

THE BABBLER

Newsletter of



BirdLife Zimbabwe
The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

ISSUE # 111 – April 2013 / May 2013

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PLEASE NOTE: New e-mail address for Julia Duprée: daliadupree@gmail.com

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 on 2nd April. Subscription fees are in USD and have not been increased this year, but donations towards *Honeyguide* and our other publications and activities are welcomed.

Individual or Family members (including children under 17)	\$ 25.00
Pensioners (65 and over) Students and Juniors	\$ 15.00
Schools (high density)	\$ 25.00
Schools (private)	\$ 50.00
Corporate	\$ 75.00
Rest of Africa	\$ 40.00
Rest of World	\$ 50.00

Carolyn Dennison is responsible for membership issues, so please send all communications regarding new, current or old members, renewals, payments, change of details and other membership-related queries to her at rolly@zol.co.zw Tel: 747567 or 0772- 210240. 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.

BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE

Notice is hereby given that the Thirty-second Annual General Meeting of BirdLife Zimbabwe will be held at Chipinda Pools, Gonarezhou National Park at 12pm on Saturday 8th June 2013.

BLZ will be booking out the tented camp at Chipinda Pools for 2 nights - Friday 7th and Saturday 8th June. 4 tents for a max of 6 people will be available @ USD25pppn. Camping: USD15pppn. (Please note that a surcharge of USD5pppn has been applied to the tariffs to cover the expense of our BLZ office staff (Sylvia, Fadzai and Toga)). The tariff is for accommodation only at

Chipinda Pools and does not include National Parks fees. To book and for further information please email: Julia Pierini at pierinijulia@gmail.com

Southern African Bird Atlassing Project

As you know, BirdLife Zimbabwe recently invited Dr Doug Harebottle of the Animal Demography Unit (ADU), University of Cape Town and co-ordinator of SABAP2 to Zimbabwe. This project has been running in South Africa and other countries are now coming on board and the Zimbabwe project was officially launched in Bulawayo on 1st February 2013. SABAP2 is the most far-reaching bird conservation research project in southern Africa and if you don't know the distribution of birds and how they are changing, you cannot do conservation effectively. As a 'citizen scientist' you can contribute too! Don't worry if you were unable to attend one of the presentations or are not a BLZ member – everyone can take part and it has been encouraging to see so many people express interest – from beginners to experienced birders.

Our participation is important - to cover Zimbabwe in the Southern African region, to put on record where our birds are and so assist us conserve our bird biodiversity. The methods are different and pentads are used instead of the QDS (quarter degree square) but this new atlas will show abundance of species on a much finer scale. The exciting thing about this is that information is put on Zimbabwe's map within minutes and we can all see what has been seen, where. Let's light up Zimbabwe – it's fun once you start! Get some friends together and go out and enjoy what's around you. If you are not able to get out much, you can still participate by recording birds in your garden or in your area, by submitting data on 'mybirdpatch'. Interested people please contact me and I will send you the attachments required. We look forward to many of you now wanting to go birding – with a purpose! A new email address has been created for Zimbabwean atlassers: sabap2zim@gmail.com We urge you to contact the team to send you the Quick Start Package - and they are also on hand to answer any questions on how to start up or if you are having difficulties online etc.

How many of you go onto **facebook** - if you don't please start now! **BirdLife Zimbabwe** has its own facebook page which you should go and look at – this is an amazing tool we use to communicate with each other about what's happening in the birding world around us. The access to information that gets uploaded is immediate and available to all around the world. It's great! The good news is that we have now also opened a new facebook site:

Sabap2 Zimbabwe where we will be posting information about our own Zim.Sabap2 project – and everyone can contribute. All of us can go on and share experiences, birds etc. Log in on facebook; go to the 'search' field on the top of the facebook page and type in **BirdLifeZimbabwe** and/or **Sabap2Zimbabwe**.

You do not have to be a member of BirdLife Zimbabwe to participate in this, but we would encourage you to do so. Birds are indicators of the health of the environment and the fact that you are a member supports the on-going ornithological conservation 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.

Subscription fees have not been increased this year, but a donation towards the costs of our publications especially, will be very welcome. Please contact me on rolly@zol.co.zw

Happy birding!

Carolyn

BRANCH ACTIVITIES

Mashonaland Branch

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.

APRIL/MAY 2013 Please note ** New starting time from May is 0700

Mukuvisi	Sunday 7 th April 2013	0630
	Sunday 5 th May 2013	0700

Chivero	Sunday 12 th May 2013	0700
Monavale Vlei	Sunday 21 st April 2013	0700
	Sunday 19 th May 2013	0700

4th Sunday Outings

Sunday 28 th April 2013	Pamuzinda Lodge	0630
Sunday 26 th May 2012	Bushman Rock Meet Mukuvisi Woodlands Office	0700

2nd Saturday Outings

Saturday 13 th April 2013	Greystone Park	0700
Saturday 11 th May 2013	Haka Park	0700

Thursday Meetings at Avondale Sports Club 1730 for 1800

(2nd) Thursday (Change of date owing to public holiday on 18 April)

11 th April 2013	Pentads and Sabap2 Project	Tony Wood
(3 rd) Thursday 16 th May 2013	The Common Myna	Geoff Lowe

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

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 cell: 0772-438697, (04) 490375

One week birding holiday

In the last three years, some of us have enjoyed two very successful one-week outings to Mozambique, so the question arose: "Why can't we have a full week of birding within Zimbabwe" in fact, why not have a full week of birding every year, somewhere? With this in mind, BLZ Mashonaland has planned a full week's birding trip to the Hwange / Vic Falls area from 17th August till 24th August 2013. The first three nights will be spent within the Hwange National Park and the last four nights in the Victoria Falls area – the planned activities are listed below. We will use National Parks accommodation for the entire week and thus will have to self-cater. Travel arrangements and individual/group self-catering options will be discussed nearer the time. To book for this trip, a non-refundable deposit of \$200.00 is required – estimated total cost \$350-\$450 each. If you have booked for the trip and can't make it at the last moment, it's up to you to find a replacement. We could end up with a waiting list, so it may not be too much of a problem! Although all BLZ Members are invited to go on this trip, first come first served – only eight places available initially! If more members want to come we will book more chalets. Travel arrangements and individual/group self catering options will be discussed nearer the time.

Day 1 Saturday 17th August - Depart Harare early to Hwange Main Camp NP lodges.

Day 2 Sunday 18th - Birding Hwange Main Camp area.

Day 3 Monday 19th - Leave for Robins Camp and stay there overnight. Birding on the way and at destination.

Day 4 Tuesday 20th - Leave for NP Vic Falls. VF Hotel tea, shopping, leisure etc.

Day 5 Wednesday 21st - Kazangula birding specials - depart Vic Falls 6am arrive 7am birding boat cruise, packed lunch, Chobe Botswana boat cruise.

Day 6 Thursday 22nd - Elephant Hills + Gorges Lodge day trip.
Day 7 Friday 23rd - Zambezi River Cruise + local birding gorges, Chamabondo.
Day 8 Saturday 24th - Drive back to Harare
Day 9 Sunday 25th - Recover from trip!

Please contact Tony Alegria on talegria@zol.co.zw or phone 490375 or cell 0772- 438697 if you want to book or ask any questions.

Matabeleland Branch

18 - 21 April: Field trip to Insindi Ranch - Gwanda

The branch will be going on a field trip to Insindi Ranch - camping at the dam. The bird life in this area is always very active. The dam is 100 km from town, making it close enough for a day trip for anyone not wanting to camp out for the weekend.

