

# THE BABBLER

Newsletter of



BirdLife Zimbabwe  
The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

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Office hours: Monday to Friday 8.30 – 4.30

## Festive Season Office Hours

The office will close at 1300hrs on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December 2011 and re-open on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January 2012.

### **MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT**

#### **The Babbler 103**

It was good to have Dr Chris Magin (from RSPB) visit us again after 18 months. He found the National Office in good order and complemented Dr Chirara on his skilled directorship of the Important Bird Area EU Programme, which has been assessed as one of the best in the 8-country programme. Kanisios Mukwashi was congratulated for his considerable efforts in the making the project a success. Sylvia Muzavazi has also played a very important role in preparing the IBA accounts. Congratulations are extended to Chip and his staff on this achievement and all good wishes are given for the sustainability of the programme.

The ever present concern of sourcing funding for conservation and education programmes, as well as fundraising for *Honeyguide* and other activities, took priority in The Executive Committee's discussion with Chris. He gave us a number of useful suggestions, having observed the funding activities of other countries, one being that it is not only the responsibility of the National Office to seek funds, but of Council too, and members can also become involved. And another suggestion was that major funding often comes through personal connections in major corporations and organizations. We know that Zimbabwe is not a favourite choice for recession challenged offshore donors, and that when funding does come in it goes to major UN groups for redistribution for poverty, health and sanitation programmes, but seldom for the environment. Many large local corporates are over burdened with their social responsibility programmes. Networking our contacts may bring positive results as well as fundraising initiatives for species studies and projects, for instance. This is a shared activity. Your ideas are welcomed.

We must once more acknowledge our recent fundraising successes. Over the past few years members have contributed greatly with donations to *Honeyguide*, *The Babbler*, the BLZ Library, projects, surveys and education programmes. Should the sum total of the voluntary hours and contributions in kind given by our members be calculated and a price tag put on that contribution, it would be massive.

The Public Relations and Fundraising Representative position on Council has been vacant since before the National Office was formed. This critically important and interesting position needs to be filled.

There are always hiccups, challenges, concerns and unmet expectations in the running of any organization and BLZ is no exception. Our organizational structures assist us in steering through such times. We are in the process of adding to these structures with the creation of BLZ's first Roles and Responsibilities document, which will provide further guidance, clarity and continuity for Council and the National Office in the management of BLZ. The initial draft is under discussion and it will likely take some months to finalize from this point. No doubt there will be a few constitutional changes triggered by this new document. BLZ is vibrant and a thriving organization, thanks to our dedicated members and staff!

Fundraising for *Honeyguide* 57(2). Of the two issues published each year, the first issue is funded by members' subscriptions and the second issue through the remainder of subs and fundraising efforts or donations. A printing cost comparison was undertaken recently which determined that for the number of copies we require, between 400 and 500, it is more economical to remain with digital printing on demand. We need to print 1000 copies before it becomes cost effective to move over to lithographic printing. Keeping *Honeyguide* in print is a top priority for BirdLife Zimbabwe. Your donations to the printing of this issue 57(2) are welcomed.

*Honeyguide* is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary with Volume 58, 2012. The Editors are calling for extra contributions for this bumper volume so why not consider a submission!

There is another anniversary to be celebrated! Dr Chip Chirara has been working for BirdLife Zimbabwe for ten years as of this October just passed! Congratulations, Chip. There is no doubt it has been a very interesting ride through thick and thin! We appreciate your staying power and your contributions to BLZ.

Many of our members who have belonged to BLZ members for decades! We will identify them and celebrate their dedication to the organization and the birds in Zimbabwe, too!

A great deal has been achieved this year. The Council and I wish you all a joyous Christmas and may 2012 be filled with interesting projects and good birding!

Dorothy Wakeling  
November 2011

### ANNOUNCEMENT

It is with great sadness that we report the recent death of Jack Amonie. He was a long time National Parks Scout at Mcllwaine Research Station, Lake Chivero. An obituary to follow in the *Babbler* 104.

### ERRATA CORRIGE

**BABBLER 103** Apologies for inconsistent common bird names. Our reference in the future will be Birdlife Zimbabwe field card.

### 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

### Outings

#### Mukuvisi

Sunday 4<sup>TH</sup> December 0630

Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> Jan 2012 0630

Mukuvisi Woodlands directions: "Turn off the Chiremba Road into Ford Road (opposite Queensdale shops) cross over Longford Avenue and bear left down to the T- junction on Blatherwick Road. Turn right and the gate is about 150metres 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.

#### Chivero

Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> December 0630

Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> Jan 2012 0630

Meet at Prince Edward School car park on Josiah Tongagara Ave



### **January: Waterfowl Count**

As usual the branch will be carrying out waterfowl counts throughout the month of January. The dates for the counts will be dependant on weather conditions (hopefully by then we will be having some significant rain!) but provisionally are as follows:

14 January: all day: SAST & Cowdray Park. Take morning tea and picnic lunch

22 January: morning: Aisleby and Good Hope farms. Take morning tea

Teams will also be covering sites in Matobo & Hwange National Parks.

Note: We also hope in January to be able to reschedule the LBJ course with Alex Masterson.

For more information contact Julia Duprée on phone mobile – 0776172864, home – 246269, email [dalia@netconnect.co.zw](mailto:dalia@netconnect.co.zw)

### **11 February: Branch AGM**

Please make note of the date of the BLZ Matabeleland Branch AGM and keep this day free.

## **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 [pggroup.gwidibira38@gmail.com](mailto:pggroup.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**

#### Visit to Bulawayo and Hwange with Chris Magin

Dr. Chris Magin of the RSPB visited Zimbabwe from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 2011. He had the opportunity to talk to secretariat staff and members of Council. I travelled with him to Bulawayo and Hwange, one of Zimbabwe's IBAs.

Bulawayo is always an interesting place to visit. We arrived in the afternoon on Saturday and received a 'warm' welcome before we even reached Cecilia Hubbard's house, where Chris was scheduled to give a talk later in the evening. It was quite hot and dry, but that seemed to worry very few people as they went about their business. Soon we arrived at Cecilia's house and had a few minutes to cool down before Chris suggested taking a walk around the area and watching some birds. Could he not feel the heat? I obliged and we went out for a little more than an hour.

We did not see many birds besides European Bee-eaters, probably reuniting with their European colleague. When we returned a sizeable group of people had gathered at the house. We waited for a further 30 minutes for more people to arrive before Chris could do his presentation. Matabeleland is never a boring place, never short of humour and we heard stories about the lighter side of the dassie counts and the Black Eagle surveys. The stories would make one want to participate in the next survey! Then it was time for Chris to give his interesting talk on RSPB's International work. This was quite informative. When it was question time, The Matabeleland Branch tried to trick me into giving a talk. I did a short one from my seat – surely they have to invite me for *my* own talk, not during Chris Magin's! I will travel again to meet this wonderful group of people, maybe during one of the famous surveys. Many thanks to Cecilia and our members for their hospitality.

On Sunday we left for Hwange soon after breakfast. We met Peter and Verity Mundy at Halfway House and they suggested we stay at Miombo Lodge. On the way we stopped at the Painted Dog Research Centre and proceeded to the lodge. We were met by Mike Sherren who offered us a generous rate for two nights. Having secured accommodation, we proceeded to the National Park. We were greeted by a Shikra enjoying in the birdbath in front of the reception area at Main Camp. Chris took many close-range pictures but that did not seem to bother the bird. Having done the formalities, we went straight to Nyamandlovu Pan. There was an elephant carcass by the pan and a total of 13 Hooded and White-Backed Vultures feeding on it. More than 20 Yellow-billed Oxpeckers were on the backs of two Giraffes. We saw a few water birds that included Burchell's Sandgrouse before hurrying back to get out of the park before the mandatory 1830hrs. To cap a fine day, we were welcomed back to Miombo Lodge by a Pennant-winged Nightjar that Chris kindly pointed out to me.

Monday was more interesting as we went to Sinamatela and worked our way back to Main Camp. We saw no less than 80 species of birds and a number of mammals. It was definitely more interesting than the previous day. There were very few little brown jobs to frustrate us with identification. Interesting sightings included the Spotted Thick-knee (Dikop is better!), White-headed Vulture, Greater Flamingo, Woolly-necked Stork. We had to rush through the last few pans so that we could reach Main Camp on time.

What a fantastic day we had had! We returned to the very comfortable and interesting Miombo Lodge. Mike Sherren was waiting for us and we had dinner together. Miombo is a very impressive lodge with a waterhole right in front of the chalets. Elephants and other wildlife come for water at night and the miombo woodland provides good birding during the day. The next time you go to Hwange, go to Miombo Lodge, produce your current BLZ membership card and you get a 10% discount.

### **Chip Chirara**

#### **IBA monitoring project report**

The EC-funded IBA monitoring project has come to an end. There were a lot of activities that were undertaken during the final stages towards the end of the project, including final technical and financial reporting, end of project evaluation and compilation of the 4<sup>th</sup> National IBA Status and Trends report. The final audit of the project will kick off in few weeks time.

As stated in previous reports, the objective of the IBA project was to institute effective monitoring of Protected Areas/Important Bird Areas as a contribution to reducing the rate of biodiversity loss in Africa. The objective of the project was met in Zimbabwe and mechanisms for sustaining the IBA monitoring project beyond its official end in October 2011 were put in place. These included, the signing of Memorandum of Understanding with the Parks and Wildlife Management Authority; long-term capacity building of BirdLife Zimbabwe staff and Protected Areas management authorities in site monitoring; stakeholder buy-in through involvement and consultation; and institutionalization of site monitoring by site management authorities and local communities.

However more effort and additional resources are required to continue coordinating the project, to upload monitoring data onto the World Biodiversity Database (WBDB), to produce monitoring reports and to upscale IBA monitoring into other areas. IBAs monitoring forms can be obtained from BLZ offices or can be sent by e-mail. For further information please contact Kanisios at [kanisios@blz.co.zw](mailto:kanisios@blz.co.zw).

**Kanisios Mukwashi, IBA National Project Manager**

#### **World Bird Festival**

This year's commemorations were for the World Bird Festival held in Norton at Twinlakes Primary school under the theme Vultures: a species worth saving. The event was a great success in which at least 10 teachers and 95 pupils from different schools participated. Among participating schools was Yemuranayi Primary School (Harare, Mufakose), Pin-Per Primary school (Norton), the host Twinlakes Primary school (Norton) as well as Schools from Murombedzi.

