

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

Subscriptions renewals

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.

Synopsis of the Proceedings of BirdLife Zimbabwe's 31st Annual General Meeting held on Saturday 9th June 2012 at Hideaway Fishing Camp, Lake Manyame.

Full reports and minutes may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary, Ken Dixon

lynnken@mango.zw

Outgoing President, Dorothy Wakeling, welcomed the 31 members gathered on the platform of Hideaway Fishing Camp, Lake Manyame, on a beautiful but cool and breezy Saturday morning for the 31st AGM of BLZ. She extended an especially warm welcome to members who had travelled from Matabeleland.

President's report:

The President thanked members for their support of BLZ noting that the time and expertise offered in kind should be acknowledged as being the equivalent of huge monetary value to the organization – something that is often overlooked.

Highlights of 2011-12 were successful fund-raising, various surveys, including the gathering of 60 plus birders for the Rufous-bellied Tit count, regular ringing by D Dalziel, the completion of the Roles and Responsibilities document which will enable the smooth communications between Council and Office, continuing good work from the Admin (with financial and membership records in good order), Education and Conservation Departments, international interest through the Website and Facebook page and the signing by the government of the Convention on Migratory Species Agreement. Thanks go to the editors of and contributors to our renowned publications *Honeyguide* and *The Babblers*, which continue to be published on time and are ever, gaining in stature.

However, at the same time, except for the RSPB core grant which was increased to GBP35, 000, and which we acknowledge with grateful thanks, the programme funding has almost dried up; the Office is being skilfully managed with the staff either on unpaid leave or on 3 days per week despite about 30 proposals having been submitted to various donors. With an international downturn of funding available to the environment Mrs Wakeling urged the society to consider looking locally for funding by adopting a new direction focusing more on habitats and ecosystem protection, and targeting local corporates in addition to traditional funders. She suggested that a meeting be convened to re-evaluate the Strategic Plan in order to address these concerns. The Director, Staff and Councillors were thanked for their valuable support over the three years. It

was noted that only 160 members had renewed their subscriptions to date and that reminders would be sent out immediately to those who had not yet renewed.

Director's Report:

A year of achievements and challenges: our governance model held up as an example for other countries but lack of new funding has led to 2 staff going on unpaid leave and others put on 3 days. 30+ proposals submitted with very little success. Education Department has done good work with scant resources. Research and Conservation have now produced 4 Status and Trends of IBAs. Government has signed up to Migratory Species Agreement as a result of lobbying. Website attractive and informative and Facebook page receiving positive comments. Director's membership of Global Council gives networking opportunities. Thanks to staff for continuing efforts despite trying conditions.

Treasurer's report:

The audited 2011-12 accounts were tabled and signed.

The loss for the year indicates our cash-strapped situation, but in part due to depreciation, which was not budgeted for. We must urgently fund-raise and pay subs. Increase in core funding for 2012-13 from RSPB welcome but not the answer. The incoming executive committee will open NMB Account to receive donations. \$2,500 due from sale of one of Michael Irwin's paintings and an Art Exhibition planned. Audit fee very high but unavoidable.

Research and Conservation:

The IBA Monitoring programme was completed and reports written. 20 Nat Parks groups trained to continue survey. A complimentary report was received from the consultant. 9,000 field cards data entered. 37 Wattled Crane were seen at Driefontein and 24 at Wigeon Pan. Waterfowl survey continues with 1,659 birds of 40 species noted on Chivero. Concern over vultures; none seen in survey near Gonarezhou.

Ringling Group:

Dave Dalziel submitted a report. 45 sessions held locally and in SA, 2 ringers ready for their A Grade licences. 25 attended session in Bulawayo.

Education Report:

BLZ was represented at many official celebrations, which is very good for image of the organization. Rueben is completing his MSc based on work with Driefontein schools. Progress, too, in Matabeleland, with an Ndebele version of 'Enjoy the Birds' ready for publication. Help from members would be appreciated.

Field Card Report:

15,222 field cards have been entered into the exercise books register. Please send in more. Copies should be sent to Office and to C Baker for Recent Reports.

Library report:

Quiet year; DW was busy with other duties and no student available. New push for 2012-13.

Publications:

Honeyguide: essential reading for ornithologists in the region containing mixture of scientific and narrative articles. 2 issues published during 2011-12 and volume 58 ready for printing. R Peek considers it a privilege to see his photos published in *Honeyguide*.

The Babbler: a lively, attractive publication under editorship of F Greiffenberg.

Branch reports:

Mashonaland: 6 outings per month and well-attended evening shows. There were 3 away weekends to Mavuradonha, Chipinge and Rifa. Excursions planned to Wedza Mt, Vumba and Mozambique for 2012-13. Garden Bird Survey now almost complete but an analyst needed to handle data.

Matabeleland:

There are 108 members but only 48 paid-up. There were plenty of activities: Black Eagle Survey, Dassie Survey, Waterfowl Census, Big-birding Day with 16 teams. National History Museum supported in money and kind. Garden Bird Survey continues. Work in schools based on Southern Ground-hornbill Survey.

Election of Officers:

2012-13	President:	Dr Neil Deacon
	Vice-President:	Julia Pierini
	Honorary Treasurer:	Roger Castelin
	Honorary Secretary:	Ken Dixon
	Member	Helen Lewis
	Member	David Rockingham-Gill

Any Other Business:

Fund-raising Calendar produced by J Pierini and C von Chamier. Please order.

Date of next meeting: to be decided by new Council later.

Tributes

Tribute to an outstanding Birder

Elias Banda (1960 – 2012)

Hwange and the greater birding community of Zimbabwe mourned the loss of one of its greatest birders last week (1st June 2012) when National Parks ranger and “birdman” Mr Elias Banda died in Bulawayo.

Elias, who was familiar to everyone interested in birds in Hwange, had served the PWMA for over twenty years. Starting as a humble pump-attendant and ended up a “Ranger 2” assigned to the research department. Never seen without his binoculars he was the man to take tourists on local bird walks as well as being involved in the Main Camp museum. Being involved in the annual waterfowl census, He was without a doubt one of the best field ornithologists in Zimbabwe today and always had his eyes open for the next rare sighting. Rather fittingly the last words I shared with him were about that “yellow” Crimson-breasted Shrike, which he had just shown a couple of tourists.

About two hundred people came to pay their respects at his home in Mabale as we laid him to rest and as the coffin was lowered into the ground an African Harrier-hawk flew low over the gathered crowd.

He will be sorely missed but not forgotten!

Brent Stapelkamp

Tribute to Bob Stjernstedt

Thanks very much to Mike Bingham for sending us the June issue of the BirdWatch Zambia newsletter with the wonderful tributes to Bob Stjernstedt. If the newsletter is still accepting Bob letters, I would like to pitch in. Doreen and I knew Bob for under 3 years, and we haven't seen him since 1994, yet he is high on our all-time list of favourite people. Along with Dylan Aspinwall and Carl Beel, Bob was one of my great tutors in learning bird song. I had all of his

early tapes and listened to nothing else when driving around Lusaka. I also learned many birdcalls directly from Bob. For example, on a trip to Siavonga to search for the African Pitta, Bob slammed on the brakes and said, "That's a Sombre Greenbul calling in the thicket." (Actually I think it was called a Bulbul at the time.) We checked it out – it was a lifer for me that day, and I have never forgotten the call. A short while later, as we descended the escarpment, he stopped and called up a Narina Trogon from a thickly wooded ravine. I still replicate his imitation of the call whenever I get a chance.