For more information please contact Gaynor Lightfoot, phone (h) 241008, (m) 0712402341, email doristoes7@gmail.com or Cecilia Hubbard, phone 0772433733, email ceilhubbard@yoafrica.com.

18 May: Trip to the Galapagos

Jill Miller-Cranko will be talking to us about the trip she and Margaret Frame made to the Galapagos. Once again Tom and Jean Cranston have kindly offered to host the event. (6 Bunting Close, Burnside). Starting time 3:30 p.m. After the talk members are invited to stay on to share a meal prepared by Jean. There will be a nominal charge to cover the cost of ingredients. To facilitate the catering please phone Jean by Thursday 16 to confirm your attendance.

For more information please contact Jean Cranston, phone (h) 242921, (m) 0733893390, email cranston@gatorzw.com

24 - 26 May: Dassie Census

The 2013 Dassie (Hyrax) Census, the seventh to be carried out by the branch, will take place on 25th and 26th May. Teams will be required to attend a briefing on the evening of Friday 24th and be ready for a very early start the next morning. We have been asked to cover 20 sites this year, which means we will need a minimum of ten teams. If you are interested in taking part please contact the census coordinators.

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

Other Areas

Mashonaland South (Kadoma) – Contact: Margaret Parrock on 068-22005 or her daughter, Coralee on 0772-739370.

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 pgwidibira@gmail.com for details.

Other Areas – Those members in other areas – especially the **Lowveld**, 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

BLZ Mashonaland Branch AGM held on Thursday 17 January 2013 at Avondale Sports Club.

41 Members and visitors were present at our recent AGM. Apologies were received from 5 members. Our Chairman, Tony Alegria opened the meeting at 6.00 pm. The previous minutes were confirmed by Tony Wood and seconded by Rolf Chenux-Repond. There were no matters arising.

The monthly outings have been generally well supported by members and friends - the most popular outing being the 1st Sunday at Mukuvisi Woodlands.

During the last year there were 4 away outings. In February 2012, 30 people travelled to RIFA near Chirundu. This was a very successful outing. The 2nd outing took place on the 3rd weekend

of September when 14 people went to Hwedza Mountain to look for the Black-faced Swee. One was found. The 3rd outing was to the Bvumba where 14 birders stayed at Madrugada, hosted by Roger Castelin. The last trip of the year was the Angola Pitta trip to Mozambique during the last week in November. There was also an overnight/day trip to Pamazinda enjoyed by 25 birders with some staying overnight.

Richard Dennison presented the Lake Chivero report. 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. Water birds have shunned Bird Island as a nesting site for the 5th year in a row because of netting around it and African Darters continue to be rare with only 2 seen in the whole year. Wood poaching and general disturbance of the woodland by trespassers has continued. This has affected nesting.

Mukuvisi Woodlands continues to be a popular venue for outings. The species count continues to be good. Julia Pierini has taken over the Sunday guide walks with much enthusiasm. Please give her your support.

Dorothy Wakeling reported on Monavale Vlei. There have been many visitors on the vlei during the past year as well as bird watchers from SA, Finland, Switzerland, Norway, USA, UK and Canada. The Monavale Vlei bird species counted from 2005 to December 2012: 210 – 238. Workshops have been held on composting and vermiculture.

A poster was put together on the work COSMO has done through the Monavale Vlei project on wetland conservation. This was presented at the 2012 PAOC held in Arusha, Tanzania.

A plant survey was also held with 110 plants collected by Christopher Chapano, National Herbarium, Botanic Garden, Harare. Specimens will be added to the Monavale Vlei collection held at the Herbarium. Monavale Vlei has been selected as a Ramsar Site along with 6 other sites in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe will be accorded accession status to the Ramsar Convention in March this year. The Monavale Local Environment Subject Plan has been approved by Council, advertised and is ready to be added to the Harare Master Plan.

The Conservation Society of Monavale continues to spearhead wetland protection throughout the city. Thanks to Jimmy Muropa for his daily bird records and taking visitors on walks. Thanks to BLZ members for their contributions and taking park in the 3rd Sunday walks and bird ringing projects.

Rainham Dam. Monthly visits were made on Saturday mornings to this venue over the course of 2012. Monthly totals averaged about 62 species. Walks guided by Alex Masterson.

New Mashonaland BLZ Committee for 2013/2014:

Tony Alegria	Chairman
Dave Rockingham Gill	Vice Chair
Linda Fussell	Secretary
Debbie Wiggins	Treasurer
James Ball	Member

Following the AGM Celesta von Chamier showed members how to access the BLZ web site and the Facebook Pages. There are many photos on Facebook and members are asked to interact on this site.

Mashonaland Branch Chairman's Report for 2013 AGM -

The outings have continued and we are getting some good turnouts, especially at the Mukuvisi Woodlands and outings on the last Sunday of the month. Certain Saturday outings are also proving popular, in particular the Botanic Gardens. Thank you to all who have come on any of these outings.

I thank all the leaders of these outings – Julia Pierini, Alex Masterson and Richard Dennison have been the main stars.

Thanks to our speakers, without them we would not have a monthly evening function. We had: (Jan) right after the AGM, bird photos presented by Celesta – our very talented members took these photos. (Feb) Hwange visit by Nick Hart; (Mar) A presentation on the RIFA outing by myself; (Apr) Tits of Zimbabwe by Anthony Cizek; (May) Birding in Cape Town and surrounds including a pelagic trip by Julia Pierini; (June) Waterfowl Census by Dave Rockingham-Gill; (July) I talked about stars, constellations and the night sky – this was a short notice presentation as Neil Deacon was unable to do his part 1 raptor talk; (Aug) Bird ringing update by Nick Hart and I presented something about the Mashonaland Big Birding Day; (Sept); 'The Value of the Harare Wetlands and their Threats' was presented by Dorothy Wakeling; (Oct) LBJ Warblers by Ferdie Couto; (Nov) Owls by myself; (Dec) PAOC and the trip to Arusha by Tony Wood & Alex Masterson – this was an additional evening function for the year and was followed by a very successful social. Of course monthly evening functions would be pointless without an audience, so many thanks to all the members and non-members who attended the functions. Finding

speakers and topics for these monthly events are the greatest challenge to the committee. If you can present something, which is birdie, or you think may be of great interest to our members, please let us know.

There have been some pretty good and some pretty poor attendances at our outings and personally I think it's because we have too many outings – we have thus reduced our Saturday outings to one per month. The Rainham Dams outings sometimes were poorly attended and with all the development that is taking place with chunks of land being fenced off etc. we have done away with this venue being a monthly outing but we will visit it every now and again.

I thank Julia Pierini for sending out her email reminders for the outings & evening functions and also for providing the necessary information to the Ndeipi monthly magazine. Without the email reminders, attendance drops significantly - it would appear that the Babbler is now an early warning system as far as future events are concerned!

Last year we planned four away outings with the first trip being to RIFA during February at which we had 25 local members as well as four birders belonging to the Zambian Ornithological Society and one birder from South Africa. We had too many birders on this trip.... but it was still a very good outing!

The second outing took place on the third weekend of September when 7 birders from Harare met up with 2 birders from Marondera along with 5 Peterhouse pupils who went to Hwedza Mountain to look for the Swee Waxbill – one was found! The third outing was to the Bvumba when 14 birders went to Madrugada and were hosted by Roger Castelin. We also had too many birders on this trip – the facilities were stretched with two birders having to sleep close by. The next and last trip of the year was the one-week African Pitta trip in Mozambique during the last week of November – most of us saw the Pitta and we all saw the Green-headed Oriole on Mt Gorongosa. We had an additional, overnight trip to Pamuzinda enjoyed by over 25 birders with some staying overnight.