The pupils demonstrated were involved in presentations, poems, songs and drama, which were in line with this year's theme on vultures. They also participated in quiz and art drawings. The

drawings depicted vulture's behaviour such as flight, nesting and feeding. Every school represented managed to receive birding and environmental books from the BirdLife Zimbabwe.  
**Yamurai Zimowa, Intern at BLZ**

## **Mashonaland**

### **Monavale Vlei Report – October /November 2011**

**Jimmy Muropa, Monavale Vlei Scout, Conservation Society of Monavale.**

[cosmo@yoafrica.com](mailto:cosmo@yoafrica.com). 0772 772771

Fantastic observations have been noted and enjoyed on the Vlei lately! For a start a female Side-striped Jackal has 3 young pups and these have been observed in the early hours of the morning for a couple of weeks now. As the young pups run, play and tumble in the sunshine, this has brought a unique charm to the Vlei. Pictures have been taken and how adorable they are.

Not to outdone are the Common Duiker. A female Duiker has given birth to a young one and they are constantly seen foraging and wandering about. Their presence is more easily noticed because of the open burnt area. The male Duiker is often seen amongst the grasses adjacent to the Vlei. An impressive list of migrants, local and those from afar, has been logged and these include, along with their arrival dates:

- Abdim's Stork: 7-11-11
- Amur Falcon: 14-11-11
- Red-chested Cuckoo: 12-10-11
- Levillant's Cuckoo: 2-11-11
- Diderick Cuckoo: 12-10-11
- European Bee-eater: 26-9-11
- Barn Swallow: 21-9-11
- Red-breasted Swallow: 22-9-11
- Greater Striped Swallow: 9-9-11
- Lesser Striped Swallow: 18-10-11
- Willow Warbler: 20-11-11
- African Paradise Flycatcher: 26-9-11
- Spotted Flycatcher: 9-11-11
- Red-backed Shrike: 15-11-11
- Copper Sunbird: 13-10-11

A Black-crowned Tchagra has almost always been seen at the Tree Nursery of late. Cuckoo Finches are around, so too was a White-winged Widow on 19<sup>th</sup> October. Other species being seen are Lanner Falcon, Green-capped Eremomela, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, Steppe Buzzard, Brown Snake Eagle and African Wattled Lapwing amongst others.

I hope I find you well and here's wishing you a wonderful festive season.

### **Monavale Vlei Outing 20<sup>th</sup> November 2011**

16 birders availed themselves today for our 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday bird walk and how wonderful it was - warm and sunny. The female Common Duiker was seen with her young suckling and a Scrub Hare sprinting along the stream for cover. Bird Highlights seen and /or heard included the following: Long Crested Eagle, Ovambo Sparrowhawk, observed sitting up in the huge gum tree along Fenella Drive, and a new listing for us. Great excitement when the Diderick Cuckoo chased it off. The Ovambo Sparrowhawk returned. Crowned Lapwing, Diderick Cuckoo, European Bee-eaters, Barn Swallows, Wire-tailed Swallows, African Stonechats and 3 juveniles, Dark-capped yellow Warblers, Willow Warbler, 2 Levillant's Cisticola, Spotted Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Longclaws, Scarlet

Chested Sunbirds, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow, Thick-billed Weaver, Golden Weaver, 2 Cuckoo Finches, Yellow Bishop and Jameson's Fire-finch to name a few. Our total bird list was 68.

**Jimmy M Maropa Vlei Scout, Conservation Society of Monavale.** cosmo@yoafrica.com

### **Mashonaland Branch visit to Rainham Dams, Saturday 12th November 2011**

The start to the day was not promising; standing in the PE car park, congratulating myself on arriving early for once, I was reminded by phone that I had said I would pick up one of our most respected members on my way there. This done we drove the 20kms along Princes' to our destination, rejoining the convoy as we arrived.

On the way, I recalled how often I had done this route on an old bike back in 1991, during my first month in Zimbabwe when we were staying in Belvedere before moving to our posting in Mutare. There I had seen so many African birds for the first time; Marsh and Grass Owls, Gallinules, all the egrets and herons etc. 20 years later, during many of which the area has been 'off limits' it was so good to be back there even if the venue is less idyllic now. We should all be grateful to Alex Masterson for having renegotiated permission to visit.

It was Alex who led the walk, first section across the dry scrub and an almost dried out dam. The highlight of this part was the sighting of all 3 Long claw, Rosy-throated, Cape and Yellow-throated. Around us we could hear Rufous-naped Lark, Diderick Cuckoo and Rattling Cisticola and see African Pipit, various widows and bishops gradually gaining breeding plumage, Red-faced Cisticola, Common and Orange-breasted Waxbill, a Cuckoo Finch and Crowned and Wattled Lapwing.

Back at the cars, we strolled along the dam wall in the strong breeze and, out on the open water, saw many White-faced and White-backed Duck and a raft of Southern Pochard. In the reeds, grass and waterlilies there were Jacana, Reed Cormorant, Coot and Great White Egret and a lone Pied Kingfisher. On the other side of the wall on another dried out dam were Little Bee-eater, Yellow Warbler, Bulbul, while Grey-rumped and Barn Swallow and Palm Swift glided over the lush grass feeding on the insects.

From the wall we went into the remains of the acacia woodland that was alive with calls and song; Pearl-breasted Swallow circled the taller trees among which we spotted Yellow Bishop, Masked Weaver, Black-collared Barbet and Bleating Warbler. The final count was 65, low on account of the stiff breeze without which it would have been uncomfortably hot.

Many thanks to Alex and Richard for leading the groups.

**Ken Dixon**

### **Visit to Christon Bank Botanic Reserve, Mazowe District, 1731C1 Domboshawa, 23 October 2011**

We all, about 15 of us, got there early it was very hot, no wind and partially cloudy. It was agreed that we would do a quick look around, and adjourn to the World Cup Rugby Match. (NZ 8, France 7).

Some of the birds seen included African Cuckoo Hawk, Lizard Buzzard, an African Goshawk, Broad-billed Roller, European Bee-eater, Black Cuckooshrike & White-breasted Cuckooshrikes, Flappet Lark, Eastern Sawing, Rock Martin, Boulder Chat, Ashy Flycatcher, Familiar Chat, Red-faced Crombec, Striped Pipit, Lazy Cisticola, Rufous-bellied Tit, Purple-banded Sunbird, Golden & Red-headed Weavers and a Giant Kingfisher. Red-throated Twinspot.

Some notes follow:

Lizard Buzzard according to Birds of Zimbabwe, the peak-laying date is September 19, October 106 and November 23. In those far off days the Nest Record Card system had 20000 cards, and it now has 46000.

An African Cuckoo Hawk was seen, a very unobtrusive bird. Their commonest prey item is the flap-necked Chameleon, but they take lizards, and snakes and large insects wherever they can find them. There are only 6 records of them nesting in Zimbabwe. The birds' eyes are said to be



different colours. Roberts 7 says, Males dark brown and females cadmium yellow. (Tell us what you think?)

The Eastern Saw-wing, there has been something in the literature of them extending their range from the east, now commonly recorded around Harare, but do they breed here? The only nest I have seen is at Seldom Seen in the Vumba, which Peter Mandziwana told me, had been in use for 25 years.

Red-chested Cuckoo, was calling all the time, they are very difficult to see, and they lay eggs in the nests of robins, thrushes and chats.

Boulder Chat, this bird is a known host of the Red-chested Cuckoo. We also saw the Familiar Chat and it also breeds October/November.

The Lazy Cisticola also has its peak-breeding season in October. One of the easiest cisticolas to identify with its rocky habitat and tail held up like a prinia.

Red-faced Crombec (*Sylvietta whytii*, After the Malawi Naturalist, Alexander Whyte whom we seem to know nothing about)

Flappet Lark – heard near a field, close to the Mazowe River, an interesting bird that draws attention to itself by wing flapping as opposed to the Rufous-naped Lark which sits on an ant heap and sings its heart out

Striped Pipit was seen twice. It favours woodlands with steep slopes. Some think it is subject to movements - maybe it is, but lets wait for the field cards to be computerised first.

Red-throated Twinspot 2 parties seen, one of two and one of four. This must be as close to Harare as it gets. The book says in pairs or small groups, but it would be interesting to get flock size counts on this, and many other species, that are difficult to get to grips with.

Jameson's Firefinch seems to be always in slightly thicker bush than the Red-billed Firefinch, closer to rivers. Roberts 7 intimate that the Jameson's like Miombo Woodland, and the Red-billed likes Acacia Woodland.

Not seen were the Black Eagle, the White-necked Raven and the African Broadbill.

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

### **James Sligo Jameson 1850-1888**

JS Jameson was an early ornithologist in this country, if not the first. The son of a wealthy Scottish businessman, he travelled and hunted widely. In 1879 he was organizing a trip with FC Selous as principle guide and Thomas Ayres as Naturalist. They reached somewhere between Hartley Hill and the Umfuli River in May 1880. They travelled down the Manyame River and got to Nemacondes Kraal. Then in the Beatrice area, he lost his manservant who was accidentally killed, when lions attacked their camp at night. They left the country in October 1880, Via Bechuanaland, because the 1st Boer war was in progress. He and his brother then went hunting in Montana. He married in 1885, Ethel Durand, and they had no issue. In 1888 he joined the rear column of HM Stanley's expedition for the Relief of Emin Pasha, and he died of a heart attack at Yambuya, Aruwimi River, in N-E Congo, Kinshasa. He collected The Mashona Hyliota and the Shelley's Francolin In Zimbabwe, and they got the Jameson's Firefinch on the Tati River, in present day Botswana, near where Selibi-Pikwe is today.

RK Brooke, 1972, An early ornithologist - James Sligo Jameson. *Honeyguide* 71 pp 13-16.

**David Rockingham-Gill**

### **Rainham Dam 1959 to 1975**

In the field card collection is a field card called "Rainham" "1959-1975". I suppose it was filled in by the late Dick Harwin, but no observers names are there, no Quarter Degree Square and no date. It is a 1967 (2nd edition), and it lists the birds seen over the time merely with a tick.

This will be of interest to the people who have recently taken part in the new Rainham Survey. Maybe someone would like to write down the differences from then to now. For instance recent short reports in Babbler have Grass Owl, Speckled Mousebird, Great Reed Warbler and Purple-banded Sunbird new to this list. There are also 4 files of sightings on different dates, in the library, which would take some ploughing through. I have used the new names for birds, but every now and again I have put the field card name (in brackets) for those interested in better/worse name changes.

