

THE BABBLER

Newsletter of



BirdLife Zimbabwe
The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

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Committee	MASHONALAND (Code 04)	MATABELELAND (Code 09)
Chairperson	Tony Alegria 0772-438697 talegria@zol.co.zw 490375(h)	Cecilia Hubbard 0772-433733 ceilhubbard@yoafrica.com 285666(h)
Vice Chairperson	Dave Rockingham-Gill rgill@zol.co.zw 882412(h)	
Secretary	Linda Fussell fussell@zol.co.zw 333896(h)	Gaynor Lightfoot 0712-402341 doristo7@gmail.com
Treasurer	Debbie Wiggins 0772-252651 wigpd@yoafrica.com 882851(h)	Dave Burnett 0772-241982 davidburnett41@gmail.com 230899(h)
Members	James Ball 0772-310351 jameszwe@gmail.com 481351(h)	John Brebner 0712-606819 brebnerj@acolchem.co.zw 242634(h) Jean Cranston 0733-893390 cranston@gatorzw.com 242921(h) Adele Edwards 882242(h) admin@dambari.com 0712-366917 Paul Hubbard 240127(h) hubcapzw@gmail.com
National Membership Secretary	Carolyn Dennison 747567(h) rolly@zol.co.zw 0772-210240	Karen Learmonth 244005(h) afspec@yoafrica.com 0772-231819
Babbler Editor	Fiona Greiffenberg 0772-224248 fiona6@zol.co.zw 336663(h)	

National Office

Office hours: Monday to Friday 8.30 – 4.30 **until further notice**

5 Clyde Road, Eastlea, P O Box RVL100, Runiville, Harare, Zimbabwe
Telephone: 04 – 481496/490208 (& fax) Cell: 0777 – 831704/ 0714 – 327814
e-mail: birds@zol.co.zw
Website: www.birdlifezimbabwe.co.zw also

Finance/Administration Manager: Sylvia Muzavazi
Conservation Officer: Fadzai Matsvimbo
Projects Officer: Togarasei Fakarayi
Messenger: Vengai Dengu

Useful Contacts:

Julia Pierini: pierinijulia@gmail.com 303178(h)

Rarities Committee: Ian Riddell gemsaf@mango.zw 0772-117054
Ringing Programme: BLZ Office birds@zol.co.zw 490208; 481496
Field Data Submissions: BLZ Office fielddata@blz.co.zw 490208; 481496
BLZ Library: piumosso@zol.co.zw 304298; 490208; 481496
Mashonaland South: Margaret Parrock 068-22005 or her daughter Coralee 0772-739370
Eastern Districts: Peter Gwidibira 0773-524844
Mashonaland East Natural History Society: Chairman Peter Hadingham 04-497035
Secretary Colin de Beer 0279-23931

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 @ USD 25pppn. 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

Obituary

It is with infinite sadness that we give notice of the passing of Vee Hadingham after a long illness very bravely fought on Sunday 28 April.

Words are inadequate to express our sympathy but we send our heartfelt condolences to Pete and the family. Vee was an active and knowledgeable BirdLife member and will be sorely missed. May we draw comfort from the words of Thomas Campbell: "To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die."

National Office

The BLZ Library

Back issues of *Honeyguide*, *Ostrich and Ibis* are available from The BLZ Library with prices available on request.

Herewith a selection of titles which have been added to the Library collection:

Dowsett, R J, Aspinwall, D R, Dowsett-Lemaire, F. 2008. The birds of Zambia: an atlas and handbook. Tauraco Press and Aves a.s.b.l., Liège.

Marais, E and Peacock, F. 2008. The Chamberlain guide to birding Gauteng: 101 prime birding sites in and around Johannesburg & Pretoria. Mirafr Publishing, Pretoria.

Newman, D and King, G. 2011. Southern African LBJs made simple. Struik Nature, Cape Town.

Peacock, Faansie. 2012. Chamberlain's LBJs: the definitive guide to Southern Africa's *Little Brown Jobs*. Mirafr Publishing, Pretoria.

Peacock, Faansie. 2006. Pipits of Southern Africa: the complete guide to Africa's ultimate LBJs. Mirafr Publishing, Pretoria.

Tarboton, Warwick. 2011. Roberts's nests & eggs of southern African birds: a comprehensive guide to the nesting habits of over 720 bird species in southern Africa. Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, Cape Town.

Very many thanks to all those members who have made donations to the Library of books and journals. If you do not wish to keep back issues of *Honeyguide*, we are very happy to take them back again, and will collect!

Please do not hesitate to contact me regarding loans, back issues and reference queries.

Dorothy Wakeling
Librarian, BLZ Library
piumosso@zol.co.zw; library@blz.co.zw
304298 or 0772 376506

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.

