

THE BABBLER

Newsletter of



BirdLife Zimbabwe
The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

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****Subscription Renewal****

Subscriptions are now due for the 2012 to 2013 year, which runs from April to March.
Subscription fees have been increased in order to cover publication costs and are in USD:

| | |
|--|------------|
| Individual or Family members (including children under 17) | US\$ 25.00 |
| Pensioners, Students and Juniors | US\$ 15.00 |
| Schools (high density) | US\$ 25.00 |
| Schools (private) | US\$ 50.00 |
| Corporate members | US\$ 75.00 |
| Rest of Africa | US\$ 40.00 |
| Rest of World | US\$ 50.00 |

Please renew your subscriptions by end of April 2012.

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

Corporate membership packages

Corporate member \$75

Executive corporate \$170

BLZ corporate partner \$500

For further information on corporate packages please contact Dr Chirara at chip.chirara@blz.co.zw

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

Your membership is really important to BLZ, whether or not you are able to attend meetings and outings. Birds are indicators of the health of the environment and the fact that you are a member supports the on going conservation and ornithological efforts undertaken by BirdLife Zimbabwe members and staff. This in turn supports the preservation of Zimbabwe's biodiversity, its avifauna and natural habitats, which are becoming increasingly threatened. As a member you receive our world-recognised journal *Honeyguide* twice a year and our newsletter, *The Babblers*, every two months. The more members we have, the more effective we can be at lobbying government, communities and local and international organisations.

Notice of Annual General Meeting

The 31st Annual General Meeting of BirdLife Zimbabwe will be held at 10am on Saturday 9th June 2012 at Hideaway Lodge, Lake Manyame.

Nomination of office bearers and proxy forms are available from Sylvia Muzavazi at BLZ Office sylvia@blz.co.zw

Hideaway Lodge is a very attractive resort on the shores of Lake Manyame (Darwendale) Dam with plenty of good birding in the grounds of the Lodge and adjacent grasslands, woodlands and shoreline. You can hire boats to bird the Lake! Hideaway is only 45 minutes from Harare, so a day visit is easily possible (US\$5pp for day trippers).

There are modern camping facilities (US\$10ppppday) and self-catering thatched chalets and tented accommodation that sleep up to 5 people at US\$150 per night for the chalet or tented accommodation. Bookings: please book directly with Kelly Foster [kellyf@junglecomms.com] 0773 109 334 0R 0772 191 356 www.hideaway.co.zw

You can order food at Hideaway Lodge: Cold Meats and rolls, Burgers or Boeri rolls Braai Pack, Steak Rolls. Braai fires are prepared on request and you may bring your own food. There is a small shop with basic commodities.

Directions To Hideaway

On the KARIBA road – after Westgate roundabout – go for about 20kms till you get to NYABIRA – turn left at WINDMILL BOTTLE STORE – go over railway line and past the police on the right. Go for about 10kms till you see LILFORDIA SCHOOL on the left. After the school go for another 11kms. Do not turn anywhere after the school. There are 2 roads turning left after the school. Follow road straight. Turn after 11kms when you see PORTA ROAD turning left. Go for about 200m when you see a little dirt strip road turning right – with white rock. Follow road for about 3kms till you see the crops – follow the road around the center pivot land and come straight through the farm boom, past the barns and past the houses on the right. Follow road straight down to the camp towards the lake. Go to the Reception. See Mayplan.

Message From The President

Sylvia Muzavazi, BLZ Finance and Administration Manager, underwent major surgery recently. On behalf of BirdLife Zimbabwe Members I extend Sylvia our very best wishes for a speedy recovery.

Anthony Cizek's Cinnamon-breasted Tit Survey is only three weeks away - 21st April at Goshu Park! You will have seen Julia Pierini's numerous pleas for a minimum of 55 birders to take part in this important survey. I too urge you to take part and bring along your friends and family to boost the numbers. Please see the article in this issue for further details.

The Garden Bird Survey is revealing some interesting records. Please consider taking part if you are not doing so already – it is never too late.

Your *Babbler* submissions on interesting sightings are always most welcome and more valuable than you might imagine. They are captured in print forever thus making them available to *Honeyguide*, other publications and researchers. They could even influence conservation decision-making! Please don't forget that elusive QDS (Quarter Degree Square number).

Membership renewals are underway as our new financial year begins in April 1st. We have noticed that despite all our efforts to record correct membership details some slip through the net. Please remember to let The Office know if you change your contact details during the year. We do not want to lose touch with our valuable members. Many thanks.

Finally, Michael Irwin leaves on the 6th May for the UK. Hopefully you read my note regarding his departure in the Addenda to *The Babbler* 104. Regarding the sale of his art collection – there is only one painting unsold: J C Harrison Swinhoe's Pheasant, which is selling for US\$8000.00. If you wish to purchase this highly valuable and most beautiful painting please contact me on 304298 or 0772 376506 or piumosso@zol.co.zw

Dorothy Wakeling

Branch Activities

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

Mashonaland Branch

Evening Meetings are on the 3rd Thursday of each month. 5.30pm for 6.00pm. The venue is the Avondale Sports Club on Brighton Road between Sam Nujoma Street Extension and Upper East Road. There is a cash bar and a security guard.

Outings and Directions to regular venues

Please note ** New starting times for winter outings is 7.00am

Mukuvisi

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 and Rainham Dam

Meet at Prince Edward School car park on Josiah Tongagara Ave

Monavale Vlei

Meet on the B.S Leon side of Fenella Drive

APRIL/MAY 2012

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|------|----------------------------------|------|
| Mukuvisi | Sunday 1 ST April 2012 | 0700 | Sunday 6 th May 2012 | 0700 |
| Chivero | Sunday 8 th April 2012 | 0700 | Sunday 13 th May 2012 | 0700 |
| (Meet PE School car park) | | | | |
| Monavale Vlei | Sunday 15 th April 2012 | 0700 | Sunday 20 th May 2012 | 0700 |

4th Sunday Outings

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Sunday 22 nd April 2012 | Gosha Park (Marondera) Details below.... |
| Sunday 27 th May 2012 | Wild Geese Game Park – Meet CABS Northridge Park 0700 |

2nd Sat Outings

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|------|
| Saturday 14 th April 2012 | Rainham Dam | 0700 |
| Saturday 12 th May 2012 | Rainham Dam | 0700 |

3rd Saturday Outings

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|------|
| Saturday 21 st April 2012 | Gosho Park | Details below | |
| Saturday 19 th May 2012 | Botanic Gardens | | 0700 |

Cinnamon-breasted Tit Count at Gosho Park (Marondera) on 21 April 2012

Keen on birds, want to have fun spending a day with friends roaming through Gosho Park (Marondera) AND do your bit for conservation in Zimbabwe?

Join us in the research project headed by **Anthony Cizek** (ex BirdLife Zimbabwe director and researcher now based in UK) involving the...

Count of all Cinnamon-breasted Tits (*Parus Pallidiventris*) (previously known as Rufous-bellied Tit and in some books still considered one and the same species) taking place at Gosho Park on **Saturday 21 April 2012**

We need at least 55 volunteer birders for the count!

Miombo Woodland is a conservation concern. Birds occur at low densities (as they are in a low nutrient ecosystem) – we know this – but we don't know how low the densities are. Therefore, it is important we get a much more robust understanding of the density of Cinnamon-breasted Tits in suitable habitat on the Mashonaland Plateau - to reduce the level of uncertainty in the total population size so that the level of threat it faces can be assessed. This will help develop regional and global awareness of the crisis of deforestation on the Mashonaland Plateau. The Cinnamon-breasted Tit is the most localised of the Miombo specialist avifauna - and the most threatened - and will likely be a good flagship to draw attention to the crisis. The aim is to present the results at the upcoming Pan-African Ornithological Congress in Tanzania in October 2012 - which should help to draw attention to the deforestation crisis on the Mashonaland Plateau.

The FAO reported that between 2000 and 2010 the area of forest and woodland removed from Zimbabwe was the 6th largest of any country - following Brazil, Australia, Indonesia, Nigeria and Tanzania – this is alarming because the other countries are so much larger in size. The area of woodland and forest removed from Zimbabwe was greater than that in the DRC. Most of the losses recorded by the FAO for Zimbabwe will have occurred from Miombo ecosystems. The Cinnamon-breasted Tit is the most localized of the Miombo specialist avifauna - and the most threatened - and will likely be a good flagship to draw attention to the crisis.

Method:

Observers will walk the woodland systematically from one side to the next, along transects. They will need to walk at approximately the same speed - which will prevent tits slipping through the observer 'front'. Two (or possibly 3) sampling count sessions will be undertaken during 1 day - one fairly early morning (to allow for arrivals from Harare on the day), and one fairly late afternoon (to allow for returns to Harare that day) - to increase confidence in the count and method.