Little Grebe (Dabchick), Great White Pelican, White-breasted Cormorant, Reed Cormorant, African

Darter, Grey Heron, Black-headed Heron, Goliath Heron, Purple Heron, Great Egret (Great White Egret), Little Egret, Yellow-billed Egret, Cattle Egret, Squacco Heron, Green-backed Heron, Black Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Hamerkop, Saddle-billed Stork (Saddlebill), Abdim's Stork, Black Stork, White Stork, African Sacred Ibis, African Spoonbill, White-faced Duck, Fulvous Duck, Spur-winged Goose, Egyptian Goose, Comb Duck ( Knob-billed Duck ), African Pygmy Goose, African Black Duck, Red-billed Teal, Cape Teal, Hottentot Teal, Southern Pochard, White-backed Duck, Secretarybird, Cape Vulture, White-backed Vulture, Lappet-faced Vulture, Verreaux's Eagle (Black Eagle), Tawny Eagle, Wahlberg's Eagle, Long-crested Eagle, African Hawk Eagle, Martial Eagle, African Fish Eagle, Steppe Buzzard, African Goshawk, Shikra (Little banded Goshawk), Dark Chanting Goshawk, Black Kite, Yellow-billed Kite, Black-shouldered Kite, African Cuckoo Hawk, African Marsh-Harrier, Pallid Harrier, Montagu's Harrier, Brown Snake-Eagle, Black-chested Snake-eagle, Bateleur, Amur Falcon (Eastern Red-footed Falcon), Greater Kestrel. Coqui Francolin, Shelley's Francolin, Swainson's Spurfowl (Swainson's Francolin), Harlequin Quail, Helmeted Guineafowl, Grey-crowned Crane, Wattled Crane, African Rail, Baillon's Crake, Black Crake, Red-chested Flufftail, Streaky-breasted Flufftail, African Purple Swamphen (King Reedhen), Allen's Gallinule (Lesser Reedhen), Common Moorhen, Lesser Moorhen, Red-knobbed Coot, Black-bellied Bustard (Black-bellied Korhaan), African Jacana, Lesser Jacana, Greater Painted Snipe, Kittlitz's Plover, Three-banded Plover, Grey Plover, Crowned Lapwing (Crowned Plover), Blacksmith Lapwing, African Wattled Lapwing, African Snipe (Ethiopian Snipe), Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Ruff, Common Sandpiper, Marsh Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Wood Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilt.

White-winged Tern (White-winged Lake Tern), Red-eyed Dove, Cape Turtle-Dove, Laughing Dove, Namaqua Dove, Grey Go-away-bird (Grey Loerie), Diderik Cuckoo, Senegal Coucal, Marsh Owl, Fiery-necked Nightjar, Common Swift (European Swift), White rumped Swift, Horus Swift, African Palm-Swift. Pied Kingfisher, Malachite Kingfisher, European Bee-eater, Little Bee-eater, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, European Roller, Lilac-breasted Roller, Purple Roller (Mocambique Roller), Broad-billed Roller, African Hoopoe, African Grey Hornbill, Black-collared Barbet, Cardinal Woodpecker, Rufous-naped Lark, Flappet Lark, Red-capped Lark, Barn Swallow (European Swallow), Wire-tailed Swallow, Grey-rumped Swallow, Red-breasted Swallow, Greater Striped Swallow, Lesser Striped Swallow, Common House-Martin (House Martin), Sand Martin (European Sand-Martin), Brown-throated Martin ( Brown throated Sand-Martin), Banded Martin. Fork-tailed Drongo. Black-headed Oriole. Pied Crow, Cape Crow (Black Crow). Southern Black Tit. Dark-capped Bulbul (Black-eyed Bulbul). Groundscraper Thrush. Capped Wheatear. African Stonechat (Common Stonechat). Icterine Warbler, Willow Warbler, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Burnt-necked Eremomela (Brown-throated Eremomela), Green-capped Eremomela (Dusky faced), Slender-billed Reed Warbler (Cape Reed Warbler), Marsh Warbler (European Marsh Warbler), Sedge Warbler (European Sedge Warbler), Little Rush Warbler, Long-billed Crombec (Crombec), Grey-backed Camaroptera (Grey-backed Bush Warbler),

Zitting Cisticola (Fan-tailed Cisticola), Desert Cisticola, Crackling Cloud Cisticola (Ayres Cloud Cisticola), Silent Cloud Cisticola (Pale-crowned Cisticola, Tinkling Cisticola, Rattling Cisticola, Levallant's Cisticola (Levallant's Cisticola) Croaking Cisticola, Tawny-flanked Prinia. Chestnut-vented Tit-Babbler (Tit-Babbler) Spotted Flycatcher, Grey Tit-Flycatcher (Plumbeous Tit-Flycatcher), Marico Flycatcher, Pale Flycatcher, Southern Black Flycatcher, Chinspot Batis. African Pied Wagtail. Cape Wagtail. African Pipit (Richards Pipit)

Buffy Pipit (Buffy plain-backed Pipit), Cape Longclaw (Orange-throated Longclaw), Yellow-throated Longclaw, Rosy-throated Longclaw. Common Fiscal (Common Fiscal Shrike), Red-backed Shrike, Magpie Shrike, Black-crowned Tchagra, Brubru, Wattled Starling, Greater blue-eared Starling, Miombo Blue-eared Starling (Lesser Blue-eared Starling), Red winged Starling, Scarlet Chested Sunbird, African Yellow White-eye, Scaly-feathered Finch, Southern Masked Weaver (Red-eyed Masked Weaver), Red-billed Quelea, Southern Red Bishop (Red Bishop), Red-collared Widowbird (Red-collared Whydah), Yellow-mantled Widowbird (Yellow-mantled Whydah), Cuckoo Finch, Bronze Mannikin, African Quailfinch (Quail Finch), Locustfinch (Locust Finch ), Orange-breasted Waxbill, Blue Waxbill (Southern Blue Waxbill), Common Waxbill, Pin-tailed Whydah ( Pin-tailed Widow), Yellow fronted Canary (Yellow-eyed Canary)

Black-throated Canary, Brimstone Canary (Bully Canary), Streaky-headed Seedeater, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, Cape Bunting, Golden breasted Bunting.

255 Sanderling & 909 Wood Pipit.

**A Talk about Rudyerd Boulton (1901-1983), by Nancy Jacobs, at Prince Edward School, on 6th October 2011.**

Nancy Jacobs (nancy\_jacobs@brown.edu) a professor of history, from Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, was visiting for research on a book on people and birds in 20th Century Africa. She was researching Rudyerd Boulton, who was a member of The Rhodesian Ornithological Society from the late 50s to 1983, and she looked forward to discussing her findings with us. She devoted four days to visiting Harare, and Atlantica Research Station, where she found enough material to study for 4 years, and she stayed with Dorothy Wakeling,

But she gave us a lecture and this is some of what she said:

Rudyerd Boulton was born in Pennsylvania in 1901 and died in Harare in 1983, so he was 82. He joined the museums as a young man, and worked for the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh, and the Chicago Field Museum, where he was a major collector of birds, and the Curator of Birds. He visited Africa 7 times, and by my count 18 countries on collecting expeditions. Some of the places he visited were Southern Rhodesia 1927-1930 & Angola 1925, 1931, and 1957. He wrote "Travelling with the Birds" in 1933.

Along came the Second World War, and he volunteered, he was sent to the Office for Strategic Services where he and Jim Chapin (Birds of the Belgian Congo) became the experts on Africa advising the American Government on things African. Rud was head of the Africa Section of the Secret Intelligence branch of the OSS, and he and his team were instrumental in getting Uranium for the Manhattan Project. (Oppenheimer and the atom bomb from Shinkolobwe Mine, Katanga). OSS was shut down after the war and later reopened as the CIA. Now Nancy had been wondering why she couldn't find much about Rud on the internet. He was a spy. The terminology she used was Government Bureaucrat.

So she decided to try and work him out through the women he married, all older than him, Laura, a singer, 1899-1980 who wrote The Music Hunter, married 14 years 1927-1941, after whom Mrs Boulton's Woodland Warbler *Seicercus laurae* is named.

Inez, 1895-1957, Chicago High Society, who wrote (under the pseudonym nee Mary le Beau) Beyond Doubt, a record of psychic experience, married 15 years 1942-1957, after whom the Evergreen Forest Warbler is named *Satrocercus mariae boultoni*

Louise, 1897-1974, married 16 years, 1958-1974. (There were no children. She didn't say that, I put it in)

She asked if we knew he was a spy? And the answer was, yes we did, but quite harmless. It so happened that Detective Ray Borrett, (1937-1973) an expert on Pipits, was a member of ours. (Obituary Raymond Paul Borrett BSA Police No 5943, worked for the CID. Outpost January 1973) – laughter!

When the war finished, Rud wrote to the museums and said he was a bit busy and he would come back when he could. Well he retired in 1958 and came to settle in the Central African Federation. They bought a house, 20kms out of Harare on the Bulawayo Road, near where the Lion & Cheetah Park is today. They set up a foundation to foster art and science in the service of conservation. Major renovation of the house took place, and the Science Block was added, and they called it Atlantica (connecting Africa – to - America). On display in the house were many African musical instruments and some valuable paintings. (They had a Chagal, a Picasso and a Kadinsky ((Ludwigkirch in Munchen)) and in 1960 they put on an exhibition of some of their stuff at the National Gallery.

So who was Rud to us?

He did a huge amount of committee work and drove people dotty with detail. But he worked on the foundations and cornerstones of our society, some of which still run to this day.

He set up the Field Card Scheme in 1963, and the Zimbabwe Bird Atlas Project, which still runs.  
He ran the Nest Record Card Scheme before it was handed over to the Bulawayo Museum to be curated by Pat Lorber  
He started the BLZ Library, and together with his Secretary Mrs Diana Brown, who did most of the work, collecting the journal back numbers.  
It is so big now we have just had to buy a container to help with storage.  
He was one of the committee that started the Special Species Survey and looked after the Cranes particularly  
He was Chairman, Rhodesia Section, of the International Council for Bird Preservation - now Birdlife Zimbabwe.  
He did masses of work on the change of English bird names - a debate that still rages today  
He introduced the Christmas Bird Count, an American custom, for the birders without families, and it was well supported  
He was a founder member of the Mukuvisi Woodland Association  
He set up a system of classification of Habitats - these were difficult to follow  
He did a huge amount for The Rhodesia Scientific Association (now defunct) and was once its President  
He helped set up the Conservation Trust of Rhodesia (now defunct).  
He helped a lot of people with the things he had, like rings and nets for ringers, equipment to record bird sounds, he had a magnificent collection of bird books, and the facilities at Atlantica were always open to those who wanted to use them.  
He left Atlantica and its assets, and unfinished paperwork to the Nation, particularly the Department of National Parks. (I understand his unfinished work on the Birds of Angola is at the Bulawayo Museum, and somebody in Bulawayo, should try and make something of it.)

Rud was here for 25 years, he undoubtedly enriched the lives of those who knew him, as an environmental missionary hereabouts he was first class. As a spy, I wouldn't know, but I reckon he spoke to the wrong people. But he had a dream of arts and science conservation in Africa and he certainly influenced the Bird Society in quite a big way and other societies too.

Thank you, Nancy, for an interesting talk and we hope we hear and see more of you.