We first encountered Bob on a ZOS walk at Jellis farm in 1991, shortly after we arrived in Zambia. An old land rover came along the dirt track. One of the trip participants said, in an almost reverential voice, "It's Bob Stjernstedt." I asked, who's that, and was told that he was one of the true birding gurus in Zambia, along with Dylan (who was leading the walk).

Being "newbies," we didn't interact with Bob that day. Instead, our friendship started a few months later when we were flying to Luangwa for a short visit. We saw Bob at the airport, looking rather scruffy and distracted, with one sideburn noticeably longer than the other, rolling a cigarette in a torn piece of newsprint. He was also headed to Luangwa on the same flight, returning to Muchenja camp, but for one small problem: he forgot to bring his ticket. As we remember it, we had just enough spare cash to buy him another ticket. (Yes, he repaid.) Thereafter, we saw him frequently when he was in Lusaka, going together on ZOS outings, or having him drop in at dinner time unannounced, to enjoy Doreen's homemade pizza, brownies, and chocolate cookies.

About a year later, Doreen went on a botanical expedition to northern Zambia with Mike Bingham, Bob, and several others. Doreen was working on her book on Wild Flowers of Zambia, and Veronica Roodt from South Africa was writing her book on Trees of Botswana. Bob also accompanied Doreen to Harare when she had to confer with Bob Drummond and check out identifications at the herbarium for her book on wild flowers. Bob decided to do her a favour by cleaning out some junk in the car while in Harare. Unfortunately, this included throwing away the temporary import license for the vehicle, which was required for crossing back into Zambia. They managed to talk their way through the border post, but the delay meant driving home in the dark.

Then there was the time we were with Bob on a ZOS walk at Jellis and got separated. He emerged a while later carrying a wonderful specimen of *Ceropegia filipendula* as a gift to Doreen. We didn't manage to find the spot where he had picked the specimen, and we never again have we seen this amazing flower. But it's in Doreen's book, thanks to Bob!

Another time, Bob took me to a farm north of Lusaka where there was a large tract of undisturbed miombo woodland, to search for Souza's Shrike, which had been eluding me. After walking through the bush for about a half hour and finding nothing of consequence, we decided to head back to my car. I started in one direction and Bob in exactly the opposite direction. He was certain that his direction was correct, but I convinced him to try my route – which led straight back to the car.

One evening Bob stopped by for dinner and told me that he was expecting a very important birder from Europe, for a guided trip to Mwinilunga. He was thinking of calling it off at the last minute because he was concerned about recent problems with police harassing travellers in that part of the country. As ZOS treasurer at the time, I wrote, signed, and stamped an official looking letter on ZOS stationery introducing Bob to authorities along the route as an important scientist on a ZOS-endorsed scientific expedition, and requesting their cooperation in the interest of scientific research. Bob agreed that this might work, and the letter turned out to be helpful in getting him and his client through roadblocks without incident.

My fondest Bob story, though, and perhaps the most important for ZOS members, is that he gave me a special gift when we left Zambia to return to the United States: a tape of Zambian Birds without Words. It consisted of his three-tape set of birdcalls, with none of the narration. I still have this cherished memento, but it's in storage back home at this point, while we are living in Harare for two years on another assignment. (In return, we gave him some books and used clothes – his were literally in tatters at the time.) I wonder whether he made copies of this tape for anyone else?

May Bob rest in peace, and in our fond memories of amazing times we spent together.

Bruce Bolnick

Harare

Anyone wishing to read further tributes to Bob in the BirdWatch Zambia Newsletter June 2012 issue please contact me and I will forward it to you. fiona6@zol.co.zw

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 time from September is 06.30am

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

Thursday Meetings at Avondale Sports Club 1730 for 1800

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

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2012

Mukuvisi	Sunday 5 th August 2012	0700
	Sunday 2 nd September 2012	0630

Chivero	Sunday 12 th August 2012	0700
	Sunday 9 th September 2012	0630
	(Meet PE School car park)	
Monavale Vlei	Sunday 19 th August 2012	0700
	Sunday 16 th September 2012	0700

4th Sunday Outings

Sunday 26 th August 2012	0700	McDonald Timbers Ruwa (Meet at Mukuvisi Office)
21 st – 24 th September 2012		Wedza Mountain camping. Contact T Alegria

2nd Sat Outings

Saturday 11 th August 2012	0700	Rainham Dam
Saturday 8 th September 2012	0630	Rainham Dam (Meet PE School car park)

3rd Saturday Outings

Saturday 18 th August 2012	0700	Greystone Park
Saturday 15 th September 2012	0630	Botanic Gardens

Thursday Meetings at Avondale Sports Club 1730 for 1800

Thursday 16 th August 2012	Bird Ringing Update – D Dalziel/J Pierini Mashonaland Big Birding Day – T Alegria
Thursday 20 th September 2012	Raptor Identification (Part 1) – Neil Deacon

2012 BLZ Mashonaland Away Outings

Outing 1: Wedza Mountain

There will be an away outing to Wedza Mountain over the fourth weekend in September 2012, arrive Friday 21st, leave on Monday 24th. All BLZ Members are invited.

This outing was inspired by observations made during the last Atlassing period, which took place sometime in the early nineties; a Sweet Waxbill was seen on Wedza Mountain. Michael Irwin has been doing a lot of thinking about this sighting and has been itching to have an expedition to the mountain ever since!

There are no facilities whatsoever on Wedza Mountain, thus we need to take whatever is required for the trip. To discuss all aspects of the trip, an early lunchtime braai and braai (eat at noon) followed by a meeting will be held at 7 Pringle Rd, Greendale, and Harare two weeks before the event i.e. Sunday 9th September. This arrangement is necessary, as the birders from Marondera, who will attend the braai and discussions, want to get home before it gets dark. Whoever is interested in going on this trip should email: talegria@zol.co.zw before the end of August. A small deposit may be called for nearer the time.

Outing 2: Bvumba Mountains

In complete contrast to the above trip where there are no facilities there will be an outing to the Bvumba Mountains where full board and lodging will be provided. This outing is scheduled for the fourth weekend in October, arrive Friday 26th, leave on Monday 29th after the morning birding session. Green Twinspots, Narina Trogons and other Bvumba specials are our targets! We will be staying at Madrugada and Roger Castelin will be our host. A deposit will be called for nearer the time.

Book by email to: talegria@zol.co.zw by the end of September 2012. All BLZ Members are invited.

Outing 3: Mozambique

There will be an outing to Mozambique during the last full week of November, arrive November Saturday 24th; leave early the next Saturday (1st December). The African Pitta and Green-headed Oriole are on top of our most wanted list! We will be staying very close to the Gorongosa National Park, which is one of our destinations as is Mount Gorongosa. For the second half of the trip, we will be staying at Catapu. This trip comprises full board and lodging and only eight birders can be accommodated. To book for this trip, a non-refundable deposit of \$200.00 is required – estimated total cost \$400-500.00. If you have booked for the trip and can't make it at the last moment, it's up to you to find a replacement. We could end up with a waiting list, so it may not be too much of a problem! Although all BLZ Members are invited to go on this trip, first come first serve – only eight places available!

