

# THE BABBLER

Newsletter of



BirdLife Zimbabwe  
The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

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0912739370

Eastern Districts Group Peter Gwidibira 0773 524844

Mashonaland East Natural History Society - Chairman Peter Hadingham 04-497035

Secretary Colin de Beer 0279-23931

PLEASE NOTE New Email Address for Julia Duprée: [daliadupree@gmail.com](mailto:daliadupree@gmail.com)  
effective immediately.

**\*National Membership Secretary \***

This is an important part of BLZ and Carolyn Dennison has agreed to take over this function with immediate effect. As she will be responsible for membership issues please send all communications regarding new members, renewals, payments, change of details and other membership-related queries to her at [rolly@zol.co.zw](mailto:rolly@zol.co.zw) or tel: 747567 or 0772-210240.

However Sylvia Muzavazi at the national office will continue to take your membership subscription payments or they can be given to Carolyn or a committee member at any outing.

You can also deposit into the **BirdLife Zimbabwe** account at **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 advise Carolyn by e-mailing a copy of the slip or by telephone.

**\*Subscription Renewal\***

**Your membership is important** to BLZ, whether or not you are able to attend the 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 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 *Babbler*, every two months. The more members we have the more effective we can be at lobbying government, communities and local and international organisations.

The BLZ membership year runs from April to March and therefore subscriptions for 2013 will be due by 31 March. Subscription fees have not been increased this year, but a donation towards the costs of our publications especially, will be very welcome.

**\*\*Subscription Renewal\*\***

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

### Message From The President

#### **Resignation of BirdLife Zimbabwe Director, Chip Chirara**

It is with regret that I announce the resignation of our Director Dr Chip Chirara. His resignation was effective from the 1st of January 2013. After eleven years' service we wish him well in his future endeavours. We are having discussions with Birdlife International and the RSPB as to where, as an organisation, we go from here.

**Tony Wood**

### **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

##### **February/March 2013**

Mukuvisi	Sunday 3 <sup>rd</sup> February 2013	0630
	Sunday 3 <sup>rd</sup> March 2013	0630
Chivero	Sunday 10 <sup>th</sup> February 2013	0630
	Sunday 10 March 2013	0630
	(Meet PE School car park)	
Monavale Vlei	Sunday 17 <sup>th</sup> February 2013	0700
	Sunday 17 <sup>th</sup> March 2013	0700
Vlei Walk	Saturday 19 <sup>th</sup> January 2013	0700
	Lead by Alex Masterson	
	Rainham Dam`	

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

Sunday 24 <sup>th</sup> February 2013	Ewanrigg Botanical Gardens	0630
Sunday 24 <sup>th</sup> March 2013-01-05	Meet CABS Northridge Centre	0630
	Irvine's/Masvingo Road	

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

Saturday 9 <sup>th</sup> February 2013	Haka Park	0700
Saturday 9 <sup>th</sup> March 2013	Botanic Gardens	0700

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

Thursday 21 February 2013	Anglo Pitta Trip – Tony Alegria
Thursday 21 March 2013	The Indian Myna – Geoff Lowe

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

#### **Outings and Directions to regular venues**

**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**

### **01 - 02 February: SABAP2 Workshop**

As previously outlined in Babblers #109 Dr Doug Harebottle is visiting Zimbabwe to give a series of presentations on the current bird Atlassing project. In Bulawayo the workshop will be held on the evening of Friday 1<sup>st</sup> February starting at 5:30p.m. at "Bean There" (the restaurant at Hillside Dams, previously "The Boma"). The workshop is expected to last a couple of hours and there will be a half hour break mid way during which time meals can be purchased from the restaurant, but you need to order in advance. Meal options are fish and chips or chicken casserole and rice, price \$8. To order your meal phone Lara 0772598711 or Lisa 0776253341, before end of day on Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> January. Soft drinks, fruit juice, tea and coffee will be on sale; members may bring their own cooler boxes. Doug asks that participants "bring a notebook and pen, a GPS (if they have one), their laptop (if they have one) and lots of enthusiasm". Don't be intimidated by this; Atlassing can be very interesting and rewarding for those of us who do not have access to the latest technology. While it is not necessary to book for the workshop (and there is no charge), it will help with the organization if we have some indication of how many people are attending, so if you plan to be there please notify a committee member. The workshop is open to non-members. If there is anyone who would like to attend but who does not have transport, or who doesn't like driving after dark, please let one of the committee know and we will try to assist. The workshop will be followed by a field trip to Tshabalala on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup>; meet at the entrance gate at 7a.m. The fieldwork should be finished by midday but bring chairs and a picnic lunch if you would like to stay on. The entry fee for Tshabalala is \$3 per person (\$2 for over sixties) and \$3 per vehicles.

For more information contact Adele Edwards, phone (h) 882242, (m) 0712366917, email [admin@dambari.com](mailto:admin@dambari.com)

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

The Matabeleland Branch AGM will take place at 10:30a.m. on Saturday 16 February at Pembroke Place. Please bring your own camp chairs. Tea, coffee and cool drinks will be available for purchase from the coffee shop. Volunteers to join the committee would be most welcome.

For more information please contact Gaynor Lightfoot, phone (h) 241008, (m) 0712402341, email [doristoes7@gmail.com](mailto:doristoes7@gmail.com)

### **24 February: Outing to Aloe Gardens Lodge and How Mine**

Aloe Gardens Lodge is situated at the 22km peg along the Gwanda Road. The Lodge has extensive grounds, which include a small dam, and the birdlife is plentiful. Meet at the Lodge from noon for a bring-your-own picnic lunch, or you can order a snack lunch from the Lodge. After lunch we will take a walk around the property then in the late afternoon we will head back to town via How Mine to check on the Barn Swallow roost. At present there are plenty of birds at the roost and hopefully they will still be there at the end of February. (Please note date has changed from that originally advised in Matland Musings of 9 January)

For more information contact Karen Learmonth, phone (h) 244005, (w) 244990, (m) 0772231819, email [afspeg@yoafrica.com](mailto:afspeg@yoafrica.com)

### **10 March: Walk at Lakeside**

We will continue to add to our species list for this area. Professor Peter Mundy, who lives nearby and knows the area well, will be leading the walk and as there should be water in the pools there should be a good variety of species present. Meet at Lakeside at 7a.m. Bring a chair and refreshments for after the walk while we sit and consolidate our list.

For more information contact Adele Edwards, phone (h) 882242, (m) 0712366917, email [admin@dambari.com](mailto:admin@dambari.com)

### **23 March: Black Eagle Survey start-of-season briefing**

2013 is a milestone for the survey marking 50 years of continuous observations. The start-of-season briefing for survey teams will be held on Saturday 23 March at 2:30pm at 20 Eglesfield Road, Fortunes Gate.

For more information contact John Brebner, phone (h) 242634, email [brebnerj@acol.co.zw](mailto:brebnerj@acol.co.zw), or Cecilia Hubbard, phone (m) 0772433733, email [ceilhubbard@yoafrica.com](mailto:ceilhubbard@yoafrica.com)

## **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 0773-524844 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**

### **Mana Pools Game Count** 29/30 September 2012

The Mana Pools Game Count took place near full moon 29/30 September 2012, dubbed the most successful in 20 years, there were 40 teams of counters, but not many noted the birds. Some people made huge effort to get here from Australia, Europe and South Africa, and few were disappointed.

