

# 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 **BirdLife Zimbabwe** bank account: **NMB Bank, Borrowdale Branch; Account no: 260092014** It is very important that with all direct deposits you include your name on the deposit, so that it appears on the bank statement and please also advise Sylvia Muzavazi, either by faxing the copy deposit slip or by e-mail. [sylvia@blz.co.zw](mailto:sylvia@blz.co.zw)

**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](mailto: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, *TheBabbler*, every two months. The more members we have, the more effective we can be at lobbying government, communities and local and international organisations.

### **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.

### **Dr Doug Harebottle, SAPAB2 co-ordinator in Zimbabwe from 25 January to 03 February 2013!**

BirdLife Zimbabwe has invited Dr Doug Harebottle, of the Animal Deography Unit (ADU), University of Cape Town, RSA and co-ordinator of SAPAP2 to Zimbabwe next year.

SAPAB2 is the most far-reaching bird conservation research project in southern Africa. If you don't know the distribution of birds and how they are changing, you cannot do conservation intelligently and effectively. As a citizen scientist, you can contribute too!

Did you contribute to the Bird Atlas (SABAP) 1987-1992? We are inviting the whole birding community in Zimbabwe to come and meet Dr Harebottle and find out more about SABAP2. This project has been running in South Africa and other countries are now coming on board. The methods are different and pentads are used instead of the QDS (quarter degree square); this new atlas should show abundance of species on a much finer scale. For more details see <http://sapab2.adu.org.za>

Dr Harbottle will be doing presentations to explain SAPAB2 and workshops and meetings with him are being organized and you are all invited to attend – (for free!)

#### **Dr Doug Harebottle`s Zimbabwean Itinerary**

25 Jan 2013 Dr Doug Harebottle arrives in Harare

26 - 27 Jan Two-Day SAPAB2 Workshop in Harare (1st day theory, 2nd day field trip. **Open to all birders!**

28-29 Jan Harebottle Trip to Marondera/Eastern Highlands (**open to all birders**)

30 Jan Dr Harebottle travels to Matabeleland

31 Jan Dr Harebottle to visit Matobo - Black Eagle survey

01-02 Feb Sapab2 Workshop in Bulawayo (1st evening theory, 2nd day field trip) **Open to all birders!**

03 Feb Dr Harebottle flies back to RSA from Bulawayo

More details to follow

Chivero Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2012 0630  
Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2013 0630  
(Meet PE School car park)

Monavale Vlei Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2012 0700  
Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2013 0700

#### **4<sup>th</sup> Sunday Outings**

December 2012 NO OUTING

Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> January 2013 Alex Masterson's annual vlei walk 0630  
Venue will be announced nearer the time.

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> Sat Outings**

Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2012 Harare Botanical Gardens 0700  
Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> January 2013 Greystone Nature Reserve 0700

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

Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2012 (2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of December)

Normally we do not have an evening function in December due to the festive season. However, because Tony Wood and Alex Masterson drove up to Arusha to attend the 13<sup>th</sup> Pan African Ornithological Congress (PAOC 13) held from 14 – 21 October 2012 we thought we should hear from them whilst the trip is still fresh in their minds. Thus Tony Wood & Alex Masterson will give a talk on their recent visit to Arusha, Tanzania and their birding experiences thereafter. We aim to make this a special occasion and members are asked to bring a plate of snacks and socialize after the meeting.

Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> January 2013 Mashonaland Branch BLZ Annual General Meeting.

#### **Mashonaland Branch**

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

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

#### **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

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

## **Matabeleland Branch FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES**

### **December:**

There are no organized bird walks during the month of December but we wish all our members lots of happy birding throughout the Festive Season and into the New Year.

### **January: Waterfowl Counts**

Once again we plan to carry out waterfowl counts throughout the month of January, covering our regular sites at Aisleby, Cowdray Park and SAST as well as areas in Matopos and Hwange National Parks. We all hope that by then it will be pouring with rain – however the wet weather does make planning these counts more difficult and it is sometimes necessary to change arrangements at the last minute. If you are interested in taking part in the counts please let one of the committee know and we will make sure you are kept informed of plans.

### **February: Branch Annual General Meeting**

The Matabeleland Branch AGM will take place in February, although details have not yet been finalized. Members will be advised of arrangements nearer the time through Matland Musings. However we urgently need some new people with new ideas on the committee. Please don't be shy! If you feel you are able to join the committee and make a contribution, let us know. Or start approaching other members whom you would like to see representing you on committee to find out if they are prepared to stand. We look forward to hearing from you.

### **Birding Big Day – 24/25 November**

Did you take part?

### **1 December: Christmas Bistro**

Can we seriously be talking about Christmas? Where did the year go? Before you start filling your diary with Festive Season engagements make a note that our annual Christmas Bistro will take place on the evening of Saturday 1 December. Once again Cecilia Hubbard has generously offered to host this event. Details of the cost, menu, etc., to be advised nearer the time but you can start booking your places now.

For more information contact Cecilia Hubbard on 0772 433733

## **Country Districts**

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

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

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

## Recent Reports And Sightings

### **Mashonaland**

#### **Warbler Presentation by Ferdie Couto – 18<sup>th</sup> October 2012**

Ferdie delivered a most interesting presentation, which concentrated on the LBJ Warblers. The only time he used a photo of a non-LBJ was when he compared the yellow colouring of the Icterine Warbler with the Dark-capped Yellow Warbler.

Throughout the presentation he used many photographs to show most of the birds in fresh and worn plumage. This clearly showed just how difficult it is to identify the Little Brown Jobs! In fact some are so difficult to identify visually, that only by measuring beak length and width, thickness of the leg and the length of the toes could the species be told apart. Some species can be identified by using the wing characteristics. So, if you don't have the bird in the hand, it just can't be done!

He also used birdcalls within his presentation to demonstrate how similar some Warbler calls were. Although many Warblers have the same sort of songs and are thus difficult to identify by call, fortunately some have distinctive calls such as the Little Rush-warbler. Yet others have some recognizable element within their varied calls.

He also used a map of Zimbabwe and Google Earth pictures to show where he had seen some of the Warblers. Ferdie emphasised that observers should submit records to augment distribution records.

Thanks Ferdie for a presentation that proved just how difficult it is to identify the LBJ Warblers

#### **Monavale Vlei Report October November 2012**

It's that time of year when various migrant feathered friends of ours arrive. The Vlei's migrant roll call so far, which includes the woodland fringes, has Lesser Striped Swallow, Wahlberg's Eagle, African Paradise-flycatcher, Levillant's Cuckoo, European Bee-eater, Barn Swallow, Steppe Buzzard, Diderick's Cuckoo, Willow Warbler, Abdim's Stork, Red-backed Shrike and White-rumped Swift, 100 + Amur Falcons on 22<sup>nd</sup> November.

October recorded a monthly total of 117 bird species seen / heard.

The Duiker is constantly being seen and the rare Clawless Otter spotted twice.

A great deal of encroaching reed clumps along the Avondale Stream storm water / sewer drain system have been rooted out and removed, and all the Red Sesbania weeded from the Marimba River, where its presence inhibits the existence of many other indigenous plants. Monavale Vlei's 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the month bird walk of November had 13 members attend the outing. As birders waited for others to arrive by the viewing platform, half a dozen Cuckoo Finches treated us to good viewing as they perched on some grasses nearby. A male Pin-tailed Whydah displayed itself before a female that sat on a dead tree.

