were seen foraging in the same area.

Birding has been good with Crowned Lapwings now breeding; Capped Wheatears and African Pipits are loving the open burnt areas. On 9th September I witnessed a situation I couldn't comprehend. An alarm call from an African Hoopoe beside the viewing platform drew my attention. About two metres away from the African Hoopoe an Olive Grass Snake lay. This Olive Grass Snake is resident there and was outside its hole. For more than 15 minutes the bird and snake were staring at each other as if they were trying to conjure up something. All through this the African Hoopoe would constantly utter its usual 'Hoop Hoop' call with intermittent alarm calls. Was the African Hoopoe curious or fascinated by the snake or vice versa? I couldn't understand nor explain such behaviour yet I enjoyed the scenario unfold before me. On 3 occasions in June African Hoopoes were seen, but regularly since July 5th they have congregated in numbers of 3 or 4 on a daily basis near the look-out and on the Tree Nursery Plot.

One Yellow-billed Kite was seen on 16 August, and one White-faced Scops Owl on 17th August. Greater Striped Swallow was seen on 9th September. Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters were present from May 15th until 3rd September. In July 103 different bird species were recorded, August 99 and at the time of writing 93 so far for September.

This week two groups of Gateway School Grade 5 pupils have visited the Vlei for wetland environmental outings, with another group due next week.

Monavale Vlei Walk Sunday 18th September 2011

Ken Dixon

Despite the late September date it was surprisingly cool and breezy, but sunny, for the 8 members who gathered at the viewing platform where the birds were in attendance whilst we waited. The Vlei has been more thoroughly and comprehensively burnt this year, but the fresh green grass was bursting through the blackness, wild flowers in full bloom and the view in all directions was unrestricted.

We first made for the BS Leon end and found Variable Sunbird, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler and Lesser Honeyguide in the riparian vegetation. The widows and bishops still in winter plumage flitted about among the reeds, alongside the African Marsh and Little Rush Warblers. Further out towards the central area there were Capped Wheatear flying from one set of twigs to another showing off their white rumps and broad black breast bands. They pass through annually en route for their breeding grounds in the south-west. Crowned Lapwing were also present and already breeding. The Grey-rumped Swallows, having just finished breeding, were abundant as always. One African Pipit was spotted. A small flock of 16 Orange-breasted Waxbill appeared fleetingly before diving back into the cover of the blackened grassland. Over 40 of these exquisite little birds were counted. Lanner Falcon, Black-shouldered Kite, Gabar Goshawk and Little Sparrowhawk (this seen in the Indigenous Tree Nursery) were the raptors of the walk. 42 species were recorded.

Outing to Goshu Park Sunday 24th July 2011

With a few birders from Marondera joining us, we had just over twenty birders present on this peaceful, sunny Sunday. We were told that just a couple of weeks back, this park had really been cold and birding very poor. With high expectations, as the day was now sunny and warming up rapidly, two groups of walkers set off in opposite directions. Peter Banks (a Marondera guy), Jacko and John Williams and I went off by vehicle to try and locate bird parties.

After much travelling around the perimeter of the park, we came to an area where there appeared to be more than just a Yellow-fronted Tinker Barbet or a Black-headed Oriole calling, on investigating we were able to find a Fork-tailed Drongo, a Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, a Miombo Tit and a few

White-fronted Helmet Shrikes. This was not very promising as we had already covered most of the perimeter and had to reverse from a couple of dead ends.

We continued for some time trying in vain to hear a noisy bird party. We eventually saw a couple of birds on a well-treed isolated rocky outcrop and stopped to have a look. Well, we were rewarded by the site of a White-breasted Cuckoo-shrike and a Drongo. After a short period, we began hearing a few bird calls and caught site of birds flitting between trees. This was the best spot we had found and proceeded to have a really good look at was about. Besides the White-breasted Cuckoo-shrike and a Drongo already mentioned before, what we saw included: Mocking Cliff-chat, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, White-helmet Shrikes, Lazy Cisticola, Miombo Tits, Southern Black Tit, Yellow White-eyes, Green-capped Eremomela and a Black-backed Puffback.

The only other bird we saw after this was a Common Fiscal on the way to the meeting point to do the bird list. The walking parties hadn't fared very well either and the combined bird list was just 53 until a Cape Turtle-Dove was heard during the call over. And whilst packing to leave for home, some ten Marabou Storks flew overhead.

A few birders stayed on after most of the birders had left for Harare and managed to add another 7 birds to the list giving us a combined total of 62 Birds. Besides a couple of Woodpeckers etc. they picked up the Spotted Creeper and Miombo Rock Thrush.