On Saturday 30th temperature reached 41 degrees C and some people had to be treated for heat fatigue.

Some unusual animals noted this year were Sable, Roan, Pangolin, Duiker, Scrub hare and seven forms recorded Nyala. Leopard sightings were similar with one group recording a baboon chasing a leopard.

A Crested Francolin was noted in the Vine Camp area; they are much more common in the south of the park. Swainson's Spurfowl is the more common "francolin" on the river. About 360 Helmeted Guineafowl were counted on 29 September a.m. and I can remember seeing 10 times that many a few years ago. Only 5 Spur-winged Geese were noted. All four woodpeckers on the new Mana Pools checklist were seen. Southern Ground-hornbill were well noted and were probably in 8 different flocks : 29<sup>th</sup> am - 33, 29<sup>th</sup> pm - 20, 30<sup>th</sup> am - 11, 30<sup>th</sup> pm - 42, while Trumpeter Hornbills were much fewer 4, 14, 1, 10.

Lilac-breasted Rollers seem to have decreased, only 3 being noted. European Bee-eaters were heard and seen on the 29 September, but not seen or heard on the 28th. We asked people to record their parrot sightings, the results were:

Grey-headed Parrot	-	-	-	4
Meyer's Parrot	30	17	52	14
Lilian's Lovebird	46	37	35	99.

Owls heard were Pearl-spotted Owlet and African Scops-owl. Owls seen were African Barred Owlet and Verreaux's Eagle-owl. The Marsh, Wood and Common Sandpipers, plus Greenshank and Ruff were seen in small numbers, but had arrived from their breeding grounds in Siberia. Black-winged Stilt were seen in Long Pool and with them was a single Pied Avocet. This is surely a rare bird at Mana Pools.

Three Vulture species were seen, but not the White-headed, and someone found the carcass of a White-backed Vulture. One group saw a Western Banded Snake-eagle. An African Hawk-eagle was near its nest and a Martial Eagle was seen. An unusual record was a flock of 9 Yellow-billed Kites flying over. African Fish-eagles counted were 29<sup>th</sup> am - 13, 29<sup>th</sup> pm - 9, 30<sup>th</sup> am - 10, and 30<sup>th</sup> pm - 16. Only a few Rufous-bellied Heron were seen on the vegetation on Green Pool and a few Black Heron were there too. All the ibis were seen and the African Spoonbill was fairly common.

Yellow-billed Stork	54,	40,	37,	39.
African Openbill	3,	5,	2,	3.
Saddle-billed Stork	6,	8,	4,	5.
Marabou Stork	159,	9,	-	10.

Red-billed Oxpeckers are not common birds. I counted 60 birds on the 4 transects we counted. The records for hosts were Eland, Kudu, Impala, Zebra, Buffalo and Hippo. An African Pied Wagtail was also seen on a Hippo.

Last year Mana Pools had ½ its annual rainfall, and the place was terribly dry. Pools were either dry or less than ½ their normal size. Birds along the river were fewer than usual, I think because so many gates were opened last year, and so quickly, leaving a very washed out Zambezi River.

To all the organizers and the staff of National Parks, Mana Pools - a big thank you. We all pulled through without incident.

**D.V. Rockingham-Gill**, [rgill@zol.co.zw](mailto:rgill@zol.co.zw) or 4 Fernleigh Road, P O Borrowdale

### **Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary January 2012 To December 2012**

The 2011/2012 rainy season was fairly average, as the rainfall in Hillside was 93% of Harare's average. However, wader space never appeared because water was drawn from Lake Manyame to supply Harare and Chivero was topped up by Harare's effluent.

#### Species Count

The annual species count was 161, which was the lowest ever recorded. The drop off in species recorded started in 2008 and appears to be directly related to human disturbance in the general area. The total number of species recorded since 1992 rose by 1 to 331. This addition to the total species count was:

- ◆ Black Stork - 1 in April.

In my opinion the other highlights were:

#### Shore and Water Birds

- ◆ Black Heron - 1 in January.
- ◆ Lesser Moorhen - 1 in March.
- ◆ Grey-headed Gull - 300 in April.

#### Other Birds of Interest

- ◆ African Pygmy-kingfisher - 1 in October.
- ◆ Grey-headed Kingfisher - 1 in October.
- ◆ Broad-billed Roller - 5 in January.
- ◆ Pearl-breasted Swallow - 30 in July.
- ◆ Eastern Saw-wing - 100 in July.
- ◆ Sand Martin - 20 in October.

Water birds have shunned Bird Island as a nesting site for the 5<sup>th</sup> year in a row because of netting around it and African darters continue to be rare as only 2 were seen in the whole year. Wood poaching and general disturbance of the woodland by trespassers has continued so that birds that nest in holes in dead branches continue to be uncommon. BLZ gave a donation to Tabengwa, the bird guide from Harare Safari Lodge, in support of his efforts at keeping the pond wall path clear.

We saw or picked up the spoor of Vervet Monkeys, Side-striped Jackal, Clawless Otter, Bushpig, Duiker, Antbear and Porcupine.

Because of the lack of support from members we have decided that we will not go on

these outings when less than 3 people in addition to the leader turn up at Prince Edward School car park.

**Richard Dennison**

**MISSION ACCOMPLISHED - BLZ Mash Branch Pitta Hunt extended to Mozambique 24.11 – 1.12.2012.**

Back in Harare, I lie in bed wondering how I would be feeling now if I had refused the chance to take part in this seminal expedition. Would I ever sleep again with the knowledge that I'd passed up this golden opportunity, had refused Tony Alegria's repeated invitations to join in, had baulked at the \$110 visa. I feel so sorry for every member who wasn't there, who missed the perfect views of that fabulous bird performing its courting rituals on a sunlit branch in the forest in Coutada 12, Catapú, on Fri 30th Nov 2012 at about 0630. We had cameras but have no photos; you simply can't put your binoculars down while there is still a chance of seeing the bird. But we have images in our heads that will never leave us.

It all began at 0600 on Sat 24 Nov; 7 of us met for the birders' journey of a lifetime. We should have been 8 but one cried off at the last minute, citing the expected heat and humidity of inland Mozambique. The border was reached and breached by 10 a.m. and we arrived at Nhambita Lodge near the entrance to Gorongosa National Park at 2pm. Having settled into our cosy 2-person thatched, reed-walled permanent tents, we set out for our first local walk along the tracks around the camp. There was little bird activity but even in the camp we became aware how abundant the Sombre Greenbul and Eastern Nicator are in the area, both always difficult to see but heard constantly everywhere. We also had visits from Red-throated Twinspot, African Goshawk and Lizard Buzzards to the dry riverbed in front of our chalet.

The first 'lifers' for many were Mangrove Kingfisher and Pale Batis, the rest, species seen in Zimbabwe like Common Scimitarbill and Green Wood-hoopoe, Barn Swallow and African Palm-swift. The commonest sunbird appeared to be the Purple-banded.

Sipping sundowners at the swimming pool, we were entertained by Square-tailed Nightjar catching insects just above the surface, or were they drinking like us? At dinner, we met other birders on similar missions. The meals were all delicious home-sourced and cooked and served by the van Zyl daughters and their friends. We were a tad miffed to discover that our Mt Gorongosa trip had been moved forward from Monday to Sunday as we'd hoped for a less tiring day in the National Park but like other incidents this turned out to be a lucky change; the Monday mountain trip had to abort because of impassable tracks. Sakkie van Zyl, our guide for the mountain excursion introduced himself and prepared us for the trip; get up at 0300 and leave at 0330 to be in situ by 0600. This news sent us scurrying for our beds as soon as the meal was over. Not even the choir of Wood, Barn and Spotted Eagle-owl could keep us awake for long.