Your incoming committee will be organizing more away trips this year – if you have any destinations you really would like to go to, please talk to or email the committee members.

For a bit of overlap, we had 56 weeks covered by the HBGS which ended late July last year, we have since launched a monthly garden bird survey that can be done anywhere in the country. Unfortunately due to unforeseen problems an analysis has not been carried out on the Harare Garden Bird Survey.

Nick Hart is standing down from the committee, as he will be going for some tertiary education in Australia. Julia Pierini is also standing down as she has too many commitments. Thank you both for the time you have spent on the committee, your contribution will be missed.

I wish to thank all those who wrote articles for the Babbler thereby providing feedback to all our members on our outings and monthly functions.

And thank you to Avondale Sports Club for hosting us for all our evening events. We had a good year!

In closing I thank my committee for all their input & work during the last year and my wife for providing snacks and for putting up with our committee meetings every other month.

Tony Alegria

Chairman

Mashonaland Branch

The Mozambique African Pitta Trip 2012.

The February evening presentation was delivered by Tony Alegria, who used photos & slides from the October 2010 Mozambique trip, along with photos from the November 2012 visit, to deliver a day-by-day account. Although the article “Mission Accomplished”, by Ken Dixon in Babbler 110, covered the trip pretty well, Tony's presentation used the many photographs, plus a few birdcalls, so that one could really “visualize and feel” just how wonderful the trip was. Over 150 Power Point slides gave a vivid description of the trip; specifically timed to coincide with the arrival of the African Pitta to the Catapú area, where they begin their mating displays. Although there had been a name change from the Angola Pitta to African Pitta, the old name sounded more special and that's the name he would use in his presentation!

Initially the seven-member BLZ party stayed at Nhambita, a camp close to the Gorongosa National Park, as it was conveniently located for the planned activities. Nhambita camp is a family run business and each member of the family contributes – the four “kids” (Sakkie, the majority shareholder, and his three sisters) were the waiters at dinnertime! Piet van Zyl is the administrator, and his wife Ria looked after the meals, which were excellent. The first “lifer” seen was the Mangrove Kingfisher, which comes inland to breed. This bird is quite common in the Catapú area and although seldom seen, it is often heard. The first part of the trip took in the Gorongosa Mountain for the Green-headed Oriole, which was seen by all members of the

birding party. Gorongosa National Park yielded many species, but the “target” was the home of the Yellow-bellied *Hyliota* – another “lifer”.

The Gorongosa and Catapú areas are both frequented by South African Guides, who bring their clients from all over the world to see the specials of the area. Whilst at Nhambita, a foreign birder had an eye problem (detached retina) and was flown out for medical attention. This resulted in a “swap” of the Gorongosa Mountain trip days, which resulted in the BLZ members going to the mountain on the Sunday (instead of the planned Monday trip), and the other birding group going up the mountain the following day. This was very fortunate for the BLZ party as they had a great day up the mountain. Overnight rain resulted in the other party getting bogged down and they never made it to the mountain. For them, virtually the whole of Monday was spent struggling back to Nhambita.

The second half of the trip was based at M’phingwe Camp, in Catapú – a logging concession, where it was hoped the Angola Pitta would be seen. There is some 50-60km of badly potholed road before the turn off. Local birding took place that afternoon, and also the next day within the Catapú area. Ant White, the manager of Catapú, indicated where pittas had been sighted in previous years and the party split into two groups and set off to investigate. One party heard a pitta but failed to see the bird. That evening, the BLZ group were given the GPS co-ordinates of where an Angola Pitta had recently been seen in Coutada 12 – a hunting concession.

A 4.30am start was made the next day in order to cover the 24km to the pitta site. The pitta was heard a few times but again failed to show itself. After the forest became quiet, the party moved on to an evergreen forest, some 20-30km north. There, a few more species were added to the list, including the Tiny Greenbuls, which were pretty vocal. Lunch was taken under a leafless tree just after a couple of Eurasian Golden Orioles had been spotted. The backwaters at the old Zambezi ferry site at Caia (small town on the southern side of the Zambezi River yielded many water birds, including Greater Painted-snipes sitting in the open on small sandbars. Then it was off to the Cua Cua hotel across the Zambezi over the new toll bridge for ice cream! There were plenty photographs covering Cua Cua and the quite spectacular bridge.

The last day of the trip began with a 4.00am start to Coutada 12 with high hopes of spotting the elusive bird. The sighting was achieved by 6.30am. We then followed the road passing through the 1km deep forest to see what lay beyond. There were forest patches every so often with open miombo woodland in-between, but no more pittas. Great celebrations took place that evening and fuzzy photographs of the revellers showed that the more they drank, the fuzzier the happy birders became! Thus ended the last day of the Mozambique Angola Pitta trip. As Ken Dixon said in his *Babbler* article - Mission Accomplished.

It was an early start back home with breakfast at Selva’s. Not far from Catapú, Yellow Weavers were seen in the reeds under a bridge.

The number of species seen in each locality was compared with those of the previous trip to Mozambique in October 2010. The 2012 overall total (242) were higher than 2010 (235) because of the additional water birds, mainly seen in the backwaters of the old ferry site.

The thoroughly interesting and entertaining presentation ended with a spectacular photo of an Angola Pitta.

Visit to Ewanrigg Botanic Garden, 24th February 2013. 1731C2, Goromonzi District, 1250-1356m a.s.l. (Rumeri Beacon) 04 March 2013 5:16 AM

26 members arrived at Ewanrigg, on a lovely day and three groups took to the developed gardens, and two of us (Dave Dalziel and I) took to the bush beyond the dam. The stream was running well, and the dam was still discoloured and muddy. We noted birds in two pentads, one in the gardens from where we parked, and one beyond the dam spillway and borehole.

Most of this report will be about the dam, the bush, the scrub and the *Hyparrhenia* grass we encountered.

We looked hard for waterbirds and found the Little Grebe, the Black-headed Heron, a Green-backed Heron, a Pied Kingfisher, a Great Reed-warbler and Orange-breasted Waxbills. Above our heads we saw a Black-chested Snake-eagle, 40 European Bee-eaters, African Palm-swift, Barn Swallow (very few this year) and a pair of Red-breasted Swallows.

In the bush we had a female Black Cuckooshrike, a Lesser Honeyguide, both the Black-crowned Tchagra and Brown-crowned Tchagra, Green-capped Eremomela, Copper Sunbird, African Yellow White-eye, Jameson’s Firefinch, Yellow-fronted Canary and Black-throated Canary.

In the grass we got the Little Bee-eater, Red-faced Cisticola and Rattling Cisticola plus two pairs of Tawny-flanked Prinias. In the high grass we got two male Southern Red Bishops and about 10 Yellow Bishops.

The garden walkers saw the majority of birds; an African Goshawk, a Lizard Buzzard, Amur Falcon, a group of 15 African Green-pigeons, Klaas’s Cuckoo, Greater Honeyguide & Brown-

backed Honeybird, Rufous-naped Lark, African Stonechat, Yellow-throated Longclaw, and in the more developed area Brimstone Canary and Streaky-headed Seedeater.

One day it will happen, when we get all 8 sunbirds on a card, but today we only got 6, missing were the Purple-banded and the Western Violet-backed Sunbird.