Ngomokurira, Goromonzi District 28th August 2011 QDS 1`731CA
David Rockingham-Gill rjill@zol.co.zw

About 8 of us including a few new members climbed Ngomkuririra and when we got there a very cold wind started blowing, those watching weather reports probably decided to stay at home. Very few birds were seen, but amongst the rock birds we saw the Lanner Falcon (a pair), the Rock Martin (16), the Mocking Cliff Chat (a male), Boulder Chat (4), the Lazy Rock Cisticola, the Red-winged Starlings and the Cape Bunting(10). The only sunbird identified was the Miombo Double-collared Sunbird and they were common. The only other raptors were the African Harrier-Hawk and possibly a Rock Kestrel.

Birds of the bush: Cape Turtle Dove, Emerald Spotted Wood-Dove, Speckled Mousebird, African Grey Hornbill, Black-collared and Whytes Barbet* , White-browed Robin Chat and the White-throated Robin Chat, Bar throated Apalis and the Neddicky, Chinspot Batis, the Tropical Boubou, the Black-backed Puffback and the Orange-throated Bush Shrike (heard). No weavers were seen, the Jameson's Firefinch, Blue Waxbill and the Yellow fronted Canary were also there.

Another bird not positively identified was a Sawwing Swallow. Which one?

There were new rock paintings - in the last couple of months someone has repainted the rocks showing the way to the Bushman paintings Gallery, the Trig. beacon and the Cave paintings with the elephants. Only Richard Dennison went to have a look at the last spot.

The lesson for the next outing is to explore the lower sides of the kopje and forget the trek up to the beacon. While filling in the field card a Black Stork flew overhead, but it is probably not using the old nest site and has another further east. I was lucky, on my second trip up the kopje, my noisy family put up a beautiful pair of klipspringers which I watched for a good 5 minutes.

* Can anyone with internet maybe tell us more about Alexander Whyte (1834-1905), a naturalist in Nyasaland, (now Malawi) where he collected extensively between 1891 and 1896 under the patronage of Sir Harry Johnston?

Other reports on the same place can be found in Babblers 61, 73, 85, 89 & 93.

Muchichiri Lodge, Mana Pools National Park 1529C2 24th-29th July 2011

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

I was lucky to see a young Crowned Eagle swoop in amongst a troop of Vervet Monkeys near our lodge, The Vervets were tipped off by an observant guard, and none were caught. The Crowned Eagle is rarely seen in Mana and I speculate they breed in the hills across the river in Zambia.

A pair of Tawny Eagles were seen, the one was feeding in a baobab when the other (paler bird) came in and tried to pirate the catch of the first bird.

Bateleurs were common and seen daily with a pale phased (creamy backed) male seen near Rukomechi Research Station. I wonder what proportion of the population is this colour phase? On separate occasions African Harrier-hawks were seen.

The Crowned Plover is now a common resident breeder on the bare ground south of Long Pool.

One day I must get out of the car and walk that area looking for larks, finch-larks and pipits. We saw a few Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters on the Long Pool Loop Road in Mopane country.

16 Black-winged Stilts were seen in ones and twos on the Zambezi River and in the pans and pools.

The pools this year were fuller than I have ever seen them in 30 years.

Up on a red hill on the Sapi Road, we saw a couple of Double-banded Sandgrouse and we were lucky to see a Spotted Eagle-Owl and a Civet Cat.

On the 28th, I spotted a Böhm's Spinetail and the next day, I saw it go into a *Faidherbia albida* hole about four metres up, and about 3 metres from the lodge next door (East of Muchichiri Lodge). Unfortunately we had to leave in 1/2 an hour and there was no way of checking it out, but the first floor verandah of that lodge, would be an ideal look out, to see if it had a nest.

The small birds of Mana are difficult to see and I looked hard for sunbirds particularly Shelley's. But I only recorded a female Scarlet-chested Sunbird, 2 male Black Sunbirds and a male Collared Sunbird. There were very few flowering *Loranthus* parasites at this time of the year, which are so common in the Acacia trees of the flood plain. I saw 8 families of White-crested Helmet-Shrikes and only one of Retz's Helmet-Shrike, and early one morning a congregation of about 200 Long-tailed Starlings on the ground near our Lodge. I saw Yellow-breasted Apalis daily. We only saw a pair of Purple -crested Turacos in a Strangler fig.