Matabeleland Branch

11-14 August: Field trip to Bvumba

Members look forward with glee to spending 4 days at Madrugada in the Bvumba and hope to be able to find at least some of the 34 specials, which are known to occur in the surrounding forest – which will be lifers for many of us.

For more information phone Cecilia Hubbard 0772 433733

18 August: Peri-urban Potter

Once again Judy and Julia will be organizing this event. Meet at 8:30 at Ilanda Gardens.

For more information contact Judy Ross (email byohelp@netconnect.co.zw) or Julia Dupree (email dalia@netconnect.co.zw, phone 246269)

7 September: Talk at The Boma, Hillside Dams

Saturday 1st September is International Vulture Awareness Day. To mark the occasion the following Friday we will be having a talk on vultures. By September the days will be getting longer so consider coming straight from work to enjoy a stroll and some birding around the dams beforehand, and as usual there is an opportunity to enjoy a tasty meal before the talk starts at 6:45p.m. Meals should be booked in advance through The Boma, phone 242490.

For more information phone Gaynor Lightfoot 0712 402341

23 September: Walk at NUST

We last visited NUST in October 2011 so it is definitely time for another visit. On each of our previous visits we've added more species to the species list for the area – and there are parts of the campus we have not yet reached. Meet at the NUST entrance on Cecil Avenue at 07:45. Bring chairs and tea for after the walk.

For more information phone Adele Edwards (h) 882242 or 0712 366917

24-25 November: Birding Big Day

Please note that this year Birding Big Day will take place over the weekend of 24/25 November. This is a national, not a branch event. You can take it seriously and dash around the countryside trying to reach the magic 200 species mark, or you can make it an opportunity to spend some time with like-minded friends with a bit of birding on the side. Any money you can raise will go into your branch's funds and will be much appreciated, but getting sponsorship is

not obligatory and you should not let this put you off taking part. The number of people taking part in Birding Big Day has been increasing each year and we hope to have more people than ever involved this year. So mark the date in your diaries now. Entry and sponsorship forms should be distributed early in September.

Country Districts

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

Eastern Districts – Monthly outings are on the last Sunday of the month and depart at 7.30 a.m. from the Mutare Museum. Spare binoculars and field guides are available. Members with a vehicle are encouraged to attend and fuel can be provided. Contact Peter Gwidibira 0913-524844 or poggroupp.gwidibira38@gmail.com for details.

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

Recent Reports And Sightings

National Office

Zimbabwe Signs Major International Conventions Important for Bird Conservation

Zimbabwe has acceded to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), and also the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA). CMS is the only global convention specializing in the conservation of migratory species, their habitats and migration routes. CMS complements and co-operates with a number of other international organizations, NGOs and partners in the media as well as in the corporate sector. The African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds Agreement is also under the auspices of CMS. Our government is therefore obliged to act to conserve migratory species and for us most of these are birds and elephants. This is a very positive move by our government and they need to be congratulated.

Acceding to these international conventions is a very important step towards the conservation of wildlife in Zimbabwe. Besides the government's commitment to conserve wildlife and habitats under these conventions, there are opportunities to access resources to promote conservation in Zimbabwe. BirdLife Zimbabwe will work closely with government to conserve migratory birds and their habitats.

Chip Chirara

Mashonaland

Monavale Vlei Report June July 2012

Monavale Vlei and the surrounding woodland fringes yielded 98 bird species for the month of June. Talk about winter months not having as many interesting bird species and the summer months – not so! Highlights included Groundscraper Thrushes on the golf course, Ovambo Sparrowhawk, African Black Ducks, Purple Herons, Marabou Storks, Black-chested Snake-eagles, Shikra, Lanner Falcons, Brown-hooded Kingfishers, Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters, Red-winged Starlings, Village Indigobirds and Thick-billed Weavers.

The first vlei fire occurred on 21st June on the western side bordering the Marimba Stream. A small stretch was only affected as the fire was quickly put out. With that area now burnt and open it brought in African Pipits, which are now constantly seen there. A duiker was seen in June.

July has had its fair share of birds with recorded: Kurrichane Buttonquail, African Cuckoo-hawk, Grey Heron, Crowned Lapwings, Little Bee-eaters, Klaas's Cuckoo, Senegal Coucal, African Hoopoes, Lesser Honeyguide, Pearl-breasted Swallows, African Stonechats, Lesser Swamp-

warblers, Little Rush-warblers, Black-crowned Tchagra and Yellow-fronted Canaries, to mention but a few. The Euplectes species occurred in large mixed flocks during both months.

June 17th third Sunday outing was attended by 5 members and 28 birds were recorded– a cold but sunny morning. A large Skaapsteker – Three Striped Grass Snake was sunning itself on the central path near the Avondale Stream.

July 15th July outing was well attended and we recorded a total of 65 species. Highlights of that walk were Lizard Buzzards, African Harrier-hawk, two Black Crakes, Red-chested Flufftail was heard along the bulrushes of Marimba Stream and a special mention. Yellow-throated Longclaws, Black-backed Puffback, Southern Grey-headed Sparrows, Red-billed Quelea, Yellow Bishops, White-winged Widowbirds and Orange-breasted Waxbills. Olive Grass Snakes are seen frequently, especially early mornings when they're taking in the sun.

Jimmy Muropa Vlei Scout, Conservation Society of Monavale - COSMO 0772 772771

You are welcome to contact Jimmy if you would like him to accompany you, or a school group or any group, for a walk on the Vlei. Support our Vlei management and wetland awareness endeavours by purchasing indigenous trees from the COSMO Tree Nursery. Donations are much appreciated.

Dorothy Wakeling. www.monavalevlei.com cosmo@yoafrica.com

Mbizi Lodge & Game Park - 3rd Sunday Bird Walk 24th June 2012

Fifteen BLZ Mashonaland members traipsed off to Mbizi for an outing. All credit to Julia Pierini, we received a warm welcome and free entrance to all areas: Lodge, Tea Garden, Picnic area and Game Park. We thank Mr Senior and his staff for their hospitality.

A brief look at the dam next to the picnic area yielded a Striped Kingfisher (sitting in the open on a telephone wire), two Pied Kingfishers, White-faced Ducks, African Jacanas and Hamerkop.

We set off into the 400ha property and spent a glorious morning wandering through pristine Miombo woodland. Our party was observed by a group of watchful Impala, a couple of Giraffe and some Kudu. One of the early special sightings were several Spotted Thick-knees. Shortly afterwards we managed to split into two groups, never to meet again. Fortunately our group met up with one of the Game Guides who led us East towards another wooded thicket.

Almost immediately we startled a Freckled Nightjar, and were fortunate to spot another almost totally camouflaged against a rock and came away with photographic proof. We also saw the following: Cardinal Woodpecker, Green-capped Eremomela, and White-browed Scrub-robin.

Once again the party split up into able-bodied and cripples, and on the way back we saw a Lizard Buzzard.