Birding highlights for the walk included two Reed Cormorants, Abdim's Stork, African Black Duck, Lizard Buzzard, Swainson's Spurfowl, African Wattled Lapwing, Red-chested Cuckoo heard, Diderick's Cuckoo, Barn Swallow, 2 Pearl-breasted Swallow, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, 4 Willow Warbler, Levillant's Cisticola, and Thick-billed Weaver (a complete nest of the Thick-billed Weaver seen at the streams' confluence). Some male Red Bishops, Red-collared Widowbirds and Yellow-mantled Widowbirds are starting to pick up their breeding dress. The bird count under the cool shade of the Acacia trees at Indigenous Tree Nursery yielded 62 bird species seen or heard.

**Jimmy Muropa** – Vlei Scout, Conservation Society of Monavale. Phone Jimmy on 0772 772771 if you would like a guided walk on the Vlei.

### **Conservation Society of Monavale Recent Activities on Monavale Vlei**

We were delighted to have a visit from the Ramsar Delegation at the end of October 2012. The delegates were in Zimbabwe to identify Ramsar Sites as part of Zimbabwe's bid to become a member of the Ramsar Wetland Convention. Paul Ouedraogo, Senior Ramsar Adviser for Africa and Denis Landenbergue, Manager, Wetlands Conservation for WWF International, were very impressed with Monavale Vlei and confirmed it met the required site criteria. COSMO is a member of the newly formed National Wetlands Committee.

Environmental Management Agency EIA officials and community leaders from all provinces of Zimbabwe attended a two day composting, vermiculture and general wetland awareness workshop at Monavale in September. This was well received.

38 fourth year University of Zimbabwe Town Planning students visited Monavale Vlei with their environmental town planning lecturer, Percy Toriro, to see an intact urban wetland and to understand the pivotal role these areas play in the provision of Harare's water and the need to incorporate their protection in any planning proposals.

COSMO continues its wetland awareness campaign through medium of newspapers, magazines, websites, petitions and attendance at environmental flora.

**Dorothy Wakeling**, [www.monavalevlei.com](http://www.monavalevlei.com); [cosmo@yoafrica.com](mailto:cosmo@yoafrica.com)

### **Mashonaland East Natural History Society - Newsletter # 108**

Chairman - Peter Hadingham, tel. 04-497035. Secretary - Colin de Beer tel. 0279-23931

#### **Visit to Tavistock Farm**

The Marondera Bird Club enjoyed a wonderful 5 day outing to Tavistock Farm at Beatrice from 18 to 22 October 2012

Tavistock is one of the most pleasant venues that our Club has visited and the large old fashioned furnished farm house with 3 bedrooms 2 bathrooms and a big veranda is imminently suitable for a group like ours.

Stoff and Christine Hawgood went out of their way to make us feel welcome and to make sure we were comfortable. All basic household facilities were available for our use free of charge, and Susan the maid was ready and willing to help wherever she could.

The venue is closed to the general public but birding and falconry groups who approach Mr Hawgood will be welcomed free of any charge to use the venue, taking with them bedding, food etc. for the duration of their stay

Ten of us enjoyed walks in different habitats around the Farm, along the Mupfure River, in the large game fenced Conservation Area and in the lovely gardens of the 3 houses, which made it possible to identify 103 different species of birds. An electrified fence protects the entire property

On the dairy effluent pond we saw 11 Black-winged Stilts, and a special for us all was the single Cape Teal, which, very cooperatively kept circulating around in flight showing the unmistakable green, white framed speculum, on the wings.

The adult and 2 juvenile Saddle-billed Storks on the farm dam were a wonderful sight, as well as the mixed herd of 22 kudu that had come down for a drink

The extensive wetlands which we explored on previous visits have dried up a bit and we missed out on the huge flocks of ducks and other water birds seen on an earlier visit during October

2009 when 18 of us ticked 133 different species; hopefully the wet-lands will be restored fully when the rains come.

Stoff very kindly took us on a particularly interesting tour of his very sophisticated potato washing, grading and packing machine, which was designed and imported from South Africa to fit into the dimensions of his existing, sheds. He now has official qualification to sell washed potatoes in special custom designed 7-kilo paper bags.

This facility is also available to other potato growers or traders who can bring potatoes for toll washing. The rate of washing through the machine is 20 tons per hour at the cost of 3c per kilo, or 45c for a 15-kilo pocket.

Some of us visited his most impressive dairy where 540 Holstein cows are milked 3 times a day in a 16 stall-milking parlour. The neighbouring farm Charmaine works closely with Tavistock where there is a second dairy milking 230 Jersey cows. All the milk is delivered to Kefalos Cheese, Yogurt, and Ice Cream factory in Harare South

As a Bird Club this venue is well worth visiting and we certainly hope to be back again

### **A Visit to the Eastern Districts 4-10th November 2012**

1932B1 Zimunya (White Horse Inn and Msasa Woodland nearby)

1932B2 Bvumba (Seldomseen, Bunga Forest and lay byes and Bvumba (Manchester) Botanic gardens)

1832 B4 Nyangani A (Aberfoyle and Katiyo Tea Estates, Nyawamba River and Dam, and Gleneagles)

Waterbirds were very poor but a pair of African Darters and a large croc was seen on the Nyawamba Dam at Aberfoyle Tea Estate.

Raptors were few but an African Crowned Eagle and an Augur Buzzard were seen from the Prince of Wales lay bye near Mutare, both were hanging dead still in the air facing into the wind. Long-crested Eagle were common and seen at all the places visited, and a Black Sparrowhawk with a prey item shot past us in miombo woodland below the White Horse Inn. I was surprised to hear the Shelley's Francolin near the Nyawamba Dam. The Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon was frequent at Gleneagles, and the Tambourine Dove was seen down by the Nyawamba River Bridge, where we taken to look for African Finfoot, but we failed, it was dipping day, and they don't like noise/disturbance. We saw the Scarce Swift at all three places, mostly flying high with other swifts, and at Gleneagles we saw a nest site, but so far the nest and eggs remain unidentified. The Mottled Swift was seen over the Katiyo Tea Estates again with swifts & swallows. Narina Trogons were common in their habitat at Aberfoyle, but we didn't hear them elsewhere. The Half-collared Kingfisher was on the river going through the golf course. Silvery-cheeked Hornbills were seen at all three places, but only one Trumpeter Hornbill at Gleneagles, where we were lucky to see the Green-backed Woodpecker. Both Orange Ground-thrush and Olive Thrush were seen at Seldomseen.

The Broad-tailed Warbler was found alongside the Anchieta's Tchagra at the Wamba Marsh at the top end of the Nyawamba Dam. Bird guide Morgan, told me there were 4 Anchieta's Tchagras (Blackcap Bush-shrike) here, but I only saw a male, and an African Broadbill could be heard from there, in the nearby forest.