### **David Rockingham-Gill**

#### References

Obituary: Honeyguide No 82 pp 10-12 by Alex Masterson (with photo)  
Honorary Life Member: Honeyguide No 116 pp 40-41 (with photo by Ilo the Pirate)  
Zimbabwe Science News April 1983 p92

### **Gonarezhou National Park 3 – 10 September 2011 Mabalauta -QDS 2131 c4**

Andy and Linda Fussell (Harare)  
Steve Williams and Tina Ship (Lusaka) Zambia  
Chris and Sandy Payne (Kadoma)

It was with great anticipation we departed a cool Harare at 5.30 am on Saturday 3 September. Our destination was the Swimuwini Rest Camp or 'the Place of Baobabs' at Mabalauta, in Gonarezhou National Park. Gonarezhou is situated in the South East Lowveld of Zimbabwe and covers an area 5 000 square kilometres. "The Place of many Elephants" is an extremely scenic park full of beautiful and rocky kopjies. It is part of the GLTP or the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park.

Our route took us onto the Masingo/Beitbridge Road. Having driven through a very hazy and smoky outskirts of Harare, we eventually broke into weak sunshine near to Beatrice. Andrew took the turn off to Gutu where the road meanders through some lovely grassland and kopjies. We had a glimpse of the first Msasa trees showing their new red and orange leaves. This was all new territory for Steve and Tina, who had motored down from Lusaka the previous day to join us on this trip. We made a hasty stop over at the TM Supermarket in Masvingo, to purchase some wine, which had

escaped the shopping list the previous day. Liquid refreshment in hand we continued our journey to Rundi River where we stopped for a picnic brunch and coffee. Our Kadoma friends, Chris and Sandy, who were travelling in the 2<sup>nd</sup> vehicle, met us there and we continued the rest of the way in convoy.

We turned east off the Masvingo/Beitbridge road at the Mwenezi Police Station turn-off, about 20 kms south of Rutenga. The 60kms of dirt road through Mwenezi Ranch to the Chikombedzi Business Centre was in reasonable condition. A couple of drainage gullies took us by surprise and spread the 30 odd eggs for our meals around the back of the vehicle! The total distance from Masvingo/ Beitbridge Road to Mabalauta is 105 kms.

We checked in at the National Parks Warden's Office at Mabalauta around 2 pm. One of the lodges I had booked 3 months previously was not available. An alternative lodge proved suitable, but a bit further away from the main lodge, Trichelia. The lodges are in the Swimuwini Rest camp about 8kms from the Wardens Office. They overlook the Mwenezi River and are thatched self-catering accommodation. We hastily unpacked so that we could spend the rest of the afternoon surveying the riverbed that must have been around 200 metres wide bounded on both sides by an embankment of up to 10 meters high. There were a few isolated pools of water and small flowing channels of water. We wondered what it must look like in the height of the rains!

Unfortunately, the following morning we had to vacate our wonderful lodge under the huge baobab tree, when the kitchen sink mixer self destructed and the water had to be turned off! We were allocated Nyala Lodge at the end of the rest camp, which proved fairly comfortable, after we had hunted down sufficient cutlery, crockery, glass ware, tables, chairs, light bulbs etc. Fortunately these small inconveniences, including the regular power outages, had minimal effect on our enjoyment of the trip. We had arrived armed with gas equipment, 12volt fridge, rechargeable lamps, torches and a host of other camping equipment.

This part of the camp has some magnificent stone built viewpoints overlooking the Mwenezi River and the valley below. Visitors have a 180degree view of animals and birds drinking at the larger pools. We found it the best way to relax and view the wild life. The Mopane bush on the sides of the road was very thick in most places and proved quite a challenge when game viewing.

Grazing in the camp most days was a small family group of Nyala. We were fortunate to see many more of these shy antelope in the following days. During our stay we also saw many kudu, wildebeest, waterbuck, giraffe, zebra, impala, klipspringer, duiker, eland, and warthog.

The famed elephants proved to be very elusive, despite reassurances from the warden in the office that there are 'many elephant' in the area. On the last evening we caught a glimpse of 5 elephant in the thick Mopane bush just off the road. They moved away as soon as we stopped the vehicle. Lions and hyena were heard most nights, but we never caught sight of them.

The birding was excellent and we collected in excess of 100 species on the bird list. Considering we could only walk around the rest camp and at the picnic sites, most the birding was done from the vehicle. Steve and Tina had a 'lifer' – the enormous and very handsome Kori Bustard. He ambled in front of the vehicle for some metres until he took to flight landing some way ahead of us. He obligingly waited for us to catch him up before disappearing into the thick Mopane scrub. Steve noted the absence of the White-browed Robin Chat during the trip. However, the White Browed Scrub Robin serenaded us one morning!

A wonderful camouflaged African Scops-owl kept us entertained most evenings with her repetitive frog-like 'prrrup' repeated every 5 – 8 seconds. Steve got her out of her hiding place adjacent to the tree trunk one evening by playing her call on the palm top. She landed on a branch right above our heads, which gave Chris an opportunity to photograph her at various angles.

A trip to the Manjinji Pan (QDS 2231 A2) in the nearby Sengwe Communal land, proved to be very worthwhile. It took us some time to locate this pan as it is well hidden from the path, but a local person eventually led us right up to the bank. We counted 24 species of birds at this hidden pan. Including Grey and Black-headed Heron, Great Egret and Yellow-billed Egret, Hamerkop, Egyptian

Goose. African Fish-eagle, Blacksmith Lapwing, Squacco Heron, Woolly-necked Stork, African Openbill, Saddle-billed Stork, Glossy and Haded ibis, White-faced Duck, Comb Duck, Spur-winged Goose, African Jacana, Pied Kingfisher and Malachite Kingfisher, Trumpeter Hornbill, and many more. We shared the shady bank with local donkeys, cows and goats. We are hopeful that the local community protects this lovely area and its birdlife.

Our grateful thanks go to Steve and Tina, who were quick to identify many of the smaller birds in the area. They were delighted to see a Kori Bustard and the beautiful Nyala antelope for the first time. I borrowed some notes and observations from Steve for this write up. Also to Chris and Sandy for their patience hanging around with us 'birders'. Hopefully, they have discovered that this pastime can be very rewarding as well as the game viewing. Chris got some excellent photographs for us. He also proved to be an excellent auto electrician in the middle of Gonarezhou. The ignition and steering lock on the Hilux jammed and Chris managed to get the whole thing off the steering column, and with a screwdriver for a key, got the vehicle back to Harare!

Andrew supplied the two vehicles, all the maps and GPS co ordinates. We all chipped in with the groceries and supplies and meals for 7 days.

Next year we plan to visit the Chipinda Pools and Chinguli part of Gonarezhou "the Place of Many Elephants."

**Linda Fussell**

### **Mashonaland Branch long weekend at New Year's Gift (Tanganda) Training Centre near Chipinge 23<sup>rd</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> September 2011**

12 members in 3 sturdy vehicles took advantage of this opportunity to visit the south east of the country and, despite a rather wet, cold and windy Saturday enjoyed a most successful stay, both birding wise and socially. We were accommodated comfortably, fed and watered by the friendly staff of the Tanganda Training Centre on this tea estate now diversifying into coffee, macadamia nuts and potatoes. From this base we made sorties to various places of interest, Chirinda Forest, Zona Tea Estate, Rupisi and the Chipinge Safari Area.

Our first meeting point on the 500km journey was Widgeon Pan about 40 kms south of Chivhu. There was very little water, just enough for 8 Red-billed Teal. In the surrounding grassland were Quail Finch, African Pipit, Blacksmith Lapwing, Orange-breasted Waxbill and 2 lovely Cape (Orange throated) Longclaw. At Gutu we spotted our first Yellow-billed Kite. By 1300, having reached the entrance to New Year's Gift we stopped for a picnic lunch under the trees, which all had to be identified, beside the river.

After settling in we assembled in the beautiful gardens for our first walk. This took us along dusty tracks parallel to a stream where we heard Sombre Greenbul, the first of many, and saw Brown-hooded Kingfisher, African Hoopoe, Cardinal Woodpecker, Red-headed, Spectacled and Village Weaver, lots of Red-billed Firefinch and Green-winged Pytilia.

The evening was cool and breezy but even that didn't prepare us for the rain and wind in the night and the mist and cloud which greeted us on Saturday. Undeterred, we drove via Chipinge to Mt Selinda and the Chirinda Forest. The camp was full of South Africans on a mission, not birds but souls. After a longish pause and no change in the weather some of us set off back, others to visit friends at the Zona Estate, and 4 of us to get lost in the Jersey area before returning to camp. Two intrepid members made their painful way to the summit of a ridge on a local mountain. A hard trek in poor visibility and some rain but their bird list justified the effort.

From Tony:

"After I had borrowed a bright yellow raincoat from Tonderai Chitungo (Training Manager), Richard and I set off to climb to the nearest saddle set between two rather high points on the horizon. Before we reached the path we had a good view of a Lizard Buzzard sitting in a gum-tree. We then proceeded along the rock-strewn path that meandered its way along a river valley where Narina Trogons had been seen on our last trip a few years back. The next bird to be seen was a Double-Collared Sunbird just after we began the climb. After a couple of Chin-spot Batis, it was rather a

long time before we heard or saw any feathered stuff! Mist and light on/off rain made the rocks rather slippery and it was hard going all the way up – some places so steep we had to hold on to rocks and trees for support. At a point some two thirds of the way up, a Scaly-throated Honeyguide began calling and kept calling on and off even after we had walked down after having reached the ridge top where we had some good rain and wind. We had a mini-bird party on the way up amongst which we saw Yellow-bellied Greenbuls, Brown-backed Honeyguide, Red-billed Crombec and Mashona (Southern) Hyliota. At one point, we struggled up the hill off the path to see what bird was calling to us and were rewarded by seeing two Striped Pipits. Apart from Rock Martins and Eastern Saw-wings the only other birds seen were ordinary stuff like Black-eyed Bulbuls which were just everywhere.”

The Zona group had an interesting day visiting the factory, tasting the tea and chatting to old friends before going back for a second try at the forest, this time without the rain. A most successful walk ensued when even the Swynnerton’s Robin was seen.

Back at HQ we notched up a few more; big flocks of Yellow-fronted Canaries. Eastern Saw-wing and Wire-tailed Swallow, Crowned Hornbill and the resident Green Pigeon in the fig tree. Later 3 of us made our way to the river and were pleased to find the remains of the riverine forest still so productive that we decided to repeat the experience as the final Monday walk before brunch.

Sunday dawned more promising, still overcast but the group’s optimism soon lifted the clouds and almost half of us returned to the forest. And we were not disappointed. One non-forest special was a Verreaux’s Eagle, spotted through a gap in the canopy on our extended tour. More expected were the Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, Livingstone’s Turaco, Red-capped Robin-chat, Chirinda Apalis, Square-tailed Drongo, Black-fronted Bush-shrike, White-eared Barbet, Terrestrial Brownbul, Striped-cheeked Greenbul, Yellow-streaked Greenbuls, Dark-capped Bulbul and Sombre Greenbuls. On the detour via the Big Tree, *Khaya Anthotheca*, I was lucky enough to be shown an African Broadbill with its back to us exhibiting clearly a white patch like a petal that had landed there. How diagnostic can you get! Sadly, no Swynnerton’s (they had performed for the others the previous day), no Crested Guineafowl and no Yellow-throated Woodland-warbler. That was a long, hard walk for the 5 of us but very rewarding. Please may the forest remain protected!