JUNE /JULY 2013 Please note ** New starting time is 0700

Mukuvisi	Sunday 2 nd June 2013	0700
	Sunday 7 th July 2013	0700
Chivero	NO MEETINGS	
Monavale Vlei	Sunday 16 th June 2013	0700
	Sunday 21 st July 2013	0700

4th Sunday Outings

Sunday 23 rd June 2013	Ruwa	0700
	Meet Mukuvisi Woodlands Office	
Sunday 28 th July 2013	Lake Manyame Hideaway	0700
	Meet PE School Car Park	
<u>2nd Saturday Outings</u>		
Saturday 8 th June 2013	Domboshawa Hill	0700
	Meet CABS Northridge Park	
Saturday 13 th July 2013	Rainham Dam	0700
	Meet PE School Car Park	

Thursday Meetings at Avondale Sports Club 1730 for 1800

20th June 2013	What do Birds Eat? – Dave Rockingham Gill	0600
18 th July 2013.	Photographic Safari – Dave Hartung	0600

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 - Kazungula 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, Chamabonda.

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

Forthcoming Activities

My apologies to Matabeleland branch members for the scant details about branch activities available in this issue of Babbler, due to my absence on leave during April/May. Adele

22 June: Umfula Adventures in Umzingwane area

On Saturday 22 June we will be making a trip to Umfula Adventures, approximately 30km from town along the Gwanda road. We will leave town at 07:30, to get there around 8 am. There will be an entry fee of \$10 per person, payable to Umfula Adventures, which covers the cost of a day visit, a guided walk, and after the walk there will be a yummy, yummy tea (their catering is excellent!) You are welcome to bring a picnic lunch and stay longer, either at the homestead or at the dam picnic/camping site.

July:

During the month of July the branch will as usual be participating in the African Waterfowl Census, with counts taking place at Aisleby, Cowdray Park and SAST as well as in Matopos and Hwange National Parks. Members will be advised of dates nearer the time via Matland Musings

Dates for waterfowl counts (to be confirmed nearer the time) are:

Cowdray Park and SAST on Saturday 13 July, all day.

Aisleby on Sunday 21 July, morning.

Out of town areas at the convenience of surveyors.

Contact: Julia D on 246269, Helen on 242285, Sandy on 242431.

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

Black Eagle Survey – 50 years old

The following wonderful message has just been received from the Cape Bird Club to BirdLife Zimbabwe. It speaks for itself.

It has been passed to the Matabeleland Branch of BirdLife who are the proud organizers and custodians of the Black Eagle Survey, a survey that has been undertaken every single year without fail since its inception.

“At the evening meeting of the Cape Bird Club last night I gave a brief account of the survey which is now in its 50th year. We have several Rhodesians in the club who recall Val Gargett and her team. In my capacity as Honorary President of the Cape Bird Club, and Vernon Head as our Chairman, we would like you to extend our congratulations to BirdLife Zimbabwe on this amazing record, the longest that any eagle population has ever been monitored. It surely deserves a place in the Guinness Book of Records. It would be appreciated if you could in some way pass on the best wishes of the Cape Bird Club to your members.”

With kind regards, Peter Steyn”

THE MATOBO HILLS BLACK EAGLE SURVEY

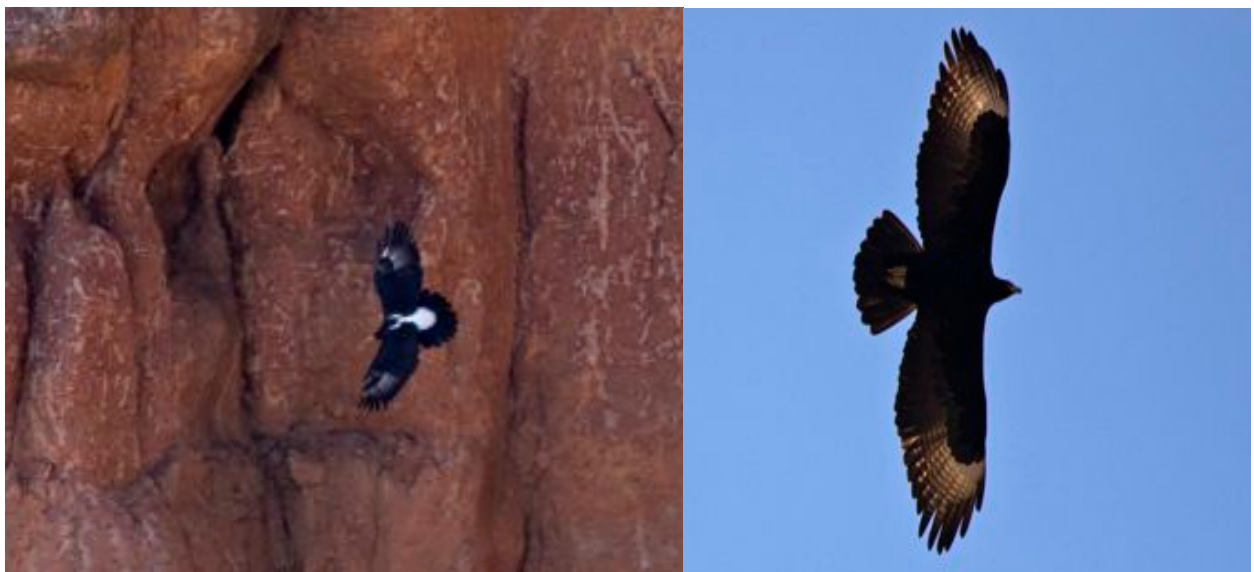
In 1959 and 1960 Ron Thomson, a young Game Ranger in the Department of National Parks in what was then Southern Rhodesia located the eyries of thirty-six Black Eagles in the rugged Matobo Hills 35 kilometres south of Bulawayo. When he left for a new posting his records were taken over by Carl Vernon who systematically relocated his nests, many from rather vague descriptions with no map references. In addition Carl set out to find further breeding pairs, and all sites were sequentially numbered following on from those first found by Ron Thomson. I was able to join Carl on some of his searches and know only too well what a challenge it was to traverse areas of such extremely rugged habit.