We did not see any cormorants, darters, gulls, terns or skimmers, although they were looked for. Noticeable by their absence from my field card was the Namaqua Dove, the White-browed Robin-chat, the Kurrichane Thrush, the Black-collared Barbet and the Grey-headed Parrot. Nor did I see the Arnot's Chat in the Mopane Country near Nyakasikana Gate.

Amongst our Red Data List species we saw 5 families of Southern Ground-Hornbills and two Hooded Vultures roosting, a little away from 15 White-backed Vultures.

My thanks go to Penny and her extended family for organizing the trip, and I have to acknowledge my friends, the baboons, who let me safely bird watch amongst them while they kept watch for mega carnivores

Kadoma July, 2011

Margaret Parrock

Kadoma and surrounds have some new arrivals. In my garden, which is on a very busy corner opposite the hospital entrance, the birds carry on daily and are not perturbed by noise. Plentiful African Yellow White-eye, Greater Blue-eared Starling and Yellow-bellied Greenbul all love the pawpaws in the bird tray. Black-collared Barbet, Crested Barbet, Black-backed Puffback, Grey -headed Bush-Shrike occur

all around my area. I have 2 to 3 pairs resident House Sparrows at the house, which have nested on the verandah eaves.

Trip to Mavhuradonha, 2-5 September 2011

Nick Hart

A large group of us – 22 people – travelled to Kopje Tops Camp in the Mavhuradonha Mountains on September 2, 2011. The drive is about 3 hours from Harare, including the last 8km which were pretty slow going. The camp is usually only set up to cater for 12 people – not quite enough for our big crowd! Fortunately, the staff had already set up a number of lovely tents for the people who did not fit into the cottages. The weather was hot upon arrival (the middle of the day) and it cooled down in the evenings, becoming surprisingly cold at night.

Birding close to camp we saw good birds, including African Cuckoo-hawk, Wahlberg's Eagle, Lanner Falcon, Shelley's Francolin, 4 owl species (Barn, African Scops, African Wood, Spotted Eagle), Freckled and Fiery-necked Nightjars, Familiar Chat, Ashy Flycatcher, Pale Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Longclaw, Retz's Helmet-shrike and Red-headed Weaver. We went on many walks during the stay, led by James and Nesbert. Some were very long, others short. Some people also went on horseback safaris. The most interesting birds seen on these various walks include: African Hawk-eagle, Western Banded Snake-eagle, Augur Buzzard, Little Sparrowhawk, African Harrier-hawk, African Green-pigeon, Klaas's Cuckoo, Fiery-necked Nightjar, Half-collared Kingfisher, Striped Kingfisher, Trumpeter Hornbill, Greater Honeyguide, Bearded Woodpecker, Rock Martin, White-breasted Cuckoo-shrike, Miombo Tit, Miombo Rock-thrush, Boulder Chat, Stierling's Wren-warbler, Lazy Cisticola, Black-throated Wattle-eye, Mountain Wagtail, Striped Pipit, Retz's Helmet-shrike, Western Violet-backed Sunbird, Red-backed Mannikin, Black-eared Seedeater and Cabanis's Bunting.

Some great birds in that list, but birds were not the only creatures that entertained us. We saw a fair amount of game; namely Zebra, Giraffe and Elephant. The only snake seen (to my knowledge) was a male Boomslang, seen by yours truly in the riverine forest next to camp. On one of the longer walks, a group saw a terrapin for a brief moment, before it swam to a new hiding spot. There were many beautiful butterflies and dragonflies flitting around, especially on the riverbanks.

On the 3rd of September, at about lunchtime, we were treated to an incredible display of the danger of bushfires in the Mavhuradonha area. The fire came very close to camp, and in fact many people were preparing for evacuation! Luckily, that was unnecessary, as the staff had previously set up a firebreak around the whole camp for precisely this reason. We watched as the surrounding grassland transformed from golden to black in the space of a few hours (with much smoke involved).

Our walking and horseback guides were incredibly knowledgeable about the area. They can identify just about anything you point to, be it a tree, flower, bird, reptile or something completely different. I personally found it very interesting to learn about the Mavhuradonha area from these people, not just from an environmental aspect, but from a historical perspective too. The camp staff (cleaners, cooks etc.) did an excellent job catering for us and keeping us comfortable during our stay. A big thank you to Varden Safaris for hosting us in this stunning area of wilderness.

Rainham Visits

Alex Masterson

The water levels have dropped so that there is dryland to cross over from the end of the road and onto the dam walls. There has also been fire in the thorn veld. Access is therefore easier. Better to be in small parties but locals have become accustomed to birders. Out on western extension of Tongogara Avenue past Warren Hills Golf Course and Presidential Guard Barracks – no trouble. Tar ends at line of gums. About 1 km of dirt with big fig on right at about 400 m and turn off on right at another 500 m: no more than a gap in the long grass just after a woody anthill. Now dry but go slow.