The Red-winged Warbler was seen at Katiyo and both of the Blue-mantled Crested Flycatchers were seen at Aberfoyle. Yellow-breasted Apalis were at Bvumba Bot Gardens and at Aberfoyle. I thought an unusual sighting was the African Pied, the Cape and the Mountain Wagtails all at the same spot on the river, above the Raffia Palms, on the golf course at Aberfoyle. This break in the riverine forest is rocky and can only be 100 meters long or less. A



pair of Wood Pipits was seen in the burnt Miombo woodland below the White Horse Inn and Woodlands, and a Tree Pipit was in the Bvumba Bot Gardens. Some of us, but not me, got good views of Pallid Honeyguide (no nest and eggs described yet) and Pale Batis at Gleneagles. We saw two Gurney's Sugarbirds at planted Proteas, near Seldomseen, and birdguide Bulawezi said there were six birds there, in the same field there were Bronzy and Malachite Sunbirds. A House Sparrow was at the Aberfoyle Tea factory. Dark-backed and Thick-billed Weaver nests were at artificial ponds in Bvumba Gardens and Aberfoyle Lodge. We only saw Green Twinspot at the White Horse Inn. Red-throated Twinspot and Red-faced Crimsonwing were at both places, and at Aberfoyle they were attracted to a birdbath and birdseed on the edge of the forest. The Grey Waxbill was at Aberfoyle and Katiyo and a flock of 8 Magpie Mannikins were observed in seeding Indigenous bamboo (*Oxytenanthera abyssinica*). A Lesser Seedcracker was seen at a layby in the Bunga Forest between White Horse Inn and Seldomseen. These laybys were very productive stops.

Breeding birds noted were White-eared Barbets, Eastern Saw-wing, Ashy Flycatcher, Cape Batis, Thick-billed, Dark-capped and Golden Weavers.

We were shown old nests of Orange Ground-thrush, Swynnerton's Robin and Anchieta's Tchagra.

A suspected Magpie Mannikin nest was seen at the top of a seeding indigenous bamboo.

Birdguide Morgan heard Chestnut-fronted Helmet-shrikes at Gleneagles, so they still exist in this country, albeit in very small numbers.

Animals recorded were Samango Monkeys at all three places, Sun Squirrels at Aberfoyle and Seldomseen, Red Squirrels at the White Horse Inn. Baboons were at Aberfoyle. Bushbucks were seen at the White Horse Inn and Katiyo Tea Estate and a pair of Blue Duiker at Gleneagles.

Thanks to Rich Kleyn, Walter Scharlach, Martin Schulmann and Edwin Jones who came from South Africa, and invited me on their boys' time out annual birding trip.

\*Who was Anchieta?

While one of our party, Edwin Jones knows Robert Kennedy, Son of Major-General Sir John Kennedy (Governor of Southern Rhodesia 1947-1953) for whom the Matopos subspecies of the Cape Batis was named by Reay Smithers & Mary Paterson.

Amazing was that we only knew of the American election and some time later who had won **D.V. Rockingham-Gill. 4 Fernleigh Road, P.O. Borrowdale.**

- The dark Angolan subspecies of Marsh Tchagra was formerly sometimes split as Anchieta's Tchagra, *Tchagra anchietae*, named after Portuguese explorer José Alberto de Oliveira Anchieta by his zoologist compatriot José Vicente Barbosa du Bocage in 1869.

## **Bird outings**

### **Hwedza 21<sup>st</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> September 2012**

The weekend of 21<sup>st</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> September 2012 found six Harare birders, two Marondera birders, five Peterhouse schoolboys and Doreen our flower-painter, on Wedza Mountains some 70kms south of Marondera. The object of the exercise was to find a Swee Waxbill. Our Eastern Districts have another 'swee' (the Yellow-bellied Waxbill), but the black-faced species, which is quite common in some places south of the Limpopo, is very seldom recorded in this country and then in only widely separated localities. One bird had been seen by Tracy Couto on this mountain about 20 years ago. Is it still there? Michael Irwin effectively challenged BirdLife

Zimbabwe 2012 to find another.

AND WE DID – Just one: a male building a nest. But several people had good views of it – I later saw the nest but not the bird. The nest was quite a compact ball with rather coarse grass blades and no spout. I believe it may have been a roosting nest rather than a breeding nest. It was in a monkey's money tree *Diospyros natalensis* at the foot of the mountain's only exposed rock face below Romorehoto (Hornbills beak) peak.

The other great sighting was a flock of 20 to 30 Alpine Swifts hurtling about only 10 to 30 meters above ground at the very top of the southern Dangamvuri peak at about 1790m asl. They were big FAST flying birds with the white belly and throat patches easily visible to the naked eye. They flew too fast for me to catch them in the binoculars.

Otherwise the veld was rather dry – only three flowers to paint in three days – and completely dominated by a 95% cover of Miombo woodland. The gullies held odd big water berries, ebonies and white stinkwood. These produced Narina Trogons one of which perched just above Penny Raynor and sang to her. White-breasted Cuckooshrike, African Golden Oriole and Miombo Tit were often seen and Shelley's Francolin called next to the campsite, but there was no Spotted Creeper, no Miombo Rock-thrush, no Southern Black Flycatchers, no ordinary doves, and very few raptors, thrushes or scrub-robins. A Retz's Helmet-shrike sat very close on its nest high up in a completely leafless *Brachystegia*. Night noises were few and far between but Tony Alegria fascinated us all with a star gazing demo. Hopefully Ian Riddell will do a full write up for a future Honeyguide.

Thanks go to Tony Alegria, Jacko Jackson from Marondera and Penny and her school class who did the dirty work.

**Alex Masterson**

### **Mynas Have Arrived In Harare**

A single Common Myna was seen on the road verge of Wimbledon Road Close, Eastlea, Harare on the morning of Thursday 8th November by Dr Rob Kelly who works there. The arrival of the bird is not unexpected as in recent years mynas have reached Bulawayo and most of the towns in southern Zimbabwe.

On the afternoon of Monday 19th November I found 2 mynas feeding on a lawn at the roadside at the intersection Bodle Avenue and Frank Johnson Roads, Eastlea. This is very close to the first sighting.

The Eastlea sightings may be the earliest confirmed sightings of mynas in Harare received to date since the bird began to invade Zimbabwe from the south in the last decade.

The fairways of Chapman Golf Club are on the other side of a wall along Bodle Avenue and the birds were seen to fly in that direction. It is likely that they also feed on the golf course.

There may also be other mynas elsewhere in Harare already.

I have also received reports of mynas breeding in Hwange National Park. In all instances the nests of Red-billed Buffalo-weavers are used. This is a very alarming development as it shows that mynas are able to survive and breed in the wild.

It is likely that mynas will become very abundant in Harare in a few years. I am also interested in the interaction of mynas with our indigenous birds. It is already known that they will evict other birds from their nests. There are reports of mynas occupying nest holes of Crested Barbets and I wonder if this will also happen with Whyte's Barbets and Greater Blue-eared Starlings in Harare.

I have been monitoring the spread of mynas through Zimbabwe for more than 10 years and hope to write a report soon.

Please send any reports of sightings of mynas to me at [wildfire@mweb.co.zw](mailto:wildfire@mweb.co.zw).

**Geoff Lowe**

Harare.