Sunday was overcast and cool, ideal for a long drive and walk up to the forest fringes of Mt Gorongosa. We were there as planned at 0600, as was the Green-headed Oriole. Its mellow calls teased us from various points in the canopy before we located it. We all had ample opportunity to view it from various angles and in all lights along with Square-tailed Drongo, Livingstone's Turaco, Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon (heard only), Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, African Paradise-flycatcher and Blue-spotted Wood-dove. We made ourselves as comfortable as possible on the steep, rocky path, lay back and searched the canopy for an hour or so. The walk-in takes one through scrub, degraded forest, rocks and mealie patches where lots of common species were added to the list. A few were lucky enough to see Lesser Seedcracker, Pallid Honeyguide, Singing, Croaking and Wailing Cisticola, Red-backed Shrike. It was still only 9 a.m. so we boarded the trucks and drove to the head of the waterfall to have a much-needed brunch. The more daring plunged into the rock pool below the falls, while the sensible ones enjoyed the rest and watched the Mountain Wagtail. Most of us spent the afternoon catching up on the morning's lost sleep but joined the sundowner trip to the viewpoint over the Pungwe, site of a former Portuguese cotton mill, the ideal way to end an exhausting day. That evening it began to rain in earnest and we realized we had been lucky to have our mountain trip brought forward. This

storm, one of the first of the season, continued all night. It also augured well for the Pitta Hunt, as they tend to start calling following the first rains.

At 6 a.m. on Monday our group was at the gate to the National Park where we failed to read the notice warning us never to get out of the vehicle. A mystery raptor however tempted us to commit this heinous crime a little later and resulted in the demand to pay a 2,500mts (\$80+) fine at Chitengo Camp. After a long argument and the summoning of ever-higher ranks of officials we finally escaped with a warning. Phew! Gorongosa National Park does not compare favourably with our Parks; it is expensive to enter and very expensive to stay in the accommodation, you can't get out of your vehicle, the range of animals is limited and there are almost no predators. However, habitat is varied and there are wonderful palm forests with Collared Palm-thrush and extensive floodplains. At the time of our visit it was mostly parched and brown. Carcasses of Warthog, Reedbuck, Oribi and Impala lay everywhere, so numerous that the vultures, satiated, stood around looking bloated. The previous night's rain had reached only a small portion of the park. The birding was good; near stretches of water hundreds of Great White Pelican, Long-toed Lapwing, heron, stork, egret, Spur-winged Goose, ibis and Collared Pratincole. Raptors included Martial and African Crowned Eagles, Southern Banded and Brown Snake-eagle, Bateleur and many more. On returning to Chitengo Camp a stroll around the camp site produced lots of sunbirds; Collared, Scarlet-chested, Variable, Purple-banded, White-bellied along with Red-faced Crombec, Yellow-breasted Apalis and Black-bellied and Violet-backed Starling. There were Ashy and Spotted Flycatcher but we failed to find the Black-and-white Flycatcher.

Back at the camp we learnt that the Gorongosa group had got stuck in the mud and spent much of the day digging out their vehicles, missing out on the Green-headed Oriole. It rained again that night and our Tuesday visit to the quarry area was rather dismal until we saw the Yellow-bellied Hyliota at its nest and could clearly see the extended white bar on the wing. Arnot's Chats were common and vocal at their nesting site. Soon it was time to set out on the 250km journey north to Mphingwe Lodge at Catapú. Rain and potholes slowed us down but we arrived in time for a late lunch. Our afternoon walk within the camp confines was rather disappointing apart from close encounters with a friendly Narina Trogon.

Wednesday morning, we visited all the known Mphingwe Pitta spots but heard only one call. A welcome resident of Catapú was encountered many times and surprisingly confiding, Crested Guineafowl and a Dark-backed Weaver were building its nest in full view of the dining room. Our list was growing steadily but generally the birding was hard work and did not compare with our last visit in October 2010. Woodland and Mangrove Kingfisher, African Golden Oriole, an African Broadbill, Bearded Scrub-robin, Red-throated Twinspot, Silvery-cheeked and Crowned Hornbill, Pallid Honeyguide, Chestnut-fronted Helmet-shrike and Cabanis's Bunting were seen and Red-chested, African Emerald and Klaas's Cuckoo heard.

At dinner that evening we learnt that another group had seen the Pitta in Coutada 12 so confidence increased for the next morning's visit to that area of forest. We set out at 0500 with hopes high and even stopping to see Lesser Spotted Eagles catching termites by 0545 were near the favoured spot peering into the dense bush lining the track, our ears pricked. We did hear the call a few times and once fanned out and moved quietly into the forest in a line but without success. After a time, the calls petered out and we turned our attention to other species like the African Broadbill whose whirring display flight could be heard in many places. This we found quickly and all had good views. We made quite a few stops on our way through forest and woodland stretches before reaching the evergreen forest. New additions to the list were Grey-headed Kingfisher, Böhm's Spinetail, Trumpeter Hornbill, Woodward's Batis, Tiny Greenbul and many others but no Pitta and only one day left. Leaving the forest we followed the GPS's directions to Caia, a small town near the Zambezi now famous for being the entrance to the toll bridge. At the bridge we descended to the old ferry terminal, left the cars and scoped the pool and wetland. This increased our waterbird score with Wood, Marsh and Common Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilt, Greater Painted-snipe, Giant and Pied Kingfisher. On land were Diderick Cuckoo, African Mourning and Tambourine Dove, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater and a wagtail plus our first Pied Crow and House Sparrow at the fuel station.



It being a very hot afternoon, our driver then persuaded us to cross the impressive bridge to the Cua Cua Hotel for an ice cream before driving back to Catapú. After some discussion over sundowners it was agreed to raise the stakes for Friday, our last chance of finding the Pitta, and set out at 0400 calculating that we must have been a little too late that day.

Back to Coutada 12, arriving before 0500. Even quieter than Thursday as we walked, watched and waited along the staked out section of the forest road. The occasional call revived hope but it was now after 0600 and I for one was ready to turn my attention to other species like the Southern Ground Hornbill whose booming voice beckoned me deeper into the forest. Just then we spied Richard's urgently waving arms lower down the track and set off at great speed in his direction. A Pitta was calling from a new location and suddenly it was in a nearby bush next to the road about 2m above it and not in the leaf litter as I had expected. Seconds later it was in full view rewarding us for our patience, bobbing up and down showing off its rainbow features. So excited was it by an answering call from the other side of the road that we could observe it at our leisure until it finally flew deeper into the forest. Alas, one of our party missed out having disappeared out of earshot into the trees. The rest of the morning could not rival those few minutes but was full of good birding. We had Black, Diderick, African Emerald, Klaas's and Red-chested Cuckoo calling around us and other common species were espied in the miombo adjoining the forest. 3 Eurasian Golden Oriole were also briefly glimpsed and heard. We returned to camp at 1100 to relax and savour our success.