Morning visits best for small dam on left and for vlei below the walls: also for thorn veld up from car park as you get to the dams. Evening visits much better for the big dam with sun behind you and more birds. The breeze always blows: take a jacket and watch the Snipe and Marsh Owls as the sun goes down.

Highlight of September visit was 94 White-backed Duck sitting in pondweed on the big dam. Wattled Starlings (80 in August) were not there this time but evening visits should provide groups flying to roost. The thorn veld has Magpie Shrikes, Rufous-bellied Tit Babblers and Marico Sunbirds – (not always on Saturdays). Still good for African Marsh Harrier with much barring under the wings and pale shoulders.

Mataberland

Walk at Hillside Dams – 13 August 2011

Adele Edwards

There was some consternation when we said we would meet at 7:30 for our walk at Hillside Dams. Those of us who are naturally early risers found the crisp morning air and masses of bird activity invigorating. The rising sun was in our eyes and sparkling off the surface of the lower dam, making identification of the water birds a bit of a challenge. After 30 minutes we had confirmed Egyptian Goose, Reed Cormorant, Black-headed and Green-backed Heron, African Jacana, Common Moorhen, Black crane, Hamerkop, Sacred Ibis and Little Grebe but had only moved about 100 meters, making it easy for the latecomers to catch us up! Moving away from the water the bushes were bursting with activity as Dark-capped Bulbuls, Yellow White-eye, Chinspot Batis, Southern- Black Tits and more darted about. Little seed eaters on an open bare patch of ground brought us to a halt once more. The Blue Waxbills, Bronze Manikins and Jameson's Firefinch as well as the bigger Rock and Laughing Doves were readily identified – though there was some debate and confusion amongst those who were not aware that a Feral Pigeon is now known as a Rock Dove. But we all gave up on the little nondescript non-breeding widows and whydahs – though later we did confirm a male Yellow Bishop who had started to get his breeding plumage. The aloes must have been a spectacular sight earlier in the year; a few still flowered attracting Scarlet-chested, White-bellied and Miombo Double-collared Sunbirds. Scuffling in the undergrowth led us to Arrow-marked Babblers, White-throated Robin-chat, White-browed Robin-chat and Tropical Boubou, while the Crimson-breasted Shrike was conspicuous wherever he went. Palm Swifts and Lesser Striped Swallows swooped overhead. As the day warmed up the birds slowed down but as we completed our circuit of both lower and upper dams we were still adding to the list (Red-headed Weaver, and Go-away-bird conspicuous by its absence until near the end). In all we recorded 54 species while a quiet meander with pleasant company made a great start to the weekend.

Dambari & Quiet Waters – 28 August 2011

Judy Ross

For those of you who thought it was too much trouble to get out of bed early - you lost out on a wonderful day! The skies were clear, there was a brisk breeze, the company and birding were great. Our first stop was Dambari Field Station. Here we wandered about the property where once there had been rhino capture pens (evidence remaining of the mighty gates still left leaning drunkenly off the paths) - little in the avian way was seen on the walk but after tea on the verandah the group moved towards their cars only to find the vegetable garden alive with an amazing assortment of birds. Although there was not a huge amount of vegetables growing (a row of carrots, 2 of choumoellier, half a row of cauliflower) the rest had been turned over in preparation for planting and this was what caused all the excitement. Well it took about 40 minutes before anyone started contemplating moving onto the next venue. The Dambari count = 35 species.

Our travels took us on to Esigodini. On turning onto the Falcon College road, right in the middle of the town, was a very tall Kenya Coffee tree, inside the Heany Hall grounds. You may have seen on TV footage of several nests occupied in the same tree - well here was evidence. There were 5 nests all occupied but what was really interesting was that they were not all occupied by the same species! Three of the nests were occupied by Spoonbills, with chicks, while the other two were occupied by Grey Herons. Being a Sunday everyone was on board and the adult birds were having a time of it trying to stay static on the thin branches with the breeze not helping - from here on we will call these birds the 'Esigodini stem dancers'! Are birds deaf to certain levels of noise? Why you ask - well the hall was occupied by an Apostolic group who were being harangued by a pastor using a megaphone - perhaps this was the cause of the stiff breeze in the upper most branches? The folk on our outing were most impressed by this sight and it was only after some length of time we were persuaded to move on to Quiet Waters (the conservation area at Falcon College). On arrival at Fish Eagle picnic site, aptly named as we passed two magnificent Fish Eagles perched in a tree overlooking the river just a few hundred meters away, lunch was the first priority followed by a wander over the dam wall. Not much was seen on the dam but the view from the wall downstream revealed a whole host of birds whilst out over the hills was spied a pair of Long-crested Eagles. Total count for Esigodini = 41 species. Total for the day = 76 species