## **Matabeleland**

### **Hwange Annual Game Count**– 03 October 2012 1:37 PM

The sun, the colour of a Crimson-breasted Shrike's crimson breast, was struggling up through the smoke and dust induced haze, as a tiny Cessna six-seater plane, rumbled down the rutted Main Camp runway, lifting off towards the rising orb. Pat Cox at the joystick, with four passengers, was off on the next leg of the pre-game count fly over to check on the status of the available water in the park. This particular morning's sortie was to inspect the pans along the eastern and southern part of Main Camp, inspecting water along the way – past the Kennedys, the Hide and Somalisa concessions, Ngweshla and the whole of the Wilderness concession, before going on down to the southern most tip of the park on the Botswana border, where there had been a report on suspected elephant poaching. Flying back up from there, over miles of waterless nothing, it was apparent that very little rain had fallen during the past season down in the southern end of the park. The inspection took in the out of the way pans as well as the Mangas and Jambile. The Wilderness concessions appeared to have plenty of water that is great to see and thanks must go to them for keeping their waterholes in a good state. While there was some water in some of the other pans, it certainly was not plentiful. Even some pans which were seen from the air with water, were found to be dry a couple of days later when inspected on the ground due to various problems with the pumping. It is a harsh time of the year for the animals and for the people trying to keep up with the pumping. Gary Cattle has to be commended for the tremendous work he has been doing, not only keeping a check on the pans that WEZ and Friends of Hwange try to keep going, but also for the constant assistance he renders to National Parks. Once again, the Main Camp water crew, as elsewhere in the park, are seriously hindered by the lack of working vehicles so there is often no transport available for them to attend to breakdowns, refuelling engines with diesel and oil or rationing pump attendants timeously. It's a never-ending headache and frustration for all those involved. The other pre-game count flights went off without hitch and Sinamatella and Robins appeared to have a little more water than expected along their river systems, although how long it will last is anyone's guess.

The next few days were spent travelling around the Main Camp area, catching up with friends seen annually during the count and just enjoying being out in the Park despite the terrible dryness and the veld taking on its dry season lunar landscape look. The *Acacia erioloba* were all out in their summer splendour and the bright green leaves on these beautiful elderly monoliths stuck out through the otherwise greyness of the dry bush. Here and there, the lilac haze of *Lonchocarpus nelsii* would also alleviate the drab brown and grey. It was very pleasing to see so many animals around the Nyamandhlovu/Dom area close to Main Camp, all seemingly very calm and peaceful, despite the daily sightings of a large pride of lion which seem to have been resident in the area for some weeks now, and which most people staying in camp got to see at some stage. The elephant herds have fragmented into smaller groups and, as is usual for this time of the year, appear to have a sad look about them as they plod wearily up to what little water there may be, to try and get some of the precious liquid before starting on the long march once again in search of food. An amazingly large number of buffalo were seen from the air during the pre-game count flights and several counters reported large numbers seen during the count. The buffalo, too, come down to the water, heads hanging low and are foot weary from their long treks. The giraffe seem to be quite happy now that the new shoots and leaves are appearing on the trees and several folk commented on the many kudu seen round and about on drives. Several sightings of cheetah were reported, which is fantastic with one game count team while out on a drive, coming across a cheetah mother with three youngsters that they managed to watch for almost fifteen minutes! One evening, just as the park gates were closing, a pack of seven wild dog unsuccessfully tried to find dinner on the

periphery of the Main Camp lodges, sending the impala that sneak in to graze on the little bits of lawn, hurtling through camp. A hot day was spent going around with Gary, checking and re-fuelling various engines as well as fixing punctures on his vehicle which plague him constantly.

Then it was on up to Masuma for the weekend of the count. On the way up, we stopped in at the various pans to see how they were faring and visited Nehimba to get permission to go through and have a look at Granny's pan – a new pan that they have begun to pump and develop. The staff at Nehimba were preparing for a large BBC film crew that were starting to arrive on the Friday, coming to film the elephant digging in the seeps and hopefully capturing some footage of Goose – the rather crazy lion which inhabits that area. Its great to see the development there and other boreholes have been established which should help the water situation up that end of the park. Apparently, Camp Hwange, one of the newer concessions opposite Shumba has also had some successful boreholes put down and all this should greatly assist Parks.

The water in the pan at Masuma was pretty abysmal and we were dismayed to see that pumping was not in progress due to the lack of diesel. It was established that there was 20 litres still available and the pump attendants had radioed for more to be sent but if the truth were known, the pump attendants, with no weapons, were too nervous to walk over to the engine, which is some distance from the pan. This was not surprising, however, when lion called all round camp every night and a pride of nine were seen sitting atop the "dam" wall just before sun up the following morning. Apparently, this pride had been in the area for the past three months or so. The pump attendants were taken down to the engine which was duly started again but by then elephant had begun arriving in their numbers so there was very little chance of any water getting into the pan as it was vacuumed up the second it gushed out the end of the pipe! Much jostling, shoving and pushing ensued with the odd grumpy bellow emitting from the middle of the melee while some of the other pachyderms stood quietly by, hoping for a chance to get a trunkful. Fortunately, more fuel was sent through so there was sufficient to keep the engine running for the duration and during a quiet period the following morning, some water did run into the diminishing pan. A strong wind blew up the night before the count which was pretty disturbing with the flapping of tents and great gusts of dust everywhere and was still blowing quite strongly the following morning, making some of the game, coming down to water, rather skittish. It was great to have the breeze later on, keeping the temperature down a bit and this also helped to blow some of the haze away and so improving the light during the count overnight. It was a fairly busy count with the usual quiet patch in the very early hours of the morning. The setting moon was a stunning sight as the last couple of elephant went on their way. There was a never ending stream of animals coming down to the pan during the next few hours – great herds of impala, shy and hesitant kudu, waterbuck, buffalo, warthog, flocks and flocks of trilling helmeted guineafowl gathering in a great grey, spotty crowd at the fresh water stream now spilling down into the pan, a couple of troops of baboon which caused a ruckus as some youngster got noisily and rather cruelly dealt with and the pair of gorgeous Saddle-billed Storks along with the resident Hamerkop fossicked around in the mud, catching frogs for breakfast. A couple of Squacco Herons flew in from goodness knows where to spend the day and birding, generally, was great.

As well as the counters occupying the available Parks accommodation, the various lodges and safari camps appeared to have a good occupancy and loads of tourist vehicles packed with guests was about in the park. The campsites were busy too with many South African and Botswana campers, a couple of Overlander groups and the usual school groups staying at the wild dog centre. Some folk are very quick to criticize and while we are all aware of the shortcomings, it would be far better to focus on the "good" things that have been done, rather than all that is not right. We do feel that Parks management, generally, has improved and the people on the ground are trying to keep things ticking over under very difficult circumstances.

Once again, we should like to thank all the sponsors and donors that do make a difference and

would like to congratulate Gary who is a worthy recipient of the Ted Hyson trophy this year which is a WEZ award to someone who has done a great amount of work for the society over the year. So well done, Gary. Thanks must also go to Stephen and Sue Long at Sinamatella who also put in an amazing amount of work, quietly and as efficiently as they are able. Thank you to all who have expressed interest in our periodic news updates and once again, we ask that if you DO NOT wish to receive them, please let us know. We have also had several people complain that they have stopped receiving our newsletters but it usually turns out that they have changed email addresses and have omitted to let us know. So please bear this in mind when changing yours!