Visitors should walk in the woodland more because that is the unexplored part of the 286 ha park, the northern corner of the park being on the Harare-Shamva Road.

We managed 96 species. Other reports on trips to Ewanrigg have appeared in *Babblers* 14, 20, 27, 32, 39, 50, 52, 55, 62, 66, 68, 71, 74, 75, 77, 78, 83, 89, 94, 100, and 105. It seems we have no reports of visits during the months of April, October and November.

David Rockingham-Gill rgill@zol.co.zw

War and treachery between Cuckoo Finch and Tawny-flanked Prinias - Mashonaland

Branch Meeting 14 March 2013

Claire Spottiswoode of Cape Town & Cambridge University came from Zambia with Ian Taylor, and spoke to the branch of 46 people on the war between Cuckoo Finches and their hosts, Tawny-flanked Prinias and sometimes Red-faced Cisticolas. The talk was Powerpoint presented with amazing photos of both birds' diversity of egg colours.

Brood parasitism has evolved in 7 groups of birds and some are Cuckoos, Cuckoo Finches, Indigobirds, Honeyguides, and Whydahs etc.

Her research is centred in Southern Zambia (Choma area), where the late John Colebrook-Robjent farmed and collected eggs. He had 14000 shells. The collection is now in the British Museum of Natural History. John had up to 40 collectors working for him, with amazing nest finding skill, and in the collection of eggs a remarkable lot of parasitized clutches.

Claire also acknowledged our own, CFM Swynnerton, who observed that females have signatures on their eggs and know them.

However, some Cuckoo Finch eggs get by with extraordinary mimicry. The Tawny-flanked Prinia builds a nest and lays spotted and scroled eggs of many colours and shades, of blues, greens and reds, and the female Cuckoo Finch tries to do the same. (Olive green eggs are the most common - Like the reverse of a US dollar). The host Prinia try to reject eggs not their own. They have 4 cones in their eyes. (We have 3) And so they can see in ultra violet light inside the nest.

One experiment they did was putting Prinia eggs in another prinias nest, to see if it would be rejected.

John collected eggs over many years, and Claire has taken tiny scrapings from old eggs and new, for DNA tests, to try and trace relationships. The DNA is inherited from the mother only.

The female Cuckoo Finch always lay in the same species nests as their mother. Timing is important because the Cuckoo Finch chick hatches a day before the host eggs and then kills the host chicks.

Because it is difficult to get answers to questions in the field, and to further their research work, Ian Taylor, a local farmer (ex Umboe) has built Claire some very large aviaries on stilts, to keep away snakes and other predators.

She briefly talked about Honeyguides and Bee-eaters which both have white eggs. The Honeyguide tries to match the size and shape of their host egg. The Honeyguide kills the host egg, by puncturing the egg. But Claire didn't know whether puncturing was done by tooth or claw.

Tony Alegria noted that Claire has taken on some of the most difficult research in the bird world and thanked her for coming to talk to us.

If you wish to read more into this complex life history try "Science Daily", 26 April 2010 by Dr. Claire Spottiswoode and Dr. Martin Stevens.

(I thank Dr. Stephanie Taylor, July 2010, *Babbler* No 54 pp. 71/72, of Birdlife Botswana for the reference) Otherwise talk to Claire cns26@cam.ac.uk She writes "Please shout about indigobirds"

David Rockingham-Gill rgill@zol.co.zw

4 Fernleigh Road P.O. Borrowdale, Harare.

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 rd 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 rd 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 rd 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 rd 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 rd 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 rd 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 rd Sun 2006
279	171.5	155.5	3						9.5	65	148.5	832mm	ain	
								43	63	95	100			2005
183	94	137	24	8				.5	12	106.5	285	850mm	ain	

☐
☐

Monavale Vlei Report - January to March 2013

Interesting bird observations from January to date: Dwarf Bittern and Little Bittern. African Jacana 20 Jan 13, a Striped Crake reportedly flushed by Tony Wood and visitors on 19 Jan, unfortunately the only known sighting this season so far [others seen were 2 or 3 on 27th Jan and 1 on 2nd & 8th Feb – I Riddell and visitors]. As all might know, the rains came late and when they did we had plenty, especially in January (421mm). With February being so dry (59mm) this may explain why Streaky-breasted Flufftail haven't been seen or heard that much. 9th Feb called and again on March 17th. March we have had over 8½ inches rain - 211.5mm (1038.5 season count).

Yellow-billed Storks and African Fish-eagle were sighted flying over. Wood Sandpiper was seen in the pools of water on the western side of the Vlei. The icing on the cake should be the African Grass-owl seen by Ian Riddell and visitors on 11th March. This should be thrilling news to any birder as they have not been seen on Monavale Vlei for more than three decades, perhaps four.

Other bird species seen or heard: White-faced Duck, African Black Duck, Red-billed Teal, Egyptian Goose, Booted Eagle, Black-chested Snake-eagle (1), Steppe Buzzard, Eurasian Hobby, Marsh Owl, Kurrichane Buttonquail, Corn Crake, Black Coucal, Lesser and Greater Striped Swallow, White-throated Swallow, Willow Warbler, Cuckoo Finch, Groundscraper Thrush.

We had the honour to host **Sir Anada Tiega, the Secretary General of Ramsar Convention on Wetlands** on 4 February 2013 at Monavale Vlei and it was such a pleasure. Twin Rivers School visited the Vlei for an educational tour on 30 January and its always wonderful having the kids around. An unexpected fire occurred (considering the time of year) on 22nd February, the night of Philippa Marrett's wonderful Monavale Vlei slide show which raised over US\$1500.00 to assist COSMO with its many and varied community activities.

(1) On Tuesday 6th March at 8.30am Jimmy found a Black-chested Snake-eagle lying face down on a path on the Vlei. I called Neil Deacon and he came immediately, checked the bird, an old adult, to find that it was temporarily paralyzed, but otherwise in good order. He surmised that it had probably eaten a young snake and failed to remove the head thus ingesting its venom. Mozambique Spitting Cobras had been seen recently with young on the Vlei. Neil took the bird to vets Rob Rees and Charles Waghorn for a jab of Atropine and it recovered well enough to be released at 2.30pm that day when it flew off up towards the storm clouds as if nothing untoward had happened so recently! A Magical Moment of Monavale!! I am sure Neil will give a more comprehensive account of this remarkable event. Many thanks to Drs Neil, Rob and Charlie for their assistance and to Jimmy for his swift response!

(2) An extract of an email from Sir Anada Tiega following his visit to Monavale. Link of report below.

Dear Dorothy,

Many thanks for this excellent report following my short visit to Monavale Vlei.

This is an opportunity to renew my congratulations for the excellent work done by the Zimbabwe government agencies, COSMO and all stakeholders, including EMA, WWF, Birdlife Zimbabwe, Mukuvisi Woodlands and Meyrick Park.

I would like to thank the donors which support your efforts, especially the GEF through its Small Grant Programme. My visit was too short but I saw so many promising actions. The existing challenges are being addressed and I hope you will get more support to fully address all challenges.

Best wishes to all team members.

Thank you.

Anada

<http://www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-news-bulletin-board-2013/main/ramsar/1-2>

Matabeleland

Birds of Zambia & the DRC – 12 January

Adele Edwards

On the afternoon of Saturday 12 January a group of 21 members gather to fill Tom and Jean Cranston's lounge and listen to Vernon Tarr talk about some of the birds he has seen while working in Zambia and the DRC. ZESA tried to thwart us with an unscheduled power cut, but while the projector was being connected up to a generator Vernon started talking – and what he had to tell us was so interesting it was over half an hour before we got around to switching on the projector and starting to look at pictures.

