

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.

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

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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.

Message from The President

This is my final communication to the BLZ Membership in *The Babblers* as I am standing down after three interesting years in this post. The BLZ AGM is to be held on 9th June at Hideaway, Lake Manyame, and I urge you to attend this very important meeting and to vote in your new officers.

Michael Irwin has now departed from Zimbabwe for his homeland. We wish him well as he settles back into English life. He will continue to contribute to our publications. Michael has kindly offered 50% of the proceeds from the sale of another painting to cover *Honeyguide* expenses: J C Harrison's Swinhoe's Pheasant.

I look forward to seeing you at the AGM!

Dorothy Wakeling

Announcements

The news of the passing today of Bob Stjernstedt has just been received. Bob was well known for his bird recordings and extensive knowledge of the birds of Zambia. BirdLife Zimbabwe extends deepest sympathy to his family and to the Zambian Ornithological Society Committee and members on their sad loss.

Errata Corrige

Babbler 105: Cultivation at Marlborough Vlei

White-winged Stilt should read Black-winged Stilt [not at all a common bird on the vlei].

Visit to Hippo Pools: the correct QDS is 1731B2 Katiyo

Visit to Tavistock Farm: the correct QDS is 1830B4 Beatrice

Visit to Nyamungai Pan: the correct QDS is 1831A1 Seke

FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES

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

Meet at Westgate Shopping Centre Parking Area at 8am

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\$10ppday) 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 OR 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 centre 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.

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

Mukuvisi: Sunday 3rd June 2012 0700 Sunday 1st July 2012 0700

Chivero: Sunday 10th June 2012 CANCELLED
Sunday 8th July 2012 0700 (Meet PE School car park)

Monavale Vlei: Sunday 17th June 2012 0700 Sunday 15th July 2012 0700

4th Sunday Outings

Sunday 24th June 2012 Mbizi meet at Mukuvisi woodlands 0700.Details to follow
Sunday 22nd July 2012 Ewanrigg Botanical Gardens – Meet CABS Northridge Park0700

2nd Sat Outings

Saturday 9th June 2012 CANCELLED
Saturday 14th July 2012 Rainham Dam (Meet PE School car park) 0700

3rd Saturday Outings

Saturday 16th June 2012 Mukuvisi Front Office 0700
Saturday 21st July 2012 Haka 0700

****Thursday Meetings at Avondale Sports Club 1730 for 1800**

Thursday 21st JUNE 2012 Waterfowl Census – Dave Rockingham-Gill
Thursday 19th JULY 2012 Raptor Identification Part 1 – Neil Deacon

This will be an introduction comprising differences in wing and tail shape with reference to form and function, description of key features used as characteristics for I.D. i.e. size, colouration, cere, eye wattles. It will be followed by species identification for falcons, kestrels and hobbies.

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

** New starting times

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

Meet at Prince Edward School car park on Josiah Tongagara Ave

Monavale Vlei

Meet on the B.S Leon side of Fenella Drive

Matabeleland Branch

15 June: Talk at The Boma, Hillside Dams

Helen Lewis will be giving a talk on The Amazing Birdlife of the Melbourne Water Treatment Plant. This site is Melbourne's equivalent of Bulawayo's Aisleby and the birdlife is prolific and stunning. Talk starts at 6:30. As usual it will be possible to enjoy one of The Boma's tasty meals before the talk – please make sure you are there in good time, as meals will not be served while the speaker is presenting. Meals should be booked directly with The Boma, phone 242490. For more information phone Gaynor Lightfoot 0712 402341

24 June: Car rally with a birding theme

Ready for something different? Join us on Sunday morning and challenge your wits, as you are required to follow a series of clues – with a birding theme – around Bulawayo. Meet in the car park at Ascot Race course at 9:30. Course will end at the Country Club around midday so there is the option of treating yourself to lunch there afterwards. For more information phone Cecilia Hubbard 0772 433733

July: African Waterfowl Census

As usual the branch will be carrying out waterfowl counts during the month of July, with teams hopefully covering Aisleby, SAST and Cowdray Park as well as certain areas within Matobo and Hwange National Parks. Provisional dates are Sunday 8th July for SAST & Cowdray Park and Saturday 21st July for Aisleby but these will be confirmed nearer the time. For more information phone Julia Duprée (h) 242634 or Helen Lewis (h) 242285

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 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

Conservation

Impact of BAP in the Driefontein Grasslands

Driefontein Grasslands schools received their BAP newsletters in February 2012 when the Education Department staff visited the area to carry out an appraisal of BAP work for its impact in influencing bird and environmental conservation. A lady in one Site Support Group, Mrs Hilda Mukaro, has planted a number of flowering plants and shrubs around her homestead. When asked the reason for growing such plants, she happily associated it to her desire to conserve birds. She noted that some birds survived on nectar, whilst other forms of life thrive well in well-vegetated areas. Lady teachers from Chivake and Taigara Primary Schools have taken the herbal garden initiative so seriously that they are now a hub of knowledge on herbs and their uses. Many thanks to the initiatives by the former Education Manager – Mgrs. Maasdorp for the job well done! The herbal gardens are spreading among the community people with the recent spread reaching Chinyaura village – one of the prime crane breeding habitats.

A quick analysis of the results of the research analysing BAP shows that most people are aware of the conservation status of cranes as well as the need to conserve them. The general public is aware of the breeding ecology of these birds; their link to wetlands and measures that can be used to improve the population status of these globally threatened bird species. There is marked behaviour and attitude change among community members towards the conservation of birds. In short, results for which the Bird Awareness Programme was established in the Driefontein Grasslands are slowly beginning to be realised now. The community is beginning to make sense out of the life of cranes and are hypothesising the local migration of these birds. With funding available, it would be worthwhile to carry out a tracking project on these birds (using biotelemetry) to map out any seasonal movements of these birds. This information will expand the programme and help promote crane conservation, as more people are made aware of the ecology of these birds. There is, however, need to engage the relevant wildlife and environment authorities and the community to stamp out illegal collection of crane eggs – a threat that may result in the drastic fall of the crane population.