The bird count was done as we refreshed ourselves under the Acacia trees in the Picnic Area. A total of 78 species were seen/heard. Other sightings included: Wire-tailed Swallow, Purple Heron, many African Yellow White-eyes, Little Bee-eaters, Cattle Egrets, Southern Black Flycatchers, Grey-headed Kingfishers, Reed Cormorants, Helmeted Guineafowl, cisticolas, Black-headed Oriole, Brown-crowned Tchagra, and four types of sunbird found in the Tea Garden. A solitary Pied Crow was observed.

Richard Dennison's much hoped for Violet-eared Waxbills failed to present themselves. All had a good time.

BLZ Outing to Wild Geese Lodge Game Park

On the 27th of May 2012, a huge group (33 people!) met at Wild Geese Lodge to do a bird walk. Due to the high number of people, we split up into three groups, each of which took a different walk. There was short and a medium walk, which both stayed mostly in the game park, whilst

the long walk went outside the fence of Wild Geese Game Park and into the neighbouring property, where there was quite a lot of riverine and acacia vegetation.

We all met back at the Lodge at about 10:30 AM to do the bird list. The total for the morning was 91 species. This list included:

Grey Heron, African Cuckoo-hawk, Black-chested Snake-eagle, Shikra, African Goshawk, Emerald-spotted Wood-dove, Fiery-necked and Freckled Nightjars, Striped Kingfisher, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, African Hoopoe, African Grey Hornbill, Whyte's Barbet, African Golden Oriole, Miombo Tit, Grey Penduline-tit, Spotted Creeper, Terrestrial Brownbul, Familiar Chat, Southern Hylia, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Stierling's Wren-warbler, Ashy Flycatcher, Pale Flycatcher, Wood and Striped Pipits, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Violet-backed Starling, Western Violet-backed Sunbird and Cabanis's Bunting.

Wild Geese is a beautiful spot with various habitats such as grassland, Miombo woodland and a dam inside the game park, as well as the riverine and acacia in the neighbouring properties. It is therefore also an excellent birding destination. I think all enjoyed the morning.

A big thanks you to Wild Geese Lodge, and especially Bob Codrington, for letting us in!

Nick Hart

Lesser Grey Shrikes, a rarely seen passage migrant in Zimbabwe

We have four records of Lesser Grey Shrike this season

Forrester Estates, Mvurwi 1730B2 31.3.2012 Rick Page

Hippo Pools, Shamva 1731B2 1.4.2012 DVR-Gill & G Lowe, rainy weather with Red-backed Shrikes nearby

Near Nyamungai Pan, Chiota, Marondera 1831A3 9.4.2012 C von Chamier & ANB Masterson

Chikwenya, Sapi 1529D1 5-9.4.2012 Alison MacDonald (lots of Lesser Grey Shrikes)

Fadzai Matsvimbo at BLZ kindly furnished me with 83 records, extracted from the field card system from 1961 -1976.

This shows that 76% of people saw only single birds.

They seem to be only rare passage migrants to this country, with 75% of records being arrival dates and departure dates.

Most arrive in Matabeleland mid November, and the same in Mashonaland.

Most leave Matabeleland early April, and leave Mashonaland late March early April, the dividing line being 30degrees East (thru Gweru).

Most are seen in Matabeleland in October November on arrival. Most are seen in Mashonaland in March / April on departure.

But having said that, we only seem to capture three records of Lesser Grey Shrike a year, so they do a loop migration in this country, coming from their winter quarters centred in Botswana, flying east, and then leaving the country through Mashonaland.

The most Lesser Grey Shrikes seen in one day were observed in Matabeleland 7, 24.3.68 Hermits Peak to Matopos Dam roadside count. Rex Newton-Howes.

The most shrikes seen in a week were in Mashonaland 7, 1.4.68 -.7.4.68 Retreat Farm H.D. Jackson.

Records show they only stay in their wintering quarters for 20 weeks a year. So their migration here and back is slow.

They breed in central and southern Eurasia. (i.e. none in Spain)

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

Harare Garden Bird Survey 2011-12

BLZ Mashonaland would like to thank all those who participated in the Harare Garden Bird Survey. The overlap sheet 14 brings the survey to an end. However, what is needed now is to have the data analysed ASAP so we can see what is happening in the Harare avian world. We need a volunteer, who has the time and inclination, to do this type of analytical work. If you are interested, please advise any committee member.

A Monthly Garden Bird Survey form is now available for those in Harare and anywhere else within Zimbabwe interested in continuing or beginning a garden bird survey. There is only one form, which will be emailed to interested parties and will be used on a monthly basis. Tony Alegria will deal with any questions regarding this new form.

“First time users of the new Monthly Garden Bird Survey form must register as per the registration part of the attachment”

Report on Mashonaland Branch Evening Meeting: 17th June 2012

Dave Rockingham-Gill did an excellent job of delivering what can only be described as a boring topic – he presented the results of the African waterfowl census covering the years 2004 to 2012.

He kept the audience interested by having a photo or illustration of the bird being reported on with the occasional slide showing varied flocks of birds.

Key: ANBM Alex Masterson, CB Colin Baker, CC Chip Chirara, CH Cecelia Hubbard, CS Clive Stockil, DD Dave Dalziel,
Di R Di Rushforth, DRG Dave Rockingham-Gill, DT Darryl Tiran, FC Ferdie Couto, FM Fadzai Matsvimbo, HE Harry Erwee, HL Helen Lewis, IL Innes Louw, IM Innocent Magunje, IR Ian Riddell, J C Tracey Couto, JA Jack Amonie, JC Jenny Carter, JD Julia Dupree, KW Ken Wilson, CJ Courtney Johnson, JV James Varden, KS Karl Schmahl, MM Mieke Manning, MP Margie Pearce, MS Maculate Shoko, NC Ngoni Chiweshe, PCR-G Penny Rockingham-Gill, PF Penny Feather, PH Paul Hubbard, RD Richard Dennison, RE R Edwards, , TS Thelma Sungiso, VM Victor Moyo,

No names can be found for the following initials: [AWL](#), DV, MB, SM, WS

Results as shown below:

Little Grebe 299 at Imbwa Ponds 14/7/2005 NC, 418 at Aisleby 25/7/2010 CH, 135 at Lake Chivero 29-30/7/2010 JA

All these congregations in the cold dry season. Abundant 340 Nest record Cards (NRC)

Black-necked Grebe 1 at Cowdray Park 12/7/2009 JD

One specimen in Priest's time 1933, still a vagrant now and stable.

Great White Pelican 400 at Lake Chivero 9/2005 FC, 62 at Tambohartia Pan 3/10/2004 FC

A casual vagrant, increasing

White-breasted Cormorant 2086 at Lake Chivero 11/7/2005 NC, 985 at Lake Manyame 13-15/8/2009 FM, 203 at Lake Chivero 29-30/7/2010 JA.