In 1963 and 1964 Val Gargett accompanied Carl during his research and when he left Bulawayo he handed over to her to build on his platform. From this mustard seed grew the most comprehensive long-term study of any eagle species in the world. Starting with a mere handful volunteers, the team grew to 74 members by 1983. Virtually all the participants were amateur weekend birders drawn from the Matabeleland Branch of what was then the Rhodesian Ornithological Society. The survey was eventually limited to an area of 620 square kilometres encompassing 60 pairs of Black Eagles, a density of one pair per 10.3 square kilometres, the highest known density of any eagle species in the world. This was due to two factors – an abundant food supply in the form of hyraxes and the availability of numerous nest sites.

The major impetus of the study centred on Val Gargett whose organisational skills, dedication and enthusiasm were legendary. In 1990 her book *The Black Eagle – A Study* was published and it ranks as the finest study ever of a single species of eagle. She did me the honour of asking me to write the Foreword, but I could not even begin to do justice to this remarkable and humble person. Val died in Australia on 6 February 2010 at the age of 87 and she maintained her interest in the survey to the very end.

Each year a Black Eagle Survey report (they have opted retain the original name) appears in *Honeyguide*, the prestigious magazine of what is now Birdlife Zimbabwe. In 2013 the study reached its 50th consecutive year and it must surely rate a place in the Guinness Book of Records? At our evening meeting on 11 April 2013 I spoke briefly on this remarkable achievement and it was agreed that I should forward congratulations from the Cape Bird Club to Birdlife Zimbabwe. They have since thanked us for our good wishes, which were much appreciated.

PETER STEYN



Black Eagle (photos D. Dell)



Black Eagle (photo D.Dell)

Recent Reports And Sightings

Mashonaland

Lanark Farm, Irvine's Chickens – Sunday 24 March

On Sunday 24 March an enthusiastic group of birders travelled out to the game park on Lanark Farm a little beyond Harare South. This was made possible thanks to Dave Hasluck of Irvine's and we are very grateful to him for the opportunity and glad he was able to join us.

It was a beautiful day, perfect for getting out & about early on a Sunday and we were all assembled by soon after 7am. We were lucky to be able to have with us Chris Magin and Tim Stowe, who were in Zimbabwe for the BirdLife International Africa Regional Committee Meeting. With about 25 or so of us, we were able to cover most habitats: water bodies, woodlands, grasslands and small kopjies.

There are three dams in the game park and with these being full, a variety of water birds were seen including an African Darter, Purple Heron & Squacco Heron. Other interesting sightings near the water were some Comb Ducks as well as Giant & Malachite Kingfishers, and a Water Thick-knee. We saw or heard Emerald-spotted Wood-dove, Lilac-breasted Roller, Senegal Coucal and Black-headed Oriole while other exciting birds on the list were the African Cuckoo, which will soon be on its way north, Yellow-throated Longclaw and a Striped Kingfisher. We saw a good selection of swallows and a variety of cisticolas were also around, Rattling, Zitting and Red-faced.

On the raptor front, we had wonderful sightings of both Black-chested and Brown Snake-eagles. A pair of African Harrier-hawks was seen flying over, and some of us were lucky enough to see a Martial Eagle. Small raptors included a Lizard Buzzard & some Amur Falcons.

As well as our favourite regulars – Speckled Mousebird, Green Wood-hoopoe, Black-collared Barbet, Black-backed Puffback, to name but a few - we saw a pleasing variety of specials: the beautiful Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Long-billed Crombec, Southern Hylia, Brubru, Red-backed Shrike, Cuckoo Finch and the lovely Orange-breasted Waxbill.

Not only were we treated to this wonderful selection of birds but we also enjoyed watching the resident family of giraffes with their new offspring. Once all the groups had returned to base to compare notes and compile the list, we counted an impressive 105 species. We all had a great morning and hope to be able to return to this venue again one day.

Debbie Wiggins

Visit to Pamuzinda on the 28th April 2013

Twenty-four birders gathered at Pamuzinda Lodge at 7am on the last Sunday of April. We were treated to tea and coffee while vehicles were arranged for the trip into the game park.