Until next time, the best way you can support the park is to visit it.

“Only if we understand, can we care, only if we care will we help, only if we help shall they be saved”

**John Brebner**

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### **BirdWatch Week at the Natural History Museum – 4 to 10 October**

#### **Adele Edwards**

BirdWatch Week at the Natural History Museum was a very successful collaboration between the Museum and the Matabeleland Branch of BLZ, which did much to raise awareness about Zimbabwe's special species and to promote interest in both the Museum and BLZ. The event began at lunchtime on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> October with the official opening of the exhibit and a talk on the Black Eagle Breeding Survey given by Cecilia Hubbard. During the next week the lunchtime talks were given by Professor Peter Mundy (Some Threatened Birds), Paul Hubbard (Birds in the Rock Art of Zimbabwe), Richard Peek (Hummingbirds) and Gavin Robinson (Ostriches). All the talks were well attended with an average of 75 people attending each session.

The exhibit, which was set up downstairs near the entrance to the Newman Hall where the talks were presented, included posters and displays featuring ten species which are of special interest for one reason or another, as well as posters giving general information such as why birds are important to the environment and need to be preserved. The species featured were: Verreaux's Eagle, Lilian's Lovebird, Grey-headed Parrot, Secretarybird, Kori Bustard, Southern Ground-hornbill, Common Ostrich, Saddle-billed Stork, Southern Carmine Bee-eater and Common Myna. The displays included photographs; write-ups giving some background to the species, its natural history and behaviour and why it is vulnerable or of special interest, and in some cases nests, eggs and mount. The Verreaux's Eagle display included an adult bird perched on the edge of its nest - visitors were amazed by both the size of the bird and its nest.

Our thanks to Anton Bhana for his assistance with printing the posters and photographs. Well done to Cecilia Hubbard and Jean Cranston for all their hard work in preparing the displayed information and for their creative ideas. Congratulations to them and the Regional Director of the Museum, Moira FitzPatrick, and her team for putting together such a professional display that appealed to a wide range of people from school children to avid ornithologists.

### **Walk at NUST – 23 September**

#### **Adele Edwards**

Summer has arrived with a vengeance and even in mid September it became very hot very early, so we brought our meeting time forward to 6:45. Cecilia and Tony arrived early and chalked up ten species in ten minutes while they waited for the rest of us to arrive at the entrance to NUST (National University of Science & Technology). Lead by Professor Peter Mundy we moved on to park near the sports fields and from there walked along a route that took us passed the maintenance unit and some of the residences (unoccupied as term had not yet started) and into thornveld in an undeveloped part of the campus. In a series of stops and starts we paused to examine every flutter in leaf or grass! And it was well worth it as by the end

of our walk we had seen 62 species, at least one of which was new to our ever-growing NUST list. Amongst the birds we saw were four species of sunbirds (Scarlet-chested, Marico, White-bellied and Amethyst), lots of little seedeaters (Blue Waxbill, Brimstone Canary, Jameson's Firefinch, Bronze Mannikin, Green-winged Pytilia, Yellow Bishop, Scaly-feathered Finch and Southern Grey-headed Sparrow) and barbets (Crested, Black-collared, Acacia Pied and Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird). Rattling Cisticola, Sabota Lark, Familiar Chat and African Pipit represented LBJs. After struggling with those it was a relief to see a Crimson-breasted Shrike, Lilac-breasted Roller and Swallow-tailed Bee-eater! Iconic of this area, for me, were the busy and vociferous White-browed Sparrow-weavers. We also saw Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Dark-capped Bulbul and African Red-eyed Bulbul. This last sighting was very controversial! Red-eyed Bulebuls have in the past been recorded on rare occasions in Bulawayo – always in very dry years, which this year certainly has been. This year there have been a number of sightings and as we walked along we were discussing possible reasons for this, when Cecilia and Gaynor, who were walking at the front of our group, spotted one. Unfortunately Prof Mundy did not see it himself and remained sceptical!

The other highlight of the day was without doubt our raptor sightings. The excitement started when we noticed a large brown bird flying amongst the trees off to our right. We couldn't get a clear view of it as it dropped to the ground and when it flew up again it did not rise high enough for us to really see the shape or if there was any pattern under the wing. Luckily for us it remained in the area for some time and eventually we were able to identify it as a juvenile African Harrier-hawk (gymnogene). While this was going on we became aware that a Black-chested Snake-eagle was hovering overhead. He moved off to the left and dropped to the ground. At this stage we started to look like the crowd at Wimbledon – with our heads swinging from left to right as we tried to first get a better view of the harrier-hawk and then tried to see what the snake-eagle was up to! Again we were amazingly lucky as the snake-eagle rose up, with a snake grasped in its talons, and as it flew low overhead transferred the snake to its mouth and proceeded to swallow it.

Our thanks to Prof Mundy for facilitating the visit, accompanying us on the walk, and so willingly sharing his knowledge.

### **Walk at Whitestone's School – 20 October**

#### **Gaynor Lightfoot**

For most of us Whitestone School grounds were unfamiliar territory and we met for our bird walk filled with eager anticipation. The fact that we were meeting in the late afternoon added to the novelty, whilst a shower earlier in the day plus a grey brooding sky that was rumbling and grumbling added to the air of expectancy. Luckily for the walk, though sadly for Bulawayo, no rain fell – though even if it had it is unlikely that it would have deterred this group of birders from a gander around the grounds. When the school administrator was approached about our proposed visit, the idea was welcomed and we were told that they have a resident pair of Spotted Eagle-owls which nest in a large fig tree near one of the buildings. As we gathered in the car park and debated where the owls might be, the question was resolved when one of the birds flew out of a nearby fig and settled again in a jacaranda about 100m away. For the next ten minutes, and again on the return from our walk, we had excellent opportunities to observe these beautiful birds as they perched, sometimes in the open on the edge of the roof or on a street light, and also in flight, moving on ghostly, silent wings. What a treat!

We walked past the swimming pool and chapel seeing Kurrichane Thrush, Tropical Boubou, Black-collared Barbet, Laughing Dove, Crested Barbet, White-bellied Sunbird, Yellow-bellied Greenbul and African Hoopoe. Across on the far side of the tennis courts we saw perched in a tree a Brown-hooded Kingfisher whilst a Groundscraper Thrush scratched in the leaf litter. Above us flew European Bee-eaters and African Palm-swifts. Then we made our way to the rugby field where we saw Pin-tailed Whydahs feeding, an African Pied Wagtail, and then, hopping around in a tree, a little bird that caused great debate. It had a pale yellow chest,

fading to a greyer belly, and a definite eyebrow. On a table under a nearby gazebo we spread out all our various bird books and finally agreed it was a Willow Warbler. We heard the recently returned Red-chested Cuckoo and an Orange-breasted Bush-shrike. After making our way back to the car park we detoured up to the water feature but there were no birds around and the light was already fading. The sunset was awesome, with the clouds turning beautiful luminous reds and orange as the sun sank behind them.

After the walk Helen and Bill Lewis kindly opened their home for a bring-and-braai and those who stayed on enjoyed a very pleasant evening. Our thanks go to them and Jean and Tom Cranston for their hospitality and to Whitestone School for allowing us access to their grounds.