It is always a pity that one has to return to the city after having had such a relaxed day - but our city is by no means lacking in bird life - so thus ended a delightful day. Thanks to Adele and Dambari Wildlife Trust and Falcon College. Next time make the effort, its well worth it!

Hwange National and Vic Falls 13th -19th June 2011-09-08

Margaret Parrock

How refreshing to leave the hub of civilization and head to West Matabeleland province where life hasn't changed much and the environment little spoiled.

The Painted Dog Conservation Centre near Hwange Safari Lodge, run by Zimbabwean Dr Gregory Rasmussen is a must to visit. Snaring using obsolete telephone wires, and road accidents, are big problems for these dogs. A Hooded Vulture and Pied Crows find easy meat in the dogs' enclosure after the dogs have had their fill.

At Hwange Safari Lodge, a lone Southern Ground Hornbill and 4 Marabou Storks were at the pan, which had little water. A large flock of about 80 Helmeted Guineafowl were frolicking, all at sunset. A lone tree near the swimming pool housed two very thorny nests of Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver, with many birds disappearing into it for the night..

Of note in the National Park: 25 + White-backed Vulture at a kill which was not visible from the road; 3 Southern Ground-Hornbill along the roadside near Main Camp; 1 Secretary Bird at Nyamandhlovu Pan; 1 Black-bellied Bustard male on the road near Somalisa Pan, beyond Kennedy no2; a rare Denham's Bustard (Stanley's Bustard) seen by excited Wilderness Safari guides near Ngweshla Picnic Area; 100 Helmeted Guineafowl counted around Main Camp campsite; 1 pair Meyer's Parrot at Main Camp and 2 pairs at Ngweshla site.

The numerous giraffe were constantly bothered by many Red-billed Oxpecker. The Park is loaded with Magpie Shrikes, Southern Yellow-billed "zazu" * Hornbill, all the grey doves, and my favourite the Namaqua Dove, as well as Swainson's Spurfowl. They are all aplenty. Along the Kasangula Road another 3 Southern Ground-Hornbill were spotted.

On our return to Bulawayo, at 8am at Lupane, a pair of Grey Crowned Crane were bugling whilst flying overhead. At Bembesi 3 Southern Ground-Hornbill were by the roadside. Animals seen in large numbers were kudu, impala, giraffe and zebra (1 with collar). Wildebeeste were few as were elephants, which had separated into male groups and female-with-young groups. We counted 16 Common Duiker usually early morning time. Also 6 Ostrich, 3 male and 3 female, were looking healthy, as were all the animals. It was a long car journey but worth every moment. National Parks accommodation is good and clean, and the staff friendly and helpful.

Kadoma*Zazu is a feisty Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill who acts as majordomo to Mufasa, in the movie "Lion King".

ABIDING BIRD MYSTERIES

More on those swee waxbills and not just the black-faced one

M.P.S. Irwin

For those of you who take your birdwatching seriously and read *Honeyguide* from cover to cover, will have noticed that we continue to add to our understanding of the distribution of the Black-faced Swee Waxbill *Coccygia melanotis* and have been able to add Mount Hwedza as a 'new' locality, but in fact dating back to 1990! And at Nyanga too, it is now quite clear that it must already have been well established there by the early 1990s and arrived some time before that. And even at such a now classic locality in the course of its discovery, there have been no subsequent reports of the situation at Great Zimbabwe for decades and we don't even know if it is still there. And what about other perhaps suitable localities between there and Mount Hwedza where nobody visits?

And while further records of the black-faced at Nyanga are certainly needed to fill in the gaps in our knowledge, what about its East African counterpart *C. quartinia* or have they just disappeared as nobody seems to report seeing them? The postulate is of course that since the appearance of the black-faced, that their respective ranges might have become mutually exclusive with the black-faced, in the Juliasdale rain-shadow and the East African up at places like Troutbeck and towards Nyangani Mountain where it is higher and wetter. And we need to know all this in much greater detail. And as the ecologists among you will realise, two birds which do the same general thing, react with one another and apportion the environment and its resources accordingly. And there can be both winners and losers in such a situation.