Vernon showed us photos of all sorts of things. Sunsets over water, lush vegetation, clear sparkling, fast-flowing streams, and ant heaps shaped like giant fairy toadstools. The camps they stayed in, the roads they had to travel on, crossing the equator. Wildlife was scarce but Vernon had captured on camera frogs and toads, mice and shrews and weird and wonderful caterpillars. And then there were the birds. A lake full of flamingos. A Racquet-tailed Roller shooting straight out of its nest hole in a tree trunk directly at the camera. Familiar birds – Marabou Stork, White-fronted Bee-eater, Lesser Striped Swallow and Grey-headed Bush-shrike. And others that had you puzzled because while they looked familiar something was not quite right: a Paradise-flycatcher that was white where he should have been chestnut, a Glossy Starling that when he turned to face the camera was wearing chestnut trousers.

After Vernon had finished talking, and answering our many question, we adjourned outside for a few sundowners and then shared a delicious meal prepared by Jean. Our sincere thanks to Vernon and Shirley for joining us, to Vernon for his fascinating talk, and to Tom and Jean for their hospitality

Waterfowl Count at Aisleby – 20 January

Adele Edwards

I can never understand why more people do not participate in the Aisleby waterfowl counts, done each year in January and July, as it is such a great birding location, not just for water birds but also for all species. This year when the Aisleby count took place on 26 January it was cool, overcast and very windy. For my team, Gaynor Lightfoot and I, our overall species count was not great (32) but we still enjoyed a good morning with some special moments.

Our team was allocated the area to the left of the road after entering the property and included the paddocks around the feedlot and 'Muddy Puddle'. After completing our section we were to meet up with all the other teams at the yacht club on Umgusa Dam.

For us the fun began as soon as we took the first turning left. From a distance we could see that several paddocks were dotted with black and white. As we drew nearer we saw there were many Abdim's Storks and fewer African Sacred Ibis. We started counting and had soon recorded several hundred Abdim's. There must have been armyworm or similar in some of the fields as a few adjacent fields were inundated with birds while other fields just across the road were empty. We had stopped at a convenient point to count the next field when we observed more birds flying overhead, coming from the direction of the river below the dam wall, and landing in the fields behind us. For at least 15 minutes the Abdim's continued to fly in, until we had recorded an estimated 1,120 birds! What a sight. After that everything else seemed a bit tame.

Our next highlight was at Muddy Puddle. In fact on this occasion the name was inappropriate as there was a good amount of water. What made the counting here a challenge was the strong wind blowing across the dam into our faces. The wind made the surface of the water choppy, making it more difficult than usual to distinguish sizes, shapes and colours. Also we could hear chirping and carrying on from birds, which presumably were taking shelter in the reed beds. Despite this we were able to count Cattle Egrets (351), African Sacred Ibis, Little Grebe, Red-billed Teal, Common Moorhen, African Jacana, Grey Heron and Blacksmith Lapwing.

By the time we reached the yacht club the wind had dropped and visibility had improved. Another team had been given the task of counting the birds on this dam so we were able to sit back and enjoy some refreshments while admiring the many birds bobbing around on the water and flying through the club grounds. The African Waterfowl Census project coordinators, Julia Duprée and Helen Lewis, will be giving a report on the full count at a later stage.

SABAP2 Workshop - 01 - 02 February

Cecilia Hubbard

When 49 members and guests, including members from Hwange and Vic Falls, had arrived at 'Bean There', it was a pleasure to introduce to members our Vice President, Julia Pierini. After greeting members and guests, Julia in turn introduced the National Membership Secretary, Carolyn Dennison. For many of those gathered, it was pleasing for them to 'put a face to the name'.

Dr Doug Harebottle then began his introduction and presentation on SABAP2. His enthusiasm for this project was evident, and after concise, precise explanation of the new method of Atlassing, members and guests looked forward to putting his explanation into practice.

Saturday morning saw 31 members and guests arrive at Tshabalala Game Sanctuary. This area once again proved itself to be a good area for species count. After the first hour a total of 36 species had been identified, after the second hour we had amassed a total of 57, and our final total for the morning reached 72 species. A very respectable total!

Dr Harebottle's enthusiasm rubbed off, and appears infectious. The slogan 'birding with a purpose' is fitting for this programme. The 'live' update of field cards submitted has tremendous appeal to those people who have tried it. Their efforts, and the species they have successfully identified, are acknowledged and appreciated by those gathering the data. What's even better is - taking part in SABAP2 means you are making a significant contribution to the gathering of the data for the distribution of species in Zimbabwe for current and future use.

Branch Annual General Meeting - 16 February

Adele Edwards

The Matabeleland Branch AGM was held at 10:30 a.m. on Saturday 16 February in the gardens at Pembroke Place. As usual the meeting was well supported. In addition to the Chairman and Treasurers reports, project coordinators presented reports on: Black Eagle survey, Hyrax census, Matopos raptor survey, Aisleby survey, Matabeleland garden bird survey, African Waterfowl Census and Birding Big Day.

The following were elected onto the committee: Chairman – Cecelia Hubbard, Secretary – Gaynor Lightfoot, Treasurer – David Burnette, Membership – Karen Learmonth, members – John Brebner, Jean Cranston, Adele Edwards and Paul Hubbard.

The committee would like to thank all those members who made the effort to attend or send apologies, and to thank Pembroke Place for allowing us the use of the venue.

Outing to Aloe Gardens Lodge - 24 February

Karen Learmonth

Sunday 24th February was a beautiful summer's day in Bulawayo; in fact, it was a HOT summer's day. We were delighted to have 24 members and guests turn out at Aloe Gardens Lodge. Because we had planned to move from there to see the Barn Swallows later that day, we met at 12 noon. Before lunch we spent an hour in the immediate lodge gardens, during which time we noted 17 species. As we were dining *al fresco*, we were able to continue bird-watching through lunch, during which time a Black-chested Snake-eagle gave us a spectacular fly-by, leaving us in no doubt as to its identification, and a few other species were spotted or heard nearby. Temperatures soared after lunch, but knowing we still had a lot to fit in that afternoon, we left the shady garden and made our way to the dam. The dam had filled up to the brim just a few days before, following a spate of heavy showers. This was wonderful, but for us it meant that there were very few water birds and waders as the high water level had covered the shorter growth on the water's edge. We managed to only find one Reed Cormorant and one Blacksmith Lapwing, which appeared to be quite attached to each other, in the absence of other friends! A lone Common Sandpiper was also spotted. Our gracious hosts had set up a viewing gazebo for us next to the dam, where we took refuge from the sun and continued our quest from there. Another 19 species were identified on our bush walk; bring our total at Aloe to 39. As we started to move away from the dam to get ready to move on, the swallows started to fly in to drink on their way home to How Mine, where we went next....