The final afternoon we visited a new area for us, the Catapú wetland about 14 kms the other side of the EN1. This also proved productive, the water-lily covered remains of a lake revealing Malachite Kingfisher, African Openbill Stork, Lesser Jacana, Yellow-billed Egret and a large flock of Collared Pratincole. One group was also lucky enough to see an African Marsh-harrier.

As you may imagine a festive mood prevailed at the last evening meal. Not only had we found the African Pitta but we had also surpassed the total species count for the previous visit.

The 750 km return journey began at 5a.m. and was not without incident as, tipped off by I Riddell, we stopped at the Nhamadzo Bridge and soon located the colony of breeding Yellow Weaver plus Thick-billed Weaver, Collared Palm-thrush and a Gorgeous Bush-shrike. A hearty brunch was taken at Selva's as a Goodbye to Mozambique before setting out on the final leg of a fantastic trip that recorded 242 species. Our heartfelt thanks are due to Tony Alegria for organizing the outing, to Tony and Tim our drivers and to the van Zyl and White families for hosting us.

**Ken Dixon with amendments by Tony Alegria and Richard Dennison**

**Greystone Park Nature Reserve**, (Harare 1731C3), Saturday 12th January 2013. Fifteen members of the Mashonaland Branch went to Greystone Park Nature Reserve for 2½ hours, in a short dry spell, of some hours, and saw 70 species, while the Inter Tropical Convergence Zone tipped plenty of rain in the northern suburbs of Harare. The dam was only about an acre in extent and filling fast with red floodwater from upstream mealie fields.

Waterbirds seen were Purple, Grey, and Black-headed Herons, a Hamerkop, and Common Moorhens. Black Crake were heard and Cattle Egret flew overhead. Three Cuckoos were recorded, Red-chested, Levillant's and Diderick. Also seen were Whyte's Barbet, African Stonechat, White-browed Scrub-robin, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, Grey-headed Bush-shrike and Streaky-headed Seedeater.

Amongst the hot wet season, male plumaged birds, we saw 4 Southern Red Bishop, 1 Yellow Bishop, 6 Red-collared Widowbirds and a Pin-tailed Whydah.

Meanwhile some other birds seen, that have increased or come to town since I was a boy, included Purple-crested Turaco, Speckled Mousebird, Violet-backed Starling, Variable Sunbird, Thick-billed Weaver, Red-throated Twinspot and Black-throated Wattle-eye. (The Wattle-eye has been seen in the Mukuvisi Woodlands, will the Twinspot turn up there too?)

**David Rockingham-Gill**

**Monavale Vlei Highlights 2012: Report to BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Branch AGM 17<sup>th</sup> January 2013**

**Dorothy Wakeling**, Monavale Vlei Project Manager. [cosmo@yoafrica.com](mailto:cosmo@yoafrica.com) ; [piumosso@zol.co.zw](mailto:piumosso@zol.co.zw)

**Bird sightings of particular interest selected from the 178 species recorded during 2012.**

**Little Bittern: Jan**

**(Dwarf Bittern: Jan 2013)**

Black Stork: Sept,

Marabou Stork: Jan-Aug

**African Black Duck: Jan-Apr, June, July, Oct-Dec**

Yellow-billed Kite: Mar, Apr

African Cuckoo Hawk: May – September

**Booted Eagle: Apr**

African Fish-eagle: Jan, Feb, Apr

African Marsh-harrier: Jan

Corn Crake: Jan, Feb, Dec

Striped Crake: Jan-Mar

Red-chested Flufftail: July, Aug

Streaky-breasted Flufftail: Jan-Mar

**Three-banded Plover: September**

**Great Snipe: Mar**

Namaqua Dove: April

**Black Coucal: Jan-April, Dec (numbers increasing)**

Spotted Eagle-owl: Feb

Southern White-faced Scops-owl: Aug, Nov

Fiery-necked Nightjar: May

White-rumped Swift: Oct

Malachite Kingfisher: Jan-Mar

**European Roller: Feb, Dec (Jan 2013)**

**Rufous-naped Lark: Jan**

Red-breasted Swallow: Jan, Oct-Dec

Lesser Striped Swallow: Jan – May, Sept-Dec

Greater Striped Swallow: Jan-Apr, Oct-Dec

**Black Cuckooshrike: Dec**

Groundscraper Thrush: June

**Icterine Warbler: Mar**

Great Reed-warbler: Jan-Apr, Dec

African Reed-warbler: Jan-June, Sept-Dec

Marsh Warbler: Feb (Jan 2013)

Lesser Swamp-warbler: all year

Dark-capped Yellow Warbler: all year except July and August

Little Rush-warbler: all year

**Broad-tailed Warbler: Apr**

Willow Warbler: Jan-Mar, Nov, Dec

**Lesser Grey Shrike: Apr, Dec**

Copper Sunbird: Jan-Apr

Cuckoo Finch: Jan-May; Oct-Dec (**11<sup>th</sup> April, flock of 300+**)

**Missing:** Capped Wheatear, possibly because of later burning.

**Mammals:**

Common Duiker, Clawless Otter, Bush pig, Scrub Hare,

**Snakes:** Olive Grass Snake, Three-striped Grass Snake, Mozambique Spitting Cobra,

**Amphibians:** Giant Bullfrog

**Bird Ringing:**

The BLZ Ringing Group has visited the Vlei a number of times during the year. Interesting records are coming through, such as re traps of migrant warblers. Their visits are much appreciated and contribute greatly to our knowledge of the Vlei birds.

### **Visitors:**

Friends of the Environment, Oxfam, UNESCO, Dzikwa Trust, Green Africa Network, UNDP, EMA, Midlands State University, UZ Planning Dept., Chitungwiza CBOs, Harare Residents Trust, All Time Media, EU, Dutch Embassy, IWT Resource Committee, City of Harare Councillors, ZIMPHOS, Ramsar Secretariat, WWF, Journalists, Humanitarian Information Foundation Centre, Mukuvisi Woodlands, National Herbarium Staff from Botanic Garden.

**Birdwatchers from beyond our borders:** South Africa, Finland, Switzerland, Norway, USA, UK, Canada

**Workshops:** Composting and Vermiculture, Sept. CBO's and EMA

**Fire on Monavale Vlei:** 21 June, 4 August, 8 August, 9 August, 22 August, 23 August.

### **Monavale Vlei Poster on Wetland Conservation for PAOC 2012**

We are very grateful to Anthony Cizek for putting together a poster on the work COSMO has done through the Monavale Vlei project on wetland conservation. He presented it at the 2012 PAOC. Alex and Tony brought it back to Zimbabwe.

### **Bird Data Analysis:**

Dr Neil Deacon is kindly analysing the Monavale Vlei daily bird records, with the emphasis being on reporting frequency relating to result variances. Katy Lannas has given statistical advice and will be contributing to analysis. Alex Masterson will also contribute.

The 3rd Sunday of the month Monavale Walk field cards will be handed over to BLZ for inputting onto their database, once a copy has been made.

### **Plant Survey:**

By Christopher Chapano, National Herbarium, Botanic Garden, Harare, 19 December. 110 plants were collected within 2 ½ Hours. Specimens added to the Monavale Vlei collection held at the Herbarium. This list is still to be combined with the existing list.