So get out and about and particularly up to Nyanga where the facilities are so very good anyway and see if you can come back with some of the answers to the problem posed and at the same time, helping to solve the best-known and certainly most challenging of our 'abiding bird mysteries'. And what fun it will be anyhow and personally satisfying and important too in the field of ornithology and you might even graduate to becoming a bird biologist in the process: and for those of you with fancy digital cameras, what about some photographs for *Honeyguide*?

FROM THE PAST

Perhaps the greatest European Swallow roost ever?

M.P.S.Irwin

It is not quite fifty years ago that I said goodbye and parted company with our main museum expedition, part of a mammal survey of what was still then the Bechuanaland Protectorate while the others moved off southwards into the Kalahari desert. I had left in order to continue with my bird collecting and to undertake a complete traverse of the whole of the wastes of the great Makgadikadi saltpan system. I had moved westward and set up camp within sight of and overlooking Lake Xau (or Dow) which historically (and most appropriately here) was at one time referred to as the 'Great Reed Vley' which lies at roughly 21° 18'S; 24° 45'E, far away, remote and uninhabited. But the lake as such had receded and all that remained were impassable mudflats. And if there might have been open water somewhere, it would have been well beyond or within the vast expanse of impressively tall reedbeds a mile or more distant that stretched as far as the eye could see towards a distant horizon.

It was by then well into the second half of November and there had already been heavy rain both here and further off to the southward in what was semi-desert country and everything had already come to life and was on the move. And in the first evening that I was there, the European Swallows *Hirundo rustica* had begun to arrive, flying in from the direction of the Kalahari where they must have spent the day feeding on the then abundant insect life. But such a vast concourse of flying birds I had never seen before or even imagined. They began moving in on a broad front on either side, certainly several miles wide and hundreds of feet deep, taking well over half an hour to pass overhead towards the distant reedbeds in which they had come to roost.

Any real estimate as to numbers was quite impossible and one was simply overcome by a sense of wonderment and awe at the experience which had by far eclipsed anything I had ever witnessed before, or could even have imagined. How many birds could there have been and estimate for yourself when the birds were coming in miles wide and hundreds of feet overhead and for well over half an hour? With such a closely packed mass no reasonable guess was ever possible as sheer wonder had all but taken over. And what could one do anyway except bear witness to it all? And there I sat in the evening, perched on the roof of the Land Rover, absolutely alone and far, far away from anybody in what otherwise might have appeared an empty world and so that somehow I had become a part of it all myself.

And how far had the swallows come and how far had they yet to travel? And then there had to be a return journey too. And during the week or so that I was there, the same massive departure in the early morning and return in the evening continued. It had already become clear that the birds were still on their passage southwards and where feeding conditions must certainly have been optimal to sustain such enormous numbers and there could perhaps on this occasion (for every year it cannot be the same), assembled together, half the population wintering in southern Africa, may be between 40 or 50 million birds drawn from millions of square miles in the northern hemisphere, or the whole of the western and central parts of the Palaearctic region. And what productivity this represented. And yet such would hardly have been possible had it not been for the recent rains and when conditions must have been ideal and the birds could then prolong their stay before moving on. And what biomass consumed every day must there have been to make it all possible? One can but imagine if all the insect life consumed in a single day by 40 or 50 million swallows was converted into a solid mass and had fallen on the Land Rover and its occupant, just what would have happened! And then again in every single day that I was there I must have seen more swallows than all the birds I could possibly have seen in a lifetime so extraordinary were the numbers. And what were the dynamics of such an event and the energy spent that had made it possible. Then round that off in terms of 365 days of the year wherever the birds had been or were going and we get as close to nature that one might ever be and become as one as long ago we must have been ourselves, born of the same great spirit that allows us to wonder so.

Roberts VII and other Avian Anecdotes

Dave Hartung

It took me a long time to become more or less reconciled to the above rather oversized (5kg!) but admittedly superbly produced volume, mainly because of the 300-odd changes to common names, which seems to me and to many others as well to be a completely pointless exercise. For one thing the same bird may have several different names in different areas – names with which we were all comfortably familiar; now, however, when reading new material containing new names one has to have a reference list constantly at hand in order to understand what the author is talking about, which is very tedious. But the list on pages 20 & 21 is not even in alphabetical order, so finding the one you want quickly is not possible. Then some of the new names are quite absurd: I mean, there's only the one Ostrich as far as I know, so why add the unnecessary extra word "Common" as an utterly useless appendage? Then we have the "Common Black-headed Gull" (of which more anon), which may be common enough in the Southern African context. For my money, the unique scientific name is the only one which matters and which always remains unchanged, except for very good reason and following accepted taxonomic rules; a unique common name as well is unnecessary and unlikely to be achieved anyway.