If you, your friends and family are keen to join please email juliapierini@yahoo.com <<mailto:juliapierini@yahoo.com>>

More to details to follow:

Julia P

Thursday Meetings at Avondale Sports Club 1730 for 1800

Thursday 19th April 2012 Tits of Zimbabwe – Anthony Cizek

Thursday 17th May 2012 Birding in Cape Town & surrounds – Julia Pierini

For info: Tony Alegria talegria@zol.co.zw, cell: 0772 438697, (04) 490375

Matabeleland Branch

15 April: Visit to Tshabalala

Meet at the entrance gate at 7:45. Parks entry fees are \$3 per person and \$3 per vehicle. Bring a chair and mid morning tea. The outing will involve both driving and walking – but if you are not interested in walking you can remain at the vehicles and bird from there. A special for this area is the Crimson-breasted Shrike – always worth seeing!
For more information or assistance with transport phone Adele Edwards 0712 366917

19 May: Walk at Hillside Dams

Meet in the car park at the Lower Dam at 7:45. Entry fee \$2 per vehicle. Bring a chair and mid-morning tea. No matter how often we visit this site we always seem to be able to add one more species to our total for the area. By mid-May some of the aloes should be in flower – always good for the sunbirds.
For more information phone Adele Edwards 0712 366917

25-27 May: Dassie Survey 2012

The place where we will camp and operate from for this year's survey has yet to be confirmed. If you are not already a member of the survey team but would like to join, or know more about it, contact one of the project coordinators.
For more information phone John Brebner (h) 242634 or Cecilia Hubbard (w) 287692 or 0772433733

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 pqgroup.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

Funding for Conservation

Over the past three years funding for conservation the world over has drastically declined. This has mainly been triggered by the World recession as the traditional sponsors of conservation are in Europe and the United States of America. My colleagues from most European countries tell me that membership to conservation associations and societies, has generally declined of the past few years, reducing income for these organisations.

BirdLife Zimbabwe, being heavily dependent on donor funds, has been affected by this reduced funding. At this year's Council of Africa Partnership meeting, a whole afternoon was devoted to fundraising discussion. Most BirdLife organisations have funding challenges, but work is however continuing. BLZ still has funding from the RSPB, but this is inadequate for all the activities we need to do.

Fundraising efforts are continuing at all levels, with the BirdLife Africa Secretariat having singled out BLZ as one of the priority organisations to fundraise for in 2012. In the meantime, we will take measures to reduce expenses – and that might include reducing time staff have to work per week. This will just be an interim measure while we wait for responses from the several donors we have approached.

We have to be more innovative in our fundraising methods. The world is changing, so are its priorities. We have to move with the times, without losing focus of our objectives.

Chip Chirara

Conservation

Blue Swallow International Action Plan Review Workshop

I had the privilege of attending the Blue Swallow International Action Plan Review workshop, which was held in South Africa, Howick from the 19th to the 21st of March 2012. A total of 9 countries were represented across the Blue Swallow range. These were South Africa, Swaziland Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya and Uganda. Tendai Wachi (Parks and Wildlife Management Authority) and I represented Zimbabwe.

The workshop was held ten years after a similar workshop was held in Kaapschehoop, South Africa. The Percy FitzPatrick Institute in South Africa sponsored the workshop. The purpose of the meeting was to review what each country has managed to achieve since the last workshop.

It appeared that South Africa has covered more areas than the other countries. Presentations by the various delegates showed that Blue Swallows are most threatened in South Africa, it is the bird that is likely to go extinct in South Africa, as they are only about 36-41 breeding pairs of Blue Swallows left. It is estimated that only 1000 pairs are left across the breeding range.

The biggest threat to Blue Swallows across all the range states is habitat transformation. There is a competing need for land for agriculture, expanding human settlements and afforestation in the Blue Swallow habitat.

A list of priorities was made for each country, hoping these can be achieved in the next two years. For all the range states, excluding South Africa and Swaziland, the most urgent step is to establish the current population as well the remaining habitat. Another important aspect, depending on available technology, is to establish the migration routes taken by the birds from the breeding to non-breeding grounds.

Hopefully most of the range states will be able to achieve their top priorities in order to improve the conservation of Blue Swallows.

Fadzai Matsvimbo

IBA monitoring project report- State of Robert Mcllwaine Recreational Park

Lake Chivero was visited in the first week of March 2012. Most parts of the Lake were reached using a boat and the present condition of the IBA still remains unfavourable. This unfavourable condition of the Lake was mainly influenced by the presence of the alien invasive Water Hyacinth, human disturbances to waterbirds through fishing activities and water pollution. The abundance and movement of the Water Hyacinth was very pronounced during the time of visit as the invasive plants were following the direction of wind.

Whilst certain waterbirds such as the African Jacana were found in reasonable numbers along the shores, other shore loving birds were generally in low numbers. The proliferation of Water Hyacinth has reduced the surface area available for foraging on the lakeshores over the years.

National Parks' staff recovered fishing nets and illegal fishing activities was also noted. Surprisingly the Fish Eagles seemed to be doing very well and the observations made were very encouraging. Due to the proximity of this IBA to Harare, BirdLife Zimbabwe will continue to visit it regularly.

Those members interested to make contributions to the on-going monitoring activities IBA monitoring forms can be obtained from BLZ offices, BLZ website or can be sent by e-mail. For further information please contact Kanisios at kanisios@blz.co.zw.

Kanisios Mukwashi, IBA National Project Manager

Cultivation at Marlborough Vlei

On Monday the 18th of March Mr Njolomole, Yamurai and I travelled to the Marlborough Vlei for habitat assessment as I intend to do a research project there. I was shocked by the extent of maize cultivation done at the vlei. It seemed the vlei is no more, as over three quarters of it is now cropland.

The vlei was so dry we practically walked through it without getting wet or some mud on our boots. We only observed a few bee-eaters, 1 White-winged Stilt and plenty of Southern Red Bishops and Whydahs.

Surprisingly the maize cobs we saw there were huge. One would indeed get a big harvest this year.

I think it is high time we, as BirdLife, started monitoring the vlei and spread awareness about the importance of the vlei before it disappears altogether.

Thelma Sungiso, intern BLZ

Mashonaland

Rainham Dam Outings

Rainham Dam 10th March 2012

It had rained most of the night and there were only two takers for the outing. The last kilometre of the main road and the track to the dam were in appalling condition. The grass was long and wet and bird numbers and variety of species were low. The smaller of the two main dams did not have a single visible duck and only two pairs of African Jacanas and two Purple Herons. From the main dam wall the light was very difficult as the sun did come out reducing visibility to silhouettes against the reflection of the sunlight. Water levels were high and birding there is unlikely to have much to offer for a few months.

Nevertheless there were about 80 duck sleeping in the pondweed on the main dam most of which were White-backs. Black Coucal were still about but no Broad-tailed Warblers. The power lines on the approach to the dam must have had about a thousand Amur Falcons. No harriers, no Black-shouldered Kite but Fish Eagle and Long-crested did put in an appearance. The thorn trees had various warbling warblers with songs that went on and on: presumably European migrants turning up for their imminent return. We recognized Willow Warbler and an Icterine Warbler - continuous song, large size and strong yellow wash, well up in the trees. A male Marico Sunbird in the sunlight at close quarters was the only bonus.

Alex Masterson

Monavale Vlei outing Sunday 18th Mar 2012

That wader again, and a lifer for me

While at Rifa pans we became aware of the presence of a, sprightly, stick-wielding wader seen in Tony's evening presentation. Well, it was there again on the Sherwood Golf course, this morning, Wade Masterson. The rest of us resisted the temptation to dive into the reeds and river having found the vlei quite wet enough and having had a marvellous morning's birding in the soaking over head-high grass along the streams.

There was action aplenty; 4 Black Duck flying along the Marimba Stream and lots of Sacred Ibis, about 60 Eurasian Bee-eater gathering ready to leave, all the usual bishops and widowbirds, 2 Yellow Longclaw singing loudly and giving perfect views, warblers and weavers in the streambeds and Wattled Lapwing among the mealies across the stream and on the golf course, Grey-rumped and a Barn Swallow overhead, lots of nesting Orange-breasted Waxbill and in a small acacia a greenish warbler with an eye stripe and yellow-edged wing coverts flitting about among the twigs, an Icterine Warbler, a 'lifer' for most of us.

As we returned for the call over we met one of our members who, arriving a little late had not managed to locate us among the distant long grass but had had the good fortune to flush a Great Snipe and 3 African Crake, a rare passage visitor, while searching for us. Sadly, our 57th bird was an injured Lesser Honeyguide found on the golf course.

Thanks to Jimmy and COSMO as usual.

Ken Dixon

Monavale Vlei report: February - March 2012

Has anyone ever seen a flock of six Long-crested Eagles or more flying together? This somewhat unusual sighting was experienced on the 2nd March at about 10 30am on Monavale Vlei. All six Long-crested Eagles were flying in a circular pattern, providing a unique experience. I watched in amazement as they slowly disappeared eastwards. The birding has been wonderful this season with sightings of Wahlberg's Eagle, Black-chested Snake Eagle, Steppe Buzzard and Ovambo Sparrowhawk.