## **Country Districts**

### **Antelope Park - Gweru 3 - 6 Sept 2012**

A good time of the year for all our avifauna wherever one may be!

The birds do become active, at the end of winter, nest building begins, the trees get new foliage, and so the birds are on the move! My friend Jane Boswell from Bulawayo and myself met up at Antelope and had three lovely days camping, on green grass under the trees. We wanted to get a bird count and check list and also to help with bird awareness and encouragement at the park. The manager, Nathan Webb, is a keen birder, as also the guide Kailos Mudenda, and both were so happy to know we counted 90 different species.

The terrain is riverine, grassland and woodland. One morning we had a drive in the park, otherwise most birds were seen in the camp area. A superb Hamerkop was spotted near the dam, and the parents not far away, always talking loudly. We also saw the usual variety of waterbirds, teals, African Jacana, Little Grebe, Common Moorhen, crane, Red-knobbed Coot and Reed Cormorant and White-breasted Cormorant. As the water is receding, Wood Sandpiper, Blacksmith Lapwing and Three-banded Plover were feasting well.

Doves were plentiful, especially around the horse stables, and so nice to see the Namaqua Dove. The heat of the day always brought the descending call of the Emerald-spotted Wood-dove. The characteristic African Fish-eagle call is stunning. Pied, Striped, Giant, Brown-hooded Kingfishers. A pair of Tawny Eagles and a Wahlberg's Eagle was nesting in the trees. Green Wood-hoopoe and African Hoopoe were seen daily. They were chattering away. Southern Black Tit, Chin-spot Batis, Long-billed Crombec, Marico Flycatcher were all busy feeding in the thorn trees new foliage.

A group of White-crested Helmet-shrikes appeared in part of the camp area.

The White-browed Sparrow-weavers have their usual cluster of messy nests on one side of the thorn trees. It was a treat to see a big group of Common Waxbill on the ground. We also saw the Golden-breasted Bunting, Herons - Grey, Black-headed, Squacco, Green-back Heron and Great Egret.

The call of the Golden-tailed Woodpecker is distinct. Barbets-Black-collared, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Crested are well known calls.

It was a truly a great place for birding. We will return.

**Margaret Parrock**

### **More Sweet Waxbills in the Juliasdale Area QDS: 1832B3 - 31/8/12 - 3/9/12**

My wife Carolyn and I spent a long weekend from on a property belonging to friends of ours that is situated about 15km west of The Inn On The Rugarara. . The area is full of granite kopjes and high altitude miombo woodland interspersed with patches of grassland and scrub. The average altitude where we were was about 1,850m, the rainfall was only 300mm in the last rainy season

and the weather was warm, breezy and occasionally partly cloudy. Nearly all of the miombo woodland, that stretched as far as the eye could see, consisted of Msasa trees in beautiful red spring leaf.

On the first afternoon that we arrived we were walking past a narrow strip of miombo woodland between the base of a kopje and an open field when our attention was drawn to small birds gleaning in the red spring leaves of Msasa trees. We identified a pair of Variable Sunbird but then we were very excited to see a pair of Sweet Waxbill with them! This was exciting because it was the first time we had ever seen them and David Rockingham-Gill had advised us to look out for them in the area. The male's black face was very obvious and his female partner looks just like a Yellow-bellied Waxbill but with a paler yellow belly. Three days later, on the morning of the day of our departure, I again saw a male flying through mixed scrub at the base of a bare rock face on the same hill about 300m from the first sighting.

Other birds of interest included Augur Buzzard, Freckled Nightjar, Mottled Swift, Familiar Chat, Cape Robin-chat, Southern Hylia, Wailing Cisticola, Lazy Cisticola, African Dusky Flycatcher and Cape Bunting. In addition a Black Coucal was heard calling from a grassy vlei which surprised me because it must have overwintered, but I know the call well. The total species count was 51.

**Richard Dennison [rolly@zol.co.zw](mailto:rolly@zol.co.zw)**

### **Birdlife Bvumba Trip, Eastern Highlands – November 2 – 5, 2012**

I had the pleasure to join the four-day Birdlife trip to the Bvumba in the Eastern Highlands this month. Roger Castelin at Madrugada hosted the group of 14. As a visitor to Zimbabwe who has birded in Kenya and South Africa, it was a treat for me to be with a group of people who know the birds so well and are just as passionate about being outdoors, enjoying nature and observing, hearing and identifying birdlife.

The group arrived on Friday at about 3 pm and started right off with a short bird walk around Roger's land. The Black-fronted Bush-shrike greeted us as we strolled down the road from the lodge. From there, we split, with one group passing through the forest and the other along the road. It was a pleasant afternoon, hearing the persistent calls of the Olive and Gorgeous Bush-shrikes. For dinner, Roger made us a delicious chicken curry and the group retired in anticipation of a delightful weekend.

Saturday morning was "a typical Bvumba morning," at least one type, very foggy and misty. We were unable to get out until the late morning, when we took a walk around the area. My group was excited to catch a glimpse of the Blue-spotted Wood-dove and made a concerted effort to see the Scaly-throated Honeyguide, though only had a quick sighting as it flew from tree to tree. The afternoon was spent at the Bvumba Botanical Garden with lovely walks through the gardens and the woodlands. We were excited to see the Orange Ground-thrush and the Cape Batis. The day concluded at the famous Tony's Coffee Shop for some delectable desserts (puddings, I should say!) and wonderful teas and coffees. I have never seen a menu of drinks so long and varied! Although I was told almost no one could finish a whole piece, most of the members of the group ordered a full serving and didn't leave a crumb behind! The Whisky Chocolate Cake was a favourite and I shared a slice of Fruit Cake soaked in brandy. Yum!

Sunday, we were treated to another "typical Bvumba morning", this one with beautiful blue skies and refreshing breezes. We were all envious of Bruce Bolnicks's sighting the day before of the Green Twinspot on the road leading up to Roger's, so several members of the group crept down the path to see if they could catch a glimpse of the beautiful bird. Not all had that luck, but most everyone was delighted to have excellent views of the Gorgeous Bush-shrike (and even some cameras were snapping!). The group meandered down the road toward the local waterfall, and ventured down the steep incline for a scenic view, where two Mountain Wagtails were cavorting along the slick rocky surface of the falls. The return past an open field, the group caught view of



an Augur Buzzard pivoted on a fencepost waiting for a passing meal. Red-collared Widowbirds and African Firefinch were enjoying the turned fields, and the first European Bee-eaters were sighted. Some folks left for home after breakfast.

The afternoon was spent on Leopard Rock Golf Course where the dam was extremely low so not many water birds were present, though we had a Giant Kingfisher in good view. It is one of the most beautiful golf courses I've seen, with remarkable scenery of the rolling hills below. And there's even a small chapel for those wanting a most memorable wedding ceremony! The day continued with more walking at the Castle Beacon, a steep hike up to a gorgeous panorama of the eastern highlands. There were Rock Kestrels sitting on the ledges and soaring about, and on the way down, a White-necked Raven was perched in a bluegum tree. I would have loved to go after the Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon calling from afar, but all were feeling a bit tired from the arduous walk up the slope.

Some more birders left early on Monday morning and thereafter only four birders remained. We took a leisurely walk through the thick evergreen forest in back of Roger's place. With Square-tailed Drongos squawking and Livingstone's Turaco calling and rushing from tree to tree, the Red-faced Crimsonwing also made a furtive appearance in the underbrush.