On another note, the World Migratory Bird Day, which is running under the theme **Migratory birds and people – together through time**, will be held later than the stipulated time. Plans are that a school in Harare will be asked to host the event. Word of mouth will be used to inform the members of the event.

Rueben Njolomole

BLZ Education Officer

Mashonaland

Mashonaland Branch meeting 19th April 2012

The Tits of Zimbabwe by Anthony Cizek (visiting from the U.K.)

57 people turned up to listen to Anthony Cizek talk on the Tits of Zimbabwe at the Avondale Sports Club. This was in advance of his safari to Goshu Park to look for tits, by compass marching on Saturday 21 April 2012, especially the Rufous-bellied Tit.

He started by splitting the tits in two: the Penduline-tits on the one hand and the Southern Black, Miombo & Rufous-bellied on the other.

The Cape Penduline-tit has a separate habitat of the much drier Botswana /South Africa Kalahari, than our Grey Penduline-tit, which lives in the Zambezi biome of Miombo Woodland with some overlap for both species in Matabeleland.

The Ashy Tit (previously Acacia Grey) and the Miombo Tit have a similar distribution to the penduline-tits, their names separate them into different habitats, and these habitats have much to do with rainfall differences, in the south-west and north-east of Zimbabwe.

The Rufous-bellied Tit lives in the miombo woodland, higher rainfall area of Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and the Caprivi Strip. (It almost certainly occurs in Angola, but we have no observers there). In Zambia it occurs on Kalahari Sands but not in this country. Anthony thought there is a wide gap between the Malawi and the Zimbabwe birds and thought movement between the two populations to be very remote. He has recently been to some areas like Bikita and Mberengwa to look for them and so far not seen any. Deforestation seems to be the problem and ALARM BELLS ARE RINGING. It occurs on our plateau where rainfall is between 800-1000mm and where trees are prone to having lichen on them. So in the granite hills with Mountain Acacia *Brachystegia glaucescens* don't bother to look for them, while forested parts of those same granite hills could have them. They have been credited with preferring Muzhanje *Uapaca kirkiana*.

So the questions are which quarter degree squares do they live in and how much habitat is there for them there?

Status-wise where do they fit? 1-10,000 birds would make them a vulnerable species and 1-2,500 birds would make them endangered (facing a high risk of extinction in the wild). According to the SA Bird Atlas it was seen 72 times in the years 1987-1993, and we filled in 12,000 field cards. (Miombo Tit 369/12000)

Anthony gave us lots of food for thought, so if you see any Rufous-bellied Tits in your travels tell anthonycizek@mac.com

Thank you Anthony

DV Rockingham-Gill rgill@zol.co.zw

Monavale Vlei 3rd Sunday Bird Walk 20th May 2012

Eleven birders braved the early cold spell that prevailed when we took to our monthly bird walk on this sunny morning. The ox-bow like pond across Marimba Stream was visited first. We were rewarded with 2 Black Crakes, Brimstone Canary, Spectacled Weavers, Yellow-fronted Canary, Yellow-throated Longclaw and Swainson's Spurfowl calling nearby. From the pond area we ambled back to the Vlei. Special mention is given to 3 Magpie Mannikins that were seen briefly perched on grass stalks along the banks of the Marimba Stream. Further down the Vlei and near the streams confluence an African Cuckoo Hawk was spotted sitting atop an acacia tree. This was well enjoyed too. Other bird species seen / heard for the rest of the walk included: 2 Grey Herons, Lizard Buzzard, Shikra, Gabar Goshawk, Little Bee-eater, Stonechat, Zitting Cisticola, Rattling Cisticola, Black-backed Puffback, Greater Blue-eared Starlings, Red-billed Queleas, Village

Indigobird and Orange-breasted Waxbills, to mention but a few. A total of 56 birds species were counted at the end of the walk.

Jimmy Muropa
Monavale Vlei Scout

Rainham Dam Outings

14th April 2012

A bright sunny morning, six participants and two very full dams, though the truck got us all across the ditch linking the two dams.

Most time was spent on the wall of the smaller dam, which has an extensive cover of water lilies in bloom, but no African Pygmy-goose yet. Three Lesser Moorhens and a pair of White-faced Duck with four ducklings about 10 days old were, nevertheless, good to see. Brown-throated Martins were back and Eastern Saw-wings were there again. Black Coucal and Broad-tailed Warblers were about and plenty of wild dagga/Leonotis coming into flower seemed to have induced a pair of Marico Sunbirds to build a nest in the first thorn tree across the ditch.

Otherwise there was nothing unusual, and no Red-knobbed Coot and hardly a duck to be seen on the big dam. Later next morning, however there were over 50 Comb Duck on that dam and they might have been there among the rushes on Saturday.

Total seen or heard 55 plus a couple of may-bees.

Alex Masterson

Rainham 12th May 2012

Conditions were good again, water levels dropping fast but no suggestion yet of a muddy fringe. There were only two observers. The grass long and giving views onto the water where fishermen establish their spots to fish from. Attempts to burn have had little success.

Both dams had extensive areas of flowering water lilies with smaller reed mats on the big dam. But no Pygmy-goose and only about 30 White-backed Duck anchoring themselves in the pond weed as they slept in the wind. There were a few small groups of Red-billed Teal and a couple of small groups of White-face Duck. No coots, no Little Grebes, no Southern Pochard.

Nevertheless a Giant Kingfisher was nice as were a couple of Lesser Moorhen and a family of four Magpie Strikes were seen for the first time these visits began over 14 months ago. Two Greater Striped Swallows were still about.

NO RAINHAM visit for June. July should produce drumming snipe and Wattled Starlings. Total recorded 62.