I already possessed Roberts I to VI, and was delighted with the layout of V & VI, with all the colour plates together at the beginning for quick & easy location of possible or probable, and direct reference to the text page. Edition VII is distinctly retrogressive in this respect. Nevertheless, there were some good points which finally persuaded me to scratch up enough capital to acquire one: firstly, the improved and highly informative text; secondly, the beautiful illustrations (scattered throughout the book!), especially those by Ingrid Welersbye whom we knew quite well through the Wildlife Society while she lived in Zimbabwe; thirdly, the discovery that the one & only sighting, in 1982, of a Black-headed Gull in Zimbabwe had finally been acknowledged – which leads me to my own (true) story about that sighting, as follows.

Black-headed Gull in Zimbabwe

Dave Hartung

During the morning of Monday 22nd November 1982 I received an urgent and somewhat breathless phone call at work from one Tony Tree (who was well known to me as a brilliant bird-spotter and a regular bird-ringer): “Dave, have you got a very long lens, there’s a Black-headed Gull out at Lake Mcllwaine (now Chivero) and we need pictures of it for ratification?” Amazingly (I’m not partial to long lenses, preferring to get close to the subject) and most fortunately, I happened to have in my possession at that time a friend’s 35mm TTL Olympus OM2 complete with Novoflex squeeze-focus 600mm lens (my Nikons were limited to 300mm). I promptly abandoned work and raced home where I loaded a spool of Ektachrome 200 into the Olympus, then dashed off to pick up Tony and take him, as directed, out to the Bird Sanctuary area on the south side of the lake. The water was very low at the time so there were a number of muddy and normally submerged one-time termite mounds protruding above the surface. The first birds we actually saw comprised a lovely flight of Pterodactyl-like Openbilled Storks, *Anastomus lamelligerus*; then with the aid of binos, we located our ‘prey’, *Larus ridibundus*, amidst dozens of Grey-headed Gulls, *Larus cirrocephalus*** , whose company it no doubt welcomed when it found itself so far from home, covering one of the bare islets a little way off shore.

From behind a large tree-clad termite mound we stalked on foot as far as we dared without disturbing the birds. Leaving Tony in the shade of the ‘anthill’, I crawled on my belly for some 50 or 60 metres down to the water’s edge where, as luck would have it, a thoughtful if perhaps illegal fisherman had left a forked rod-rest onto which I cautiously raised and rested the huge lens, this then being nicely steadied. Our bird behaved perfectly, occasionally taking off to do a few circuits of the island, allowing some flying shots, then settling conveniently on the nearest part of same to pose and preen for our entertainment. I took some 20 photos of these activities, the whole episode proving pretty exciting. The combination of high-speed Ektachrome, a rather ‘cool’ or blue-is but fast film, and the non-colour-corrected Novoflex lens were not ideal, but the best I could manage at the time. Subsequently I handed over to Tony Tree four or five of the best pictures to send to S. Africa. Disappointingly, I personally have never heard another word about them; I expected to see at least a reference to the sighting in the 1985 Roberts V, but no, and nothing in the 1993 Roberts VI either. Hence my pleasure in finding it in Roberts VII.

** Digression on the subject of scientific binomials. The latter are derived from Latin and / or Greek words, all too often including rather horrible Latinised names of people which tell us nothing about the subject. But, having been something of a Latin and Greek scholar in days gone by, I do find it both interesting and helpful towards remembering these universal names to find out their true meanings which are often descriptive of important features of the subject. *Larus* comes straight from the Greek *Λαρος* (Laros) in Latin, meaning a ravenous seabird or Cormorant; in modern Greek *Γλαρος* (Glaros) means a seagull; *ridibundus*, in Latin, means laughing (as correctly stated in Roberts VII), but *cirrocephalus* does not, to the best of my belief, mean greyheaded. The Latin for grey is *griseus* or for light grey *canus* (not to be confused with *canis*, as in dog). Certainly, *κεφαλή* (Kephale) in Greek means head, but *cirrus* in Latin means curly, fringed or feather-like (as in clouds), though just how this applies to the gull I’m not sure; anyway in future I shall be calling *L. cirrocephalus* by its new common name, “Cloudy-headed Cormorant”. Some may find all this terribly dull I fear, but I have to say that most people on nature walks, during which I have a nasty habit of exercising my pedantic tendencies, do seem to enjoy hearing the meanings of names of birds, trees or whatever, so no apologies!