Not to be outdone Striped Crakes and Streaky-breasted Flufftails have been flushed several times, thanks to Bob Warren-Coddrington's trained dog Rommel. A Red-chested Cuckoo has been around in the nearby hill, so too were Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Spotted Flycatcher and Black-crowned Tchagra. Black Coucal were seen every day and on lucky days Copper Sunbirds, Cuckoo Finches were enjoyed, Brimstone Canary, White-winged Widowbirds, White-faced Duck and African Black Ducks.

Just the other day, on the 15th March, hundreds and hundreds of Amur Falcons were seen at midday flying from east to west – I stopped counting them when I reached 400! Soon most migrants will be leaving and I am sure they are sorting out their visas at the moment!

Jimmy Muropa

Monavale Vlei Scout

Visit to Hippo Pools, Mazowe River, Shamva District (1731B1 Bushu), 2-4 March 2012

Very few water birds were seen, river running fast & muddy from Chinese gold panners upstream, the Green-backed Heron had brought up two chicks still being fed, and flying up and down stream about 50 m. There were 10 White-faced Duck & 3 African Black Duck in two groups.

No African Fish-eagle seen but 3 were counted there during the Waterfowl Count (15.1.2012) and an Osprey. Reed Cormorants had also vanished. (15 during African Waterfowl Census) and two Black Crake were heard.

Looking at an exposed Bushman Painting about 7 kms from camp we heard a Crowned Eagle, other raptors were two Wahlberg's Eagles, and a Lanner Falcon in the Amm Mine Quarry. Natal Spurfowl was common but Swainson's was heard across the river in Murewa District. Three Owls were seen/heard the Barn, African Wood-owl and the Spotted Eagle-owl. The Common Cuckoo was a surprise, but has been reported before. A couple of Narina Trogon was seen near an old village near the dam. After sundown both the Fiery-necked and the Square-tailed Nightjars were heard. A Greater Honeyguide followed us into the bush to attract attention. We also saw the Green-capped Eremomela in that Miombo Woodland. Near camp we got photos of the nest of Livingstone's Flycatcher, about 5m up in a small tree, Like no other flycatcher (cup) nest, and more like that of the Amethyst (Black) Sunbird.

Animals seen were Hippo, Kudu with a three-week-old calf, impala and zebra. The baboons and monkeys were all along the river in fruiting trees and were reported by Tadious to have damaged many nests including two of Red-throated Twinspots. The dam was full of tadpoles from Foam Nest Frog nests which still visible and of interest was a very big leopard tortoise.

Thanks go to Ian Jarvis and Tadious who showed us the nest of the Livingstone's Flycatcher. Tadious reported that he had seen two juvenile L. Flycatchers the week before; they were from another nest since blown down in a rainstorm. He had earlier reported the Narina Trogon male feeding chicks on the lawn, but he had not found their nest.

Narina was a sixteen-year-old girl from the Khoekhoen Gonaqua tribe near the present day Cookhouse, Great Fish River, Knysna District. Levaillant could not pronounce her actual name and called her Narina, the Khoekhoe name for flower, Levaillant named the trogon for her. (Circa 1765-1782). Narina had a cousin Amiroo, in whose company Levaillant often went hunting for birds - I suppose as a guide. There is watercolour painting of both Narina and Amiroo attributed to J.L.Reinhold in the Library of Parliament, Cape Town.

D.V.Rockingham-Gill

Mashonaland Branch outing to Ewanrigg Botanic Gardens (1731C2), Sunday, 26 February 2012.

22 people came to the meet, including 3 with heavy cameras, and no one was disappointed. This was a hot-wet season visit, and so we saw some migrants, which we don't normally see. Steppe Buzzard (1), Amur Falcon (12), Red-chested (1) & Black Cuckoo (HD) European Bee-eater (20), Eurasian Golden Oriole (1) and Willow Warbler (1)

Amongst the other raptors were Black-chested Snake-Eagle (2), Lizard Buzzard (1), and we heard a Fish Eagle in the distance.

The Red-eyed Dove (30) seemed very common and a couple of groups of African Green Pigeon were seen (2 & 4), both louries (2 & 2), Horus Swift must be a new bird to the list for Ewanrigg. Grey Hornbills (10) were common, two families of Whyte's Barbet (2&4), Lesser Honeyguide (1) and Rufous-naped Lark (Heard), a female Black Cuckoo-shrike and the Eurasian Golden Oriole. This last bird seems to be on the decline, as a small boy, I used to see it much more often in the 1950's & 60's, than I do now.

The grass was tall and wet but Zitting (1) Rattling (1) and Croaking Cisticola (2 or 3), and a Tawny -flanked Prinia (2) were heard. Also a Yellow-throated Longclaw was recorded.

Surprising was not seeing Masked Weavers or Red Bishops, but in their full plumage we saw Yellow Bishop (3), White-winged Widow (1) and Red-collared Widow-bird (5). The Village Indigo-bird (1) was seen but its host the Red-billed Firefinch was not recorded. However, Jameson's Firefinch was.

Highlight of the visit was breeding Magpie Mannikins (2) and their nest, 3-4m up in a *Euphorbia ingens* specimen. This was snapped by Nick Hart.

Animals seen were Vervet Monkey (5) Bush Squirrel (1) and Scrub Hare (1). Meanwhile at the dam, which was very full of muddy water, there was only a female Little Grebe and a Malachite Kingfisher.

On the way home a single White Stork was seen in a Soya Bean land on the Mtoko Road.

Later in the day I was talking to Ian Piercy over lunch, he lives in Ruwa, and has for many years, and he told me that 20 years ago the European Bee-eater was on the electricity lines in their hundreds out there, and now in their tens. Have you noticed a decline, and what is the position in Europe?

D.V.Rockingham-Gill, 4 Fernleigh Road, P.O. Borrowdale. rgill@zol.co.zw

Harare garden bird survey 2011-12

HGBS SHEET 3 Weeks 9-12 22Aug – 18 Sept 2011

26 sheets were sent or handed in with an average of 44 species, 10 more than in the previous batch, evidence that activity is increasing. Breeding is getting under way, especially of weavers, Red-billed Firefinch, Speckled Mouse bird, Variable Sunbird and Robin-chat. The highest number was 65 recorded in Greendale and which included a flock of Wattled Starling, a Cuckoo hawk, an Eastern Saw-wing Swallow and a Meyer's Parrot. A Peregrine Falcon was seen perched on a telegraph pole in Eastlea where first ever Black Flycatcher and Copper Sunbird were in the garden. Our second Paradise Flycatcher appeared on 16th Sept. Terrestrial Brownbul was another garden rarity but they are regularly heard in the Botanic Gardens. Among the much-reported flyovers of Cattle Egret and Sacred Ibis was 5 and 11 African Spoonbill.

HGBS SHEET 4 Weeks 13-16 19TH Sept – 16th Oct 2011

We received 27 completed Sheet 4s. As expected, lots of activity as the migrants arrive and many species get breeding, mostly resident and offering opportunities for the cuckoos, indigobirds and honeyguides to parasitize. The cuckoos were seen or heard in many gardens; 10 Klaas's, 7 Red-chested, 2 Diderick's and 1 Levillant's. The most often reported breeder was the Southern Masked Weaver but then this species does make a point of building so many nests it's difficult to ignore him. Spectacled and Golden Weaver also make no attempt to hide their activities. The common residents like Speckled Mousebird, White-browed Robin-chat, Kurrichane Thrush, Laughing Dove, Dark-capped Bulbul, various sunbirds; Bronze Mannikin, Red-billed Firefinch, Blue Waxbill and Pied Crow were all recorded as well as Gabar Goshawk. One observer in Hatfield/Park Meadowlands, with the help of two gardeners, has located over 20 nests on her 2-acre property.

Apart from the cuckoos, the other arrivals were Paradise Flycatcher, in 12 gardens, European Bee-eater overhead, 3 Willow Warbler, 1 Spotted Flycatcher, 1 House Martin, 1 Wahlberg's Eagle and 1 Yellow-billed Kite. Senegal Coucal became more frequent visitors to gardens (3) as were Thick-billed Weaver and Red-backed Mannikins were again seen at birdbaths.

The night sounds were once again Fiery-necked Nightjar, in 10 locations, 9 Barn Owl, 5 Southern White-faced Scops-owl and 3 Spotted Eagle-owl.

HGBS Sheet 5 Weeks 17-20 17th Oct – 13th Nov 2011

We received 24 completed survey sheets, 7 handed in and 17 electronic. The average number of species recorded was 39, an increase on the previous month as birds become bolder as they search for mates or food for partners and young. Lots of breeding and fledglings noticed including a Miombo Double-collared Sunbird feeding a Jacobin Cuckoo. A resident breeding Gabar Goshawk helped itself to 2 Speckled Mousebird chicks in Monavale and a Shikra was attacking other species at a feeding tray. Cuckoos everywhere, Klaas's, Red-chested and Levillant's being the most frequently mentioned. There are worryingly few swallows and martins, only 2 Barn, 1 Lesser-striped, 1 Eastern Saw-wing and a House Martin. There was only one Spotted Flycatcher although they do tend to arrive later than other migrants. A Red-headed Weaver was seen in Mt Pleasant and Red-backed Mannikins in 3 locations and the first Lilac-breasted Roller in 30 years in a Highlands garden. Owls often recorded including 2 breeding White-faced and a Wood Owl was heard.