Abundant 51 NRC and increasing

Reed Cormorant 3820 at Lake Chivero 12/7/2007 NC, 1931 at Lake Chivero 4-6/8/2009 FM, 909 at Lake Chivero 29-30/7/2010 JA, 1103 at Lake Chivero 20-21.7.2011 MS
All in the cold dry season, abundant 97 NRC & increasing

African Darter 210 at Lake Chivero 17/7/2003 JC, 288 at Lake Chivero 12/7/2007 NC, 2 at Lake Chivero 10/7/2011 DRG, 50 at Jenje River Mouth, Lake Kariba and nesting 25-27/12/2010

They have left Lake Chivero for whatever reason pollution /netting
In 1994 they were abundant and now uncommon 191NRCs & decreasing

Grey Heron 27 at Manjinji Pan 23/9/2008 FM&JA, 406 at Lake Chivero 29-30.7.2010 JA, 144 at Lake Chivero 20-27 7 2011 MS
Not common & no breeding records in Priest's time now common all over 145 NRCs. Increasing

Goliath Heron 10 at Gache Gache 21.1.2009 KW, 73 at Lake Manyame 5.6.2010 FM
Far from Common & no breeding records in Priest's time. Now common 68NRCs & increasing

Purple Heron 43 at Lake Chivero 4.6.2009 FM
Now frequent 30 NRCs & increasing

Great Egret

Not rare in Priest's time. Now common and 11NRCs. Increasing

Black Heron 10 at Lake Manyame 22.1.2005 Di R
Regular visitor to the plateau 1960 (SIP) Now frequent . Only 1 NRC. Increasing

Yellow-billed Egret 127 at Lake Manyame 13-15/8/2009 FM, 69 at Lake Chivero 29-30.7.2010 JA,
83 at Lake Manyame 1-4-/2/2010 FM
Few records & not breeding in Priest's time. Now frequent 6 NRCs. Stable

Cattle Egret 1584 at Aisleby 20/1/2007 SM
Very abundant 29 NRCs and increasing

Little Egret 88 at Lake Chivero 4-6/8/2009 FM, 58 at Lake Chivero 5-6/ 3/2012 TS
Rare in Priest's time. Not breeding. Now common, only 4 NRCs & increasing

Squacco Heron 718 at Lake Manyame 1-4.2.2010 FM, 198 at Lake Chivero 5/6/2010 FM
Not very common. Not breeding in Priest's time. Now Frequent 4 NRCs & Increasing.

Dwarf Bittern 1 at Hippo Pools 31/12-1/1/2003 DV & PCRG, 1 at Lake Chivero 5-6/3/2012 - a lowveld visitor TS
Rare 40 NRCs and stable

Yellow-billed Stork 50 at Mcheni Camp Mana 4/7/2007 IR, 12 at Manjinji Pan 23/9/2008 FM & JA,
19 at David Whitehead Settling Ponds 12/7/2009 IL
Rare and not breeding according to Priest. Now Frequent 2NRCs and Increasing

African Openbill 122 at Shapi Pan Sinamatella 7-8/2/200 DT, 443 at Lake Manyame 1-4/2/2010 FM
One of the rarer storks. Not breeding. Now common 15NRCs and increasing

Black Stork 35 Kennedy & Ngweshla Pans 20/1/2007 HL, 4 at Shapi pan 16/7/2007 DT
Rare not breeding. Now Frequent 312NRCs & increasing

Abdim's Stork 230 at Crowborough 8/1/2008 FM, 183 at Crowborough 19/1/2010 FM, 295 at Crowborough 8/1/2011 MS
Now common and decreasing

Woolly-necked Stork 86 at Kennedy & Ngweshla Pans 25-27/1/2007 PF
32 at White Hills, Hwange 9-10/2/2008 MP, 3 at Lake Manyame 13-15/8/2009 FM,
15 at Save Runde Junction 10-17/10/2010 CS
Very rarely met with. Now uncommon, 8NRCs resident lowveld increasing. A few highveld records

White Stork 265 at Aisleby 29/1/2006 JD, 16 at Crowborough 7/1/2009 FM, 70 flying over at Hippo Pools, Shamva/Mrewa border 29/1/2011 DRG & MM
Was common now decreasing.

Saddle-billed Stork

10 at Lake Manyame 13-15/8/2009 FM
Priest says by no means rare. Someone worked out about 500 pairs. 41NRCs & increasing

Marabou Stork 18 at Rifa on a dead Lion carcass 22-25/4/2011 BLZ Mash outing, + 200 at Pomona Rubbish Dump April 2012 DRG
Priest says rarely seen, No breeding. Now frequent 19NRCs and increasing

African Sacred Ibis 814 at Lake Chivero 12/7/2007 NC, 480 & 160 chicks at Greengrove Dam 8/2008 DD,
(This Dam has held more than 900 at one time , birds counted on photos)
140 at Greengrove Dam 19/7/2009 IL, 449 at Crowborough 7/1/2009 FM, 437 at Aisleby 23/7/2006 JD
Priest: a few records No Breeding. Now common all over. 5NRCs increasing.
It has exploded from 2000-2012.

Hadeda Ibis 13 at Mana Pools 31/7/2004 IR, 1 at Aisleby 28/1/2004 HE
Some have been seen on the highveld including recent sightings at Bally Vaughan

Glossy Ibis 137 at Lake Chivero 3/7/2005 NC, 150 at Gache Gache 2/1/2009 KW, 224 at Lake Manyame 13-15.8.2009 FM, 1000 at Lake Manyame 23/11/2008 DD, 1000 -2000 at Lake Manyame roost 27/11/2009 IR
Priest said uncommon. Now more frequent but still no NRCs and increasing

African Spoonbill 40 at Lake Chivero 13/11/2005 IR, 14 at Nyamungai Pan 13/1/2009 CC.
Priest said an uncommon visitor. No breeding. Now frequent 15NRCs & increasing

Greater Flamingo 26 at Twin Sisters Island, Kariba 21/11/2005 MB, 1 at D Whitehead Ponds, Chegutu 31/1/2008 12/7/2009 Admire, 1 at D Whitehead Ponds, Chegutu 12/7/2009, possibly the same bird IL,
18 at D Whitehead ponds, Chegutu 22/1/2010 IM
Priest says scattered records. Rare No NRCs & Stable

Wattled Crane 138 at Driefontein 2005 NC, 37 at Driefontein 19/6/2010 CC, 5 at New Driefontein Dam 29/1/2009 FM, 24 at Widgeon Pan 13/5/2011
Priest: The commonest Crane in Southern Rhodesia. Now uncommon 93 NRCs and decreasing

Grey Crowned Crane 105 at Mbazhe Pan 3-4/7/2004 NC, 142 at Driefontein 6/2005, 34 at Shashi Fountains/ Goodhope, Gutu 18/7/2005 FM, 25 at White Hills Hwange 9-10/2/2008 MP,

2 at Driefontein 29/1/2009 FM, 5 at Shumba Pan 1/2/2010 CH. 67 at Driefontein Mission Dam 7/2011 AWC

Priest said not a common bird . Now Frequent 66NRCs and increasing

Hamerkop It is widespread and at low density. The nest obvious everywhere. It has started nesting in the suburbs of Harare. I know two places where two nests are in the same tree. One in Alexander Park and one on Pippendale.

Fulvous Duck 173 at Lake Manyame 1-4.2.2010 FM, 0 at Lake Manyame 5/6/2010 FM. Priest said one record. Not known to breed. Now uncommon 10NRCs and stable

White-faced Duck 857 at Lake Chivero 4/6/2009 FM, 605 at Lake Chivero 29-30/7/2010 MS, 800 at Save Runde Junction 16-17/10/2010 CS.