Lady of the Rings

John Meikle

I was amazed to discover from *Honeyguide* that the late Dale Hanmer had ringed about 50 000 birds in her lifetime, of which I would guess a couple of thousand were ringed in my garden and surrounds at Mountain Home, north of Penhalonga. Behind the seemingly gruff exterior was a warm, witty person with a sharp intellect. She overcame life’s set-backs by immersing herself in her work.

Virtually every month for about 9 years from 1992 - 2000 she and Bill Chadder came to Mountain Home to set up their nets. Once the nets were in place, it was a question of waiting. Some days it was misty and blowing and very few birds were caught, while on other days it was hectic with Bill untangling the birds and a helper carrying the bags for Dale to process on the veranda. On occasion there were up to 30 bagged birds hung up waiting to be measured and documented, some of which had to wait while we had lunch! Dale patiently weighed each bird, measured the beak, counted the secondary and primary feathers and checked on sex and breeding status. I have probably got the details of the process wrong, but I remember up to 130 birds being documented in one day.

The great majority of birds captured were sunbirds attracted to my aloes and cultivated proteas. Dale's hypothesis was that there should be significant seasonal movement from Mountain Home to La Rochelle some 12kms away, but this was not the case. In fact there were only a handful of retraps of our birds at La Rochelle. One male Bronzy ringed in 2000 (which gave us great pleasure every morning during the breeding season twittering at his reflection in the bedroom window) prematurely died in 2008, which Safring reported to have travelled 0kms in 2985 days.!

The great thing for me was actually handling a bird and being able to closely examine its characteristics, without the frustration of trying to observe from fleeting glimpses. Without holding a bird, who could deduce that the Eastern Saw-wing Swallow is so named from serrations on the first primary feather, or that the Olive Sunbird has a bright yellow spot hidden by the wing? Or marvelling at holding a Willow Warbler (all 8 grams of it) which Dale authoritatively told me to belong to a race migrating from Eastern Europe? The highlight for me was discovering birds in my garden for the first time, such as an Eastern Honeyguide trapped in the 1992 drought well out of its normal habitat. Other notable ringings were the Lesser Cuckoo, Tree Pipit, Red-faced Crimsonwing, Green Twinspot, Pygmy Kingfisher and Gurney's Sugarbird.

Dale's contribution to science has been immense. There must be many of Dale's birds still flying around there waiting to reveal their secrets.

TAIL FEATHERS

Double sighting of Green-backed Honeybird in Umwinsidale, Harare.

On June 23rd and July 14th, I had the chance to observe for several minutes each time a Green-backed Honeybird in my garden in Haslemere Lane. Both sightings took place in the afternoon, in the same area of the garden characterized by acacia trees, about fifty meters from a patch of Miombo woodland. During the first sighting (15-20 meters away) the bird was feeding, gleaning among the branches of a couple of trees, occasionally opening up the tail and showing for a fraction of a second the white external tail-feathers. The second time (about 10 meters away), the bird was perching and cleaning its feathers, offering ample time to observe all its details.

Enrico Leonardi (leonardi.enrico@gmail.com)

Wattled Cranes at Gulliver Dam, Rhodes Nyanga National Park, August September 2011

Pete and Judy Wienand observed a Wattled Crane foraging at Gulliver Dam, Nyanga, from 11am to 4pm on Monday 15th August 2011. Adrian and Barbara Maasdorp saw a bugling Wattled Crane flying over the Gulliver Dam area, on the morning of the 6th September. Rob Rees and Clare Savage visited Gulliver Dam on 10th /11th September to look out for the cranes. Much of Nyanga was burnt that weekend including the Gulliver area where there were no Wattled Cranes to be found.

Dorothy Wakeling

Who has been hearing things that roar in the early evening?

First hour plus after dark. Soft roar lasting about 1.5 -2.0 seconds repeated every 10 – 15 seconds from well up in the trees around you. May sound as if it comes from far away. Look for “baby” White-faced Owls calling for supper. They should be about for a few more weeks.

Alex Masterson

Missing *Ostrich*

Book not bird – still missing. Please have another look. 3 volumes of *Ostrich* Journal in old A5 format bound in red covers. Gold high-stepping ostrich on front cover and initials ANBM at foot of back spine. Reward now \$100,00. If found PLEASE hand in to the Office.

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Contributions for *The Babblers* 103 December 2011 / January 2012 may be sent to the Editor anytime between now and 14th November 2011.