Keep the records coming in and if you lack confidence or expertise send for an expert. There are more Bar-throated Apalis, Green-winged Pytilia and honeyguides than appear on the forms.

HGBS Sheet 6 Weeks 21-24 14 Nov – 11th Dec 2011

A high average of 37 species per garden with migrants much in evidence. Amur falcon chasing alates in a few places, 1 Red-backed Shrike, 1 Garden Warbler, Eurasian Bee-eater calling overhead and 2 Red-breasted Swallow plus the expected Paradise Flycatcher. I'm sure there must be lots of Willow Warbler but they get lost in the foliage and only 3 were recorded.

Fruiting trees attracted a few Green Pigeon and there were more Yellow-fronted Canary and Yellow White-eye. Relatively rare garden birds were Groundscraper Thrush in Hillside, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting and a Buff-spotted Flufftail was heard 23/11 and seen 9/12 in a large, wild garden in Highlands.

2 Swainson's Spurfowl reported and sporadic Thick-billed Weaver. More woodpeckers at last, both Golden-tailed and Cardinal. At Agrifoods a Familiar Chat was an interesting sighting. Once again only one Common Fiscal was seen and a Pied Wagtail was new to the list as was Purple-banded Sunbird. Odd Meyer's Parrot and a Rosy-cheeked Lovebird put in an appearance again.

More species flew over; Wattled Lapwing, a White-faced Duck, Reed Cormorant plus the widely reported Cattle Egret, Sacred Ibis and Black-headed Heron.

Don't forget to look out for partridge in pear trees next sheet!

BirdLife Zimbabwe, Mashonaland Branch Long Weekend at Rifa, 17-20th February 2012

BirdLife outings just get bigger and better. There were an amazing 30 birders on this latest long weekend at the ZHA Rifa Educational Camp and all went swimmingly well from first to last. The old hands were all astonished to see heavy rain at Marongora and the valley bottom obscured by thick mist as we looked down from the top of the escarpment. Some had been coming here for 30 years or more and never seen the like. The long queues of trucks in the valley bottom sat in mud and puddles which we had to splash through to reach the Chirundu Valley Motel where we were to rendezvous with our 4 Zambian colleagues.

The 'main' road to the camp being impassable we all, or all but one, drove back to the 'back' road in which was very muddy but negotiable. It was a rather dejected bunch that assembled at the dining room to meet our hosts who in contrast to us were delighted to see the long-awaited rain at last. There was talk of various board games to fill in the weekend but in the event the rain abated slowly and our first walk was possible.

At 15:00 we had tea and biscuits before setting out for the hot springs. The muddy road was treacherous but suddenly we all found our feet as the first rarity was spotted climbing about on the Water Hyacinth at the Bream Pools, an Allen's Gallinule. We slipped and slid our way down to the hot springs picking up many common species like Levillant's and Klaas's Cuckoo, Coucal, Broad-billed Roller, Brown-hooded, Woodland Kingfisher and then picked our way through the tufts and puddles down towards the mighty Zambezi noting various herons, egrets, plover and waders, and 2 magnificent Fish Eagle. Of special interest were many Blue-cheeked Bee-eater on the telegraph lines, numerous at this time of the year and extremely active. There were also the more normal European, White-faced and Little Bee-eater varieties. There was very little on the river itself except Wire-tailed Swallow and a Comb Duck. In the channel we saw Woolly-necked, Yellow-billed, and Openbill Stork and Goliath Heron plus Ruff, Greenshank and plenty of Wood Sandpiper. At the after dinner count we were astounded to hear that our 60 eyes had already recorded 107 species on a cool overcast afternoon.

On Saturday we awoke to a very dismal scene and an even worse weather forecast but we decided to put on a brave face and go ahead with the 2 planned walks, one long, one short. I joined the former as it included the Chipandauri River and cliffs where in the spring we see huge flocks of Carmine Bee-eaters. The overnight rain meant that the river was flowing abundantly and we had to remove boots and wade through the muddy water after negotiating the treacherously slippery bank. Not all of us made it unsullied, but it was getting brighter now so clothes had a chance of drying.

There were 2 frustrating calls to be heard, Yellow-spotted Nicator and Broadbill; the latter only recorded at Rifa once or twice. They both eluded us; the Broadbill's whirring display call not heard again, the Nicator's lovely song heard repeatedly but the bird remaining invisible. The bee-eaters' nesting holes were in use by Grey-headed Sparrows who lacked the charisma of the Carmines. However, looking up we spied Boehm's Spinetail, Mosque, Barn and Lesser-striped Swallow, and Little Swift and someone heard an Emerald Cuckoo. From the cliffs we wandered on to Long Pan which had almost no open water but lots more treacherous tufts and muddy holes as we discovered in trying to cross it en route for the river. Woolly-necked and Openbill Storks, a Spur-winged Goose and some Egyptian were enjoying the wet conditions more than us.

John Osborne our hunter-guide managed to find a fairly dry route through the bush down to the river. We hoped to see Verreaux's Eagle Owl in the huge albidas but were out of

luck. For me the star attraction of the return was a large flock of Wagtails, 2 Pied and 37 Yellow in the short grass near the flood line of the Chipandauri. They all rose at our approach and settled in the trees, 25 in one and 12 in another.

After a sumptuous breakfast with all the toast you could manage prepared by Levy and his helpers we all went down to the edge of the floodplain to watch a wheelbarrow with a sheep's carcass (no head, guts or skin) and two mombe heads being taken out to the vulture's dining table. A lone Bateleur was the first bird to notice it but it showed little interest. No vultures to be seen and the low clouds meant no thermals. However, we settled down to watch but had to be content with the antics of the abundant, smart Red Bishops and Masked Weaver in the tall grass below us. An hour passed and interest began to wane; perhaps sheep's offal was not attractive to vultures. From time to time Freedom the resident hunter-guide espied distant Hooded and White-backs but it was 2 hours before the first Marabou Stork landed and settled down to wait patiently at a respectable distance. Gradually numbers increased as the weather improved, mainly White-backs and Marabou but also 3 White-headed and several Hooded. They stood around bickering and tussling for a time with the Marabou seeming to be the dominant species indicated by the bright red fleshy patch on the back of their leader's neck.

Eventually feeding began with all fighting for their share. When it was nearly all gone a single Lappet-faced flew in and took control of what was left. It took about an hour in all for the meal to be completed. Freedom counted 207 vultures, 25 Marabou, 1 Tawny Eagle and 1 Yellow-billed Kite.

After afternoon tea and biscuits we all set off for the area below the Chirundu Bridge by the direct route, which was now drivable. What seemed a simple logistical operation turned out to be just the opposite, as 2 vehicles got lost before we left the camp and another drove off in the wrong direction. We did eventually all meet up again and parked near the lodges for a walk along the riverside track favoured by the jumbos. Tony stayed behind as car guard and spent his time looking for Skimmers and pratincole with his telescope. In the riverine bush the walkers found lots of common birds and one Mourning Dove before sitting down for sundowners on the riverbank.

Sunday morning was reserved for our trip to the pans about 10kms back towards Marongora. We picked up our escorts, David, Rosslyn and Josiah and 2 interns William and Nyemurai in Baghdad. Rain still threatened but we stuck to our plan and drove into the mopane forest. Arnot's Chat was soon found and all had excellent views before moving on to Chura pan. It was evident here how little rain had fallen in the area, so different from Harare. Barn Swallows gracefully overflowed the water and grass and there were Boehm's Spinetail and Mosque Swallows too. One new bird in the forest was a Golden-breasted Bunting. Alex Masterson waded through the shallows but was unsuccessful in flushing out anything.

The next pan was almost dry but the colony of Village Weavers in the magnificent Nyalaberry carried on noisily regardless and a group of African Golden Oriole also flew in. "Wade" Alex Masterson, took to the water once again and after some time flushed out 4 Lesser Moorhens. Mensa pan came next but wasn't the extensive lake we'd hoped for. On arriving at Mensa Pan, we had to wait some ten minutes before birding as some rain hit us. However, our resident reed-beater had success here flushing a few Painted Snipe. In the marshy area stood Openbill, Saddle-billed and Abdim's Stork, Spurwing Goose and Comb Duck while a Yellow-billed Kite wheeled above. Hadeda Ibis then appeared to be joined by 30 more Openbill sent up by our advance party. On the way back we dropped in at the sulphur spring but not a single bird was seen so we rushed back to camp for a very late brunch.