As we were drinking our coffee the bird list had started and we soon had Little Sparrowhawk, Lizard Buzzard and Giant Kingfishers that were spotted from the terrace. The group was divided up and we left the lodge in three vehicles. Each vehicle soon ended up on its own which meant that each group had a very interesting morning but saw many different birds. The Pamuzinda area is a wonderful place to bird watch, as there are so many habitats. There are areas of Miombo, Mopane, Acacia, grasslands, dams and a well-vegetated riverine area that has water all year because of the weir in front of the lodges. Some people were very lucky to see a pair of Martial Eagles around a nest site. Others were fortunate to see Brown Snake-eagle, Burnt-necked Eremomela, Stierling's Wren-warbler and White-breasted Cuckooshrike.

After the interesting drive around the game park the vehicles returned to the lodge for lunch. Back at the lodge we found that one of the party that had stayed the night at Pamuzinda had done a canoe trip instead of driving around and had seen the African Finfoot. No one else was lucky enough to see this very interesting bird. An unexpected sighting in the lodge area was a female Black-throated Wattle-eye. These birds were among a number of birds not seen during the first Atlas. White-faced Duck with ducklings, White-backed Vulture, African Green-pigeon Square-tailed Nightjar, Marico Sunbird, White-crested Helmet-shrike and White-browed Sparrow-weaver were all seen by various members of the group.

The lunch was excellent! Very good food and lots of bird talk. In what seemed like no time at all it was 2pm and we now left Pamuzinda for a quick drive around Chengeta. A few extra birds were seen and the group that had missed the Martial Eagle at Pamuzinda were very lucky to see an immature Martial Eagle. Other birds spotted in this area included Pied Kingfisher, large numbers of Namaqua Doves, Pearl-breasted Swallow, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting and Meyer's Parrot. The people in the vehicle I was on enjoyed sitting under the fig tree watching the giraffe browse.

We were all very grateful to the lodges and the BirdLife people that organised and co-ordinated this outing which is a real high light of the year's outings.

Dave Dalziel

Monavale Vlei

Could a Snake-eagle be poisoned by eating snakes?

As a follow on to Dorothy Wakeling's report in *The Babbler* 111 about the incapacitated Black-chested Snake-eagle found on Monavale Vlei, I did a bit of research into the effect of snake venom on Snake-eagles. While there was nothing specific about the impact of snake venom on snake eagles, it was evident that although snake venom is toxic it is generally not considered to be poisonous.

By definition poisoning only occurs by ingestion or inhalation of a toxic substance and venom because it is a protein is only toxic if injected directly into the bloodstream. Presumably the generalisation covers absorption of venom into bloodstream via cuts or ulcers in the mouth and digestive tract. It was also apparent that nothing, not even snakes, are immune to snake venom although some animals show some resistance to its effects.

So returning to the incapacitated Black-chested Snake-eagle, it was certainly intoxicated as its legs were paralyzed, both wings dysfunctional and the pupils of its eyes contracted and slow to react. However, it was not showing symptoms associated with a chemical poisoning as there

Black-chested Snake-eagle (photo D. Wakeling)



was no sign of regurgitation, the plumage on the bib was clean and dry although the crop was empty, and no diarrhoea since there was no soiling around the vent. There was no evidence that the bird had been in any sort of collision either. At the time I surmised that the bird was perhaps poisoned from eating off the abundance of baby cobras seen by observers on the vlei, but it appears that this theory was flawed since cobra venom is not poisonous.

I still think this may have been the cause though, as it figures that the eagle might not have effectively dispatched a small cobra (s) on account of the small size, swallowed the prey whole and got bitten in the process, or maybe it was bitten just in the course of hunting!

There is consensus that young cobras are just as venomous as larger cobras even though they have less venom, it is just much more concentrated than that of adults. There is reference to snake-eagles removing the heads of snakes to avoid the venom, but in light of the above it would appear that this behaviour might be to ensure the prey is dead before swallowing it, or coincidental since most raptors eat the head of their prey first regardless of whether it is toxic or not.

Whatever the cause I still believe it was a natural phenomenon as notwithstanding the kind (and free!) treatment received from Dr's Waghorn and Rees, the bird's rate of recovery was remarkably fast with no lasting ill effect. At release, only six hours after being found, the eagle flew off strongly, caught the first thermal and was out of sight within five minutes, a far cry from its pathetic state that morning. At the end of the day I suppose this is all that matters, a bit of luck and quick thinking and an eagle gets to fly another day (well done Dorothy and Jimmy).

Neil Deacon neilrobindeacon@gmail.com

Matabeleland

Branch activities March / April / May

Adele Edwards

Field trip to Insindi Ranch, Gwanda – 18 to 21 April

Adele Edwards

Over the period 18 – 21 April members made a follow up visit to Insindi Ranch in the Gwanda area, with members staying from one to four days to enjoy the great birding in this area. I was able to join the field trip for only one day, accompanied by Verity Bowman, Director of Dambari Wildlife Trust, and Simon Tonge, CEO of Paignton Zoo, UK, and chairman of Dambari's board of trustees. We enjoyed a good day of birding chalking up 63 species. For me the highlight was a sighting of a Stierling's Wren-warbler, which I have only seen once before. Another unusual sighting was that of 4 night apes curled up in the branches of a thorn tree!