### **Ramsar Site Status:**

Monavale Vlei has been selected as a Ramsar Site along with 6 other sites in Zimbabwe. The Secretary General of Ramsar, Sir Anana Tiega is visiting Zimbabwe later this month, Jan 2013 – Feb 05. He will tour the various sites. Zimbabwe will be accorded accession status to the Ramsar Convention in March this year. A World Wetland Day press conference will possibly be held at Monavale ahead of the national day celebrations.

### **Monavale Local Environmental Subject Plan:**

This has been approved by Council, advertised and is ready to be added to the Harare Master Plan.

### **Conservation Society of Monavale continues to spearhead wetland protection throughout the City;**

assists other communities in protecting their wetlands; is working on creating a Harare wetland lobbying and advocacy action platform. It works closely with EMA and the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Management in implementing wetland protection. The wetland gazetting of July this year is an example of this effort. Media tours to wetlands are undertaken.

### **Indigenous Tree Nursery**

Sales are not covering costs. Please spread the word about buying our trees. We had hoped to fund our Vlei expenses through this initiative but have not managed this. The land is up for sale and we are looking for funding to buy this 2-acre plot before end March with the intention of building a wetland interpretive centre.

### **UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Status**

The application was worked on during 2012 and will be submitted to Paris by March this year.

### **UNDP GEF SGP Funding**

Two years later we have received the small outstanding tranche of our funding to publish a small booklet on wetlands. We are appreciative of the support UNDP has extended COSMO with this programme.

### **Thank you:**

To Jimmy Muropa for his daily bird records and for taking visitors on walks. His knowledge is considerable, and increasing with the years! He has been with COSMO since 2005.

To COSMO Trust, particularly Steve Davies who works tirelessly on the Vlei Project, and the community for their support.

To BLZ members for their contributions and taking part in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday walks.

To Bobby Warren-Codrington for accompanying birding groups on the Vlei during the wet breeding season!

### Monavale Daily Bird Records and Rainfall Statistics kept since 2005.

Monavale Vlei Bird Species Counted 2005 to December 2012: 210-238

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total Bird Species	Rainfall in blue	
142	136	137	124	103	100	102	102	110	117	120	129	178		2012
72	62	59	66	56	32	65	32	47	57	62	70			3 <sup>rd</sup> Sun 2012
267.5	171.5	173.5	24.5						37.5	94.5	215	924mm		335 Jan 2013
144	132	136	124	106	96	103	99	108	106	125	134	177		2011
66	71	75	61	56	56	48	58	45	66	68	80			3 <sup>rd</sup> Sun 2011
221	75	62	9	1	2.5	9			35	115	419.5	940mm		
142	140	136	111	93	87	97	106	107	121	130	143	181		2010
62	66	61	54	46	54	32	64	63	62	83	78			3 <sup>rd</sup> Sun 2010
207.5	171	49	178	3.5					25.5	126	152	912.5mm		
131	123	120	114	95	89	100	91	103	109	120	127	163		2009
70	51	59	49	45	47	37	47	44	51	61	57			3 <sup>rd</sup> Sun 2009
197.5	130	165.5	20	40					4	142	183	937.5mm		
117	113	115	110	90	91	87	98	103	108	112	126			2008
52	53	52	45	25	45	45	50	40	47	64	71			3 <sup>rd</sup> Sun 2008
383.5	38.5	43	33						9	167.5	253	927.5mm		
121	118	112	109	91	91	91	93	97	101	109	116			2007
58	69	53	53	40	39	53	53	55	57	73	52			3 <sup>rd</sup> Sun 2007
174	58.5	92.5	45.5	2.5				4	2	168	540	1087mm		
116	114	115	107	85	90	86	92	92	101	104	106			2006
	58	52			49	35	48	41	36	48	52			3 <sup>rd</sup> Sun 2006
279	171.5	155.5	3						9.5	65	148.5	832mm		
								43	63	95	100			2005
183	94	137	24	8				.5	12	106.5	285	850mm		

### Recent Reports

#### Christmas Bistro – 1 December

Our end-of-year get-together was once again a feast of fun and food. Tony and Cecilia hosted the evening and prepared most of the food and we thank them for their hospitality. All the committee took a hand in sourcing ingredients for the

evening and thanks to the kindness and generosity of our donors we were able to make a profit of \$187 on the evening.

**Adele Edwards**

### **Peri-Urban Potter – there's more!**

We appreciate the opportunity to complement Adele's write up in *Babbler* 109 by including a few details that we feel characterise this event and describe its purpose. Judy Ross came up with the idea in 2011 and she has run this half-day project every year since. Its aim, apart from a fun day out, is an attempt to ascertain which birds occur in and around Bulawayo in areas not normally visited by birdwatchers. A bit of a treasure hunt really, as at the starting point participants are given maps directing them to selected venues in and around Bulawayo (for which formal approval has to be obtained) to record what they see.

This year as we were a small group we all went together. First port of call was the Breedon Everard Racetrack on the Vic Falls road, where we parked at the pits and walked through scrub across to some tall trees. The habitat includes grassland, acacia bush, a variety of shrubs and well-grown indigenous trees and lovely open space. Here we identified 24 species typical for this sort of area, including a Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler, African Pipit, Long-billed Crombec, Zitting Cisticola, Red-billed Buffalo-weaver (on nest), Spotted Flycatcher, Chin-spot Batis, a couple of sunbirds (White-bellied and Scarlet-chested), Little Brown Jobs in the form of bishops and whydahs, and Streaky-headed Seedeater. Overhead glided (should that be "glid"?) a Yellow-billed Kite and noises off were provided by Crowned Lapwing and Magpie Shrike.

Next we visited the Crematorium garden, mostly cultivated and including a few mature exotic and indigenous trees, a bit of a river (dry) and a couple of buildings. We saw (sometimes with difficulty!) and heard 10 species, rather different from above: 3 doves – Rock, Red-eyed and Laughing; colour was provided by Little Bee-eater, Lilac-breasted Roller and Brimstone Canary; and soundtrack by Pied Crow and Red-faced Mousebird.

Finally, off to the Municipal Caravan Park, a green, cool and shady haven where we settled ourselves comfortably to continue our bird watching from a sedentary position with refreshments to hand. Cultivated, irrigated and with mainly exotic trees this area attracted 20 species. Kurrichane Thrush, Dark-capped Bulbul and White-browed Scrub-robin enjoyed the sprinklers; African Hoopoe potted around on the grass, Green Wood-hoopoe poked around in a tree trunk, Fork-tailed Drongo oversaw the proceedings from a low branch; Black-collared Barbet *two-puddled*, Crested Barbet yodelled, and Black-headed Oriole sang sweetly in the trees above; Arrow-marked Babblers clattered through shrubs below as only they know how.

A most unusual and enjoyable outing during which we recorded 45 species overall, and which culminated in our sighting of the season's first reported jacaranda in flower - an important traditional event in Bulawayo's calendar!

**Julia Duprée** January 2013

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

**Adele Edwards**

Birding Big Day (BBD) 2012 took place over the weekend of 24/25 November. The results are summarized in the table below. Sixteen teams took part in various places around the country including Hwange National Park (Sinamatella), Mana Pools (Nyamepi), the Eastern Districts, the Lowveld (Chiredzi and Chilo Safari Lodge) and Gwanda, as well as in and around Bulawayo and Harare. Weather conditions were not favourable in many areas, and there were the usual grumbles about the absence of regulars. However the general consensus was that everyone enjoyed the event and that is very important. The data collected are all very useful and the field cards are being sent on to National Office.