A small group of us made an extra sortie after lunch to try to see the Dwarf Bittern at Mopane Pan. We did get a fleeting view but that was all as it flew off at our approach. Later on we all left camp on foot but by 2 different routes to rendezvous at the hot springs for sundowners. Our group's 'higher impact' walk yielded Greater and Lesser Honeyguide, lots of Grey-backed Cameroptera, crombec, hoopoe, Green Wood Hoopoe and Scimitarbill, more Woodland Kingfisher and plenty of Grey Hornbill.

One of the best sightings of the trip, though, was made by the group that went down to the river; first a Red-necked Falcon in a leafless *albida* but then an Osprey fishing in the channel, and with success, for later we all saw it doing a flypast with a 300gr Tiger in its talons. On comparing notes we realized that perhaps the same bird was seen earlier by a small splinter group at Sunset Point fishing in a channel. The other distraction as we sipped our sundowners was a group of 3 Black Heron mantling only 100 m in front of us between the Little Egret and Wood Sandpiper.

We were pleased to calculate after another delicious braai that the total for the weekend was now 186. Would we reach 200, with 1 more walk to go?

Well, no, we didn't, but Monday morning was hot and sunny and we still had thrills to come on our walk in search of the Broadbill and Nicator along the now dry Chipandauri river course. Neither of these species materialized but the latter led us a merry dance as it sang loudly and melodiously from various areas of thick foliage. It was on our way back to Mopane Pan that we spotted some Retz's Helmet-shrike moving through tracked by a large cuckoo, which gave us good views. Although it could have been the Thick-billed or Great Spotted we decided on the former given that it is the brood parasite of the Retz's Helmet-shrike. The Dwarf Bittern gave us another tantalizing glimpse as it flew away in the pans area.

A few species were notable by their large numbers e.g. 150 Violet-backed Starlings, 90 Egyptian Geese, 60 Openbill, 200 Comb Duck, 50 Meve's Starlings & 50 White-browed Sparrow-weavers. On the other hand a few species were absent – notably the Skimmers and White-fronted Plovers.

Then it was the final brunch, a count of 193 and lots of thank you speeches to Levy, John's cook, and his helpers, Guida, Amanda, Annette and Aloys from Zambia, Yakoo from South Africa, Dave and Elspeth the resident hosts, John, our tireless hunter-guide and Marie his wife who had supervised the kitchen, Freedom, resident hunter-guide, Leslee Maasdorp who had negotiated so successfully with camp and Parks and last but not least, our popular Chairperson, Tony Alegria who had conceived and organized the whole fantastic operation.

Ken Dixon

Report on Mashonaland Branch Evening Meeting: 17th November 2011.

A presentation on the impacts of elephant-induced vegetation changes on bird diversity in Hwange National Park (HNP) was made on the 17th of November 2011 by Tawanda Tarakini, a Leeds University MSc student who collected his data under CNRS.

There was a huge attendance by Mashonaland branch members, and many thanks to the organisers. The speaker had a lot to share but this report will highlight a summary of his findings.

There has been much speculation on the indirect impacts of vegetation modification by the African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) on bird communities but little has been done to prove such effects. Tawanda investigated how reductions in plant cover and architectural

complexity is impacting bird communities in Hwange National Park. He also aimed to determine how different ecological functional groups were responding to elephant-induced vegetation changes.

Thirty-four sites were surveyed for vegetation characteristics and elephant damage in 2008 and 2010. In the same sites, birds were surveyed using point sampling method 3 times per year from 2008 to 2010 and mixed effects models were used in the analysis. *Terminalia* sites had the highest proportion of trees broken to shrubs by elephants (mean 61.3%) compared to the rest of the vegetation classes (mean 32%). 131 bird species were observed out of a potential 157 that could have been observed in the specific study area during the sampling period.

Elephant damage (in terms of trees broken to shrubs (TBS)) did not significantly reduce the overall bird species richness but there was a general decrease in the number of frugivores, nectarivores, migrants and woodland bird species with increasing elephant damage. The number of ground nesting and carnivore bird species increased with increasing elephant damage. In his concluding remarks, Tawanda indicated that his findings may have important management implications for conserving biodiversity particularly in the face of continued increase of elephant densities in Protected Areas and the “do nothing” option is rather unrealistic as a management goal.

Although further monitoring and study is required into this issue, managers and ecologists were encouraged to explore the long-suggested option of manipulating artificial water supply to wildlife particularly in HNP where the elephant increase is mainly attributed to water provision. The audience were also given an opportunity to ask questions and it seemed everyone was happy with the answers. The secretariat is sincerely thankful to Tawanda Tarakini for having travelled all the way from Hwange National Park to give such an interesting presentation.

Compiled by: Kanisios Mukwashi, National IBA Project Manager

Mashonaland Branch Evening Meeting, 15th March 2012. Rifa relived.

Presented by **Tony Alegria**

An appreciative audience of about 35 members and friends was entertained by a lively, excellently illustrated, PowerPoint presentation by our Chairperson the organizer of the long weekend at Rifa, which took place from the 17th to 20th Feb attended by 30 members.

The expedition was a great success from all aspects; ornithological (we identified 194 species), economic (we lived well for 4 days for less than \$100), social (we met and mixed readily with both old and new friends, 4 of whom came from ZOS in Lusaka), security (we had same number at end as at beginning), hosting (we were welcomed, accompanied everywhere and guarded by our hosts and hunters).

Those in the audience who had missed the trip must have been very jealous as our journey; our venue, our excursions, our socializing and the birds we saw were revealed in the wealth of photos from participants. I never cease to be amazed at the high quality of the bird photos taken by our members.

Elsewhere in this Babbler you will read a detailed description of the birding but we should mention a few birds we didn't see this time; no lovebirds, no White-fronted Plover, no Skimmers on the Zambezi, not even through the telescope.

Our grateful thanks to Tony for all his hard work in organizing the trip and composing the presentation.

Visit to Tavistock Farm, (1831B4 Beatrice) Harare District Sunday 25th March 2012

11 of us and a visitor from Johannesburg, pitched at Tavistock Farm, Beatrice for a hot wet season bird count, unfortunately it was a windy day and the bird count was only just

over 70 species. At the farm we met owner Stoff Hawgood, who showed us where to go, and pointed us in the right direction.

A Little Bittern was seen in a small dam near the game paddock, 20 Abdim's Storks were with the cattle in the feed pens. A Long-crested Eagle, a Brown and a Black-chested Snake Eagle were the eagles seen. With so much shoreline inundated at this time of year, it was good to see the 50 Blacksmith and 30 Wattled Lapwings associating with the cattle, and a little further away 10 Crowned Lapwings.

Only 1 Wood Sandpiper. An immature female Fiery-necked Nightjar was in the Miombo Woodland/game park paddock and I also saw an unidentified Vulture there. A Spotted Flycatcher, the Barn Swallows and a few House Martins must just about be ready to go back to Europe.

In the grassland everyone saw the 13 Cuckoo Finch. Birds in breeding dress included 1 Southern Red Bishop, 1 White-winged Widowbird, 3 Yellow-mantled Widowbirds, a Pin-tailed Whydah and a Village Indigobird.

A Little Grebe had two chicks, one riding on an adults back. About 20 Comb Duck were sitting on a lateral branch of a gum tree close to the dam. A Yellow-throated Longclaw was feeding a chick out of the nest, and the Black-chested Snake Eagle was seen to pick up a snake.

An African Grey Parrot was free flying around Stoff & Christine's garden, when we left to say goodbye and thank you.

Four kudu and a Schlegel's Blind Snake were recorded.

D.V. Rockingham-Gill, 4 Fernleigh Road, P.O. Borrowdale. rgill @zol.co.zw

Visit to Nyamungai Pan, Chiota Communal Land, (1831A3 Mahusekwa), Marondera District. 25 March 2012

In the afternoon, three of us decided to visit The Nyamungai Pan in the Chiota Communal Land, about 40 kms east of Tavistock. These Mashonaland pans have been little studied, and are always well worth a visit. This one seldom dries up

On the pan were 170 Red-knobbed Coot, some with nests, a full house of White Egrets, Great, Little, Yellow-billed and Cattle.6 African Spoonbill, 2 White-faced duck with 7 young swimming between the parents. Two Southern Pochard, a Lesser Moorhen and a Lesser Jacana and nest with one egg. On the electricity lines as we left about 50 Amur Falcons were perched.

On the route home, about 20 Kms from Chiota we saw a Long-tailed Paradise Whydah.

D.V. Rockingham-Gill, 4 Fernleigh Road, P.O. Borrowdale. rgill @zol.co.zw

Matabeleland

RECENT REPORTS

LBJs with Alex Masterson – 28/29 January

Adele Edwards

At the end of January Matabeleland Branch was privileged to have Alex Masterson with us for a weekend. On Saturday evening at The Boma Alex gave two very interesting presentations: the first on cisticolas; the second on early names attached to birding in Zimbabwe. These talks were both educational and entertaining. I doubt that anyone who was there and witnessed Alex's performance will forget the difference between the jizz of a lark and a pipit, or will forget the call of a ground hornbill.