Not a common duck : Priest. Now abundant 125 NRCs and increasing

White-backed Duck 74 at Lake Manyame 27/1/2007 Di Rushforth, 79 at Nyamungai Pan, Chiota 21/1/2010, 26 at INswatugi Dam, Matobo 6/1/2010 RE.

A number of records but not found breeding in Priest's time. Now frequent, 109 NRCs and increasing

Spur-winged Goose 239 at Driefontein Dam 14/7/2005 NC, 38 at Manjinji Pan, Mwenezi 23/9/2008 FM, 67 at Rossi Pool, Mwenezi 23/9/2008 FM, 67 at Lake Manyame 13-15/8/2009 FM, 400 at Save Runde Junction 16-17/10.2010 CS

Common on the Zambezi & breeding in Priest's time. Now Frequent 18NRCs and increasing.

Comb Duck 30 at D.Whitehead Settling Ponds, Chegutu 3/2/2009 FM, 200 at Rifa, Zambezi River, Hurungwe 17-2-/2/2012

Not uncommon & Breeding in Priest. Common 79NRCs and increasing

Egyptian Goose 528 at Aisleby 25/7/2004 JD, 456 at Lake Manyame 13/7/2005 NC, 206 at Aisleby 20/1/2008 JD, 156 at Crowborough 19/1/2010 FM

Priest said not a common goose. Now common 243 NRCs and increasing

It was confined to the big rivers and estimated at 1000 birds. Now estimated at 40000-50000 birds nationwide

African Pygmy-goose 125 at Lake Manyame 13/8/2009 FM, 200 at Save Runde Junction 16-17.10/2010 CS

Priest said not very common. Now Frequent 36NRCs & increasing

African Black Duck In mid September 1890 Frank Johnson shot Black Duck on the Makabusi River, now Mukuvisi. They are still there and the Johnsons are still here. Priest thought it the most common duck. It is now frequent 6NRCs and decreasing.

Cape Teal 162 at Cowdray Park 6/1/2010 JD, 29 at Crowborough 19/1/2010 FM, 36 at D Whitehead 22/1/2010 IM

Priest did not record it. Smithers, Irwin & Patterson (SIP) said it was very rare. Now uncommon 24 NRCs & increasing

Yellow-billed Duck Priest thought it not uncommon. Now very rare 5 NRCs & decreasing
Our rarest duck now

Red-billed Teal 1064 at Lake Chivero 13/7/2005 NC, 674 at Crowborough 18/7/2008 FM, 222 at Nyamungai pan 13/1/2009 CC, 4442 at Lake Manyame 13-15/8/2009 along with 11 other duck species.

322 at Aisleby 25.7.2010 CH

Priest thought one of our more common ducks. Now common 133 NRCs but maybe decreasing in recent years

Hottentot Teal Priest thought it a rare bird. Now uncommon 3NRCs and increasing

Cape Shoveler 45 at Cowdray Park with juveniles 15/7/2007 JD, 3 at D Whitehead Ponds 12/7/2009 IL,
2 at D Whitehead Ponds 22/1/2010 IM.
Priest said it had been seen in Matabeleland. It is now generally uncommon 9NRCs and increasing.
It has extended its range to Mashonaland.

Southern Pochard 585 at Lake Manyame 20/9/2003 DR, 659 at Lake Manyame 3/1/2004 DR,
296 at Aisleby 14/12/2007 JD, 222 at Aisleby 28/7/2007 JD
Priest had as not common. It is now common 10NRCs and stable.
Large numbers sometimes are not really the picture. Normally seen less than 20 at a time

Maccoa Duck 13 at Aisleby 20/6/2009 JD, 7 at Cowdray Park 6/1/2010 JD
Priest said 1 was shot in 1932. Now uncommon 10 NRCs and increasing this century
At Aisleby it is regularly seen and sometimes up to 30 birds are present

The ducks have been reviewed twice to my knowledge once by Smithers and once by Chris Bell.

African Fish-eagle 116 at Lake Manyame 13-15/8/2009 FM
40 at Lake Chivero 20-21/7/2011 MS
Widely distributed on large rivers Priest Now common also on dams 138 NRCs and increasing.
1 pair every 1-3kms of the Zambezi

Osprey 2 at Gache Gache 2/1/2009 Ken Wilson, 2 at Lake Manyame (a mid winter (cold dry season) record)13-15.8.2009 FM.
There are about 50 in the country, in the hot wet season. Will this bird breed here one day?

African Rail 26 at Lake Chivero 29-30/7/2010 JA

5 Red-chested Flufftail at Marlborough Vlei 8/7/2004 IR

8 African Crake at Shapi Pan, Sinamatella 7-8/2/2008 DT

Black Crake there are more here than anywhere else in Africa so far counted

African Purple Swamphen 43 at Lake Manyame 1-4.2.2010 FM, 37 at Lake Manyame 22/1/2011 DRG and we only saw a small portion of the lake

Red knobbed Coot 797 at Aisleby 25/7/2004 JD, 959 at Lake Manyame 13/7/2005 NC, 1483 at Lake Manyame 1-4/2/2010 FM.
Common 165NRCs and increasing.

African Finfoot 1 at Hippo Pools 17-19.2010 PCR-G
By no means common 2 Br. Records. Uncommon, 21NRCs decreasing probably due human disturbance

Lesser Jacana 20 at Chikekerano Pan 31/7/2004 ANBM

African Jacana 1353 at Lake Manyame 13-15.8.2009 FM, 1577 at Lake Manyame 1-4.2.2010 FM

Black-winged Stilt 71 at David Whitehead Settling Ponds 14.7.2011 MS, 127 at Lake Manyame 3.1.2004 DR, 149 at Aisleby 19.8.2007 SM

Pied Avocet 210 at Aisleby ?. 7 2007 JD, 47 at Imbwa 18.7.2008 FM, 51 at D Whitehead Settling Ponds 17.7.2008 FM, 21 at D Whitehead Settling Ponds 14.7.2011 MS all winter records

Two specimens in Checklist of the Birds of Southern Rhodesia. Now uncommon, 6NRCs and increasing

Greater Painted-snipe 5 at Sinamatella 3-4.2.2007

Collared Pratincole 487 at Lake Manyame 13-15/8/2009 FM, 80 at Lake Kariba 22-25.12 2010 DRG (only 5 kms of shoreline visited)

Long-toed Lapwing 4 at Lake Manyame 22.1.2011 DRG, 2 at Lake Manyame 9.6.2012 RD. Uncommon 12 NRCs and increasing. They must be breeding on Lake Manyame now

Blacksmith Lapwing Priest said there were a few records in Matabeleland Now abundant & all over the country, 231 NRCs and increasing.

African Wattled Lapwing Priest said it was the most plentiful Plover. Now common 220 NRCs & increasing

Kittlitz's Plover 83 at Nyamungai Pan 29/1/2005 NC, 41 at D Whitehead Settling Ponds 31.1.2008 Admire, 102 at Aisleby 22.3. SM. In 1994 I thought it common, but now I think it is decreasing.

White-fronted Plover 12 at Save/Runde Junction 16-17/10/2010 CS.

1 Common Whimbrel at ? C. Johnson 6.12.2004

Eurasian Curlew 1 at Shumba Pan 29.1.2005 CS, 1 at Rukomeche 17.4.2007 WS.