A more detailed report about this trip will appear in Babbler #113. Again my apologies for the scant details about branch activities available in this issue of Babbler, due to my absence on leave during April/May.

Afternoon Presentation On The Galapagos – 18 May

Cecilia Hubbard

Saturday 18th May at 15.30, twenty-one members gathered at the home of Tom and Jean Cranston to find out the adventures of local branch members Jill Miller-Cranko and Margaret Frame. These two ladies are fortunate to have paid a visit to the Galapagos Islands – a

destination many of us only dream of. A truly wonderful series of photos and Jill and Margaret's accompanying interesting information for the slides, made for a truly entertaining afternoon. The vision of sea lions, the only colony of Fairy Penguins north of the Equator, the patient females of the magnificent Albatross awaiting the return of their mates, and of course the giant tortoises after which these islands are named, all made for an afternoon of great entertainment and of course – envy.

A wonderful presentation, followed by an evening of fantastic 'fellowship' in the form of a lovely meal prepared by Jean, and enjoyed by those who remained after a most enthralling presentation.

We are all looking forward to hearing of their latest adventure to India.

Dassie (Hyrax) Population Census – 24 to 26th May 2013

Cecilia Hubbard - Co-Ordinator – Dassie Survey

The popularity of a census which is conducted in winter, with participants required to be in their census sites before dawn was overwhelming this year.

Friday evening was time for a briefing of what was to happen over the following two mornings. Inexperienced observer teams were paired with the experienced for the first morning of the census, with the inexperienced teams having to locate their allocated sites for the following Sunday morning.

Everyone left the campsite in time to be 'in situ' in good time. For a change the weather was ideal for both dassies, and humans. A magnificent dawn, with slightly less than freezing temperatures started what appears to possibly be one of the best census carried out by the Branch.

As a mark of respect for its founders, and in celebration of the Black Eagle Breeding Survey's 50th Anniversary a scrumptious dinner was given on Saturday night. The incredible dedication of past, present, and future co-ordinators, and participating members over the past 50 years of this historic survey was acknowledged and appreciated - A tribute to the Late Valerie Gargett, as well as all those who have contributed to the continuation of this survey. An amazing feat.

Sunday morning saw all teams scurrying off, including the inexperienced teams who proved more than their weight in gold after reporting they had found their sites, and were prepared for the morning count.

A Visit to Stonehills Farm near Marula, Matabeleland

18-21 April 2013, Pentad 2030_2805

Twelve of us went, 5 from Mashonaland and 7 from Matabeleland, for a bird watching weekend, but there was an April lull and combined with the wind we had a shortlist of birds comprising of 85 species, with some gems. But we discussed all things natural history from first light to falling asleep at night.

First people in this area were the Bushman, a residual genetic token of whom still live in the district, as seen in the gateman. The sanctuary is 6500 acres and Richard Peek, the owner, tells us there are some 80 known rock art sites on the farm. There is a place where very well preserved grain bins still stand, which could be at least 150 years old. There are old kraal sites, where the old hunters or 'bywomers' used *Commiphora* stakes to make their kraal enclosures, ensuring that the poles would sprout and form permanent, live, termite-proof stockades. Most are straight sided and could be a 100 or more years old. The grave on the farm of a man called Smith, buried in 1923, is near ruins of a dwelling. The Viljoens occupied the property around the 1920s and then sold Stonehills to Dennis Greef. He and his wife were subsequently murdered in Plumtree. Their family then owned the farm until 1989, when the Peeks bought it. When Richard and Bookey Peek took over the farm, it was then a rundown cattle ranch with only a ruined homestead and one reservoir as the only development. The I.C.A. had placed an order on the property as it had been severely overstocked, which had caused extensive erosion. The Peeks have built a beautiful private lodge and have developed roads, dams, and weirs and fenced the property for game. No cattle now exist on the property, and it was proclaimed a game sanctuary in 1993. It is in the north-western fringe of the Matopos and large granite outcrops feature the landscape with the predominant woodland mostly *Burkea*.

Of the birds a lifer for me and Richard Dennison on day one was the Lark-like Bunting which only reaches the western half of the country on a line from Kariba to Chiredzi, and we were greeted by the resident pair of Verreaux's Eagles as they flew overhead. Two days later we went to their nest site and saw one on the nest. Opposite the nest Richard has installed a hide, which was pulled up the vertical rock face – and secured – from the top with steel cables. The hide is built of fibreglass from rock moulds, and amazingly painted to resemble the surrounding rock. Often a pair of Speckled Pigeon nest within the hide. During one season the Verreaux's Eagles at this site unusually reared two chicks to 6 weeks, the smaller of the two succumbed to gradual starvation and persecution by the larger chick. The bigger chick attacked the smaller one only when the adult arrived on the nest and feeding commenced. Once the adult left, and even if food still remained within the nest, all aggression stopped and the smaller was left in peace. Often the chicks would lie close together, gaining mutual body warmth.

All told, around 150 breeding birds have been recorded on Stonehills. Some migrants were late departing: the Common Sandpiper and the African Golden Oriole, and Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters met us at the gate.