The rest of the group had piled into one vehicle and taken off for Rupisi Hot Springs and the Chipinge Safari Area. I’ll hand over to Stuart for his account of the day’s excursion.

On Sunday our group of seven set off for the Risimbi National Park and Hot Springs. The hot springs were very busy as we arrived on laundry day with everyone doing their washing in the lovely hot water, children running around playing and much noise. We saw a few birds and moved on to the Ripisi National Park. The Officer in Charge was pleased to see us. It appeared they do not get many visitors. He allocated us a guide, Howard, who took us to three water spots in the vicinity. We saw 48 species whilst we were in the region, the best spot being the first visited in the NP. It was a small, barely flowing stream. We sat on some rocks with a “birds eye view” of the goings on underneath a heavily wooded bushy area that partly covered the small pool underneath the bush.

Our viewing side was open - a beautiful spot for photography. It was as if the birds flew into the picture frame where they had their refreshment centre. Drinking, bathing and socialising with each other. We saw among others: Orange-winged Pythilia, Green-winged Pythilia, African Firefinch, Blue Waxbills, Dark-capped Bulbuls, White-browed Robin-chat, all mixing together, splashing in and out of the water.

The other two walks were through very thorny bush to water spots. It was hard going and we did not see many birds. One was a regular watering spot for the Black Rhino, Ripisi being a protected area for the Rhino. There was a remote camera set up to monitor the spot.

On our return we detoured through the Middle Sabi Agricultural irrigation area. We were entertained for many kilometres by Sannie, our “tour guide”. Sannie, having lived there for many years, knew the history of the area and “everyone” who was “anyone” in the area over the last thirty years or so and gave us a very interesting and entertaining history of the area. It was a bit sad to see so many previously productive farms now lying dormant.

We returned to the New Years Gift Tea Estates where we had another lovely dinner and a chat around the large log fire about the day's events.

On Monday we set off early for the river only a couple of kilometres from our HQ. All 3 groups had good experiences; Mountain Wagtail on the river, Hadedda Ibis overhead, Tambourine Dove, Little and Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Eastern (Pallid) Honeyguide, Collared, Variable and Olive Sunbird, Black-throated Wattle-eye, Forest Weaver galore, Red-throated Twinspot, Southern Black and Ashy Tit and many more.

And some had kippers for breakfast! That was after the final count of 144 confirmed sightings. Our heartfelt thanks go to the management and staff of the Training Centre for a fantastic weekend and to our modest Chairperson whose idea it was as a result of a previous visit.

**Ken Dixon**

### **The September evening presentation was delivered by Tony Alegria, The topic - "Birding in the Save Conservancy - Chishakwe Ranch".**

The Mashonaland committee was invited to carry out a "bird survey" by habitat to help Chishakwe Ranch in their ecotourism endeavour. This was achieved by conducting three trips to cover the Hot/Dry (November), Hot/Wet (March) and Cold/Dry (July) periods. Thus 7 or 8 birders per trip enjoyed birding in the lowveld at three very different times of the year – the first two being particularly hot whilst the July outing was pretty cold in the evenings. Chishakwe Ranch bird records covering some seven years had 229 birds listed and a few of the species at first glance appeared to be improbable – perhaps misidentifications?

All these trips began with a stop at Widgeon Pan (some 40 Kms south Chivu on the road to Zaka) where up to 30 species of birds were seen – from the ever-present diminutive Quail Finches to the much larger Herons. Five species of Cisticolas (Grass Warblers) were identified as well as Ducks and Harriers. Quail Finches and Yellow-crowned Bishops were "lifers" for some of the party. The pan was illustrated with quite a few photos one of which showed the first Wader seen – Alex Masterson in the water, wet up to his thighs!

There followed many pictures showing various road signs and the turn off to Chishakwe Ranch. Once you left the main Masvingo-Mutare Road you were on dirt roads! Unlike the through road to the various Ranches comprising the Save Conservancy which was not maintained, the Chishakwe roads were maintained and were fairly good.

There followed a bit of history – the birding parties stayed at a guesthouse that was part of the old Devuli head office. As well as the guest house, Chishakwe has a well appointed Safari Lodge area, along the river bank, which can accommodate up to 10 people - the per night payment includes all the meals. There is an airstrip on the ranch, so no need to drive there! The Giant of Devuli (a Baobab Tree) is not on this ranch, but there is a massive Baobab at Chishakwe near the dam. The taller Chishakwe tree is estimated to be 2 – 2.5 thousand years old and has approximately 1.5 metres less girth than the Devuli Giant. The Giant is a squatter tree and said to actually be two trees growing in close proximity that melded into one big tree.

Photos of the numerous habitats showed everybody just how beautiful the Chishakwe Ranch is with its many rocky outcrops and trees that are just about everywhere except for a +- 30 acre grassland area which was cleared for citrus trees but never used for that purpose as the owner became bankrupt. The third largest grassland was a disused football field! A dam was constructed for irrigating the citrus trees and now supplies water to humans and the animals. Other habitats included; acacia, mopane, riverine & mixed woodland.

The birding parties arrived on a Friday at lunchtime and left after a full breakfast the following Monday. Birding took place either first thing in the morning or after 3:00 pm in the afternoon. In between the morning and afternoon birding sessions (during the midday lunch/chill out period) birding continued in the gardens and surrounds.



### **Results of the Chishakwe bird surveys:**

First outing (Hot/Dry) November 2010 - 180 species

Second outing (Hot/Wet) March 2011 - 180 species ..... but 29 of them were different to those seen on the first outing!

Third outing (Cold /Dry) July 2011 - 125 species ... .. but 16 of them were different to those seen on the previous two outings!

Total number of species seen on all three outings = 225

Total number of species seen before during the period 2001 – 2009 = 229, birds on this list not seen by us: 47

Over a period of time, probably as many as 400 species will be seen. You have to be there at the right time to see whatever is around at that time!

Number of species seen in various habitats: Garden – 114, Dam – 120, Riverine – 159, Acacia – 89, Mopane – 43, Kopje – 99, Mixed Woodland – 127, Grassland/open (airstrip) – 25

Some of the improbable birds were seen including a Collared Palm-thrush!

### **The Harare Garden Bird Survey (HGBS) – where are we?**

First of all, I'd like to thank all those participating in the HGBS and appeal to all birders not doing so to begin as soon as possible – this is one survey where it's impossible to have too much information! We need it to be the basis for all future Harare Garden Bird Surveys.

By now the BLZ Office should have done an interim report with facts and figures showing us how many participants there are now and how it has developed from the beginning.

The Harare Garden Bird Survey is aimed at trying to find out what is happening with the birds in Harare. The gardens appear to have become a rather special habitat with many flowers, fruit trees, exotic trees and shrubs. We believe that many birds have made it their home and we look forward to the day when the survey is over and the results have been analyzed.

Having looked at the first lot of sheets sent to the BLZ Office, it is interesting to note that many birders are trying to adhere to the old Garden Bird Survey format and including Ds and Ws to indicate birds seen on a daily or weekly basis – this is unnecessary as the new format only requires a bird seen or heard anytime during an entire week to be reported as seen in the garden (code 1), heard (code 2), seen flying overhead (code 3) or seen to be breeding as evidenced by seeing the nest, bird carrying food or nesting material or seen with youngsters. This means we won't have a huge jump in the number of birds seen on Saturdays & Sundays if the survey was done on a daily basis. Whether a bird is seen or heard in your or an adjacent garden is immaterial as birds don't have boundaries as we do. And if it's your garden or another garden – it's still in a garden!

The other observation is that the codes are not always being used correctly, e.g. unless you have palm trees in your or adjacent gardens, the chances are that Palm Swifts will only be seen flying overhead and thus code 3 ought to be used. If a Crow or Cattle Egret or whatever is seen in your garden, it must be utilizing your garden and therefore should be under code 1 – if flying overhead, then it's a 3.

The sheets coming in appear to show that there are a few misidentifications – some of the birds listed should not be here, but if they are – WOW, we need to see them! We need to keep a close eye on this aspect and contact the participants so we can confirm these sightings!

If anyone is having difficulty in identifying a bird that is being seen regularly, please contact us so we can try and help.

Another issue is the new names; participants are not all familiar with the new names and may inadvertently mark off the incorrect bird. I believe we need to send out any name change lists we have to all participants. Here's a tip, if in doubt about a name change, look at the Roberts number in your old book and match this number on the HGBS form.

Of interest is the diversity of birds being seen/heard in the gardens – from common, expected to be seen birds to things like Red-headed and Thick-billed Weavers. There are also many raptors being seen and plenty of Purple-crested Turacos – a group of 15 seen in one tree!

It is obvious from the results that certain gardens are rich in birdlife and others are fairly poor. The fact is that if only a few birds are seen in a garden, it must mean something and could be more informative and useful in the long run than a garden full of birds. So, no matter what's in your garden, it's important to report it by participating in the HGBS as you just don't know what it may indicate in the long run.

Happy garden birding

**Tony Alegria**

P.S. "Many forms do not have a name or contact details on page 2 of the sheet – it is extremely important that a participant completes this section, or else, once the attachment has been saved in the HGBS database the connection to the email with the participants' contact details is broken!

### **Flock Sizes-HGBS**

There is lots of space on the back of the Garden Bird form, and maybe members can record some of the flock sizes they count.

Some of the information we have on flock sizes in the literature is not as good as it should be. Here are some of mine:

Sacred Ibis	9 week 19 (flying over)
European Bee-eater	55 week 20 (flying over)
Red-billed Firefinch	23 week 19 (taking flying ants)
Common Waxbill	6 week 13
Common Waxbill	20 week 14
Bronze Mannikin	10 week 15
Common Waxbill	10 week 15
Green Wood-Hoopoe	7 week 15
Speckled Mousebird	6 week 16
Red -backed Mannikin	11 week 20 ( a first in this garden for 36 years )
Blue Waxbill	7 week 20 (taking flying ants)
Marsh Owls	8 week 20 (At the Pomona Dam 10/11/2011)

**D.V. Rockingham-Gill, 4 Fernleigh Road, Pomona, P.O.Borrowdale**

### **Abiding Bird Mysteries**

Those two saw-wing swallows

M.P.S. Irwin

We are lucky I believe in this part of Africa, that there are still some very basic problems that remain to be resolved where we can still make a very meaningful contribution to biology. And in that quarter we have already been alerted in *Honeyguide* to the problem presented by the two species of sweet waxbills up there at Nyanga and the even greater mystery that now surrounds a very certain second species of double-collared sunbird that is recorded sporadically in our Eastern Highlands. But on this occasion it is the challenge awaiting us by our two closely related saw-wing swallows. Namely the Black Saw-wing *Psalidoprocne holomelaena* and its counterpart the Eastern Saw-wing *P. orientalis*. And although very much alike when adult in their shiny black plumage, where the former has the underwing-coverts and axillaries wholly black in the other they are contrastingly white.