The following day we set out to put into practice, with varying degrees of success, what we had absorbed the previous evening and enjoyed some excellent birding at Aisleby. Our sincere thanks to Alex for taking the time to come down to Bulawayo and for sharing his extensive knowledge with us, and to Julia Dupree for coordinating the weekend.

Matabeleland Branch AGM – 11 February

Adele Edwards

There was a good turn out of members for the Branch AGM held on Saturday 11 February. In addition to the Chairman's and Treasurer's Reports the various Project Coordinators reported on project activities including Black Eagle Breeding Survey, Hyrax (Dassie) Survey, Matobo Raptor Survey, Aisleby Survey, Garden Bird Survey, African Waterfowl Census and Birding Big Day. The following people were elected to committee:

| | |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Chairman | Cecilia Hubbard |
| Secretary | Gaynor Lightfoot |
| Treasurer/Membership | Helen Lewis |
| Committee members | Karen Learmonth |
| | Jean Cranston |
| | Paul Hubbard |
| | Adele Edwards |

Thank you John & Jenny Brebner, for hosting the event.

Walk at Lakeside – 26 February

Those of us who bird regularly at Lakeside can never understand why this is not a more popular venue with birders. Of course the name is a bit of a misnomer – there has been no permanent water at Lakeside for many years.

Unlike Harare, Bulawayo is very dry having experienced a poor rainy season, with the season-to-date total being only 60 – 70% of normal. So we were lucky that one of the few scattered showers fell in the Lakeside area in the week preceding our walk, resulting in a sizeable pool, which provided some interesting sightings of Red-billed Teal, 14 Little Egrets (who obligingly lifted their yellow feet clear of the water) and 3 African Spoonbills.

The thick bed of weeds surrounding the pool made it difficult to see smaller water birds other than from the top of the dam wall. We knew they were there so it was frustrating not to be able to confirm a common sandpiper and an African Jacana. But that came later in our walk.

On arrival as soon as we stepped out of our cars we were conscious of lots of activity with every bush bustling with birds. Within the first five minutes we'd ticked off 8 or 9 of the more common species. Surprisingly the most frequently seen bird was the red-backed shrike. We were all pleased to have the chance to closely observe the sexual dimorphism in this species – the male with his brick red back, grey head and black eye mask, the female with pretty rust patterning on her front.

Some 800m from the cars was a stand of blue gums in the top of which perched two large black and white birds which at first glance we all assumed were pied crows. However closer inspection showed we were wrong – but we didn't quite believe our eyes, until we'd walked a lot closer and confirmed a pair of African hawk eagles.

Alex's efforts were not in vain; we were more confident in our identification of a Neddicky, a Zitting and a Rattling Cisticola – even if we did have to ask Karen to play the call for us on four different occasions due to variations in the song! But still we struggled with our LBJs. I watched one little bird fly into a small shrub about 5 meters away and was determined to ID it. As I was sure it had not flown out the bush, but I could no longer see it,

I approached nearer and nearer. It was a heart stopping moment when a scaly-feathered finch exploded out the bush and flashed passed my face – and then of course its nest, a ball of dry grass deep inside the bush, was quite obvious.

It was an interesting and enjoyable morning with a final total of 58 species.

Adele Edwards

AFRICAN WATERFOWL CENSUS 2011 IN MATABELELAND

In January 2011 our teams undertook counts at seven sites – three in the Bulawayo area and four in Hwange. The count in the Matobo Hills could not be covered as the National Park and Game Park were closed at the time. In July we were able to cover all seven of our main census areas, four around Bulawayo and the other three in Hwange.

We are grateful to everyone who took part in this survey. Unfortunately, once again there was no funding and it was only through the generosity of all team members that the counts went ahead, particularly in the Hwange area at high cost to those teams.

Hwange was covered by Bill & Helen Lewis, Tom & Jean Cranston, Cecilia Hubbard & Tony Wharam, Karen Learmonth, Paul Hubbard, Rob and Andrea Chapman, Gavin & Marjorie Blair.

Counts in the Bulawayo area were undertaken by: Sandy McAdam, Gwen Attwell, Elton & Gaynor Lightfoot, Adele Edwards, Judy Ross, Joy Kets, the Gillot family, Bruce & Jenny Stephens, Margie Blake and Jen & John Brebner as well as some of those mentioned above.

Thank you to you all.

The summary tables below give results and comparative figures.

SUMMARY BY SITE TWO YEARS: JANUARY AND JULY 2010 & 2011

| SITE | January | | | | July | | | |
|----------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| | Total birds 2010 | Total birds 2011 | Total species 2010 | Total species 2011 | Total birds 2010 | Total birds 2011 | Total species 2010 | Total species 2011 |
| Aisleby | 3038 | 1502 | 35 | 26 | 1375 | 1833 | 28 | 32 |
| SAST | 231 | 438 | 20 | 32 | 428 | 585 | 21 | 28 |
| Cowdray Park | 797 | 293 | 30 | 27 | 426 | 311 | 20 | 18 |
| Matobo National Park | - | - | - | - | - | 44 | - | 11 |
| Hwange White Hills | 483 | 467 | 34 | 32 | 191 | 143 | 16 | 13 |
| Hwange Ngweshla | 262 | 137 | 30 | 19 | 91 | 48 | 5 | 7 |
| Hwange Sinamatella | 921 | 393 | 44 | 46 | 266 | 240 | 18 | 28 |
| Hwange Robins | - | 92 | - | 16 | - | - | - | - |
| TOTAL | 5732 | 3322 | | | 2776 | 3204 | | |

SUMMARY 4 YEARS 2008-2011 - ALL SITES

| | 2008 | | | 2009 | | | 2010 | | | 2011 | | |
|-------------|----------|------|-------------|----------|------|-------------|----------|------|-------------|----------|------|-------------|
| | Janu ary | July | Total | Janu ary | July | Total | Janu ary | July | Total | Janu ary | July | Total |
| Total sites | 6 | 5 | | 5 | 5 | | 6 | 6 | | 7 | 7 | |
| Total birds | 4239 | 1919 | 6158 | 2694 | 3073 | 5767 | 5732 | 2776 | 8508 | 3322 | 3204 | 6397 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Total species | 77 | 54 | 66 | 52 | 78 | 46 | 79 | 57 |
|---------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|

TOP EIGHT SPECIES BY COUNT - JANUARY AND JULY 2011

| Species | January 2011 | Species | July 2011 |
|---------------------|--------------|----------------------------|-----------|
| Cattle Egret | 1022 | Little Grebe | 1249 |
| Southern Pochard | 302 | Red-billed Teal | 328 |
| Red-billed Teal | 144 | Blacksmith Plover | 266 |
| Wood Sandpiper | 190 | White-faced Whistling Duck | 152 |
| Red-knobbed Coot | 167 | Cattle Egret | 143 |
| Egyptian Goose | 155 | Egyptian Goose | 125 |
| Blacksmith Plover | 141 | Red-knobbed Coot | 122 |
| African Sacred Ibis | 133 | African Sacred Ibis | 118 |

This year we could not match the total of 2010, which was boosted by an exceptionally high count at Aisleby in January, but were above the totals for 2008 and 2009. Figures this year for January and July were almost level, and for the first time during the Matabeleland survey two species exceeded one thousand birds – Cattle Egret at 1022 in January and Little Grebe 1249 in July. For the first time in many years, in July the Lewis's sallied forth by boat onto the Umgusa and spent a great deal of time counting a multitude of waterfowl, particularly Little Grebes. Hopefully this exercise will be repeated this year.

Conspicuous by their absence were Abdim's Storks (none); White Storks and African Darters (only 1 of each); Yellow-billed Egrets (4 – possibly lack of recognition of the subtle differences between this and the Great Egret); Fulvous Ducks (2); Cape Shoveler (2); Cape and Yellow Wagtails (1 and none).

On the other hand we had some good news - 6 Greater Flamingos in Sinamatella, a Rufous-bellied Heron at Robins (a first since the inception of this survey in Matabeleland), 49 Cape Teal mostly at Aisleby with a few at SAST, 99 Comb Ducks including 37 on the White Hills circuit in Hwange, and 41 Pied Avocets at Aisleby which have divided themselves into 3 groups. But SAST as usual came up with the goods, producing the highlight of 2011! Of the 57 African Jacanas present in July, about 65% were juveniles and chicks! The shallow water in the two lower ponds transformed them into mini wetlands, with weeds growing thick and fast - ideal for young legs to plod around in and balance on!

Apart from those mentioned earlier, Sandy McAdam, co-ordinator of the monthly surveys at Aisleby, expressed her on-going concerns at the total absence or reduction in numbers of some species there.

Expanded schedules have been prepared and are available to anyone interested. They have been submitted to the BirdLife National Council and National Office for onward transmission to the African Waterfowl Census administered by Wetlands International in Nairobi.