On our Mashonaland outings we don't go to many kopjes so we seldom see some of the birds we saw here, such as Cape Glossy Starling, Speckled Pigeon, Boulder Chat and Mocking Cliff-chat. Retz's Helmet-shrike was feeding young as were Yellow-fronted Canary. A Violet-backed Starling was eating *Combretum molle* fruits and flying overhead were 11 White-backed Vultures and 2 Lappet-faced Vultures. For me it is a long time since I saw a Black-bellied Bustard; two of us followed one, and swept the grass for another sighting, but didn't find it again.

In the evenings Richard showed us many of his wonderful bird photos. Kori Bustard had bred on the farm, and we saw pictures of a clutch of nearly white Kori eggs, which were consumed by baboons, and of a better-camouflaged clutch, which was successful. These clutches were laid in nests 1.5 km apart at an interval of 5 years. Another set of photos revealed Red-winged Starlings on giraffe, eland and impala mimicking oxpeckers and White-necked Raven de-ticking an eland that was lying down. A high voltage power line crosses the farm and over time has killed numerous birds among which have been White Stork, Kori Bustard, Black-bellied Bustard, six Lesser Flamingos; one night a Secretarybird; and then more recently, injured one of the resident Verreaux's Eagles. This was rescued and nursed by the Peeks and after four months was released back into the wild. There are indications that it is trying to resume its place in the territory, taken over in the interim by a rival bird.

The animals we saw were zebra, wildebeest, tsessebe, sable, kudu, impala, giraffe, yellow-spotted and rock hyrax, baboon, warthog and, in an enclosure, bushbuck consisting of a female aged 22 years and her 14 year old son, with 20 inch horns.

Spoor we saw were of leopard, brown hyena, klipspringer, ant bear, honey badger and porcupine. During the weekend we were told 2 lion had visited the sanctuary in past years that caused havoc for a short time and a cheetah that over a period of 10 years had caused steenbok, reedbuck, waterbuck, tsessebe and gemsbok to decline beyond recovery by preying on each year's calf crop. Aardwolf is now very rare with the general decline of termites and springhare has become scarce in the sandveld area. Bookey Peek has written three books, published internationally, that cover incidents and experiences the Peeks have had on Stonehills. One covers the antics of a warthog they raised and released back into the sanctuary and the following two features an orphaned honey badger they had for two years, appropriately called "Badger". Many of Badger's adventures have been recorded on video. Richard's video 'Raising Hell' was accepted and distributed by National Geographic.

My interpretation of the rock art we saw had lion, klipspringer, tsessebe and giraffe. The giraffe were painted in both yellow ochre and sienna, the first possibly more modern than the second.

Richard Peek was involved with photo assistance used for reference for the new book called *Roberts Geographic Variations of Southern African Birds*. It is surprising how different some of these birds are on our western border. The Emerald-spotted Wood-dove *Turtur chalcospilos zambesiensis* in Mashonaland, and the much paler bird *T.c. volkmanii*. Or the Cape Batis, *Batis capensis erythrophthalma* in the Eastern Highlands and *B.c. kennedyi* of the Matopos – which Richard says has seemingly disappeared from Stonehills, possibly because the Marula area and kopjes in particular have become much dried in recent years.

All in all, a wonderful weekend in a marvellous setting. Thank you.

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

Birding Trip to Northern Section of Umfurudzi Park_ – 23 March 2013

Having often looked at the Umfurudzi area on the map, and noticing the large amount of terrain to the north of Hippo Pools Camp, I have long sustained a considerable itch to explore the area. When the opportunity arose to take two BirdLife representatives from the UK out birding - the first place, which popped into my mind, was here. In fact it had long been in my mind only now it was shouting "me me" with considerably more vigour!

Hence thirty minutes past the fourth hour of the day, we awoke and packed the vehicle, had a quick cup of coffee and headed out past the tollgate onto the Shamva road. One follows the standard route to Hippo Pools heading straight onto the dirt road leading to Madziwa Mine. Normally one turns right shortly after the dirt - through the shops and the old mine - onto the Hippo Pools road. In our case we proceeded straight for a further 16km, turning right to the Magadzi Gate, which is not that well signposted, a further 5km up this road on the left.

Having paid our entry fees, we snacked on breakfast as we drove into the park, although the boundary only starts some way ahead - fields and houses continue for a few kilometres after the gate. The habitat is much as one finds further to the south - mixed woodland - different to the *miombo* that we know around Harare and typical of the Highveld. *Brachystegia boehmii* (Prince of Wales Tree, or Mfuti) appears to be more common in the north - and in patches the dominant tree - so whether this habitat can be called *miombo* or not, I am not sure. Our birding method for the day was to stop whenever we saw or heard birds from the vehicle, which at times made for a very stop - start method of progress; the general destination being the river forming the northern boundary of the park. Our first stop provided a good show of Lazy Cisticola, and soon after down the road Tawny-flanked Prinia - so a good view of two similar birds with similar sounds was achieved. Boulder Chats were the highlight of the stop - showing themselves at the base of the ridge adjacent to the road. Further on - Spotted Creeper proved to be common, being seen on three occasions. Flappet Lark displayed often during the day and Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, once you learn the call, was without doubt the commonest bird. A sneaky Racquet-tailed Roller flew past the car ;I say sneaky because he did not show well - but after following him for a while, and some patience, good views were had - though his racquets were still busy growing. Broad-tailed Paradise-whydah showed well, rounding up a nice batch of miombo typical birds.