Alex Masterson

Monavale Vlei Report

April-May 2012

On the morning of 3rd May 2012 an African Crake was spotted flying a short distance whilst calling before dropping into grasses. Yet again on 9th May 2012 and near the viewing platform, an African Crake emerged from the grass and preened itself in the middle of the path. *Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa* says they migrate to these parts from November to April. Obviously the African Crake had delayed its departure. Was it a first year bird or was its food supply still plentiful? Has anyone seen African Crakes this late in the season?

Enrico Leonardi and I saw hundreds of Cuckoo Finches on 11 April 2012. This remarkably huge flock was flying about on the Vlei and on occasion perched on tall grasses. We have had the

privilege of witnessing this amazing spectacle at close range and a conservative figure of in excess of 300 birds was agreed upon.

Monavale Vlei and fringes recorded a total of 137 bird species for March and 124 for April. Another interesting sighting was that of a Vervet Monkey seen on 16 May 2012. It sat atop an *Acacia gerrardii* tree situated right along Marimba Stream near the streams' confluence. Seeing us approach it quickly climbed down and disappeared into the thick grass.

Arrivals and departures of migrants seen at Monavale Vlei 2011 - 2012

Name of Migrant Bird	Date of Arrival	Date of Departure
Abdim's Stork	7 November 2011	15 April 2012
Yellow-billed Kite	16 August 2011	29 March 2012
Wahlberg's Eagle	22 September 2011	3 April 2012
Steppe Buzzard	26 October 2011	19 April 2012
Amur Falcon	14 November 2011	19 April 2012
Corncrake	5 January 2012	16 February 2012
African Crake	14 December 2012	9 May 2012
Striped Crake	13 January 2012	7 March 2012
Streaky-breasted Flufftail	28 December 2011	23 March 2012
Red-chested Cuckoo	12 October 2011	23 March 2012
Levaillant's Cuckoo	2 November 2011	19 April 2012
Klaas's Cuckoo	26 July 2011	5 April 2012
Black Coucal	15 December 2011	21 April 2012
Grey-headed Kingfisher	27 January 2012	6 March 2012
European Roller	23 December 2011	11 February 2012
Barn Swallow	21 September 2011	16 April 2012
Great Reed-warbler	6 December 2011	5 April 2012
Willow Warbler	20 November 2011	21 March 2012
Spotted Flycatcher	9 November 2011	5 April 2012
African Paradise-flycatcher	26 September 2011	11 April 2012
Red-backed Shrike	15 November 2011	16 April 2012
Copper Sunbird	13 October 2011	20 April 2012
European Bee-eater	26 September 2011	14 April 2012

Jimmy Muropa, Monavale Vlei Scout. Monavale Vlei Biodiversity Project and Conservation Society of Monavale. www.monavalevlei.com cosmo@yoafrica.com

HARARE GARDEN BIRD SURVEY 2011-12

Notes on Sheet 7: 12.12.2011 – 8.1.2012 Weeks 25-28

Well, Christmas passed without a single turkey, goose, chicken or partridge (unless you count Swainson's Spurfowl) and only 1 White-faced Duck and 2-Helmeted Guineafowl. Serious breeding was reported from some suburbs but I think few of us observe closely enough to be aware of nesting except for weavers and sunbirds. Those, though, who are fascinated by the detail, send most informative notes.

We received 14 completed sheets with an average of 38 birds per garden. The highest number was 76 and 4 were in the 50s. Levaillant's Cuckoo was by far the most frequently noted with only one record each of Diderick's Cuckoo and Klaas's Cuckoo. The Red-chested Cuckoo was fairly often heard. 1 Wahlberg's Eagle flew over Hogerty Hill but otherwise only resident Long-crested Eagles got a mention. A Little Sparrowhawk was present for the whole period in a Hatfield garden. Barn Owl, Southern White-faced Scops-owl, Spotted Eagle-owl and African Wood-owl called over a wide area. Swallows were disappointingly few but Barn, Lesser Striped and Greater Striped and Wire-tailed Swallows were recorded. The only migrant warblers were 1 Garden Warbler and 1 Willow Warbler.

Among the unexpected birds were a Familiar Chat in downtown Harare, a Groundscraper Thrush in Hillside, Terrestrial Brownbul in Highlands and Hogerty Hill and a White-crested Helmet-shrike on 2nd St Extension.

Notes on Sheet 8: 9.1 – 5.2.2012 Weeks 29-32

Slightly fewer species recorded in January, down from average 38 to 34 but plenty of breeding going on; not only is the Grey Go-away-bird now a common garden bird, it is also breeding widely. Others often recorded nesting are African Paradise-flycatcher, Crested Barbet, Black-collared Barbet and Whyte's Barbet, firefinches, robins and Fork-tailed Drongos. The first Village Indigobird noted was in Rolf Valley on the 18th Jan. A wide variety of raptors overflew; Ovambo Sparrowhawk, Black Sparrowhawk and Lanner Falcon while Gabar Goshawk was everywhere frequently seen. Common Waxbill, abundant earlier is now rarely noted and only one Black-throated Canary occurred. A Purple Heron over Pomona was unexpected.

Notes on Sheet 9: 6.2 – 4.3.2012 Weeks 33-36

February brought a high average of 41 species per garden but perhaps because all the experts participated. Certainly, lots of 'new' species, some difficult to identify, were reported; Common House-martin, Eastern Saw-wing, Little Swift and White-rumped Swift, Miombo Tit and Miombo Blue-eared Starling which is difficult to distinguish from the more common Greater Blue-eared except by its call. One observer thought he/she heard a Woodland Kingfisher and a Striped Kingfisher was definitely heard. One species that must go undetected in many gardens, the Green-winged Pytilia (Melba Finch), was seen in Milton Park. It is common in the Botanic Gardens and I can find it in mine if I'm patient. Another new entrant was Little Bee-eater, while the European Bee-eater was recorded over-flying in many suburbs. Levillant's is still the cuckoo most often seen with only one Diderick's Cuckoo mentioned. Amur Falcon and Abdim's Stork are widely seen overhead.