In total, the group counted an impressive 116 species during the four days in the eastern highlands. I would like to thank the Birdlife group for their warm hospitality; I felt very welcome and thoroughly enjoyed the trip.

**Steve Aversa**

#### **Birding in N.W. Namibia**(July-Aug 2012)

In July, my Mum & I went to stay with my brother and sister-in-law, Pete & Hillary Morgan, at their lodge on the Kunene River, in the far N. W. corner of Namibia, which is between the Raucana and the Epupa Falls. (Email [info@kuneneriverlodge.com](mailto:info@kuneneriverlodge.com) or [www.kuneneriverlodge.com](http://www.kuneneriverlodge.com) Tel; +264 (0) 65 274 300

This used to be a very good wild life area, but sadly, the army shot almost everything out, during the wars with Angola. The area is now a Conservancy and over the past 4 years, Kudu, Mountain Zebra, Giraffe and Black-faced Impala have been released into the area, to supplement the small nucleus of these species. The region is also home to the Himba people, some of whom still follow their traditional lifestyle and KRL organize a visit to a local Himba family.

It's certainly quite a trek to get there from Zim, but for birders, who have the time, a good truck, and can include some other wonderful places in Bots and Namibia, (i.e. Okavango + Etosha etc.!) along the way, it's WELL worth the effort! ...As well as birding trips, the lodge also offers, white water rafting, canoeing, fishing, sunrise and sunset river cruises. If you're touring Namibia and travelling long distances, KRL makes a very welcome, peaceful place to take a break, before setting off on your next loop of your journey... Namibia is a much bigger country than Zimbabwe, so you'll either need at least 2 months off, or you'll need to decide what you specifically want to see. (Don't be deceived; the distances are much further than they might look on the map!) As Namibia only has about 3 million people, most of whom live in Windhoek, Swakopmund, and the Caprivi strip, it leaves most of the country very scarcely populated, virtually untouched, which is wonderful. Geologically, it's a very interesting country to visit. The main roads are very well maintained, but there are plenty of very interesting, magnificent, "off the beaten track 4X4 roads", where you need to be totally self sufficient, if that's more your style of transport! To get to KRL in the winter, you would only need an ordinary truck, but a 4X4 is advised in the summer. Most people visit KRL from April – September, as it is often too hot, and sometimes too wet, in the summer months.

Pete's a keen birder and loves sharing his birding with other similar minded folk! The couple of "Twitchers" whom I saw the Angola Cave-chat with, heard about it on the Internet, and they

immediately started the next morning and drove solidly for 4 days, from Port Elizabeth, in S.A, to KRL! There aren't vast numbers of water birds, possibly because the river levels rise and fall daily, depending on how much water is let through the turbines at the Ruacana hydroelectric power station, which produces approximately 50% of the country's power. The power station was built underground in the 1970's by the South Africans and is quite an engineering feat, being very environmentally friendly. The different water levels cause the water birds problems when nesting, as most of the ground-nesting water birds nests get washed away... What KRL lacks in numbers in water birds, it more than makes up for in other "specials".

The countryside around is a bit like the dry Beitbridge area, with a green strip all along the banks of the Kunene River itself. The water in the river is very clean and is a pale greenish colour, as it mostly flows over highly polished iron-stone rocks and clean sand, (with very little mud, swamps or pollution, being partly the cause of the lack of insects and big numbers of water birds) The Lodge has huge shady trees, and they offer accommodation with a restaurant, and campsites on the banks of the Kunene river, looking across to Angola. Below, is a list of the 'special' birds I saw, (that were "special" for me)? It isn't a total list, which would have included plenty of the more common birds that we can see fairly easily in Zim. Looking in the bird books, there are quite a few other "specials" in the area, that I unfortunately didn't see, and being winter, no migrants had arrived yet...

The Bare-cheeked Babblers, are hopping around babbler-fashion in the camp almost all the time, and very easy to see, along with the Swamp Boubou, African Red-eyed Bulbuls, White-browed Coucals, Black Crake, African Green-pigeon, African Mourning Doves, (with their very gentle, soothing calls, all day!) Red-faced Mousebirds, African Scops-owl, (that slept daily, in the tree about 10 metres from my window, near the fruit bats, with their bright little fox-like faces, folding their wings around them, as they settled down to sleep!) The Bats roosted at the end of the branches, in fairly thick vegetation for the shade, and overhanging the river, presumably for peace, coolness and safety. As I watched a White-browed Coucal pestered them for about half an hour, trying to reach them with his beak, but the branches weren't quite strong enough to hold his weight! . After a while, the bats closest to him, lost their nerve and flew into another tree for some peace and quiet, only the ones roosting at the very end of the branches, well out of his reach, stayed put and he eventually gave up and flew away.

In the bush around the lodge the Familiar Chat, Acacia Pied Barbet, Pirit Batis, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, White-tailed Shrike, Monteiro's Hornbill, Ruppell's Parrot, Three-banded Plover, Double-banded Sandgrouse, Meves's Starlings, Pale-winged Starlings, Short-toed Rock-thrush, Carp's Tit, Chestnut Weavers (although being July-Aug, not in breeding plumage) Along the river, Water Thick-knee, Green-backed Herons, White-backed Night-herons, Violet Wood-hoopoe,

Black Storks (flying over head), Lesser Striped Swallows (+ nests in VERY safe places, tucked under the overhanging rocks that are above the whitewater rafting rapids!), African Palm-swifts, Red-billed Buffalo-weavers...

The "Extra specials" for me were....

- 1/. Rufous-tailed Palm-thrush (in the camp most of the time due to the palms)
- 2/. A female African Finfoot, apparently on her own, working her way along the riverbanks, mainly on the Angolan side, under the overhanging vegetation.
- 3/. The Cinderella Waxbills (which are KRL's logo). They are quite rare and difficult to find, but after a good walk Pete found them for us, and has taken some clear photos, showing that they do not look quite like the books! Very little is known about them, but Pete has found the only nest which has 2 separate compartments. A large compartment for the female and her chicks, and a smaller one above that the male uses. They each have separate entrances.
- 4/ The Red-necked Spurfowl that seem to have slightly different markings than shown in most field guides.
- 5/. There are some Grey Kestrels near KRL, but unfortunately I didn't see them this time

6/. The best sighting of all was the Angola Cave-chat! (There's an article on Angolan birds in Dec 2011/Jan2012 Birds & Birding Magazine, with a beautiful photo of the Chat, on one on page 47) It was only recently seen for the first time in Namibia, by a Botanist, who was looking for plants. He alerted Pete, who searched in July and had a good sighting of it. The "Twitchers" twitched! The first couple drove as soon as they saw it recorded on the Internet, taking them 4 days from Port Elizabeth to KRL, hoping to see it... I was so privileged to be able to go with this first group, and after a few hours hot walk, I was the first person to see it, (making me the 3rd recorded person to have seen it in Namibia, and therefore in Southern Africa!). It's only been seen by a very few people since then, as it is certainly not easy to find. It's fairly rare in Angola, and there's about 250kms, between this new location and the nearest known population in Angola. As it's somewhat difficult to find, we took a recording, in the hopes of soliciting some sort of response. After several hours, we all heard a birdcall, that none of the experienced birders recognized at all, and had everyone guessing... Is it possible, that they have been living there all this time, but no one has recorded them before, and because they've been cut off from the rest of the population in Angola for so long, that they've now changed their tune?!... Pete's been walking and scrutinizing the boulder-scrub slopes and has now found 2 separate locations, one with a pair, but they are certainly difficult to find, making them very exciting and interesting. Since then the bird has been observed calling on several occasions and it does differ from any of the available recordings sounding not unlike the plaintive two-note guineafowl 'bideep' that we all know....