We had lunch by the river - beautiful, and somewhat bird less - but I was pleasantly surprised to find very little evidence of habitation and environmental impact on the northern boundary; over the river it was still woodland showing very little signs of degradation. In patches we passed clumps of palms and I'm sure Collared Palm-thrush could be found here. Clumps of thickly growing riverine trees could also produce some forest birds, though we did not see any. Very few water birds - in fact only Three-banded Plover.

We continued following the track downriver and passed a small pan, which produced a flurry of new species for the list, including Brown-backed Honeybird and Meves's Starling – the latter being a lowland bird as I know it? The altitude here was about 850m, and by the ruler on Google Earth 137km from Harare. I wonder if any closer locations are known for this starling; I will always remember them as being Mana birds, even though they are common throughout the lowveld. White-browed Sparrow-weavers were also present – I am sure I have seen them in the southern section of the park and here too is an interesting question, where is the closest known location to Harare? They are not Highveld birds either.

A little track turning towards the river proved to lead to a bridge still in good condition, and it was upon this bridge whilst negotiating exactly how we were to turn around, that a Black Stork was spotted not far upstream. Always nice to see one of southern Africa's rarer, endangered species. After crossing a little stream we ended up at the ranger base – actually an old disused lodge from long ago, but time was now running away from us so we could not spend much time exploring. Departing from here we saw a sight I did not want to believe at first – and I spent some time having a good look with my binoculars before believing! Just in front of us were three hornbills in a tree. Now we had seen African Grey and Trumpeter already – but both of these were not birds I had seen close to Harare before and not in the same tree either. One was a Red-billed Hornbill, the other two Southern Yellow-billed. I suppose all things considered it is not surprising to see them here, but they are not the normal species we encounter on birding trips out of the capital city! These last few species I very unhappily had to leave out of our Atlassing card – as we had just crossed the pentad boundary – but none the less I entered them

as incidental records anyway. Our total list for the trip I must admit is too much like hard work working out – we had completed two atlas cards – and cross checking the lists is one thing my Atlassing app on my phone cannot do! However it is in the region of 70 species! The road back brought us back into the pentad boundary and I was able to tick Dark Chanting Goshawk as the last for the card!

Birding-wise even one day is still worth the distance and hours involved, though the region is too vast to cover properly and a few days will be required. Our route took a little track to the left, hardly noticeable unless you are looking, shortly after entering the park proper. This leads down to the river, though it took us about 2 hours as we were birding along the way. We passed a little dwala about 100m to the right, not very high, and we walked over to explore. What an incredibly interesting little dwala with natural bonsai-type trees growing out of the cracks, several of them baobabs. I shall upload some photos to Google Earth as soon as I can and will hopefully be viewable once this *Babbler* is out. Returning back from the ranger post at the river we took the more direct route home, turning left at an intersection not far up from the river, a large Baobab is present just on the right. This track couldn't have been used in months if not even a year. The grass was taller than the car, and had one or two tricky bits but was otherwise OK. Driving in this section requires high clearance and I did use four-wheel drive once, crossing one of the rivers. A normal bakkie will not manage in my opinion. Fit a grass guard over the front of your vehicle – the grass is long and plentiful – and will clog up your radiator very fast. I had acquired a map from the main office in the south some weeks prior to our departure.

A very pleasant end to our day was exiting at the park gate where unbeknown to us we had been under-charged. The attendant asked to modify our receipt so we happily gave it to him. He adjusted accordingly and returned it to us, bidding us a safe trip home. I was surprised to not be asked for more money so I asked him why he didn't need more money from us. He replied it was his mistake so he will pay, don't worry. I have not come across such responsibility before in such a situation, we were all very impressed. We gave him the outstanding money, much to his appreciation. Jan Stander is the park manager, and he can be contacted if you want information about going to the northern section. E-mail jan@umfurudzipark.co.zw or cell 0774-376-458.

Damian Newmarch damianinafrica@gmail.com

Mbazhe Pan – Nkai

This is a water bird hot spot a couple of kilometers to the East of the Shangani River just before it takes a 70 degree bend to run due west passing north of Lupane and then swinging north a little to receive the Kana river course and then joining the Gwaai.

It was new country for Rolf Chenaux and me so we were pleased to take up a Mountain Club recce to see what was there. – No mountains but lots of gently undulating woodland Msasa, Mopane and further west mkusi – the railway sleeper teak tree. The rivers follow broad treeless belts running parallel courses. But along and just off these waterways – not perennial – is a service surface of large water bodies covering anything from 40 to 140 hectares that hold lots of shallow - 1.2m deep – water for anything from a few months to several years at a time.