Ken Dixon

Some Results from the Rufous-bellied Tit Count, Goshu Park 21 April 2012

There was a good turnout for the Mash Bird Club census of all tit species in Goshu Park on 21 April, so we were able to have 24 teams of observers following transects spaced approximately 50m apart, and covering c.300ha. This is a large area of woodland to census - consider that Carl Vernon's work at Great Zimbabwe covered c.100ha - but the low density of birds in miombo ecosystems means that large areas need to be covered if we are to quantify the densities of different species. This applies especially to the Rufous-bellied Tit, which is the least common of the miombo specialists.

So, how many Rufous-bellied Tits did we find? On the day, it was reported that we had seen 3 pairs, but on assimilating the data, it was realised that a pair had been overlooked: the group which worked transect 3 recorded it after the count was over, on their way back to the bush camp along the fence, and it seems there was a pair lurking in the sundry areas outside the park during the count. (I had originally - erroneously - assumed it was the same bird/s as recorded by transect 1, but on plotting the approximate locations of the contacts, this seems unlikely.) Bruce Bolnick and Lindani Mkiwane also recorded a singleton on the way back to the bush camp after the end of their transect, and it is possible this was a new pair (a 5th), overlooked during the count period. There were twice as many contacts with the Miombo Grey Tit during the census period - which tallies with the conventional wisdom.

The results are being written up in full for *Honeyguide* - and the aim is to list all those involved in what seems to be a fairly ground-breaking effort (to develop a useful method to count low density African woodland passerines.) I have the following names, but there is some missing.

Please could those who are not listed - or anyone who spots a missing name - contact me on the email address below?

All those involved are thanked for making the day not only successful, but a memorable one. It is no mean feat getting so many birders together in one place at one time, and the count simply would not have happened without the efforts of the following people: Tony Alegria, Dave Dalziel, Celesta von Chamier, Penny Raynor, Dorothy Wakeling and, especially, Julia Pierini. Thank you Julia!

Anthony Cizek

anthonycizek@mac.com

T.Alegria J.Ball I.Bartosz S.Bartosz V.Bartosz B.Bolnick D.Bolnick? Botha
K.Connelly A.Couto T.Couto D.Dalziel C.de Beer T.Dibb K.Dixon R.Dennison
S.Desai N.Hart E.Holland P.Jackson J.Kelly E.Leonardi I.Louw R.Louw Riana
Louw? Marillia A.Masterson E.Murphy A.Nkiwane L.Nkiwane M.Nkiwane C.Pierini
J.Pierini J.Pitt S.Pitt J.Rautenbach I.Riddell M.Roberts S.Roberts D.Rushforth
J.Saunders F.Searle C.Shadwell E.Shadwell L.Shadwell M.Shadwell N.Solanki
K.Stainton J.Thornhill K.van Vuuren C.von Chamier J.von Chamier D.Wakeling
R.Warren-Codrington D.Wiggins P.Wiggins L.Wilson T.Wood Sophie?

Matabeleland RECENT REPORTS

Barn Swallows at Jabulani Safaris – Shangani – 16-18 March

An unexpected, last minute invitation was received from Richard and Win Blackburn, camp managers for Jabulani Safaris, Shangani, which opened with the words: 'The swallows are here. Would you like to come see them, and listen to the hum as they settle themselves for the night?' Unfortunately, most members had made arrangements for the coming weekend, but somewhere, someone was looking out for me, as for once I had not planned anything. I accepted their kind invitation.

We arrived at Jabulani Safaris camp at about 5.15 p.m. We were welcomed warmly, by Richard and Win. As the sun was getting lower and we had a fair distance to travel, we were made comfortable in the camp's suitable transport and we were driven to the appointed 'viewing spot'. Having visited the Barn Swallow roost at How Mine, on the outskirts of Bulawayo, and aware of this bird's tendency to roost in large trees, I was baffled by this 'spot' which was at the edge of a small dam – not a single large tree in sight [extensive reed beds are also favoured sites – Ed.]. We were facing a bank of reeds that filled one of the inlets of this dam. However, looking overhead, swallows had begun their circling in the sky above. Innumerable birds were arriving and systematically joining the swirling vortex.

That unknown signal was given, and we watched in utter amazement as the swallows came down to land on the river reeds. This constant, seemingly orderly stream of birds landing seemed to last forever but was in reality no more than 20 minutes. The slight lack of judgment by the swallows, as to how many birds one reed could hold before dipping too low, made for a constant flurry to find their place for the night.

The sound of their calls rose to a crescendo as the colour of the reed bank changed from emerald green and white to a sea of blue/black. Noticeably, throughout their preparatory flight, and their descending to roost, not a single bird of prey was to be seen.

As the sun dipped behind the horizon, and night started, another mysterious signal and this incredible congregation fell silent immediately.

Fern Creek becomes a 'swallow roost' for a short period of time, twice a year. It would seem this little piece of heaven on earth, becomes a place of rest for these birds when they arrive from Europe, and a place to gain strength for their return journey. Their arrival and departure is as unpredictable as the place they have chosen to roost.

We would like to thank Richard and Win, and Jabulani Safaris for affording Tony and I this wonderful experience. Their hospitality and enthusiasm is astounding. The place they manage and care for is amazing, and truly lives up to the adopted company motto: 'Where Peace is Paramount'.

Cecilia Hubbard

Walk at Mabukuwene: 24 March

A bright, sunny morning with a few wisps of cloud and a fairly strong breeze blowing welcomed thirteen members at Mabukuwene who arrived in good time, two of whom had brought their little dogs along for the walk as well. A pair of Violet-backed Starlings had greeted the first arrivals while bird sound reverberated around the parking area.

Splitting into two teams it was agreed that we would meet back at the old kiosk for tea at ten and we set off in our groups. It was great to see that there had been a lot of clearing done around the little park, with the paths all cleared and plenty of lantana hacked away. Once again, the little nooks and crannies were visible with paths cleared up to the various quiet seating spots. The old Hamerkop nest has all but fallen down and very little nesting material remains. It is probable that the Hamerkop are nesting in close proximity as the birds are often seen flying over that part of Mabukuwene.