- and How Mine - 24 February

Adele Edwards

Our afternoon at Aloe Gardens Lodge was so enjoyable it was with some reluctance that we decided we needed to move on if we wanted to see the Barn Swallows come in to roost at How Mine. As it happened we could have lingered for at least another half an hour as the swallows were very late in going to bed. Upon arriving at the mine we were pleased to see all the BLZ signs in place and in good order. The little knoll we traditionally sit on was somewhat overgrown with lantana and grass but we were all able to find a viewing spot, and settled down with a sundowner to await the spectacle. For a long while nothing happened, and as the sun sank lower we began to wonder if the swallows could have already migrated north. We knew from others who had visited the site earlier in the year that there were large numbers of swallows present at the roost, but where were they now? But then they started to arrive, at first a few, widely spaced, small flocks, and then a steady stream. We soon realized that the birds have chosen a new roosting site, in a stand of gum trees further down the river below the bridge. So instead of having the swallows circling directly above us we were now watching this dense cloud further away. While in some ways this was a pity, it was fascinating to watch how each new group merged into the cloud, how the cloud shifted and roiled, and how the Bat Hawks and other small raptors plunged through the swirling swallows on their hunt. A very satisfying end to a very pleasant day.

Walk at Lakeside - 10 March

Cecilia Hubbard

Six of us braved the chilly, wet weather that dawned on this Sunday morning. There are pools of water dotted around this old 'lake' area, and of absolute delight were 2 African Spoonbills, together with 6 Little Egrets strutting their stuff in one of the larger pools. Red-billed Teal, and Little Grebe swam and dived in the same pool, whilst two Grey Herons watched with incuriosity.

The cool breeze that accompanied the overcast skies meant birds were taking short flights and immediately settling in the protection of the well-leaved trees. The Scarlet-chested, and White-bellied Sunbirds had taken refuge in the same parasitized tree. 8 White-winged Widowbirds were perched on top of the long grass found behind the dam wall, and the fanning of their tails was a sight to behold. When raindrops began to fall, as is the law of nature, there were suddenly many birds around who needed to be identified. Of particular interest to us, was the sighting of 6 Marico Flycatchers all sitting in close proximity in a small tree. None in our group had seen so many together before. The grey skies provided the perfect backdrop for the iridescent black and red of the Village Indigobird.

Whilst the weather did its best to send us packing relatively early, it was with some delight we realized we had identified 53 species in the seemingly short period of arrival and departure. An invitation by the leader of the walk, and nearby resident, Prof Peter Mundy, to adjourn to he and Verity's home for a hot beverage was quickly welcomed. Whilst warming up, the White-throated Robin-chat entertained us with its call – and allowed us to end our pentad with a grand total of 54 species! Our thanks to Peter for leading us, and Verity for allowing us to 'warm' ourselves before heading for home.

GARDEN BIRD SURVEY 2012 – MATABELELAND

January-November

Summary

Bulawayo survey area
QDS 2028 B1 = 13 gardens
QDS 2028 B4 = 1 garden

Total gardens monitored = 14
Total species listed = 211
Total species recorded = 190

Overview

This Survey has just completed its second year in Matabeleland. Most gardens are based in Bulawayo – 13 in QDS 2028 B1 - and one in Esigodini QDS 2028 B4. To enable the report to be finalized in time for the Branch AGM, the period covered is January to November. December 2012 reports are still coming in. Nine participants took part regularly through the year and another six sent in intermittent reports as and when they were able to.

We would like to thank our participants who were dedicated, enthusiastic and meticulous, completing their forms and delivering them soon after the close of each month.

Twice during the year updated checklists were distributed, which included additional species recorded by our participants. Now a third version has been produced for use during 2013. This has added about 50% more species and runs into four pages, thanks to information submitted by our observers. And everyone added pertinent and interesting observations. Judging by the number and variety of species reported, it is very apparent that our participants have really increased their identification skills and have developed a greater awareness of birds and their doings.

Observers & number of species recorded per garden

Name	Location	No. Months	No. Species
Judy Ross	Ntaba Moyo	11	110
Sandy McAdam	Hillside	11	102
Peggy Lendrum <i>et al</i>	Suburbs	2	90
Laraine Oosthuizen	Esigodini	10	85
Joy Kets	Hillside	11	73
John & Jenny Brebner	Burnside	6	69
Peta & Alan Ditchburn	Morningside	8	63
Gwen Attwell & Helen Lewis	Burnside	9	59
Nicky & Vince Pegg	Kensington	1	55
Dave & Marina Jackson	Suburbs	4	53
Sharon Peters	Suburbs	11	40
Tom & Jean Cranston	Burnside	1	38
Christina Gillott	Burnside	5	37
Auriel Hansen	Suburbs	1	23

Particularly unusual for the area

Two particularly interesting species turned up during the year – Northern Grey-headed Sparrows and African Red-eyed Bulbuls.

Peter Mundy and Geoff Lowe have recently cast doubt on whether the so-called Northern and Southern Grey-headed Sparrows are separate sub-species, as suggested by Michael Irwin a while back, and as featured in *Roberts Bird Guide 2007*. In a nutshell, after examining over 2+

drawers full of skins (probably over 100) in the Museum collection, they have put forward their hypothesis that the ID features claimed for the Northern bird actually represent the summer breeding plumage of both Northern and Southern Grey-headed Sparrows, i.e. a white throat patch, heavy black bill and variable-sized white wing patch. This description fitted specimens collected only during summer months. All specimens collected during winter months (with the exception of only 4) indicated non-breeding plumage - no throat patch and a yellow and/or horn coloured bill.

BUT – Sandy identified her Northern Grey-headed Sparrows during April, June, July and August using the above identification pointers. This is very interesting and we will report further as appropriate. *Watch this space!*

The second interesting species, which occurred, were African Red-eyed Bulbuls, which appeared in Sandy's garden in August, September and October. This bird has rarely been reported in Bulawayo over the years, the last sighting was in the same garden during 2002. (They were also seen during this year in Tshabalala, up to 7 birds, in central and northern areas). Bulbuls are very dependent on water. It is believed that these Red-eyed birds move from their normal habitats in particularly dry years in search of water.

Top Species	
(Raptors reported separately)	
Species	In how many gardens
Grey Go-away-bird	Green Wood-hoopoe
Black-collared Barbet	Crested Barbet
Pied Crow	Dark-capped Bulbul
Kurrichane Thrush	Tropical Boubou
Blue Waxbill	Bronze Mannikin
Laughing Dove	Red-faced Mousebird
Brown-hooded Kingfisher	African Hoopoe
Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird	Black-headed Oriole
White-browed Robin-chat	White-bellied Sunbird
House Sparrow	Southern Grey-headed Sparrow
Red-billed Firefinch	European Bee-eater
Tawny-flanked Prinia	African Paradise-flycatcher
Black-backed Puffback	Miombo Double-collared Sunbird
Scarlet-chested Sunbird	Hamerkop
African Grey Hornbill	Arrow-marked Babbler
African Yellow White-eye	Cut-throat Finch
Red-eyed Dove	Yellow-bellied Greenbul
Golden Weaver	Black Cuckoo
Red-chested Cuckoo	Jacobin Cuckoo
Senegal Coucal	Fiery-necked Nightjar
Grey-headed Bush-shrike	Jameson's Firefinch
Diderick Cuckoo	
<hr/>	
Cape Vulture	Yellow-billed Kite
Black Kite	Wahlberg's Eagle
African Hawk-eagle	Long-crested Eagle
Brown Snake-eagle	Black-chested Snake-eagle
African Fish-eagle	Lizard Buzzard
Little Sparrowhawk	Black Sparrowhawk
Shikra	Gabar Goshawk
Dark Chanting-goshawk	African Harrier-hawk
Barn Owl	African Scops-owl
Southern White-faced Scops-owl	Pearl-spotted Owlet
African Barred Owlet	Spotted Eagle-owl

Julia Duprée, Helen Lewis, Sandy McAdam

AFRICAN WATERFOWL CENSUS 2012 IN MATABELELAND

Lack of funding for the third year running began to take its toll this year, and counts in some areas had to be curtailed or omitted. Nevertheless, our surveyors produced numbers higher than in the previous three years – other than the exceptional 2010, where for the first time Little Grebe and Cattle Egret topped the 1000 mark. Who knows, had we been able to follow

our traditional schedule we might have succeeded in achieving only another 750 birds to beat the previous record – pretty good, the teams did very well!