Julia Duprée Co-ordinator

GARDEN BIRD SURVEY 2011 – MATABELELAND Months: March to December OVERVIEW

Our Garden Bird Survey in Matland started in March 2011 and this overview covers the period from March up to November 2011. Reports are still to come for December and January 2012.

We started with 6 participants and now have 14. Another 3 indicated their intention of joining in, and have records at home, but unfortunately the sheets have yet to arrive! Most of the 14 reported regularly, though not everyone was able to do so.

We would like to thank everyone who took part. It's a fun project; fun to take part in and Helen, Sandy and I find it fun to run. We hope others will be encouraged to join in. It's not possible at this stage to produce a meaningful scientific analysis, due to inconsistent participation, and we regard this year as a trial run.

Order of gardens

| No | Location | No. Months | No. of species |
|----|---------------|------------|----------------|
| 14 | Hillside | 8 | 94 |
| 9 | Ntaba Moyo | 4 | 87 |
| 6 | Hillside | 10 | 79 |
| 7 | Esigodini | 5 | 69 |
| 3 | Burnside | 7 | 68 |
| 2 | Burnside | 8 | 66 |
| 13 | Glengarry | 10 | 50 |
| 11 | Fortune' Gate | 3 | 47 |
| 4 | Morningside | 3 | 44 |
| 8 | Suburbs | 9 | 40 |
| 1 | Burnside | 2 | 28 |
| 5 | Burnside | 1 | 28 |
| 12 | Belle Vue | 1 | 27 |

Top 30 Species

| Species | In how many gardens |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Grey Go-away-bird | 14 |
| African Hoopoe | 14 |
| Crested Barbet | 14 |
| Pied Crow | 14 |
| Dark-capped Bulbul | 14 |
| Red-faced Mousebird | 13 |
| Black-collared Barbet | 13 |
| Kurrichane Thrush | 13 |
| White-browed Robin-chat | 13 |
| Tropical Boubou | 13 |
| White-bellied Sunbird | 13 |
| Bronze Mannikin | 13 |
| Laughing Dove | 12 |
| Brown-hooded Kingfisher | 12 |
| Black-headed Oriole | 12 |
| House Sparrow | 12 |
| Fork-tailed Drongo | 11 |
| Tawny-flanked Prinia | 11 |

| | |
|--------------------------------|----|
| Hamerkop | 10 |
| Arrow-marked Babbler | 10 |
| Green Wood-hoopoe | 9 |
| African Grey Hornbill | 9 |
| Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird | 9 |
| Yellow-bellied Greenbul | 9 |
| African Paradise-flycatcher | 9 |
| Black-backed Puffback | 9 |
| Miombo Double-collared Sunbird | 9 |
| Scarlet-chested sunbird | 9 |
| African Yellow White-eye | 9 |
| Southern Grey-headed Sparrow | 9 |

Some Participants' Observations

March

Jen Brebner: Cut-throat Finch: 2 pairs of chicks being fed at the same time.

Sally Simpson: White-throated Robin-chat daily feeding a large cuckoo chick – Red-chested Cuckoo?

African Goshawks, 2 adult and 1 sub-adult hunting garden birds (plus domestic chicks through chicken wire!).

April

Betty van der Merwe: Yellow-billed Kite, neighbour reported breeding in pine tree. Out of season? Also concerned at the way it was flying from tree to tree – injured?

May

Peta Ditchburn: Dark-capped Bulbul, leucistic– a misnomer in this case, as it didn't have a dark cap! The bird was mainly white with brown on wings, black eyes with brown around, and a yellow vent.

June

Jen Brebner – Shikra having protracted bath in birdbath after chasing off Mannikins.

Peta Ditchburn: leucistic bulbul still around.

July

Jen Brebner: Cut-throat Finch, male and female, apparent adults, feeding each other.

Peta Ditchburn: leucistic bulbul disappeared.

August

Gwen Attwell/Helen Lewis: Red-headed Weaver started nest building and by month end was on its third nest.

Joy Kets: Dark-capped Bulbuls built a nest in a hanging basket on the patio.

September:

GwenAttwell/Helen Lewis: Red-headed Weaver still nest building.

Jen Brebner: surrounded by a cacophony of bird sounds: Peacock on one side, guineafowl on the other side and geese behind.

Striped Kingfisher seen in the garden.

Yellow White-eyes collecting nesting material.

Joy Kets: Yellow-billed Kites have built nest and one is sitting.

Dark-capped Bulbuls have hatched 2 chicks in the patio nest.

Sharon Peters: White-bellied Sunbird raised 1 chick in nest in rose bush.

October

Joy Kets: Yellow-billed Kites still incubating.

Dark-capped Bulbul chicks have fledged. Parents returned to the patio nest and one bird sitting.

Laraine Oosthuizen: heard all cuckoos except Levillant's. The birds were responding to tape recordings.

November

Joy Kets: The patio bulbuls raised 1 chick in second sitting, and returned to renovate the nest again.

The Yellow-billed Kites have hatched two chicks. They are now aggressive and regularly dive-bomb Joy and the gardener. One made contact with Joy's head causing her to feel faint and see stars. Another kite grabbed the gardener's beanie and deposited it on the neighbour's roof.

SURVEY IN 2012

We have added about 35 species to our original checklist, thanks to input from our surveyors.

And we have now simplified the form. We are asking for a record only (not numbers) in the relevant week for species seen or heard (or both), but FO for those flying over. For special species and uncommon sightings, we will ask for specific numbers and as much detail as possible where relevant.

At this stage our aim is to encourage members – though it doesn't have to be only members! – To develop an interest in birds and familiarize themselves with the species around them. We would also encourage them to invite any one or more of us over to help with IDs if necessary, and to imbibe a welcome cup of tea!

Apart from a survey in private gardens, we are inviting groups or individuals to monitor areas such as golf courses, Hillside Dams, Ascot Racecourse, residential complexes (Qalisa for instance), schools and other establishments, such as NUST and the Natural History Museum.

Julia Dupree

Birding Trips of Interest

35 years on: a visit to Seldomseen

By Peter R.B. Ward Vancouver, Canada

On a recent visit to Zimbabwe, I went to stay at Seldomseen, Bvumba. I was in good company, and we travelled from Harare in Rolf Chenaux Repond's venerable Peugeot 504 station wagon. Accompanying me were Rolf and Maia Chenaux-Repond and Arthur Barrie.

I have excellent memories of visiting Seldomseen in 1977, with Alec Manson, driving his old VW camper van. Looking at my old photos, I realise how much the vegetation has grown up around the property in 35 years. Alec was an avid bird ringer, and his table, weighing scale, bird bags, rings and other paraphernalia were always on the veranda outside the cottage. Peter Mwadziwana was helping Alec and learning on the job, and was already a really good bird watcher. Cecilia was providing immense support, in terms of housekeeping, cooking, gardening, and a list of duties too long to mention. Years later I was at Seldomseen briefly (in January 1991), and regrettably that was the last time I saw Alec. He was still busy, still meticulously ringing birds, and as always very positive.

I returned to Seldomseen in November 1997, with my late mother Monica Fiorini, and good friend Dr Ken Hall (from Vancouver Canada). We had our sound recording equipment with us, including an excellent Marantz tape deck, with two Sennheiser microphones, wind socks on, and bass roll-off switched to ensure best results. We were rewarded early the first morning with very good recordings of Olive Sunbird, Livingstone's Turaco and Square-tailed Drongo, with the persistent calls of Red-chested Cuckoo in the background. Later in the morning we had, in a single four-minute recording sequence a wonderful chorus, including Buff-spotted Flufftail, Red-capped Robin Chat, Chirinda Apalis, Livingstone's Turaco, Orange Thrush, Red-chested Cuckoo, and Bar-throated Apalis. Later we were rewarded by the rich, loud sounds of the Black-fronted Bush Shrike. Early

the following morning, in the grassland adjacent to the riverine forest, I was excited to record, for the first time, Singing Cisticola, to add to my much treasured list of cisticola sound recordings.

On the recent visit to Seldomseen, in mid January 2012, I went equipped with a new lightweight digital camera, a Nikon J1, with a regular zoom and a telephoto zoom. Both lenses were outstanding, and with the camera set on medium pixel density, and after a brief lesson from Celeste prior to departure from Harare, about how to set the focusing system, I got some excellent photos. Peter Mwadziwana was still there, still nimble, and still finding all the birds that we missed. The atmosphere was just as wonderful as I had remembered.

Probably the best photo was not of a bird, but the view just after dawn, with an aloe in the foreground, and layer upon layer of cloud lifting off the valley floor in front of us, with the ever-changing light making the photos more surreal by the minute.

We stayed at Twin Streams, a self-catering cottage, and were warmly welcomed by Sandra and Harry Beru. The cool nights, even in January, made our log fire welcome. On the way back through Mutare, we stopped briefly to see Cecilia Manson, who is doing well at Strickland retirement home.

Seldomseen is reached by taking the Bvumba road out of Mutare, to the 24.5 km peg, and then going 1 km along Nyamheni road. Current E-mail address is mhumhe@zol.co.zw.