**Congratulations to the Bundu Boys, who recorded an astounding 266 species in 36 hours, and to the Pel's Challengers who recorded 191 species in 24 hours.** Eight other teams recorded over 100 species. The information from those

teams who recorded fewer species is still very significant and we appreciate your input. Well done everyone! We mustn't forget that one of the aims of BBD is to increase awareness about birds and birding and to encourage more people to get involved and enjoy the pleasure of birding – and I believe all the teams were also successful in this regard.

A special thanks to those teams who raised sponsorship. Once again the Bundu Boys were ahead of the rest raising a fantastic \$885, equalling their success last year. Well done that team! The contributions from those teams that brought in smaller amounts were also much appreciated by their branches. Members of the three teams, which raised over \$100, will be receiving commemorative cloth badges in recognition of their efforts.

Our sincere thanks to all those who took part in BBD12. By now you are no doubt aware of the SABAP2. This will add extra interest to BBD13 and we look forward to having even more teams participating in this year's event.

Team Name	# of Species	Location	Member 1	Member 2	Member 3	Member 4	Sponsor-ship
<b>Garden : 24 hours</b>							
Glen Top Twitchers	43	Glenwood, Harare	M Cannon	L Agiotis	B Rhodes		
Ilanda Gardens	34	Ilanda, Bulawayo	C Gifford	J Ross	K Wessels		
<b>Garden: 36 hours</b>							
Crake Cottage Counters	55	Monavale, Harare	D Wakeling	H Lewis	J Kelly		
<b>50km radius: 24 hours</b>							
Pel's Challengers	191	Chilo Safari Lodge	C Stockil	L Barrie	M Horsley	R Horsley	
Crazy Bustards	177	Harare	J Pierini	J Rautenbach	D Dalziel	N Hart	
Bhejane	133	Sinamatella	Sue Long	S Long			
Bunny Huggers Incorp	115	Burnside, Bulawayo	John Brebner	J Brebner			\$20.00
The Louws	74	Harare	I Louw	R Louw			
Happy Feet	64	Bulawayo	G Lightfoot	E Lightfoot	A Edwards	M Friend	\$25.00
The Lemons	36	Bulawayo	K Learmonth	M Learmonth			\$108.00
<b>50km radius: 36 hours</b>							
Bundu Boys	266	S 18 18 135 E 32 31 022	G Douglas	John Francis	J Francis		\$885.00
Sanjul	166	Tshabalala	J Dupree	S McAdam			
South West Wanderers	159	Gwanda	C Hubbard	T Wharam	L Wharam		\$50.00
Four Flufftails	156	Chiredzi	J Jackson	K Connoly	J Hill	G Wilson	
Angwa Angolensis	147	Masoka Village, Mash West	T Wood	J Ball	M Zarota	S Ferreira	\$218.00
Peterhouse Learner Hunter Guides	100	Mana Pools, Nyamepi	P Raynor	A Kashula	J Cragg	B Ross	

Below are report backs from two of the participating teams.

### **Birding Big Day, November 2012, Chilo Gorge Safari Lodge Clive Stockil & Lin Barrie**

Our count started at 06:00 on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> and ended at 06:00 on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> November. We ended up spending the 24 hours within a 10km radius of the Chilo Gorge Safari Lodge. This covered the Save Runde Junction and the large pans of

Tembwehata and Machanu - the latter was almost dry with a little water and mud reaming. We also covered the sand forest on the east bank of the Save and a little mopani woodlands. The day was sunny and very hot with the temperature reaching 42°.

Some comments and highlights

1. White-browed Sparrow-weaver: this is a recent arrival to the Gonarezhou. Two pairs had built nests in an acacia tree which was then pushed over by elephants; they have since rebuilt in a mopani tree not far away.
2. The female Lesser Kestrel which landed in a dry tree gave us a great sighting.
3. Several Collared Palm-thrushes in the palm forest / riverine woodland were a pleasure to see.
4. The Narina Trogon was heard calling from the Gorge below the lodge.
5. The bonus was the Pel's Fishing-owl that flew down and landed on the opposite sand bank in front of a herd of elephants drinking in the Save River.

### **Birding Big Day, November 2012, Sinamatella**

#### **Stephen Long**

We decided to take a big circular route for this year's BBD, from Sinamatella to Mbala Lodge, from Mbala along the railway service road to Inyantue, from Inyantue to Shumba via Tshompani Dam then from Shumba back to Sinamatella via Mandavu Dam. It sounded a perfect route, several different types of habitat; plenty of scope to get out of the car along the railway road and water birds at Mandavu, so we expected a big score.

First were the night birds. We sat out on the edge of Sinamatella hill to listen. Frogs, hyenas, lions even, but not many birds. Eventually all we could tick off were a couple of nightjars and owls, not a great start, so we went to bed ready for an early start on the day-birds next morning. When the alarm went off at 04.30 there were already birds calling and by the time we left Sinamatella an hour and a half later we had a decent score of fifty-five. Nothing spectacular at that stage and a number of unexpected gaps (where were the Bearded Scrub-robins, the Green-winged Pyillias and the Laughing Doves?) but not too bad for a beginning.

The first setback occurred on our way to Mbala. Near the Gurangwenya River we met up with a pack of Wild Dogs – and what a pack it was; seventeen adults and eighteen pups. There was no way we could just pass that by and we spent at least half an hour with the dogs, taking loads of photos and not ticking off a single bird. Oh well, sometimes even birding has to take a back seat. By the time we reached Mbala we'd begun to realise that the birding was going to be difficult. The sky was overcast; the wind was blowing strongly and high humidity made it surprisingly hot. Hardly a bird was moving or calling. We ticked off a few at a small pool on the Lukosi River, including Red-faced Cisticola and Red-billed Firefinch that we weren't likely to get elsewhere, then headed down the railway road towards Inyantue. The road passes through a number of small rivers with quite dense vegetation and in the past we have recorded such species as Eastern Nicator along here so we stopped at various places to walk and listen. It was hard going. The rainy season had yet to reach the area, there was no water and there were very few birds to be seen. Near Pongoro Siding we got our first special of the day. Driving through bush consisting of a mosaic of scrubby acacia, mixed with bigger Mopane and various other species, we saw what we thought were two Spotted Flycatchers in a low acacia but their behaviour wasn't right so we stopped to look more closely. They were not shy and we were able to watch them moving through the acacias. They were the size and shape of flycatchers but the bill was too heavy and we eventually identified them as Olive-tree Warblers – a new species to us. No other interesting species turned up before Inyantue where we re-entered the Park with just eighty-six ticked off. We had hoped to find water in some of the big pans between Inyantue and Tshompani but all were dry and there were few birds to be seen. We had expected simple things like Southern White-crowned Shrikes and Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills in the Kalahari Sand areas but like a lot of our predictions for the day that turned out to be wrong. At Tshompani there was a little water from the pump with a couple of elephants drinking. There were many Marabou and Vultures on a buffalo carcass and flocks of Red Billed Queleas and Whydahs so we were at last able to tick off a few more than

head for Shumba where the picnic site was a certainty for Amethyst Starlings, those elusive Yellow-billed Hornbills etc.

Of course we were wrong again. We did get a couple of the Shumba certainties – Red-billed Buffalo-weaver and Rufous-naped Lark but once again there were few birds moving or calling and still plenty of unexpected gaps in the list when we moved on towards Masuma Dam.