But to obtain a wider perspective we must first consider what is regarded by many as a single highly variable polytypic species *P. pristoptera* which, ranges from Nigeria and Ethiopia southwards to Angola in the west and to the Cape in the east. But unlike most swallows where geographical variation may be minimal, there are no less than 12 well-marked races or subspecies that often differ markedly between themselves and with often clearly defined ranges with little evidence for intergradation. Most too, are intra-African migrants and otherwise appear to wander

considerably. And where one form may be found within the range of another, which is not easily explained. We are therefore not really sure whether the presently accepted taxa are full species or simply races. And in this part of Africa we have a compromise and recognise *holomelaena* and *orientalis* as two distinct species as there is no evidence that they ever interbreed or intergrade morphologically. And while with us the Black Saw-wing has a restricted breeding range in the higher rainfall areas along the south-eastern edge of the central plateau, that of its Eastern counterpart is centred along the Eastern Highlands with a range-extension in recent years across the high ground of the central watershed in Mashonaland. And between which there are no really apparent natural barriers. And both are rather typical of the Miombo woodland biome where they end to nest in stream banks or cuttings during the rains.

The proof of course of a biological species is that they can breed sympatrically without intergrading or hybridization although at the moment there is no clear overlap. But evidence now seems to be accumulating that the Black Saw-wing has and perhaps does breed occasionally alongside or actually within the range of its more widespread Eastern relative. It has therefore become essential that we find out more and what may actually be happening on the ground if they can breed in the same general area, but not necessarily in close proximity to each other. And one of the complicating factors is that both species tend to breed at rather low densities and where the location of suitable breeding sites may be limited with individual pairs being widely dispersed. This may be further reinforced by the fact that the adults may arrive on their breeding ground while already paired and thus minimising the possibility of potential gene flow. And as we have already made clear, there is no evidence that they intergrade. And this provides further support that they do behave as good species here, whatever might happen elsewhere.

But the problem at the moment as I see it is one of identification and certainly here in Mashonaland any saw-wing seen is automatically regarded as being an Eastern and are all field identifications really seriously checked? A further complication is that unlike their black counterparts, immature Eastern saw-wings resemble their black counterparts, in having the underwing-coverts and axillaries suffused with brown, but of course lack the full glossy adult plumage. And it might also be mentioned in this context that the same character (but with a glossy plumage) is shared by the race *reichenowi* in Zambia and which replaces *orientalis* westwards within the Miombo biome from the Muchinga Escarpment and is again likely to occur in here in the course of its wanderings. And it too, it might be said, is not known to intergrade with the other two species and maintains a finite range. The whole problem really seems to be one of field identification and making really sure that any saw-wings encountered are correctly identified.

So the challenge is there, does the Black Saw-wing breed more widely in the country than presently accepted and can it at times perhaps breed within the range of its eastern counterpart? And why not, especially as food availability is unlikely to be a factor and the only potential competition might just be for nest-sites. And there are suitable localities as along the Great Dyke and where the black has been recorded in the breeding season in clearly suitable habitat. And another question that we might well ask is not the Black Saw-wing in the process of extending its range too? So get out there and see what you can find out and sort out the biological side of it as well and do these two swallows behave as good species in Zimbabwe whatever happens elsewhere?

### **Please correct me if I am wrong**

We often do perhaps, but probably should not, take for granted what is written in the bird books whoever the author might be. And this probably goes as much for what I have written as anyone else. A good case in point there is the bold statement on page 365 of my *Birds of Zimbabwe*, where for Gurney's Sugarbird *Promerops gurneyi*. I make the rather generous statement that the total population, while very small, might comprise only a few thousand individuals. A Few thousand, but is that not being rather too generous? I certainly believe so now. One only has to go through any reference to sugar birds in the pages of *Honeyguide* to see that it is in fact uncommon everywhere and nowhere occurs in any numbers. And after doing a rethink myself, we would seem lucky if the number of sugarbirds that are to be found between Nyanga and the Chimanimani Mountains, even reached a thousand individuals! And my own more mature guess is that five hundred might still be rather too many. But what do you think then and what is your experience in sugarbird country. So let's think in terms of something more insightful and if we can't come up with

a reasonable figure then we will have to organise a survey. And of course it is a conservation issue as well, even though these birds have been the beneficiaries of the planting of Proteas on a commercial basis. And it would be a satisfying exercise as well and well worth the effort.

**M.P.S. Irwin** [rolly@zol.co.zw](mailto:rolly@zol.co.zw)

## **MATABELELAND BRANCH**

### **RECENT REPORTS**

NUST campus – 2 October

**Adele Edwards**

Only 5 people managed to stir themselves at 6:30 on a Sunday morning to join Professor Peter Mundy for a walk on the NUST campus; the rest missed out on some good birding and on benefiting from Peter's extensive knowledge, which he is so generous in sharing. Thank you, Peter. The Branch had undertaken a walk once before, in February, on the campus but as it happened none of those present on this occasion (except Peter) had been there then so it was new territory for us. After parking near the playing fields we set off on a meander, with the goal of reaching the quarry. We walked past one of the residences, where Masked Weavers were busy building nests in the surrounding trees, and where we paused to confirm that the swallows overhead were indeed Lesser Striped, but for the most part walked through open Acacia scrub.

Progress was slow – inevitable as we stopped to look at something in every other bush and patch of bare ground, as well as the sky overhead! The only raptors we saw were a Shikra and a Black-shouldered Kite. But there were plenty of seed eaters including: Blue and Black-faced Waxbill, Brimstone and Black-throated Canary, Streaky-headed Seedeater, Jameson's and Red-billed Firefinch, Bronze Manikin, Green-winged Pytilia, Southern Grey-headed and House Sparrow, Yellow Bishop and Golden-breasted Bunting. We enjoyed a very good sighting of a Brubru, and spent some time making sure we were all clear on the way to distinguish between Little (tail short & square) and White-rumped Swifts (tail deeply forked, looks pointed when held closed); (the third swift with a white rump, the Horus Swift, was not seen but has a slightly forked tail which looks square when spread in flight). We also saw Palm Swifts.

After a couple of hours, having still not reached the quarry, we reluctantly decided to turn back as we still wanted to spend some time walking along the main drive into the campus – always a very productive bird area. On our way back to the vehicles we dallied for some minutes trying to locate the source of a puzzling call – eventually tracking it to a White-browed Sparrow-weaver who had added an interesting variation to his song. A large, plump Purple Roller awaited us on the sports field fence. Deciding we couldn't complete a second count on campus without seeing the quarry, a few of us drove there before leaving. While we didn't pick up any water birds we were rewarded with close up sightings of beautifully coloured Little and Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters.

In total we recorded 61 species, matching the number seen during the walk in February (though the species were different.) As a result of this walk Prof Mundy was able to add another 10 species to his species count for the NUST campus bringing the current total to 113.

### **WEZ HNP Game Count – 11/12 October**

**Adele Edwards**

The annual game count in Hwange National Park, organized by Wildlife & Environment Zimbabwe Matabeleland Branch, took place over the 24hour period starting midday on 11<sup>th</sup> October. This was a static count with teams remaining at their allocated water point for 24 hours and recording all the animals that came down to drink. Teams were also asked to keep a checklist of all the bird species observed at their water points and these lists are ultimately passed on to BLZ. Many of the participants were also members of BLZ. Some teams also completed BLZ Special Species forms

and provided additional information on vultures (as requested by BLZ at the briefing prior to the count).

This year 70 teams took part in the count, with 63 teams submitting bird checklists – an excellent effort. A total of 229 species were seen (171 in Main Camp region, 136 in Sinamatella and 140 in Robins). A lot of interesting information comes out of these observations. As one example: 75 ostrich were recorded, 69 in the Main Camp area, 5 at Robins, nil at Sinamatella. Of these 14 were males, 15 females and 46 chicks of varying ages and sizes. 22 birds were recorded at Nyamandlovu pan, believed to be two clutches – one for each of the females seen there.

### **Birds: Made in New Zealand – 21 October 2011**

#### **Adele Edwards**

A good crowd pitched up at The Boma, Hillside Dams, to hear Vince Pegg's talk on some of New Zealand's unusual birds. The flora and fauna of New Zealand are unique. There never were many mammals native to New Zealand; now there are only two species still extant – both of them bats. Consequently birds evolved to occupy many of the niches occupied by mammals in other parts of the world. Due to this, and the lack of any natural predators, several species are flightless. It is believed that the first New Zealand birds to become extinct were the Moa, of which there were 11 species the largest of which stood 3.7m high and weighed 230kg. Following the arrival of the first humans in New Zealand, the Maoris in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Moas were hunted to extinction as a food source, and were followed by the giant Haast's Eagle which relied on the Moas for food. Since then habitat destruction and the introduction of 'foreign' mammals – such as rats and pigs - which are a danger to the birds or more often to their eggs, has led to many New Zealand birds becoming threatened or endangered. However New Zealand's Department of Conservation (DOC) has had a number of success stories, bringing species back from the brink of extinction by establishing populations on offshore islands, which were rehabilitated and brought close to their natural state before reintroduction of the birds.

Vince is a New Zealander and so was able to give us the correct pronunciation for the names of the birds he spoke about including tui, kea, kiwi, weka, kakapo and takahe. Our thanks to Vince for a most interesting talk and to the staff at The Boma for the good food and service.

### **Summer Dassie Count – 28-30 October 2011**

#### **Adele Edwards**

In May the branch undertook its fourth Dassie Survey in the Matobo National Park. The Dassie Survey is an adjunct to the Black Eagle Survey, as it is believed fluctuations in the dassie population may affect the population size and breeding capacity of Black Eagles. During the May survey a number of people commented on their frustration at not being able to see the dassies clearly due to the thick foliage. It was suggested that we repeat the survey at another time of year. And so we gathered for a summer dassie count. On the plus side we didn't have to get up on a cold winter's morning to sit on a freezing chunk of granite while waiting for dassies to appear at first light. On the down side dawn was at 5:20am, which meant we had to be up very, very early to be in position in time. And after all that we saw very few dassies. It would appear the dassies modify their behaviour depending on the season, and follow a different routine in summer; we are going to have to investigate further. Dassies were seen during the course of the weekend, mainly in the late afternoon. This then raises the question: do the black eagles modify their behaviour to be more active at the same time as the dassies?