Most of the cacti had dragon fruits bulging from their stems – large, delicious looking deep pink or red orbs, attracting plenty of Dark-capped Bulbuls and Yellow-bellied Greenbuls. Although it was some time before we actually saw a Yellow-bellied Greenbul, we could hear several grumbling away in the undergrowth.

The tree parasite (*ex Loranthus curviflorus*) was all flowering so plenty of sunbirds were flitting around, most of which we could hear but we did eventually get to see the White-bellied, Marico and Miombo Double-collared Sunbirds.

All during the walk, we could hear and see European Bee-eaters flying above us and quite a large number were seen perched in the gum trees in one of the neighbouring properties that borders the nature garden. There were patches of Barn Swallows and African Palm-swifts also aerial.

Some excitement was generated when our group spotted a couple of large birds scuttling into the bushes, only to be identified as two scruffy, long legged bald necked chickens which dashed back to join their flock in another neighbouring property on the boundary!

Sadly, with some of the boundary properties, the fences are inadequate and we were several times yapped at and followed some way by dogs from these properties.

Our group had a wonderful sighting of a tiny Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, busily looking for breakfast, feasting on some ripe figs it had found. The bird was very obliging and we were able to study it while it fossicked around in the tree very close to us.

At one stage, we saw a large raptor soaring high above us, but despite everyone opening up bird books and mulling over the various points, while we agreed that perhaps it was an immature bird, we were still unable to identify it with any certainty and decided to forget we'd seen it.

Before joining the other group back at the old kiosk, we had a quick walk around the little garden of rest, first spotting a Spotted Flycatcher having a drink at one of the birdbaths and at the other birdbath a Yellow-fronted Canary. It was great to see so many birdbaths all around the property and all full of water too.

While having refreshments, we compared notes and everyone agreed that the bird count was somewhat disappointing but we'd all had a very enjoyable couple of hours. Many thanks to the organisers.

A total of 35 birds were seen or heard ((H) = heard only) – not including two scruffy long legged bald necked chickens and one unidentified highflying raptor!

Crested Barbet and Black-collared Barbet
European Bee-eater
Dark-capped Bulbul
Long-billed Crombec
Levaillant's Cuckoo and Jacobin Cuckoo

Chin-spot Batis
Tropical Boubou
Yellow-fronted Canary
Pied Crow (H)
Laughing Dove and Cape Turtle-dove

African Fish-eagle (H)
Yellow-bellied Greenbul
Bronze Mannikin
Tawny-flanked Prinia
White-browed Robin-chat
White-throated Robin-chat
Violet-backed Starling
Barn Swallow
African Palm-swift
Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird
African Yellow White-eye
Jenny Brebner

African Paradise-flycatcher
Spotted Flycatcher
Brown-hooded Kingfisher
Red-faced Mousebird
Black-backed Puffback
Streaky-headed Seedeater
Marico Sunbird
Miombo Double-collared Sunbird
White-bellied Sunbird
Kurrichane Thrush
Blue Waxbill

Tshabalala Game Sanctuary – 15 April

April 15 was one of those lovely pre-winter days; not cold but with a slight nip in the air early in the morning so that as the birders arrived they climbed out their cars and lined up facing the sun – like a row of swallows on the telephone line.

Tshabalala Game Sanctuary, on the outskirts of Bulawayo, consists of 1,200 hectares of thornveld savannah. In recent months, with the assistance of Wildlife & Environment Matabeleland branch, Parks have normalized the water supply, and at the time of our visit water was being pumped at two points and there was also still a little rainwater in the bottom dam. Some years ago the then Ornithological Association of Zimbabwe (OAZ) prepared a checklist of 76 of the more common birds of Tshabalala, though OAZ had recorded more than 200 species there over a period of five years. Armed with these checklists and maps of the Park our group of enthusiasts set off to explore the Park and enjoy a morning of birding.

To our delight the first thing we saw was a large herd of animals, about 20 wildebeest, 8 zebra and a few impala. Unfortunately, with the exception of one warthog, these were the only animals we were to see that morning – but as our main objective was to see birds, and we recorded 77 different species, we ended the morning well satisfied.

Of the 76 species included on the ‘common’ checklist we saw 45. Amongst the 31 species we did not see seven were migrants, and we did not expect to see these at this time of year – the rest were just plain illusive, e.g. Green-winged Pytilia and Pied Crow. But then we managed to pick up another 32 species that were not on the list.

The little dam was particularly productive. The first bird to catch our attention – and to puzzle us for a while – was an immature African Harrier-hawk. A solitary White Stork was also of special interest. For some time we watched the activity in a large thorny shrub overhanging the water, spotting Blue Waxbill, Violet-eared Waxbill, Common Waxbill and Black-faced Waxbills and Jameson’s Firefinch. We also picked up Brown-hooded Kingfisher and Wattled Starlings here. Not all the migrants had left for the European summer and we saw a few Barn Swallows, though we had to be quick to identify these, Wire-tailed Swallows and Lesser Striped Swallows as well as White-rumped Swifts also swooped overhead. The only other migrant we saw was the Red-backed Shrike. We were pleased to see the iconic Crimson-breasted Shrike, a Tshabalala special, as well as Magpie Shrike and Southern White-crowned Shrikes, Tropical Boubou, Black-backed Puffback, Brubru, both Black-crowned Tchagra and Brown-crowned Tchagra and White-crested Helmet-shrikes.

Colour was added by the Lilac-breasted Rollers, Scarlet-chested, White-bellied and Marico Sunbirds, and Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters. Besides the African Harrier-hawk the raptors were represented by the Black-shouldered Kite and the Black-chested Snake-eagle. We also heard a Pearl-spotted Owlet. We probably spent the most time identifying a Green-capped Eremomela; this little bird with its yellow chest, cream belly, grey back, greenish head and whitish eye was a first for several of us.