Masuma is in the process of being scooped and looks like a building site. There was very little water and few water birds. We ticked off African Sacred Ibis – there were four of them feeding on – well I dread to think what, in a disgusting pool of water around an elephant carcass and also Woolly-necked Storks feeding on the open ground beyond the Dam. The camp attendants had filled the birdbaths and we added Black-throated Canaries as well as a couple of unexpected Wattled Starlings.

With the sky filling with dark clouds we drove to Mandavu, arriving just minutes before a heavy storm. There was just time to tick off the simpler water birds –Black-winged Stilts, herons, Egyptian Geese then we were marooned in the car, visibility nil for half an hour with the rain pouring down. When it stopped we moved to the top end of the dam where the Mandavu River was already flowing and we were able to add Greater Flamingos, African Spoonbills, Goliath Heron and a few waders.

The last part of the day took us around Salt Spring loop. Since leaving Sinamatella in the morning we had been seeing occasional large grey cuckoos flying across the road but never stopping. Close to Salt Spring we met a bedraggled, wet cuckoo sitting in easy view and were able even to see it's under tail and identify it as a Common Cuckoo. I suspect the others we had seen were the same, just arriving and passing through the area.

Back at Sinamatella we tried, but failed, to add some of the obvious, easy species that were still missing from the list and when the 24 hours was up, all we had ticked was 133 species. That's well down on what we expected and well down on last year with a lot of birds we see or hear every day not recorded. Of course, the next morning we woke to the song of White-browed Robin-chat, the Bearded Scrub-robins were practically hopping around on the veranda, the Black-cheeked Waxbills were at the bird bath and Levillant's Cuckoos called from all around. Too late!

### **The 13<sup>th</sup> Pan African Ornithological Conference - Arusha, Tanzania** **14- 21 October 2012**

The first of these congresses was held at the Victoria Falls in 1959 and was organised primarily by John Graylin, then an attorney/solicitor in Livingstone and later a Minister in our Federal government. That Congress was noted for the discovery of Taita Falcons in the Falls Gorges. This 13<sup>th</sup> Congress was due to be held in Nigeria but during 2011 it was decided to move the venue to Tanzania for security reasons. Tony Wood and I decided to go because David Rockingham-Gill said someone should go, because we could and because it was important that the African birding community should be exposed to the energy and enthusiasm of our outgoing President, Dorothy Wakeling, and Acting President, Julia Pierini. In the end the ladies could not make it and we had to do our own washing up.

Arusha, at the foot of towering Mt Meru and only 60kms from Kilimanjaro, is just as big as Harare and it hums. Town planning has been superseded by progress and development throughout much of the country but Arusha had some streets as pretty as any in Harare. The people are totally free of any racial angst but very few can speak English. Everyone speaks Swahili and Zimbabweans do not know how lucky we all are when so many of our folk do speak an international language. The Congress was held in a large modern hotel, one of four such places within a few blocks each accommodating over 100 people and capable of catering for 300 and more. Prices were over US\$100.00 per day but we got boarding-house-type digs at US\$30.00 for bed and breakfast, within walking distance of the venue.

Congress sessions were attended by up to 300 people though 50 to 150 were more normal numbers. Many of the big names from South Africa were not there save for those from the ADU (Statistics) arm of the Fitzpatrick Institute. They were there in force to counter the opposition of two other contenders for all the data that the continent could offer. A good half of those attending were Africans, many of them young men, mostly sponsored and presenting papers in a concerted effort to bring



the indigenous people into what has been the white man's preserve of conservation. Oziman Mabachi also represented Zimbabwe ex Birdlife Zimbabwe and Driefontein cranes, Josphine Mundava, a NUST protégé of Dr. Peter Mundy's and Anthony Cizek. Josphine had the misfortune of having to present her second paper as the last act of the last session on the last Saturday. Ex-pats included many from Europe and abroad who are working on birds in Africa and a substantial VIP contingent.

Each day included two or three plenary sessions addressed by an invited guest. These were all first class – well prepared, full of substance and well presented. Some 40 minutes were devoted to these talks after which there would be 4 to 6 shorter oral presentations of 12 minutes only on many other topics. The organisers had prepared a magnificent 130 page "Programme and Abstracts" book from which one could pick and choose what talks to go to. Two plenary session topics that took my fancy were an address by Dr. Kathy Martin from Vancouver on cavity-nesting birds and Les Underhill from the ADU who launched a massive data gathering exercise for ordinary birders to build up a vast bank of information on all the weavers, bishops and widows. Shorter presentations that stand out in my mind included one on Airports and air strikes. The essence of this talk was "Don't build an airport next to the municipal rubbish dump". Otherwise there will be many collisions with Marabous and "YBKs" – kites.

Another interesting subject related to the adaptability of Little Egrets to environmental changes on Lake Victoria. The originally fair sized population crashed when Nile Perch were introduced and ate up all the little cichlids on which the egrets lived. Then came water hyacinth that shaded out and de-oxygenated the water under big mats of hyacinth that floated out "to sea". This suited the cichlids and therefore the egrets that took to sailing the ocean. But hyacinth was brought under control and the egrets had to think again. By now they had learned that the surface of the waters out in the open swarmed with kapenta-like 'dagaa' fish. So now the egrets fly low over the water, well away from land and snap up fish as they go feeding in flight.

An Australian girl attached to the PFIAO had been working on tagging Verreaux's Eagles with transmitters that told you where each bird was every three minutes and what it was doing: sitting, flapping, soaring, feeding, etc. She was a reluctant participant but 'forced' to perform and explain her early results. The reason for her reluctance became evident when she had to acknowledge that the programme to which she was working showed that her eagles spent a lot of time 'floating'. The programme had originally been designed to track albatrosses. It needed 'a bit of attention'.

The Conference included a day in the field where 39 new long bodied land rovers from one tourist company's fleet of 150 such vehicles took us to various nearby game parks – Tony Wood will expand on that. A lot of free wall space in the venue was also taken up with a display of 60 to 70 posters on c1.5m<sup>2</sup> each. These covered a mass of fascinating information about an equal number of different birds and facets of birding. There was plenty of entertainment when the talking got heavy.

One of the principal objects of attending the Congress was however to meet people who produce the funds which keep ornithology ticking. They were the people who Dorothy and Julia should have been finding and whose monies they should be raking in for Bird Life of Zimbabwe. Undoubtedly the big name for this Congress was that at Dr. A.P. Leventis. He is already doing for West Africa what the Niver family did for Southern Africa with the establishment of PFIAO. The Leventis flagship is the APLORI, the A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute, which is based in Nigeria. He is already moving into East Africa and Tony and I were careful to bring little old Zimbabwe to his mind. Mrs Leventis quickly took us up but we had to say "Not just yet". Wally van Sickle with his Idea Wild was there from America: looking for birding organisations seeking help in kind – not in cash. We got the message and so did he. Bird Life of Zimbabwe will be taking that up. Julius Arianaitwe was another important person and one who will be willing and able to help. He is BirdLife International's top man in Africa. Based in Kenya he is committed, focused and well aware of the need for conservation organisations to secure political appreciation of the value of Africa's wild life resources and a serious commitment to apply and enforce laws enacted for those purposes. The local organisers, Neil and Liz Baker, Damian Bell and others cannot escape mention for their first class management of

the general operations. Thank you.