Despite the absence of dassies the weekend was still most enjoyable with lots of fun, laughter and shared experiences. And as the dassie survey part started so early and was complete by mid morning there was plenty of time to check Black Eagle nests and do some general birding. By the end of the weekend between the various teams we had recorded 129 species. Besides Black Eagles raptors seen included: Crowned Eagle, Wahlberg's Eagle (2 pairs seen at their nest site), African Hawk Eagle, African Fish Eagle, Tawny Eagle, Brown Snake-eagle, African Harrier Hawk, Black Sparrowhawk, Yellow-billed Kite and Black-shouldered Kite. Maleme Dam produced a number of water birds including: African Black Duck (3), Egyptian Goose, Little Grebe, Common Moorhen, Lesser Moorhen, African Jacana, Black-crowned Night-heron, Black Crake, African

Darter and White-breasted Cormorant. Also seen were 3 types of Kingfishers: Giant, Brown-hooded and Grey-headed. Purple-crested Turacos (common in many Harare gardens but a treat for us in Matabeleland) were seen in all their glory around Maleme. A Matobo special, the Boulder Chat, was seen as well as the Mocking Cliff-chat.

Our thanks to Cecilia and Tony for hosting us at Nungu Guest House and for all they did to make the weekend so pleasant, comfortable and enjoyable for us all.

### **Meeting with BLZ Director & RSPB International Officer (Africa)**

#### **Adele Edwards**

On Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> November Chip Chirara, Director BLZ, and Chris Magin, RSPB International Officer (Africa), spent the evening in Bulawayo on their way through to Hwange National Park and took the opportunity to meet with Matabeleland members. Despite the short notice, as their travel arrangements were only confirmed late, 13 members came along to the Chairman's home to meet the visitors. Chris gave a most interesting presentation on the RSPB, its history and activities and its affiliation with BLI and BLZ; while for several of the members it was their first opportunity to meet Chip who willingly answered questions. It turned into a very interesting and entertaining evening, with everyone staying on to enjoy a meal generously provided by Cecilia and Tony. Chris kindly donated to the branch several pairs of second-hand binoculars brought out from the UK.

### **Hwange Game Count, QDS: 1826d2-10 to 13/10/11 and Nunqu Lodge, Matopos, QDS: 2028c2-14 to 16/10/11**

My wife Carolyn and I were invited to join Jeanette and Eddie Cross on this year's annual game count at Hwange National Park. The count started at midday on 11/10/11 and ended at midday the next day. The plan was that we would leave Harare at about 9am on 9/10/11 and drive to Bulawayo to get there in mid afternoon. Unfortunately we had a couple of mishaps and did not get to Bulawayo until about 8pm. First we forgot something and had to go back for it when we were 22km out of Harare and then the radiator boiled when we were over 100km out of Harare so we decided to go back slowly and change cars. So by the time we left Harare for the third time we had added about 250km to our journey and ended up travelling about 750km in one day. Fortunately no harm was done and we set off for the park the next morning.

The weather was just about perfect for the next 7 days that we spent in Matabeleland so we had a pleasant journey and arrived at Main Camp around lunchtime. We saw 2 groups of Ground Hornbills along the road and noticed significant numbers of Yellow-billed Kites and Pied Crows in the campsite. After lunch and a siesta we decided that we only had time to drive as far as Nyamndlovu pan that afternoon. On the way to the pan we saw a juvenile Martial Eagle perched in a tree that appeared to contain an eagle's nest and at the pan we picked up some migrant waders in the form of Kittlitz's Plover, Wood Sandpiper and Ruff. The other recent arrival was the Barn Swallow. As with several of the Hwange pans the water level was low so the water was muddy and the elephants were crowding around the trough to get the clean water as it was pumped out of the pipe. That evening the counting teams met on the lawn outside of the restaurant where we were briefed on the status of the water for the game and wild dog, herbivore and lion research and given a performance by a very good song and dance troupe from Dett.

The next day was the first day of the 24 hour count and we planned to leave for our pan at about 10am as it was only about 5 minutes drive away. We had been allocated Livingi pan, which is a few kilometres from Main Camp on the entrance road, and as it is close to this road we were closer than we would have liked to have been to the traffic. We would also have preferred to be somewhere deep inside the park, but you are allocated your site on a random basis. This departure time gave us plenty of time for an early morning bird walk and I managed to get close to some of the Hwange specials including Red-billed Spurfowl, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Cape Glossy Starling and Black-cheeked Waxbill. When we arrived at the pan there were a lot of elephants queuing up for a drink so we had to wait for about half an hour to drive to our selected spot under a shady

Leadwood tree. While we were waiting we had good views of more Crimson-breasted Shrike and a Tinkling Cisticola. The Crosses had managed to borrow a portable gazebo that we erected and parked the car underneath and this made things much cooler in the car as the temperature rose to 35C in the afternoon. However, we spent nearly all of the next 24 hours in our chairs around our tree so that our view was unimpeded. We know what the temperatures were as each team was required to bring a thermometer and record the temperature every 3 hours.

Our pan was just a small muddy patch as there was so much demand for the water being pumped into the concrete trough that overflows into the pan that it never reached the pan. We counted 933 elephants coming down to drink from a 1, 5-inch supply pipe in 24 hours, so some of those elephants probably visited the pan twice during the count. The only time that the elephants were not trying to drink was when Main Camp was drawing water from our pump and then it became quiet after the constant din of thirsty, trumpeting elephants tussling to get a drink. This water collection was necessary because the Zesa supply had been cut off when some of the wooden pylons were destroyed by a veldt fire a few days earlier. Elephants totally dominated the fresh water supply so that other species of game and birds had to try to skim water off the surface of the mud when the elephants were not mud bathing in the pan. The other mammals recorded included hyena, bat-eared fox, baboon, giraffe, sable, zebra, kudu, impala and steenbok. Hooded and White-backed Vulture began to land near the pump house on the other side of the road and after the count was over we found that they and the 3 hyenas that we had seen had probably been feeding on the carcass of a 4 year old elephant. Yellow-billed kites and Bateleur were the commonest raptors but I was surprised that we also saw a Long-crested Eagle. Other daytime birding highlights included Mosque Swallow, both Yellow and Red-billed Oxpecker and Red-billed Buffalo Weaver at their nests. At night the loudest calls came from Rufous-cheeked Nightjar and we also heard Fiery-necked Nightjar and a distant African Scops-owl. The elephants became more used to our presence as time went by and even cows with calves passed by quite closely at times. However Carolyn had to talk one matriarch cow out of bringing its herd to use the rubbing posts that were next to our tree as she just kept coming until she was only about 10m away. Such moments add spice to game viewing as long as there are no mishaps.

We returned to Main Camp in the afternoon of the 12<sup>th</sup> to find that dustbins had been filled with water so each person was restricted to about one bucket of water to bath with. Fortunately the weather was hot so this was not a hardship and we had brought drinking water from town. That night I think we all slept very well after not getting much sleep during the count. The next day we returned to Bulawayo after adding a few more species of birds from an early morning bird walk around the camp. Our total species count for the park was 77 and we also saw a White-headed Vulture and another family of Ground Hornbills along the road. We spent the night of the 13<sup>th</sup> with the Crosses and went to the Matopos the next day.

Julia Dupree had very kindly arranged to book us into a private lodge at Nungu Farm in the Matopos for the nights of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>. The Crosses joined us on the 15<sup>th</sup> and Dorothy Wakeling and John Kelly were with us for the whole time, as they just happened to be in Bulawayo on business. The lodge is built onto a small granite kopje so that there are 4 levels. On the ground floor, which is reached by a stairway up the kopje and is about 7m above the ground, is the lounge leading onto a patio, the dining room, the kitchen and a bathroom and the next 3 floors are bedrooms with an outside bathroom on the top floor. Thus the design makes for splendid views at different levels.

On the drive to the lodge we were shown the nests of African Hawk and Wahlberg's Eagle and we managed to see Verreaux's, Martial, Walberg's and Brown Snake-eagle. After lunch we went for a very pleasant walk up the river to the western boundary and noticed that the river was still flowing as they had recently received about 35mm of rain. 3 Bushbuck were seen at the boundary and we also saw African Harrier Hawk, European Bee-eater, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, White-throated Robin-chat, Willow Warbler, Ashy Flycatcher, Grey-headed Bush Shrike and Golden-breasted Bunting and heard Red-chested Cuckoo. After a superb supper we went onto the patio to listen to the night calls and look at the stars and picked up African Barred Owlet and Fiery-necked Nightjar. Throughout our stay Julia did most of the food preparation and we were fed very well indeed.

The next morning we decided that we would go for an early morning walk, then have breakfast and drive to an area near World's View after the Crosses had joined us. Julia was up at the crack of dawn followed by the rest of us. In a nearby kopje we quickly picked up Boulder Chat and later Speckled Pigeon, White-necked Raven and Red-winged Starling on other kopjes. Crested Francolin, Natal and Swainson's Spurfowl were heard or seen and Purple-crested Turaco have become quite common in the few years since they first became established in the Matopos. African Grey, Red-billed and Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill were seen and we added Pearl-spotted Owlet, Bearded Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Eremomela and Green-winged Pytilia. On the journey to our destination near World's View we saw some Klipspringer and Red-billed Oxpecker. We parked the cars at the foot of our dwala and walked up to the top where we had magnificent views of the surrounding countryside and were able to watch the foreign tourists visiting World's View. As we neared the cars on our return we picked up Retz's Helmet Shrike.

When we returned to the lodge for lunch we found that we had no water because a tap had stripped its thread. Fortunately John managed to get it flowing again after some clever temporary repairs and later still our host visited us and replaced the tap. At about 3pm we went to Maleme Dam and walked upstream from the main picnic area on the eastern side. Associated with the dam were the common water species but around the dam we saw Yellow-billed Kite, Long-crested Eagle, Lesser Honeyguide and Familiar Chat. Towards the top of the dam our attention was captured by a flock of a *Euplectes* species in non-breeding plumage that had the dark wings of a Fire-crowned Bishop and much more yellow on the back than either the Yellow Bishop or the Yellow-mantled Bishop. After checking my field guide I decided that these were Yellow-crowned Bishop, a species that I had previously only seen at Widgeon Pan. That evening some of us again spent time on the patio where we added Freckled Nightjar as both seen and heard as one landed on our thatch roof and another was calling nearby. We were also treated to a large shooting star that lasted for several seconds.

The next day was our departure day but we did have time to explore different parts of the farm on an early morning bird walk before breakfast, packing up and the final bird checklist call over. The total species count was 95.

Thank you very much to our host and to Julia for arranging such a special venue.

**Richard Dennison**

I found this story interesting and hope that others do too. Ed

**Satellite-tagged Lesser Spotted Eagle killed in Zambia** 14<sup>th</sup> November 2011

Darryl Tiran - Ecolynx Safaris [<mailto:ecolynx@yoafrica.com>]

Subject: A short one-way flight thru savage Africa...

A satellite tagged Lesser Spotted Eagle from Romania was killed in northern Zambia out of superstition...