I highly recommend a visit to Namibia generally, and especially KRL, to any birders!  
If anyone wants more information, my cell is 0712 217 079, or home Byo 285692

**Sally Simpson**

### **Sightings of interest**

Black Storks *Ciconia nigra* nesting at Siya Lima farm on a big granite feature called Nyambare. Two nest sites, one in use, the other very possibly. 16.09.2012

Map ref – HORSESHOE 1630D2 TS 697585

2 Grey-headed Parrots *Poicephalus suahelicus* seen flying over Chingoma farm, Guruve district, 17h30.

Map ref – CHIKONYORA 1630 D4 TS 6944

**James Varden**

### **Tail Feathers**

A first for us, Thick-billed Weaver juveniles feeding of sunflower seeds in our garden  
Shortly followed by the squirrels!!

I also heard a StripedKingfisher, which is a first for me in Harare

**Leanne Agiotis & Michael Cannon**Glen Lorne

### **Red-headed Weaver (*Anaplectes rubriceps*)**

On Friday 26th October 2012, we were having lunch with friends at the Codfather restaurant at 15 Dacomb Drive, Chisipite, when we observed a Red-headed Weaver building a nest just above our table on one of the rafters of the open-air verandah. I was most surprised as the nearest I have ever seen this bird to Harare was many years ago when I saw a large number of them building nests in a tree near a farm house outside Kwekwe. I have made sure that we made the correct identification of the bird and could find only one other person who said he once saw a single Red-headed Weaver bird in his garden in Greendale. However, fairly wide enquiries confirmed no further sightings of this species in Harare. Perhaps you would be kind enough to enquire from your Bird Society members whether there are any other Harare

sightings.

**Alex Siemers**

**Red-headed Weavers** have nesting in the garden in Greendale – I never saw the bird and was only alerted to the fact when a palm frond ‘swung down’ to eye-level, still attached to the bole, with a nest on the end. Within the last week (14-18 November) we saw a male in Celesta Von Chamier’s garden in Highlands, where it hasn’t been seen before.

**Ian Riddell**

### **Red-throated Twinspots *Hypargos niveoguttatus* in Glen Lorne**

On 4 November 2012 we were having sundowners on a verandah of a house on Ashby Glen Road in Glen Lorne, when a pair of Red-throated Twinspots flew onto a birdbath. The house is on a slope so the verandah is raised high above the garden so the birds must have ‘known’ about it and drunk there before. Unfortunately we were just a few metres away so the pair was uncertain and left after debating ‘should we, shouldn’t we?’ They decided on ‘shouldn’t’ but no doubt will be back.

They appear fairly rare in Harare though are sometimes seen in the Botanic Garden and of course on the Mazowe at Christon Bank (1731C1, in which QDS this sighting falls, though in the opposite corner) and nearby Lowdale Farm. Greystone Park Nature Preserve is another spot, though those records have never been mentioned in *TheBabbler*, and I should think the Umwindsi River must provide good habitat.

**Ian Riddell**

### **Ayres’s Hawk-eagle**

On Sunday the 11th November at 5.17pm an immature raptor landed at Kanga Pan in the Mana Pools National Park to drink. I took several photos and initially thought it was a Booted Eagle; however on close inspection by Ferdie Couto it has been identified as an Ayres’s Hawk-eagle. About two months previously I took pictures at the same pan of what I thought at the time to be an African Hawk-eagle so when I get back to Australia next week will take a closer look at those photographs as I may well have a case of incorrect identification considering the birds look alike, should this be the case I will inform you.

**Patrick Kelly**[patrick.kelly@saboti.co.zw](mailto:patrick.kelly@saboti.co.zw)

### **Help us find the cheetahs of Zimbabwe!**

In January this year my husband and I started Cheetah Conservation Project Zimbabwe (CCPZ). Although the cheetahs in Zimbabwe form an important part of the largest cheetah population in Southern Africa, not much is known about this shy and elusive animal. Our first aim is therefore to conduct a survey in order to find out where cheetahs occur, how many there are and what conservation challenges they face.

I admit this doesn't sound like it has much to do with birds, but... you might have come across a cheetah on one of your birding trips! If this is the case, you can help us by sending us your (historical) cheetah sightings and/or pictures.

Sightings give us an indication of cheetah occurrence so if you have seen this beautiful slender carnivore somewhere in Zimbabwe please let us know when and where, how many cheetahs you saw and whether or not they had cubs. Each cheetah has a unique coat pattern that enables us to identify individuals. If you managed to take a picture send it to us as well so we can add it to our National ID database.

You can send your (historical) sightings and/or pictures to [cheetah@cheetahzimbabwe.org](mailto:cheetah@cheetahzimbabwe.org) or fill in the sighting form at [www.cheetahzimbabwe.org](http://www.cheetahzimbabwe.org).

**Esther van der Meer** Project director

**For sale**

I have a pair of fabulous binoculars for sale. They are LEICA 12X50BA, and in immaculate condition. I had a leather 'cup' made for the front lenses, and these are linked to the eyecups on the front optics. They are fitted with a shoulder strap. I would love someone in the birding fraternity to take them off me for a decent price.

**Gavin Ford** [hawkeyeford@gmail.com](mailto:hawkeyeford@gmail.com)

### **Birding at Umfurudzi**

Varden Safaris is very excited to announce that they will be operating a temporary tented safari camp over the 2012/2013 festive season.

Dates from 20th December to 10th January (others dates possible on request) at the New Umfurudzi National Park just an incredibly short 1.5 hours out of Harare on the Shamva Road.

If you are ever feeling down about Zimbabwe, Umfurudzi is sure to lift your spirits. Come and see what has been happening at this fantastic little known National Park of some 76,000 hectares right on your doorstep.

In the past 18 months 1600 new animals have been introduced to Umfurudzi including Buffalo, Eland, Zebra, Kudu, Wildebeest, Waterbuck, Tsessebe and Impala not to mention the existing residents including Hyena, Leopard, Bushbuck and awesome raptors.

Activities on offer will include Game drives - walking, bird watching, viewing of rock paintings, and incredibly interesting historic monuments and ruins.

That's not to mention the fantastic food and drink that will be on offer including Christmas Day with all the trimmings.

As well we will have a special Wild Spa therapy tent for bush massages, pure bliss.

Ideal location to bring visiting family and friends from overseas.

\*Umfurudzi the closest real safari experience to Harare.

/\*More information contact:

[riding@vardensafaris.com](mailto:riding@vardensafaris.com)

PH: 0772 256434

Email is the best way to contact us.

**Contributions for The Babbler 110 February 2013/ March 2013 may be sent to the Editor anytime between now and 14th January 2013.**