So, in January 2012 our teams covered four sites (Robins is the fourth but see Note 2 below). Weather interfered with our plans for SAST, Cowdray Park and the Matopos dams. Aisleby streaked ahead with just under 4000 birds of 32 species, Red-billed Teal (1057) and Southern Pochard (1055) again breaking the 1000 mark. Sinamatella/Robins improved their count to 726 compared to 2011's combined count of 485, including the highest number of Egyptian Geese in January.

In July 2012, we counted at 6 sites, a couple in Hwange were limited – see Notes below. Aisleby again led the way – after all it has, probably, the two most favoured dams in the survey! Little Grebe (839) moved to the top of the list, followed by 802 Red-billed Teal.

In January, species found in all survey sites were White-faced Duck, Red-billed Teal, Southern Pochard, Blacksmith Lapwing, Wood Sandpiper and Ruff. In July, Little Grebe, Hamerkop, Black Crake appeared at 5 sites, Egyptian Goose, Cape Teal, Red-billed Teal, Common Moorhen, African Jacana in 4 sites.

Sadly only 1 African Darter was seen during the year, at Sinamatella – this species seems to have moved away from our survey sites in the last few years. Noticeably absent also were White Stork, Common Ringed Plover, Pied and Yellow Wagtails; and thin on the ground were Squacco Heron, Saddle-billed Stork, African Spoonbill, Cape Shoveler, African Purple Swamphen, Greater Painted-snipe, Little Stint, not to mention Reed, Swamp and Rush warblers, not popular with many of us from an ID viewpoint!

On the increase are Cape Teal, whose numbers have moved from single figures to a high of 138 this year! Flamingos and pelicans are not common at Aisleby, though they appear from time to time, but very rarely on Waterfowl Survey days. This time we were lucky – 7 Greater Flamingo were present there in July! (We won't mention that during October and November 25 Greater & Lesser, adult and juvenile Flamingo stayed on Mgusa Dam for a few weeks!)

We would like to offer our warm thanks to our surveyors for this year, all of whom willingly took part and at their own expense:

Bill & Helen Lewis, Tom & Jean Cranston, Jill Pilz, Jeanette Cross, Bruce & Jenny Stephens, Cecilia Hubbard, Gavin & Marjorie Blair, Karen Learmonth, Paul Hubbard, Gavin & Marjorie Blair, Sandy McAdam, Gwen Attwell, Elton & Gaynor Lightfoot, Adele Edwards, Judy Ross, The Gillot family, Jon & Jen Brebner.

I would personally like to thank Helen Lewis for stepping in to run the July counts in my absence as the result of a family bereavement.

The summary tables below give results and comparative figures.

SUMMARY BY SITE TWO YEARS: JANUARY AND JULY 2011 & 2012

SITE	January		Total species		July		Total species	
	2011	2012	2011	2012	2011	2012	2011	2012
Aisleby	1502	3941	26	32	1833	1908	32	27
SAST	438	439	32	25	585	277	28	22
Cowdray Park	293	644	27	25	311	663	18	22
Matobo National Park	-	54	-	13	44	177	11	19
Hwange White Hills	467	534	32	32	143	-	13	-
Hwange Main Camp	-	-	-	-	-	100	-	2
Hwange Ngweshla	137	227	19	24	48	-	7	-
Hwange Sinamatella	393	726	38	45	240	34	28	6
Hwange Robins	92	-	16	-	-	99	-	12
TOTAL	3322	6565			3204	3258		

Notes:

1. Only Main Camp area was surveyed
2. Robins & Sinamatella areas were combined
3. n/c = not counted

SUMMARY 4 YEARS 2009-2012 - ALL SITES

	2009			2010			2011			2012		
	January	July	Total	January	July	Total	January	July	Total	January	July	Total
Total sites	5	5		6	6		6	7		7		
Total birds	2694	3073	5767	5732	2776	8508	3322	3204	6526	6565	3258	9823

TOP EIGHT SPECIES BY COUNT - JANUARY AND JULY 2012

Species	January 2012	Species	July 2012
Red-billed Teal	1057	Little Grebe	839
Southern Pochard	1015	Red-billed Teal	802
Cattle Egret	888	Blacksmith Lapwing	219
Little Grebe	605	Southern Pochard	218
Blacksmith Lapwing	351	Black-winged Stilt	125
Ruff	277	Cape Teal	123
Comb Duck	250	Red-knobbed Coot	114
Red-knobbed Coot	245	African Sacred Ibis	101

Julia Duprée

Co-ordinator, Matabeleland Waterfowl Census

Chimanimani birding adventure

We recently took a trip to the delightful thatch and stone Kweza Cottage in Chimanimani. The property is nestled in fantastic miombo woodland and hosts a wide variety of miombo birds. While enjoying a cup of coffee and taking in the spectacular mountain vistas from the verandah in the early morning we twitched the following - Miombo Tit, Red-faced Crombec, Brown-backed Honeybird, Green-backed Honeybird, Spotted Flycatcher, African Dusky Flycatcher, Singing Cisticola, Wailing Cisticola and fantastic views of Scarce Swift! The latter we observed every morning as long as there was cloud on the mountains.

Tempe van der Ruit, the proprietress, shared her local knowledge and recommended some wonderful indigenous forest patches for us to explore. We were fortunate enough to come across a few pairs of Red-faced Crimsonwing, Green Twinspots, White-starred Robin, Barratt's Warbler, Black-fronted Bush-shrike, Gorgeous Bush-shrike, Chirinda Apalis and Roberts's Warbler.

The roads that travelled close to the streams had dozens of pairs of Mountain Wagtails, which are such beautiful birds.

For some heavy miombo birding, the Chimanimani mountain base camp situated within the national park is the best area to spot the Rufous-bellied Tit, Black-eared Seedeater and Miombo Rock-thrush.

We also managed to positively identify 106 species of tree and 30 species of butterfly with some exceptionally rare ones thrown in!

All in all we were thoroughly impressed with our visit to Chimanimani and highly recommend it as a getaway destination for nature enthusiasts!

Herewith are the details for Kweza Cottage - Tempe van der Ruit - 0772 101 283; email – dougvan@zol.co.zw Single - \$ 30; Double - \$ 50; 3 or more people - \$ 20 per person

Jonathan Francis jonathanfrancis26@yahoo.co.uk

Nyanga trip 14/15 September 2012

We embarked on an adventure to Nyanga to see the Msasas in their full spring colours, a spectacle which should not be missed! At London Store we picked up a pair of Mottled Swift gleaning aerial plankton at very close quarters. We stayed in a cottage along the Pungwe Scenic Drive and had amazing birds in the garden. Nearly all the local "near" endemics were seen, Stripe-cheeked Greenbuls, Yellow-streaked Greenbuls, Chirinda Apalis, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher, Roberts's Warbler and a delightful pair of Red-faced Crimsonwing which decided to roost in the front garden offering us great views. The following day took us down to the Pungwe where we had a pair of Blue Swallow floating around us - the males' tail streamers were long and beautiful! We called up a Barratt's Warbler which was a lifer for my wife Jenny and then we picked up a bird which I have not seen for 15 years and had great views of it - the Rufous-chested Sparrowhawk! I remember as a youngster seeing these birds fairly often and am not sure what happened to them, so I was delighted to find one and get it as a lifer for my wife!