By the time we left we were all wondering why we don't visit this little sanctuary more frequently and promising to be back soon.

Adele Edwards

Field Trip to Insindi Ranch, Gwanda: 28 April – 1 May

So many special moments to remember! The flight of four White-breasted Cormorants skimming low and perfectly reflected in the still water of the dam. Three quarrelsome Pied Kingfishers sitting side by side on a bouncing reed. Five Grey Crowned Cranes, their every move stately and elegant. Brilliant colours! Thirteen Hadedda Ibis gleaming bronze in the early morning sun. Lilac-breasted rollers that seemed somehow brighter than any we had ever seen before. Southern White-crowned Shrikes with white bits so white they "look like they've been washed in Persil".

Sounds! The haunting cry of the African Fish-eagle was heard first thing in the morning. The call of the Pearl-spotted Owlets was all around us in the evening. Fork-tailed Drongos – without doubt the predominant bird of the weekend. ("I think I've seen 473 drongos ... or perhaps I've seen one drongo 473 times?"). And we discovered that the Pearl-spotted Owlet that called at all odd times of day, but only seemed to know the first phrase of its call, was in fact a drongo. Also plentiful were African Wattled Lapwing, Blacksmith Lapwing and Crowned Lapwings, whose raucous alarm calls made it impossible to go anywhere or do anything without everyone knowing about it.

Our satisfaction at positively identifying an African Pipit – admittedly only after spending some time consulting Faansie Peacock's book *Pipits of Southern Africa*, and only because we were lucky enough to clearly see the bright orange-yellow inside of the mouth, as well as the yellowish bill, as the bird fed close to road. Our fascination at seeing an African Darter catch, manipulate, and swallow a large barbel, longer than the bird's neck – and the ribbing the fishermen in our group had to take when in the course of the weekend they failed to catch anything nearly as big. Our delight at the confirmation we received of our tentative identification of a juvenile Burnt-necked Eremomela. We'd observed a small bird with colouration similar to a Long-billed Crombec but with a long tail and a more slender build. After much consulting of various field guides we thought it might be a juvenile Burnt-necked. As we hadn't noticed any of the adult birds around, and weren't familiar with the call, we decided to play it to see if we could recognize the sound as one of the many that were coming from the surrounding bush. The moment someone played it on their I-pod there was an instant reaction with at least 3 birds appearing in the tops of the trees above us all calling loudly.

Our field trip to Insindi Ranch, near Gwanda, was most rewarding. The relatively close proximity to Bulawayo (120km), on a good tar road, meant for those not lucky enough to be able to make this into a long weekend it was still an option to come for a day, or the weekend. Our hosts, Joe & Doreen Stewart, together with ever-generous Tony Wharam and his staff, had prepared a comfortable campground for us, close to the waters edge, under large shady trees. The weather was perfect: hot and sunny, but not too hot, during the day, crisply cool at night, but not freezing. Many of us had not been 'proper' camping for some time and there was quite a bit of excited preparation for the trip with all sorts of camping gadgets being unearthed, dusted off, and brought to light – with the result that between us we had everything we needed. In addition to great birding, we had good food, good conversation and good company.

The dam provided some surprising results. Conspicuous by their absence were Little Grebes, Red-knobbed Coot and Common Moorhen. And yet there was no shortage of water birds. White-breasted and Reed Cormorants, Black Crake, African Jacanas and lapwings were plentiful. We saw six types of kingfisher: Giant, Pied, Brown-hooded, Striped, Malachite and Half-collared. There were egrets – Cattle, Great, Little and Yellow-billed; and herons – Grey, Goliath, Greenback; and Black-crowned Night-herons. We saw African Black Duck, Comb Duck and

White-faced Duck, as well as Egyptian Goose, Hamerkop, African Darters, African Sacred Ibis and Hadedda Ibis, Water Thick-knee and Three-banded Plover.

A short walk from the dam and you entered woodland, thick, dense and green along the river bed (Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, Black-headed Oriole), opening out into mixed acacia and mopane scrub (African Grey Hornbill, Red-billed Hornbill and Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, White-browed Sparrow-weaver, Red-billed Buffalo-weaver, Wattled Starling and Meves Starling, White-crested Helmet-shrike) – both with a host of different types of birds. Then there were the lands (Temminck's Courser, and Red-billed Oxpecker on the cattle) and the lush gardens around the homesteads (Senegal Coucal, Kurrichane Thrush and White-browed Robin-chat). On Sunday we made a short excursion to neighbouring Longueville Ranch where we were made welcome by Stan and Val Nicholle – and almost got diverted into a history session as Stan was so knowledgeable about the early days in this area and had a home full of fascinating photos and memorabilia. The highlight of that trip was seeing the pair of Verreaux's Eagles which nest on this ranch.

Other raptors seen were Black-chested Snake-eagle, African Hawk-eagle, Little Sparrowhawk, Shikra, and African Goshawk, and we saw a lone Lappet-faced Vulture.

The list went on and on, resulting in an impressive final total of 132 species. Apparently this is only the third list to have been submitted for the Gwanda area in the past 20 odd years, so not only did we have a most enjoyable long weekend but we were also able to gather some useful information and were able to provide an updated list for use by the National Office for inclusion on World Birds.

Adele Edwards

Travel

A Week in the Chimanimanis

I recently spent a week in the Chimanimani area. I arrived on the 13th and left on the 20th of April. For the first half of the week I was busy being the official photographer for an Outward Bound instructor selection course. During this time I did not get much birding done, as the schedule was pretty tight. I did, however, stay a couple of days extra at Outward Bound so that I could spend a bit of time looking for birds.