Wood Sandpiper 57 at Aisleby 20.1.2008 JD, 95 at Cowdray Park 6.1.2010 JD, 223 at Lake Manyame 1-4-2.2010 FM, 9 at Lake Manyame 5.6.2010 in our winter FM 150 at the Pomona Dam 22.12.2005 CB. (They do sometimes congregate)

Common Sandpiper 15 at Sinamatella (Shapi Pan) 7-8-2.2008 DT, 60 at Tshebe Tshebe (White Hills) Hwange 4-5-.2.2006 AWC.

Much less common than the Wood Sandpiper in Zimbabwe

1 Great Snipe at Monavale Vlei 18/3/2012. Maybe one record per year

Ruff 122 at D Whitehead Settling Ponds 31.1.2008 Admire, 335 at D Whitehead Settling Ponds 3 .2.2009 FM.

Eurasian Oystercatcher seen a few km downstream of Kariba Dam reported by Africa Birds & Birding

A [Pacific?]Golden Plover at Limpopo Province. Reported by Africa Birds and Birding

East African **Western Reef-heron** (with a bi-colour Bill) Greg Poole, 3.2.2006, South Luangwa National Park

Spur-winged Lapwing, at Ngamo Pan, Hwange by Victor Moyo, Courtney Johnson, March-April 2004. Nyamatusi Channel, Mana Pools, Sept 2004 James Varden and again by Tony Wood 10 November 2004

Lake Manyame must be the most outstanding water bird concentration in Zimbabwe today

Rainham Dams were surveyed from the early 1950's to 1975. All the files are at the BLZ office. The survey restarted in 2011.

Kariba has a shoreline of 2164 kms (The same distance as from Harare - Cape Town) It is very UNKNOWN

The Mukuvisi Woodlands have been surveyed since 1975. What waterbirds have been seen there ?

The Driefontein Grasslands and their cranes are well known.

The Rifa and Nyamepi parts of the Zambezi River are well known through field cards.

The David Whitehead settling ponds are slightly saline, and attract a mass of different birds like flamingos, Pied Avocets, Chestnut-banded Plover and Black-winged Stilt

Field cards with ticks are useless. They show only presence or absence. Colin Baker in his Field Observations/Recent Reports can only report an "unspecified number" or "ticked on a field card"

So since Priest's time, 88 species have increased, 36 species are stable, 24 species have decreased and 5 have become "*extinct*" (South African Shelduck, Spotted Redshank, Blue Crane, Sooty Tern & the European Storm-petrel)

He asked: "Among this audience and elsewhere, do you think it's possible for boat owners to participate on one day over a week end during July for a combined Waterfowl Census?"

The idea of the talk was to give a spur to the African Waterfowl Census in January & July in Mashonaland.

Dave thanked Tony Alegria, Celesta von Chamier & Nick Hart for photographs for the power point presentation and for the ones they couldn't find to SASOL Birds of South Africa.

Many thanks to Dorothy Wakeling for wanting this talk in *The Babbler*.

Matabeleland

Recent Reports

Walk at Hillside Dams – 19 May

Gaynor Lightfoot

On a lovely, fresh, sunny Saturday morning at Hillside Dams we met in the lower dam car park. After a few minutes wait we proceeded to walk along the road towards the aloe garden, where we were joined shortly afterwards by another member. On our way to the aloe garden, on an open lawn, there was a bird party with many birds hopping around in the morning light namely African Hoopoe, Kurrichane Thrush, Heuglin's Robin (White-browed Robin-chat), Red-eyed Doves, Melba Finches (Green-winged Pytilia) and Blue Waxbills. We had the opportunity of

watching a Bearded Woodpecker on a tree very close by to the path. At the aloe garden, where some aloes were already in flower while others were still about a week or two away, the White-bellied Sunbirds and Miombo Double-collared Sunbirds were in heaven with all the nectar, as were the bees. We walked up and over the hill and along to the upper dam, meeting up with a very friendly dog that walked most of the way with us. At the upper dam we saw African Jacana, Dabchick (Little Grebe) and African Pied Wagtail. After a scramble about the rocks we returned to the lower dam along the stream. When we finally reached the lower dam we saw Common Moorhen in the reed beds, and Egyptian Geese on a rocky outcrop in the dam. Then baskets were brought out and we enjoyed our mid morning tea in these tranquil surroundings.

Dassie Census, Matobo NP – 24-27 May Adele Edwards

The annual dassie (hyrax) census is conducted as part of the Verreaux's (Black) Eagle Breeding Survey; as dassies are the main prey of the eagles it is of interest to know whether fluctuations in their numbers affect the eagles' breeding. This was the 20th census to be conducted, but only the 6th to be carried out by Matabeleland branch. For the previous five years the team based up at Nungu Farm House but unfortunately on this occasion that venue was not available. Instead we based at Maleme Rest Camp within the Matobo National Park, with most of the group camping and some staying in the lodges. The census took place over a long weekend and the lodges were fully booked and the camp sites busy. While it is encouraging to see so many people coming back into the park, including a large number of South Africans, it was of course also a bit irritating to those of us who have become used to having the place to ourselves. But one of the big advantages of being at Maleme was that most teams were that much closer to the sites they had to count – allowing a few extra and welcome minutes in bed in the morning. In fact a couple of teams that were counting in territory one only had to roll out of bed and they could start counting! And weather conditions were ideal for both counters and dassies. The nights were cold and clear, the stars brilliant and appearing magnified. Getting up before dawn it was cold but not bitterly so, and as the sun rose into clear skies with no wind it quickly warmed up. The number of dassies recorded was the highest since the branch started doing the census - 388 animals were recorded at 18 sites by 9 teams over three days.

The Matopos is always a good birding area and besides Verreaux's Eagle many other species were observed. Maleme Dam produced White-breasted Cormorant, Little Grebe, Egyptian Goose, African Black Duck, African Fish-eagle, Black Crake, Common Moorhen, African and Lesser Jacana, and Giant, Pied and Malachite Kingfisher. Some of the other less commonly seen birds (at least for us here in Matabeleland) included: Purple-crested Turaco, Boulder and Familiar Chats and Mocking Cliff-chat.

“The Amazing Birdlife of Melbourne”, Helen Lewis: 15 June Adele Edwards

It was definitely a case of quality not quantity with regards to the audience when Helen Lewis, with assistance from Bill, gave us a talk on the birds they had seen on a visit they made last October to the Melbourne Water Treatment Plant (MWTP). I know that I get so caught up in trying to sort out our own local species that I tend to forget there is a whole world of wonderful birds out there and it was fascinating to hear Helen talk, and see her many photos of some of the amazing birds they saw in Australia. Not knowing where to begin with birding in Australia Helen searched the Internet and on the website of BOCA (Bird Observation & Conservation Australia) learnt about MWTP, which includes Lake Borrie – recognized as ‘the most significant wetland in Victoria for migratory shorebirds’. However the Lewis' soon discovered that getting a permit to access the area was not easy, but a lucky chance conversation led them to meeting a local bird ‘expert’, Tom Fletcher, who took them through the area and helped them find and identify 110 species, of a possible 270, in the course of a day.