On 24 October 2011 Tom Papp, President of the Milvus Group, received a letter from Zambia, David Chisala Ngwenyama, a researcher who is following our online eagle tracking project and believes that one of our lesser spotted eagles was killed by locals:

"I am a researcher in Zambia's Bangweulu Swamps and came across a story that I thought may be related to one of the Lesser Spotted Eagles your organisation is tracking.

A few days ago some villagers in Kawambwa killed an Eagle, which according to the description had 2 rings and a solar powered satellite transmitter.

Looking at your map, it seems that one of the Eagles from your project was in the area at the time. Could you please verify if you have lost track of one of the birds. I have attached the story below.

Best regards, David

**David Chisala Ngwenyama**, Bangweulu Shoebill Research

The letter was copied to the local press. Gadgets, which turned out to be a satellite transmitter and



two rings, were believed by locals from Mutoba Village to have magical powers and therefore the eagle was beaten and burned to death:

**“Magic Bird Hacked and Burnt In Kawambwa  
By Godfrey Chikumbi in Kawambwa**

An eagle believed to be superstitious was yesterday hacked and burnt to ashes in Kawambwa after it failed to fly for safety.

In what is believed to be a bizarre incident, a group of people from Mutoba village located 25 kilometres away from Kawambwa boma yesterday morning found what was believed to be a magic bird in the nearby bush.

Narrating the ordeal to tumfweko.com village headman Mutoba said the bird fell from a tree that was being cut. He said when the bird fell down it lost strength and became so weak that it failed to make a flight as it was decorated with ornaments of different kind.

The headman said the creature had a metallic silver ring on each leg with inscriptions on them saying the right ring had letters ‘USA’ with the left having ‘1995’. He said on its chest the bird had a small Television screen with a solar panel and battery connected to it. The traditional leader added that on the bird’s back was a small motorcar attached to a motorbike. Headman Mutoba said when some people started beating the creature with sticks it showed no sign of losing its life until after 3 hours. He said the creature was later burnt to ashes after hours of watching it.”

We already suspected something was wrong with Lisa, born in Brasov County on 8th July 2011 and later fitted with a satellite transmitter. The last GPS co-ordinates were recorded on 15th October. This was followed by satellite broadcasts on October 18, 21 and 24, after which the transmitter became silent and no more messages were sent from her.

In a letter sent by David Chisala Ngwenyama, he explains everything: the location indicated by the coordinate of the last record from the transmitter, and the described killing and burning at the same place and time ... arising from religious fanaticism, cruelty and human stupidity – the victim being an eagle.

**And, here is Lisa’s 8,535 km journey to her death in northern Zambia:**

Lisa’s 37 day voyage began on September 9, 2011. On 13 September she crossed the Bosphorus and four days later reached Turkey. The Belen Pass on September 17, took between 6-8 hours to cross and in two days she reached the northern part of the Sinai Peninsula. Six days later, on 25th September, Lisa successfully left the Peninsula and finally succeeded in getting through the Suez Canal, reaching Africa and the Egyptian Nile Valley.

She then travelled undisturbed across Sudan, Ethiopia and Uganda. On 10<sup>th</sup> October she crossed the Equator. The last flight co-ordinates were recorded in Zambia on 15th October, having travelled 8,535km.

## TAIL FEATHERS

**The Common Myna extending its range in Botswana**

I have frequently seen the Common Myna in Nata (2026A1) but it appears to be spreading further afield. On 4 November 2011, whilst travelling from Pandamatenga, 2 adults were foraging/walking on the gravel of the main road under construction 85km north of Nata (1925B4). I presume BirdLife Botswana is monitoring this species.

**Ian Riddell**

**Interesting Bird Observations...& Comments!**

Hmmm ?!?! How long have Red-backed Mannikins been sharing my birdbath with the Bronzies? Surveys make us much more vigilant.

**Tony Wood**, Chisipite

There is a pair of Lilac Breasted Rollers resident in Borrowdale Brooke Estate.  
**Vernon Dickinson**

### **Confrontation between Paradise Flycatchers and a Chameleon**

Two female Paradise Flycatchers attacked a large chameleon (totally unperturbed) that was moving closer to a Paradise Flycatcher nest. Three chicks had hatched that morning. We intervened and removed the chameleon before it could take the chicks. 20<sup>th</sup> Nov 12.00noon

### **D. Wakeling**

### **Vulture Sighting – Gonarezhou Mabalauta National Park**

While visiting Gonarezhou National Park on Wednesday 07 September 2011, we decided to go fishing at the Mwatombo Pool on the Mwenezi River (GPS Co-ords S21° 57' 43"). We arrived at the viewpoint at approx 10h30, and proceeded to walk about 500m to reach the water.

After about 5 minutes fishing, we saw 2 white backed vultures circling above us. In about 3 minutes, the number of vultures had grown to at least 30, all circling above us. There were two species of vulture, the white backed and cape, approx half of each.

The number of vultures gradually decreased, after about 10 minutes the last of the cape vultures moved off. The whole spiral of vultures moved over the bush to the south east of our position, when we walked back to the vehicle about an hour later there was no sign of any vultures.

### **Andy Fussell**

## **NOTICE BOARD**

### **Ornithological Conference and BLSA AGM, Port Elizabeth, March 2012**

The Ornithological Conference, which is being co-convened by the Percy FitzPatrick Institute and BirdLife South Africa (and hosted by BirdLife Eastern Cape) will be held in Port Elizabeth on Thursday 15 and Friday 16 March 2012.

'Frontiers in South African Ornithology' promises to be a very interesting conference and, as it not only aimed at the professional ornithologist, we'd like to encourage birders and citizen scientists to attend.

Also consider staying on for a weekend of birding (including a 'pelagic') and BirdLife South Africa's AGM (Flock 2012). We will be awarding the prestigious Gill Medal to one of South Africa's top ornithologists at Flock 2012, and the gala dinner will be an elegant evening (with an eminent scientist as a our guest speaker, and the announcement of a new partnership to conserve our country's birds).

More details are available at: <http://www.birdlife.org.za/events/agm>  
<<http://www.birdlife.org.za/events/agm>>

### **The 13th Pan-African Ornithological Congress has been changed from Nigeria to Tanzania owing to security and costs concerns.**

PAOC 13 will be held in Arusha from the 14th to 21st October 2012. The theme is "Birds in a Changing Environment".

The Organising Committee have made a call for symposia <<http://www.birdlife.org/community/2011/09/paoc-symposia/>> papers see <http://www.birdlife.org/community/2011/09/paoc-symposia/>

The Pan-African Ornithological Congress (PAOC) takes place every 4 years and its aims and purpose are to:

- (a) Further the study of African birds
- (b) Promote the preservation of African birds as an integral part of the African heritage
- (c) Foster the appreciation of birds and discussion of African birds in relation to man, and
- (d) Disseminate information on African birds through appropriate international meetings (Congresses) and publications (Proceedings of the Congresses).

The previous congress took place on 7-12 September 2008 in Rawsonville, South Africa (see details including proceedings at <http://paoc12.adu.org.za/>)

**Nick Hart's Birds of Zimbabwe 2012 Twelve month calendar.** US10.00. Contact Nick on 0774329430 or [nick@hartofperth.com](mailto:nick@hartofperth.com)

## Monavale

- The Monavale Vlei Calendar 2012 is now available from The BirdLife Zimbabwe Office at US\$3.00 each and donations towards this calendar are welcomed. Any profits from the Calendar go to the conservation of the Vlei and wetland awareness. Contact details: [cosmo@yoafrica.com](mailto:cosmo@yoafrica.com); phone Steve Davies 308382 or 0712 636458.
- Join the Friends of Cosmo Group. You do not have to be a Facebook member to belong.
- The Conservation Society of Monavale Indigenous Tree Nursery is located at the end of Fenella Drive, Monavale. The trees sell for US\$3.00 each, or more for the bigger trees. This also supports the management of the Vlei and promotes the awareness of trees and their correct habitats. Contact details: [cosmo@yoafrica.com](mailto:cosmo@yoafrica.com); phone Steve Davies 308382 or 0712 636458.

## BirdLife Zimbabwe Membership Subscriptions

Our membership year runs from April to March.

Individual or Family members (including children under 17) US\$ 20.00

Pensioners, Students and Juniors US\$ 10.00

Schools (high density) US\$ 20.00

Schools (private) US\$ 50.00

Corporate members US\$ 50.00

Rest of Africa US\$ 30.00

Rest of World US\$ 30.00

Payment may be made at the Office, to a Branch Committee Member at an outing or you can deposit it into the BLZ bank account – Barclays Bank NGO Centre, Branch no: 2157; Account no: 6465998. It is very important that with all direct deposits you include your name on the deposit, so that it appears on the bank statement and please also advise Sylvia Muzavazi, either by faxing the copy deposit slip or by e-mail. [sylvia@blz.co.zw](mailto:sylvia@blz.co.zw)

\*Tiered Corporate Sponsorship Packages are available. Support our Conservation and Education Programmes by becoming a Corporate Sponsor. US\$175, US\$250 and US\$500. For further information please contact The Director. [chip.chirara@blz.co.zw](mailto:chip.chirara@blz.co.zw)

Donations towards *Honeyguide* and our other publications and other activities are welcomed.

**Dear BLZ Members,**

BLZ is asking each BLZ member to wishing to continue receiving updates and Babblers via e-mail to actively subscribe to the mailing list by simply sending an empty mail to:

blznews-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

For this to work, you must do this yourself. BLZ sign you up to this service.

Why? BLZ has had problems recently sending updates to members recently. This is due to the method by which BLZ has been sending these messages. Up until today, whoever sends out a notice, update or Babbler, must do so in groups of 15 recipients over and over again for the same message until the mailing list has been covered. This kind of mass mailing is not only time consuming, frustrating and often inefficient, but is regarded as spam behaviour by servers. This is because these mails are sent out unsolicited to many people from the same email address. Recently it has become more and more difficult to send updates to all of our members without being caught up in the dragnet of anti-spam programs, which servers use to detect unauthorized mass mails.

Fortunately, there is a solution to this problem. By creating a mailing group to which recipients actively sign up for and solicit e-mails generated by this group (blznews). This eliminates the possibility of these mails being considered spam. The group has been created and is located on the yahoo server. It is very easy to become a recipient of mails generated by BLZ using this group e-mail service. The BLZ office, which sends you your Babbler in addition to other info well as Julia Pierini will administrators of this group. No need to fear about your data being misused, your e-mail address is in the same hands as it was before!

So, BLZ is asking each BLZ member to wishing to continue receiving updates via e-mail to actively subscribe to the mailing list by simply sending an empty mail to

blznews-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Easy as pie. But you need to do it, not BLZ for you.  
Thanks

Contributions for The Babbler 104 February 2012/ March 2012 may be sent to the Editor anytime between now and 14th January 2012.