The theme of the Congress had been "Birds in a Changing Environment". The congress clearly showed that birds are losing and man is the agent affecting the changes that produce the major immediate adverse changes to the environment. But nobody other than Arianaitwe bit the bullet of expounding the need to secure POLITICAL determination to arrest degradation and promote sustainable use of what is already being developed. Instead the Congress just fizzled out with tributes to three members of Africa's birding community who had passed on since the last congress. Those were sincere and well deserved tributes, but why did the main PAOC Committee fail to capitalise on the presence of Africans from all over Africa by driving home a strong but balanced resolution for the politicians to do their job for Africa and its future rather than for themselves and today.

**Alex Masterson**

### **Christmas Trip to Chimanimani**

Over the Christmas holiday, my wife, Doreen, and I made our first visit to the Chimanimani Mountains for four days of hiking, birding and botanizing. Given the timing (arranged months in advance), I was expecting wet, misty, cloudy weather. Instead we had just one downpour and some sprinkles, and otherwise clear sunny weather with superb views of the stunning mountain scenery. This was bad for the farmers, but nice for us.

Given the research conducted last year on incidence of the Rufous-bellied Tit (*Parus pallid* subsp. *pallidiventris*), it may be of interest to report that I had an excellent view of a male and female near the top edge of the miombo woodland on Pork Pie Hill. Maps in both the *Roberts Field Guide* and the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of *SASOL Birds of Southern Africa* show that this is near the south-eastern limit of their range. (The SASOL guide shows *pallidiventris* as a split of the species.) In the grasslands near the top of Pork Pie, I also found a Buffy Pipit (*Anthus vaalensis*), accompanying a variety of cisticolas; the two field guides suggest that Chimanimani is slightly out of range for the Buffy, but the identification is straightforward (plain back, just a hint of streaking on breast, no malar stripe) and the habitat was suitable.

Other notable sightings included an unusual close-up view of the African Olive Pigeon (Rameron) in the miombo woodland above Outward Bound, many White-throated Swallows in a ravine on the Bundi River below the highland hut, a pair of Half-collared Kingfishers at Tessa's Pool (we had the place to ourselves for hours on Christmas morning), Blue-spotted Wood-doves along the road to the park, and multiple sightings of the East African Swee (now the Yellow-bellied Waxbill) an Red-backed Mannikin, and, of course, a wonderful display of Malachite Sunbirds among the proteas in the highlands. I failed, though, to spot the two birds at the top of my wish list for the trip: the Blue Swallow and Gurney's Sugarbird. And raptors were surprisingly scarce – just a Steppe Buzzard, a Long-crested Eagle and one of the brown eagles that swooped by without giving me a fair chance at identification (it definitely wasn't Wahlberg's). I was watching especially for Kestrels, but none showed up. Trip total: 72 species, not bad, but below my expectation.

**Bruce Bolnick**, January 13, 2013

### **Report on visit to Malilangwe** - Wed 19 to Mon 26 November 2012

Ten of our Mashonaland East Natural History Society Bird Club members from Marondera set off at 6am on Wednesday morning on the journey through Chiota, Beatrice, Chivhu, Gutu and Zaka and we arrived at Croco Motors at the turn-off to Chiredzi Town at 1.30pm. We were met here by a guide from Malilangwe who escorted us on the final stretch of our 527km journey from Marondera to the very comfortable non-commercial accommodation provided for us by Malilangwe.

The magnificent mixed woodlands and riverine habitats of the area were teeming with birds but many trees have been damaged by Elephant recently and the area was very dry. We also visited the Triangle feedlots and the effluent ponds below the Hippo Valley Sugar mill, which added many more birds to our total of 187 different species recorded.

On the relevant two days our team comprising of Jacko Jackson, Kay MacDonald, Jill Hill and Gordon Wilson represented us on the 36-hour "Big Birding Day" exercise, and they ticked a total of 156 different species of birds. To our dismay

they discovered that the Common Myna birds, which are regarded as unwelcome invaders in Africa, have now reached this area and appeared to be nesting at the Triangle cattle Feedlots.

We also saw 15 species of game on our walks and one late afternoon while sitting on the bank of the Chiredzi River with an excellent view of the wide sand stretching into the distance we saw elephant, buffalo, kudu, zebra, impala, bushbuck, waterbuck, hippo and crocodile. On all our daily excursions we were conscientiously minded by Kefas our guard and at the camp Jonathan took excellent care of our needs. Except for one cloudy day the weather was hot and sunny and the temperatures during our stay were very high; being used to the mild weather at Marondera we all suffered. On two of the hot days even the three resident big yellow crocs did not come out to bask on the sand island in front of the camp, and the hippo sheltered under some overhanging reeds.

Of particular interest to us Mashonaland East Birders were: - Goliath Heron; Saddle-billed Stork, Woolly-necked Storks and African Openbill; Hooded & White-backed Vultures; Steppe, Brown Snake-eagle and Bateleur Eagles, Crested Francolin; White-crowned Lapwing; Sanderling; Brown-headed Parrot; African Emerald Cuckoo; Pearl-spotted and Barred Owlets; Woodland & Grey-headed Kingfishers; White-fronted Bee-eater; Trumpeter, Southern Ground, Grey, Red & Yellow-billed Hornbills; Mosque and Black Saw-wing Swallows; Yellow-bellied Greenbul; Eastern Nicator; Dark-capped Yellow Warbler; Yellow-breasted Apalis; Spotted Flycatcher; Yellow-Wagtail; Red-backed Shrike; Common Myna; Meves's Starling; Red & Yellow-billed Oxpeckers; Collared Sunbird; Thick-billed & Red-billed Buffalo Weavers; Long-tailed Paradise-whydah;

The Marondera birders would like to express sincere thanks to Malilangwe for enabling us to enjoy such a wonderful outdoors experience in the lowveld.

**Colin de Beer.**

### **Tail Feathers**

Outside my front door I have two barbet nest boxes: logs into which Black-collared Barbets have excavated nests that they sleep in. Crested Barbets have taken over. I think the one pair is using both nests. This morning a different bird came to one box. It was a Lesser Honeyguide, which promptly flew across to inspect the second nest. It was immediately chased off. - Not by barbets but by a male Southern Masked-weaver. The Honeyguide departed, barbet came home and kicked up a fuss with his special honeyguide protest. Perhaps he had seen the honeyguide go.

**Alex Masterson**

Many years ago there was a pair of **Lanner Falcons** nesting on the 12th floor of the CABS building corner 1st St & Jason Moyo Ave. As I haven't worked in the CBD for many years I don't know what ever happened to them. However on Monday (21 January 2013) I was driving down Rotten Row opposite the Zanu PF building and heard a familiar Lanner screech & managed to look up and see what appeared to be 2 lanners (they were silhouetted so wasn't sure) circling the Zanu PF building!

**Neil Nativel, Harare**

**Buff-spotted Flufftail** has been singing in our garden in Chisipite, Harare for three nights now. (January 2013)

**Tim** [wildreach11@gmail.com](mailto:wildreach11@gmail.com)

Last year, while having tea with John Ford at his house in Marston Close, Greystone Park a pair of **Red-throated Twinspot** appeared at his birdbath (a plough disc, just off the ground, next to a very thick bush).

**David Rockingham-Gill**

**Contributions for The Babblers # 111 April/May 2013 may be sent to the Editor anytime between now and 14th March 2013.**