Mashonaland East Natural History Society

Report on visit to Malilangwe - Wed 23 to Sun 28 November 2011

Eleven of our Bird Club members from Marondera set off at 6am on Wednesday morning, and met up with Pete & Vee [who left from Harare] at our tea stop just beyond Chivu. The 13 members journeyed through Gutu and Zaka and arrived at Croco Motors at the turn-off to Chiredzi Town at 1.45pm to meet up with Bruce Fivaz, who escorted us on the last stretch into Malilangwe. The distance from Marondera is 505kms

The area west of the Chiredzi River belongs to Hippo Valley/ Tongaat Hulett, and is an area included in a management agreement between Hippo Valley and The Malilangwe Trust. Malilangwe manage this pristine area.

The magnificent woodlands and riverine habitats of the area were teeming with birds. We also visited the Triangle feedlots and the effluent ponds below the Hippo Valley Sugar mill, which added considerably to the fantastic total of 192 different species seen.

Of particular interest to us Mashonaland East Birders were: - Goliath Heron; Saddle-bill Stork; Hooded, White-backed and White-headed vultures; Steppe, Lesser-spotted, Ayres [Irish according to our Guard] Eagles, Sanderling; Ruff; Sand-grouse; Brown-headed Parrot; Emerald Cuckoo; Woodland & Grey-headed Kingfishers; Trumpeter, Ground, Grey, Red & Yellow-billed Hornbills; Mosque Swallow; Sombre & Yellow-bellied Greenbul; Nicator; White-throated Robin-chat; Yellow-breasted Apalis; Grey-backed Camaroptera; Spotted Flycatcher; Yellow-Wagtail; Red-backed Shrike; Meve's Starling; Red & Yellow-billed Oxpecker; Red-billed Buffalo Weaver; Long-tailed Paradise Whydah; I think the Marico Flycatcher could be added to this list.

We also saw Wattled Cranes at the 29km peg on the Chivu to Gutu road on the journey to Malilangwe. The Hadinghams saw 8 Wattled Cranes and a pair of Secretary birds and Pete Jackson and his passengers counted 14 Wattled Cranes in the same spot 2 hours earlier.

An added interest was that on the relevant 2 days we split up into 2 teams to participate in the international "Big Birding Day" exercise, which happened to be on at this time, and with some good natured competition both teams reached totals in the 150s. Malilangwe also decided to take part and entered their team

We saw some game but they are much more plentiful on the other side of the river. The two resident crocs in the pool in front of the main lodge were visible most of the time and the lions were heard roaring several days not far away

We were worried about the heat because temperatures at Chiredzi had topped 40 degrees Celsius before our arrival but the skies were clouded over when we departed on Wednesday, and during our visit we experienced a spell of most welcome inclement weather, which lasted until our return to Marondera on Monday 28

Thank you Malilangwe for a wonderful experience
Colin de Beer.

The Chiota Pans 25th March 2012

Priest's 1930s books on the Birds of Southern Rhodesia have much to say on these pans situate in communal lands some 55-70 kms south east of Harare. I have visited them periodically over the last fifty years. Nyamungayi occupies almost a whole grid square but last time I saw it a couple of years ago it had no water at all. Chikokerano near Mahusekwa and the Samuriwo one is a lot smaller but it can hold a lot of water. The roads have all changed and the pans did take a bit of finding. A note of their condition may nevertheless be worth recording.

Nyamungayi was about one sixth full. About 500 x 700 meters 90% of which looked like open water with only a small 160 x 20-60 meters of emergent growth along one edge. The open water nevertheless carried a 70% surface growth of *Potamogeton* pondweed, which just comes to the surface but does not project above. This had about 60 coot, including half a dozen nests, 20-30 Red-billed Teal, 2 Spoonbills and a few egrets: all three species of white and water egrets but no cattle egrets. The little patch of emergent vegetation had a couple of pairs of Lesser Jacanas!

Chikokerano had three open patches of water about 30 x 50 meters each, and each had a 40% cover of water lilies in bloom. Water must have covered about 900 meters in length varying from 30 meters wide at the shallow end to 300 meters down towards the deep end. 95% of the water was therefore covered in rushes and grasses growing 50-60 cms out of the water promoting a wider green meadow with isolated granite boulder islands. Seen were Purple Swamp-hens, big jacanas, White-faced, White-backed and Red-bills among the duck and Cattle Egrets on the boulder islands sharing with Blacksmiths. The prize of the show was on pair of Whiskered Terns in full breeding plumage with lots of protest at the lone human wading round their territory.

In four weeks time these places will be worth another visit. So will Widgeon Pan, but that is about 160kms away down past Chivu. Local reception was very civil.

Alex Masterson

Tail Feathers

Not perhaps so strange behaviour by Purple-crested Turacos

I was most interested to read Alex Masterson's note on Purple-crested Turacos feeding on the ground, which perhaps is now much more commonplace than before, at least in urban situations such as Harare. Di Rushforth in *Honeyguide*, 2004. 50: 186 has recorded them

feeding on the ground by plucking off the leaves of rape plants and here in Dandaro Retirement Village I have observed these birds visiting small vegetable gardens, particularly around my house. But being such wary birds I am uncertain what the attraction might be but it does seem that it might simply be for whatever might be grown there. And I am sure this is but a further indication as to how these birds have adapted to urban situations where a new spectrum of food items must have become available that are easily exploited by these adaptable birds. The thing now of course is to discover whether in more natural situations they may do much the same thing where surely there must be similar opportunities?

M.P.S. Irwin

The Louries and the Snails

Yes, they do eat snails. Thanks for the responses. Len Bruce has produced beautiful photographic proof and Ian Jarvis a chick with a crop full of snails, shells and all. These records are still welcome.

Alex Masterson

In reference to your observation of **Purple-crested Turaco** feeding on the ground, I can confirm that these would definitely be feeding on snails. I once found a nest of two, 3-week-old chicks and their crops are absolutely full of snails. The snails were about 25mm diameter and looked like they had been eaten whole, without any sign of crushing or damage at all.

Possible this is only a seasonal activity only taking place while they have chicks. Probably the chicks need the calcium for fast growth of bones and feathers.

Iain Jarvis

Purple-crested Turacos

January 29 and 30th 2012

Spotted with delight on the ground in a flowerbed, on the lawn and near compost heap - eating snails. Snails were also climbing back wall but after the visit, none were seen. We have a small garden in a simplex complex in Avondale, bordering Mendel Road and Sam Njoma extension.

Jeanette Cross.

Something special..

On Sunday 29 January 2012, at about 10am, I joined in a lovely walk through Christon Bank with family and a couple of close friends.

About an hour into the walk just before a rocky little dam, we saw-with amazement- the African Emerald Cuckoo!!

I looked in the Robert's bird book and this bird is no-where near Harare-but is found more along the eastern parts of Zimbabwe.

How exciting! This is a new lifer I can now add to my list.

Erin Murphy.

What bird is it?

It flew into my garden by the way,

It flew into my garden just today.

This bird is rather common,

And no, it's not the Heuglin's Robbin!

It's bill is light orange and waxy,
The back and tail is brown (ish) on top see..
Outlining its eyes like a bandit-is bright red,
Below its bill and eyes-its face is slightly white,
And just on top, is brown-grey for its head.
On this small bird patterns layers of lines,
They cover its outer body, so thin, so fine.

It lives near long grass, or hangs out near dams,
So what does it weigh?
More or less~8 grams..

By now I'm sure you've guessed this bird,

* BUT *

If you don't know,
And won't make a go,
I'll tell you that
As I fling off my hat,
This bird is.....

>'THE COMMON WAXBILL'<

Erin Murphy.

(*Inspired by School poetry*)

Interesting RIFA siting.

The Tambourine Dove was heard by Tony Wood and I up the hill to the North on the 2nd afternoon's walk and was based on comparing it to an Emerald Spotted Wood-dove that was calling at the same time. The Tambourine Doves call was deeper and slower. I was the only one who heard the Broadbill and I heard it call twice from riverine vegetation just upstream of the cliffs on the first morning's walk, as reported at Rifa. I know the call well from the Eastern Districts and had not heard that it had already been sighted at Rifa before I heard it.

Richard Dennison

Tavistock siting

On Sunday the 25th of March BLZ visited Tavistock Farm. While we were there we saw some interesting birds. These included a group of 13 Cuckoo Finch sitting on a power line in the grassland next to the Mupfure river and 2 Chestnut-backed Sparrow-lark in the quarry area of the Game Sanctuary. The Cuckoo Finch number is high according to my experience and Tony Alegria always says that these Sparrow-larks don't exist.

Richard Dennison

Interesting sightings:

Icterine Warbler and Great Snipe at Monavale Vlei Sunday 18 March 2012.

Ken Dixon

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Contributions for The Babblers 106 June 2012/ July 2012 may be sent to the Editor anytime between now and 14th May 2012.