While they saw many waterbirds MWTP covers a number of different habitats including: bushland – where they saw the gorgeous bright blue Superb Fairy Wren and Red-browed Finch; eucalyptus plantations – where they saw Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo, Purple-crowned Lorikeets and a Sacred Kingfisher (so called because of his white clerics 'dog collar'); and open paddocks – where they saw a Brown Falcon. The wetlands included open coastal water, sand banks, ponds and swamps, where they saw literally hundreds of thousands of birds. (It is estimated that MWTP can at times house up to 650,000 birds at any one time). Birds seen included the prolific Black Swans, and such delights as Hoary-headed grebes, Pink-eared Duck, Straw-necked Ibis and Brolga – the threatened Australian crane.

We would like to thank the staff at The Boma for hosting us and to Helen for her very interesting and informative talk.

Car Rally – 24 June Adele Edwards

There was very little birding involved in our car rally – in fact I think I took even less notice of any birds that may possibly have been around than I usually do when driving because my attention was so focused on finding the next point along our course and answering all the questions posed. Nevertheless it was a very worthwhile event. It was an entertaining way to spend a Sunday morning. It called for teamwork. It developed our skills of observation (as when we got asked a question about something we had passed 5 km and 20 minutes earlier). It tested our knowledge (most people know that a female ground-hornbill has a blue patch on its neck below the bill but did you know they have blue eyes?) It cemented friendships (everyone decided to stay on and share lunch at the Country Club afterwards). We collected a bit of money for the branch (there was an entry fee of \$5 per car). And it forced us to clean out our handbags and cubbyholes (as we searched to try and dig up the 10 objects we had been asked to find). Thank you to Cecilia and Lisa for putting it all together.

Waterfowl Count at Cowdray Park – 08 July Adele Edwards

I never really understand why so few people are interested in taking part in waterfowl counts. They are really just another outing – to a venue that has the advantage of having water so chances are you will have a higher species count. If you are not interested, or feel you are not equipped to take part in the counting you don't have to. Of course three of the sites that Matabeleland regularly covers on these counts, which take place in January and July, are sewerage works (at Cowdray Park, Khami and Aisleby) so it is sometimes a bit smelly but that's a small price to pay for some interesting birding. The Project Coordinators, Julia Dupree and Helen Lewis will produce the official results from these counts at a later stage. But at Cowdray Park Julia, Judy Ross and I spent nearly as much time looking at non-water birds as we did at waterfowl. The ponds were all very active and we counted a couple of hundred each of Red-billed Teal, Southern Pochard and Little Grebe, as well as a few Cape and Hottentot Teal, White-faced Duck and Cape Shoveler. We saw Blacksmith Lapwing and Three-banded Plovers, and Black-winged Stilts. The highlight for me was a couple of sightings of African Purple Swamphen, with their lovely colours lit up by the morning sun. Notable for me amongst 'the rest' were Grey and Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills, a couple of large flocks of Wattled Starlings, and a Brown snake-eagle which, while we were sitting enjoying a cup of coffee at the end of our walk, landed in long thick grass a couple of hundred meters away from us, then after a few minutes rose up carrying off a small snake which, after landing in a nearby tree, it proceeded to devour.

Country Districts

Visit to Chegutu ponds -18/4/2012,

Regrettably, as the textile operation at the David Whitehead complex has ceased for close to a year, the rains are the sole water supply for the ponds. Far more water in the first pond and similarly water in other ponds, which were completely dry at my last visit in September 2011 with Dave Dalziel.

There was total overgrowth on embankments. No evidence of 'new' bird snares on the water edges. However, although most birds were 'skittish', my count was: c.35x Black-winged Stilts, 8x Blacksmith Lapwing, 3 x Pied Avocets, 1x Kittlitz's Plover, 6 x **Three**-banded Plovers, 2 x Cape Teal, 3 x juvenile 'teal'? 7 x Black-headed Herons. On the raptor scene we saw 2 x Black-chested Snake-eagles circling between the 'ponds' and to the south of Chegutu. We spotted sunbirds: 1 x Marico and 1 x Variable male. The total count was just over 30 for an hour's slog through the overgrown routes.

Road Kills (or other means of fatality) for ANY owl in Zimbabwe.

If *The Babbler* readership can forward to me any records of owls they have come across killed on our suburb, farm/ Game Park and main roads (even from years back). Kindly advise identity of the owl (if not sure of the id still send in a report), route for example: Bulawayo- Shangani, approximate distance from a town and date.

Thank you.

innes@battweryworld.co.zw

Tail Feathers

African Green-pigeons continue to frequent trees around my home in Mandara. There are always two or three perched on the top of Conifers or in Gum trees. Last weekend (9/10 June) my Gardener saw 10 birds.

On Sunday 2nd June there were two in a gum tree, together with at least 70 Miombo Blue-eared Starlings and a Black-headed Oriole. The juvenile starlings were clearly apparent with their pinkish breasts.

James Ball

Where have all the Lesser Striped Swallows gone?

I recently spent 3 days at Katiyo Primary School (19,20,21 June) on the Pungwe River at the end of the Honde Valley road at the Mozambican border. Staying at the Katiyo Tea Estate Club, I was amazed to be woken by dozens of Lesser Striped Swallows swirling around the Club and grounds. No doubt they'll be on the way back here as soon as it warms up a bit.

Ken Dixon, Harare.

Haka Park, Sat 21 July BLZ outing.

Was this the lowest count of the year? There were only 41 species identified by our group of 7 who braved the frost. Fortunately, a Black-chested Snake-eagle overflew as we left making it 42. Mind you, there were excellent views of Black-crowned Tchagra and White-fronted Cuckooshrike, Green-capped Eremomela and Brubru. We found almost nothing on the dam, only a Little Grebe. An African Jacana and 3 noisy African Wattled Lapwing all watched over by an African Fish-eagle.

Ken Dixon, Harare.

Fifteen Purple-crested Turacos visited Debbie and Paul Wiggins' birdbath, simultaneously, at their home in Borrowdale on 28th June 2012.

Taken from BirdLife Zimbabwe Facebook Page

Nyanga Ringing 16/17th June 2012

The White-starred Robins were particularly interesting because according to Irwin's Birds of Zimbabwe these birds vacate the highlands during winter and move to lower elevations - perhaps to escape the cold. Why are these two still in Nyanga in the middle of winter? There must be more still in the area; if not for having caught them we wouldn't have even known they were around.

From Dorothy Wakeling: Nick Hart has put together an amazing blogspot, which I urge members to look at. The snippet above has been extracted from this site as it refers to interesting changes in the seasonal movements of this species.

<http://zimbirding.blogspot.com/>

A Long-toed Lapwing was spotted by Richard Dennison and photographed by Celesta von Chamier at Hideaway, on the shore of Lake Manyame on June 9²⁰¹² - the day of the BLZ AGM. **Check the BLZ Facebook page for the photos.**

Parrots

Please could you write a few lines about the parrot species in an area you are an expert at? Status, how often seen, breeding where & when. Anything really.

Rowan Martin wants to know. He goes to a conference in a month`s time

I think more will come out of this initiative either at or after the conference

Many thanks David Send info to rgill@zol.co.zw

Contributions for The Babbler 108 October 2012/ November 2012 may be sent to the Editor anytime between now and 14th September 2012.