In the 'gardens' around the houses and dorms there were a fair few birds, many of which were fairly accustomed to people. Miombo Rock-thrush was the main performer here, with a family of three seen regularly and providing me with great photo opportunities. Familiar Chats were also quite easy to find in the gardens. Plenty of waxbills, mannikins and whydahs were around, but no Green Twinspot this time. A flowering bottlebrush tree attracted many sunbirds; Miombo Double-collared, Variable, Collared, Amethyst and even Western Violet-backed Sunbirds made an appearance. A Red-faced Crombec spent a short time in one of the trees in the garden – a bird I had never seen before. A Blue-spotted Wood-dove was sitting on the lawn one afternoon!

The day before I left I noticed a small nest on a branch hanging over the roof of my car. It was low enough that I could stand on the roof of the car and see inside (just!). It turned out to have small chicks inside; Yellow-fronted Canary.

Birding in the Miombo woodlands was, for a change, a real joy. The hilly terrain meant that I could be at the same level as part of the canopy, instead of being dwarfed by the trees as far the eye could see, as is usual in Harare woodlands. This meant nice backgrounds for photographs! The birds were quite exciting too; Red-faced Crombec, Southern Hylia, White-breasted Cuckooshrike and Miombo Tit and Cinnamon-breasted Tits [Rufous-bellied Tit] were seen most days, plus Striped Pipit and Green-backed Honeybird were seen twice each.

The other main habitat was riverine woodland and thicket. Quite a few small rivers flow past the area, and there are nice patches where thicket meets Miombo woodland, creating an interesting mixture of birds.

Dark-backed Weaver, Cape Batis, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher, Olive Sunbird, Stripe-cheeked Greenbuls and Yellow-streaked Greenbuls, White-eared Barbet, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, African Firefinch, Livingstone's Turaco, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, Tambourine Dove and Square-tailed Drongo were some of the more exciting birds of these riverine habitats. Near Tessa's Pool I photographed a Mountain Wagtail on the boulders by the river's edge. In one thicket I saw three species of Apalis, Bar-throated, Yellow-breasted and Chirinda Apalis.

As far as other wildlife was concerned there was not much about. Other than Baboons, the only mammals I saw were a pair of Klipspringer and a Mutable Sun Squirrel. One exciting find was a lizard, which I believe to be a Chimanimani Flat Lizard, confined to (you guessed it!) the Chimanimani area.

Other than that, the scenery was gorgeous, and I had a wonderful time.

If you'd like to read more about my birding trips, see my blog at: zimbirding.blogspot.com

Nick Hart

Outing to Catapú, Mozambique with The Tree Society

My wife Carolyn and I joined the Tree Society on their outing to Catapú Logging Concession in central Mozambique from the 7th to the 14th of April. In April the vegetation is lush and most of the summer migrant birds have left, so it is not an ideal time for birding but it is a good time for tree identification. Tree watchers do not necessarily stop where the birds are so we had to do our dedicated birding in the half hour before breakfast and on one morning that we specially set aside. So, for an area that has, to the best of my knowledge, recorded over 200 species in Catapú and the surrounding area we only recorded 71 species.

Nevertheless we did manage to add the following 3 species to the list for Catapú alone.

Pennant-winged Nightjar
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater
Dusky Indigobird

The Dusky Indigobird was a lifer for me and we also managed to see 3 Narina Trogons and a flock of Chestnut-fronted Helmet-shrike. We also identified 10 mammals including Nyala, Tree Dassie, Red Duiker, Suni, Sun Squirrel and Red Squirrel.

However, our most interesting incident occurred when we were driving through some forest and a half grown Samango Monkey landed on the bonnet of our car. We were quite shocked as we thought we had killed it. However, I had caught a glimpse of the shadow of a large bird on the bonnet just before the monkey landed and examination of the monkey revealed that there was blood on the throat and some of the fur had been plucked out. We concluded that the monkey was already dead before it was dropped by an eagle perched on a branch about 7m above the road. We believe that the eagle was either an African Crowned Eagle or a Martial Eagle. Although Crowned Eagles are the principal monkey predators out of the raptors, we were in a Martial Eagle nesting area.

Richard Dennison

Mashonaland East Natural History Society Hildemara visit – 17 to 21 May 2012

20 members from M.E.N.H.S. enjoyed a super excursion to Hildemara. We were joined on 3 days by Julia and 3 other members from BLZ Harare.

The Hildemara Campsite is 100kms from Harare along good roads. It is situated about 20kms South East of Trelawney and is an exceptionally comfortable venue. There are 3 fully furnished up-market chalets with ablutions on suit, and spacious dining room and kitchen complexes with all modern appliances.

The large camping area under shade trees provides demarcated campsites, 2 tents, a rondavel and 2 ablution rooms with hot water. All amenities at Hildemara are serviced with power from ZESA and backed up by a stand-by generator

The Game Park is 350hectares in extent and is crisscrossed with many game-viewing roads. The variety of habitat is rather limited but is comprised of a large dam, small dams, pristine middleveldt woodland, some Miombo, grassland, vlei, and rocky outcrops, but there is widespread invasion of Lantana

120 species of birds [which includes 5 from an earlier visit] were identified but nothing unusual was seen. It was very pleasant wanderings along the good roads through unspoiled woodland and grassland in fantastic surroundings searching for birds. Of note was the absence of Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and all the Sunbirds except for the White-belly.

Julia rigged 9 mist nets and caught 5 birds and was satisfied with that; they were 2 Yellow-bellied Greenbul, a Terrestrial Brownbul, an Emerald-spotted Wood-dove and a Brown-headed Kingfisher.

The fishing was rather quiet but a few small Bass and 3 sizeable bream of 2.6, 2.5 and 1.2kgs were landed; 3 big bream got away as well as something else much heftier which took all the tackle with it.

The rides on the vast expanse of water in a 3-seater canoe were enjoyed by several of the participants.

Our game viewing drives, which took place every afternoon, were very popular and we saw impala, blesbok, tsessebe, wildebeest, eland, giraffe, zebra and warthog as well as ostrich, python, leguaan and a huge croc

The Secretary
Colin de Beer

Tail Feathers

Over the Easter weekend we were on a houseboat on Kariba, between Spurwing and Fothergill. Two birds flew overhead and on checking I found them to be Bateleur, but one was all white except for the trailing edge of the wings, which were black and narrow and there were three dark interrupted stripes across the tail.