A short and great weekend!

Jonathan Francis jonathanfrancis26@yahoo.co.uk

Puerto Rican Birding

We spent a very brief time in Puerto Rico and managed to get out to one of the national forests for a few hours and managed to bag a few of their delightful endemics. Firstly the Puerto Rican Bullfinch, followed by the Red-legged Thrush. One of the most iconic birds of Puerto Rico must be the Puerto Rican Tody, the most beautiful surreal creature ever - with its emerald green back,

long red bill and pale eye this was a big one for us and we got it! We then had the great pleasure of finding the Puerto Rican Lizard-cuckoo followed by the Puerto Rican Tanager, the Black-whiskered Vireo, Black-cowled Oriole, Loggerhead Kingbird, and finally the Puerto Rican Stripe-headed Tanager.

What a morning - what a day!

Happy birding

Jono Francis

Tail Feathers

When I was in Tete towards the end of January I saw my first Spotted Creeper and a funny dove. It was picking up spilt and broken mealies with lots of other doves. But it did not have a ring neck and it wasn't a Laughing Dove like the ones we get at the bird table in our Harare Garden. It had a patch of black and white speckles on each side of the neck near the jaw.

Richard Hotchkis 5 B.S. Leon Trust

[This could be an Eurasian Turtle-dove, a very rare bird in the region and only once recorded in Zimbabwe, that being shot on Lone Star Ranch in the lowveld on 15 August 1997. The Laughing Dove does have patches placed more towards the chest but these are black and chestnut rather than black and white. I. Riddell]

White Stork over Wingate

On the left, 1km north of Harare Drive on Alpes road, 1km from entrance to Wingate Park Golf Club and opposite Pomona Refuse Dump there are fertile fields either full of growing potatoes, maize, beans, or cabbages or ploughed ready for the next crop. From the 29th Dec 2012 up to today, March 11th, it has been possible to see between 5 and 30 White Stork on most days. They seem to prefer ploughed crop less areas but also feed among the crops and fly over the golf course and dump in the company of Abdim's and Marabou Storks. A sight to lift the spirits of the unsuccessful hacker.

Long-crested Eagles in Suburbia

Long-crested Eagles, which decades ago could be seen no closer to Harare than perched on a telephone pole along the Mazowe Road, some kilometres beyond the last houses of Marlborough, have long become a common sight much closer to the City centre in the Northern and Western suburbs of Harare.

Some months ago, I saw one of these birds scavenging in an illegal refuse dump, close to the entrance of Old Hararians Sports Club. I stopped the car and observed the Eagle at close quarters for about a minute before it flew off in a westerly direction. Regrettably, I was not able to identify the object it had picked up which could have been a food item or some nest building material.

Last week I noticed one of these pretty small eagles perched on one of the high, long defunct, street lighting poles near the intersection of Bishop Gaul Avenue and Drummond Chaplin Street. And a few days ago a friend who lives in Milton Park, opposite P.E. School observed a Long-crested Eagle pounce on a rat in a flower-bed in his garden, a few paces from the dining room window. It dragged its prey onto the adjacent lawn and sat there clutching it for about ten minutes before flying off leaving the dead rodent behind.

I suppose these three sightings refer to the same bird, which seems to have become quite accustomed to hunt and move around in a suburban environment.

Rolf Chenaux-Repond rochen@mango.zw

The Fern-leaf and barbets

Just outside the front door grows a fern-leaf *Filicium decipiens*, an eastern highlands forest tree that can get large – up to 25 m. At the moment it is quite small and perhaps won't reach full size in Harare. But the Whyte's Barbets love the fleshy purple drupes and even chase away the Purple-crested Turacos; it's clearly *their* tree and they are here all the time, up to six at once, or will be whilst fruiting lasts. If you want to attract Whyte's to your garden this is definitely a good subject. Right outside the door may not be a good idea in the long-term but for really close-up views the situation can't be bettered. The fern-like glossy compound leaf has a winged rachis and the wavy margins make it an attractive tree.

Ian Riddell, Newlands.

Collared Palm-thrush in Kariba (11 Feb 2013)

I live on the lakeshore in Kariba and just discovered a pair of Collared Palm-thrushes nesting under the eaves of our roof. Now I'm not sure how significant this may be, (being a VERY

amateur birder) but I found it rather remarkable to find this pair apparently sitting on eggs, under my very roof!!! I spent the weekend sitting on the ground, with my neck craned at very odd angles waiting to get 'the picture'. And I hope I have succeeded. I thought this might be interesting to you, as I have followed your articles in Ndeipi Magazine, and thought I would share my pictures. We do have 3 coconut palms in our garden and these are probably what the birds used for their nest. We first saw the pair late November, early December, calling around our garden. I am delighted that they decided to nest here, and have attached a few pictures.
Jo Sharp sharp_joanne@hotmail.com

3/16/13,

I am aware that the *Babbler* and BLZ is about birds but this story involves birds and a cat and I am unable to leave the cat out, as if I did, I would be unable to relate the tale. This particular incident happened at Glenara where we lived temporarily, after being evicted from our usual habitat.

The cat was a feral /bonga crossbred called Colonel Fireball alias Kernet who originated from the Mount Hampden district, being found in the bush by my son, as a tiny starving kitten. At this point in time Kernet was about 18 months old and an opportunist and hunter of note. I was at home and heard a huge commotion by the French doors and leapt up to see what it was all about. Kernet had a White-crested Helmet-shrike in his jaws and was scurrying towards the house with his prey and was being noisily attacked and dive-bombed by the remainder of the group of White-crested Helmet-shrikes. I was so impressed by their brave attempts to rescue one of their own. The moment I got there and started to yell at him, he quick as lightning, caught another White-crested Helmet-shrike and held it pinned down with one paw (as I said he was an opportunist of note). I then grabbed him by the scruff of his neck and lifted him up releasing the bird under his paw and then proceeded to prize open his jaws and the other shrike immediately flew away. The flock of helmet shrikes were delighted to be reunited with their rescued associates and flew off noisily discussing this close shave. Kernet was, as you can imagine, absolutely spitting and tail twitching mad with me.

I must add that prior to this incident the White-crested Helmet-shrikes had frequented the garden and regularly perched noisily in the topmost branches of the peach tree teasing the aforementioned cat. He would climb the tree as high as he could and they would remain jabbering away just out of reach on the flimsiest of twigs so that he could not reach them and I would hear him protesting in cat language.

Kernet did forgive me and forget about my unfair intervention of his hunting skills. The White-crested Helmet-shrikes continued to visit the garden but took greater care when teasing the cat.

Anne Lowe

BLZ member, **Enrico Leonardi** and **Morgan Saineti** of Aberfoyle Lodge, Honde Valley are claiming an Isabelline Wheatear sighted on the top of Gleneagles yesterday 25 March 2013.

Raffle Result

The draw for the *Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa* (7th Edition) by PAR Hockey, WRJ Dean and PJ Ryan that was being raffled took place on 21st February at the BLZ Mashonaland meeting at the Avondale Club. The winner was **Greg Watson from Bulawayo!** Well done Greg!

Many thanks to J Thomson for the donation of the book and to everyone around Zimbabwe who bought tickets for our fund raising effort

Contributions for The Babbler 112 June 2013/ July 2013 may be sent to the Editor anytime between now and 14th May 2013.