David Gray

T Wood has told me, that the occurrence of African Green-pigeons in Mandara (Harare East) is significant.

The last five mornings(0600-0900) I have seen at least six, but up to eight birds feeding on a fig tree (quite small, beak-sized fruit) *see picture*.

At the same time I get approx twelve Purple-crested Turacos flapping around, also feeding on figs.

Herewith 2 pictures.DSC06166.JPG, DSC06084.JPG Try it out here: <http://picasa.google.com/> 24th April 2012.

James Ball(The African Green-pigeons are still around 25th May 2012)

A Taste of Honey!

It's not often I get the chance to sit and enjoy the birdlife in our Hogerty Hill garden, but was able to do so on 4 May while on leave. Within the space of half an hour just before lunchtime we were visited, at different times, by a female Greater Honeyguide, a Green-backed Honeybird and a Lesser Honeyguide. The two honeyguides made use of a birdbath and the honeybird flitted between a large Acacia and a Cassia tree next to the house. The Lesser Honeyguide is a frequent visitor, but it was quite extraordinary to have three members of that family around in such quick succession.

Colin Baker

Burchell's Coucal (*Centropus burchelli*)

On March 6th, around 9 a.m., I spotted a coucal perching in good sight on a branch of one of the acacia trees less than two hundred meters west of the "creeks corner" on the vlei. Thinking about the usual Senegal Coucal (*C.senegalensis*), I approached it slowly, to observe it properly. I was surprised to hear its call, somehow different from the expected one. When I got closer, it was showing me its back, in full light, and it gave me the opportunity to observe for several minutes its barred rump. I used the calls on my I-Phone (*Sasol* 4th edition) to see the effect, and it promptly started answering and getting curious. I had the pleasure to observe it for almost ten minutes, during which I tried to get hold of Jimmy by SMS. Unfortunately for him, he managed to join me only a couple of minutes after the coucal flew away. In consideration of the fact that neither the *Sasol* (4th edition) nor the *Roberts* (7th edition) extend the distribution of the Burchell's Coucal to Harare, it would be interesting to know if more sightings have taken place in town or in the area in the recent past.

[Comment: the Burchell's Coucal is unlikely on Harare's vleis and hasn't been previously recorded, which makes this report interesting. However, there is a strong likelihood that this was a moulting juvenile Senegal Coucal, which starts out as very barred, gradually losing this as it gets older and I should think confusion is possible at some stage. As to calls, I have found coucal calls generally to be quite variable and not 'good' for ID and I wonder if a youngster's call has some variation? Whether a young Senegal would respond to a Burchell's call is something I don't know. ICR]

Cuckoo Finch (*Anomalospiza imberbis*)

On April 11th, around 8.30 a.m., while crossing the vlei on the main central path, I noticed numerous yellow birds on some shrubs. Approaching slowly, I realised that a large flock of Cuckoo Finch – males, females and immatures – were perching on it. While I saw Cuckoo Finches a few times on the vlei, they were never more than two or three. While observing them, they suddenly took off, and I could estimate between 200-300 individuals in the flock. After a few seconds, a second, smaller flock (100-150 birds) appeared, apparently following the first. I guess in total there were between 300 and 400 individuals. After a while I met Jimmy, and we were fortunate to see together a flock of 100-150 birds. Later during the morning, I saw at least one flock again in the distance, from the platform. Where these Cuckoo Finches gathering for a migration somewhere else in Zimbabwe? Or elsewhere?

Enrico Leonardi

The search for African Skimmers and White-fronted Plovers

In March 2012 Celesta and I did a bird list for Bumi Hills (there are photos and I think there is also a trip report on the BLZ website) and a great time was had with a list of 163 species. Not quite as impressive as the 193 on the BLZ Rifa trip in February, but we were only two after all!

We checked some of the islands, where there was a sandy foreshore, and of course also the front of Bumi where there was again a good sandy stretch, but this habitat varies a lot on Kariba and the time of year and lake level makes a great difference to whether it will be there at all. Nice shorebirds in front of Bumi were Common Ringed Plover (12) and very nice was a Common Whimbrel, both on return migration.

I had slight hopes of African Skimmer and White-fronted Plover but these were very slight. Habitat for these important birds is threatened and breeding depends on suitable sand banks. Neither species are nowadays common on Kariba.

But apart from this the main reason for 'very slight' is the time of year. The skimmer is a migrant, mainly between June and December and the plover through a similar period. Both turn up outside these times and there are, or were, a few residents through the year but nowadays I expect residents only in prime habitat where the population is strong... days of yore, I'm afraid!

Both birds were mentioned in the Rifa article (and later monthly talk) in *Babbler* 105 as being searched for and being notably absent. Well, with the diminished habitat on the Zambezi and equally diminished population I would not have expected much chance of finding them – you guys were just there at the wrong time of the year.

I.Riddell

I was intrigued to read in the last issue of *Babbler* that the purpose of Purple-crested Turacos feeding on the ground was to search for snails and for feeding their chicks. But I think it should be pointed out that the snails now so abundant in gardens are not the native species of *Achatina*, which are usually rather large, but the introduced common English garden snail, which is an unwanted pest, so beloved of Song Thrushes *Turdus ericetorum*.

However it is clear that if these turacos are now exploiting this resource they can only do so in suburbia and another reason why they should have re-adapted in recent years. And it goes without saying that this aspect requires much more detailed investigation and of course publication, in the pages of *Honeyguide*.

M.P.S. Irwin

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Notice Board

For Sale: Outstanding watercolour painting by J C Harrison: Swinhoe's Pheasant.31"x24".
US\$8000 or offers. Contact Dorothy Wakeling on piumosso@zol.co.zw for further information.

Contributions for *The Babbler* 107 August 2012/ September 2012 may be sent to the Editor anytime between now and 14th July 2012.