Mbazhe – or Dambazhe – as some locals call it because it is like an artificially contracted reservoir and has a supplementary wall, is one of the bigger 'pans' as we used to call them. Others are Dagamela Dandanda, Sikoba-sina-donka, Gambagalala and the incongruously named "Lake Alice". Colin Saunders and I did a couple of trips to Lake Alice on the Gwampa in 1960. It was nearly 2 kms long and 700m wide. There were lots of big bream, lots of big crocs and lots of men and women standing up to their waists in the water and in among the crocs. "The ingwenya's they like the fish". It was otherwise a great big sheet of open water with little emergent fringe vegetation. Plenty of water with lilies and plenty *Potamogeton* pond weed that floats to the top but doesn't extend much above the surface – lots of African Jacanas, including Lesser Jacanas but not much waterfowl other than duck and not all that many of them. These were duck shooting times and perhaps they moved off as soon as a car came down.

Mbazhe early in March 2013 was totally different. The locals said that it had filled in one rainy spell during October 2011 prior to which it had been dry except for one small muddy pond. Size? Depth? At this time the northern end had a narrow (2m) fringe of scattered clumps of sedges/*Eliocharis* that grew wider as one went down the long western and eastern shores. About a third of the pan was grass-fringed with bigger taller sedges as the water

deepened from ankle deep to knee deep. Parts of the eastern fringe were a mosaic of sedge patches and drying out squelch patches of soft open mud carrying a lot of dead and dying water lilies. This was much favoured by the duck. The rest of the pan (mostly knee-trouser crotch depth) carried an unusually dense growth of water lilies: many in flower, white and odd patches of blue, but all with 10-15% of the leaves blown into standing up positions and occasionally forming clusters of leaf.

There were masses of ducks. Our estimates were as follows: -

White-faced Duck about 300. Knobbies – sorry Comb Duck – about 100, one female apparently with swimming young. Red-billed Teal about 20. White-backed Duck – numbers very difficult, say 25 including one pair with about 4 x 1/3 grown young. Fulvous Duck 18. Spur-winged Goose a dozen, with lots of white plumage. Cape Teal 9. Egyptian Geese 2 only. Hottentot Teal 6. Southern Pochard 3.

Other big water birds were Grey Crowned Crane 2; Saddle-billed Stork, 1 male; African Openbill, 2 one with very yellow-cream sides to bill, Grey Heron, a couple; Black-headed Heron, 3-4; African Sacred Ibis about 10; African Jacana many – 50? – 100? Very difficult to count. Little Grebe 6 +; Red-knobbed Coot 0, Black Crake 0, kingfisher 0, Common Moorhen 0, Swampheens 0, Reed Cormorant 1 only, White-breasted quickly changed into knobbies none of which had knobs on; and the Reed Cormorant was gone next morning.

Star of the water birds were the Whiskered Terns. All day long they flew up and down across and round – mostly flying fast downwind about 5 m about the water then slowly back up-wind just above or hovering less than 2m up. Some of them were not grey below but black: some of these birds had an almost brown look about their backs. But most of them were pure white with a whitish rump and a mottled back. These seemed to follow the black/grey bellied birds and when a few were sometimes fed by the adults, we realized they were youngsters which kept up persistent short, soft chipping which became an all pervasive sound as evening came on.

So it seemed that this season.

- Heavy rain fell early and quickly filled the pan.
- Vegetation would have taken about six weeks to come up and through for the terns to nest and lay their eggs between Xmas and mid-Jan.
- Early March – young still following adults for food but finding most food for themselves.

Alex Masterson and Rolf Chenaux-Repond

Namibia Trip 2013

Day 1 – 27 April 2013

Route: Harare – Bulawayo

Weather: Hot and sunny

O/N Accommodation: The Bulawayo Club – Tel: +263 9 64868 (\$90pppn B&B)

Restaurants: Bulawayo Club, 2 orders of perfectly cooked Oxtail

Interesting Birds: Tawny Eagles, Abdim's Storks, plus or minus 150 Comb Ducks feeding in a freshly tilled land just west of the Manyame bridge and Lanner Falcon.

Interesting Creatures: Goats, cattle and donkeys

Butterflies Observed: None

Comments: We had a bit of a let-down in that we broke down just outside Norton, not a great start to the trip but with the expert assistance of Amtec Kwekwe we were soon on our way again and had a delightful finish to an exhausting day at the Bulawayo Club. Amazing rooms and fantastic antiques adorned each corner of every room and floor level. Whilst partaking in an icy cold beverage on our room balcony a pair of Lanner Falcons attempted to hunt Rock Doves around us.

Day 2 – 28 April 2013

Route: Bulawayo – Vic Falls

Weather: Hot and Sunny

O/N Accommodation: National Parks Cottages – Tel: +263 13 42294 (\$80 for a cottage sleeping 4 pax – Self Catering)

Restaurants: Self-cooked Pork Chops in fig jam

Interesting Birds: Tawny Eagles, Dusky Larks, Martial Eagles, Bat Hawk, Collared Palm-thrush

Interesting Creatures: Donkeys, goats, cattle, impala and warthog

Butterflies observed: Foxy, Bushveld, Pearl and Lightening Charaxes and a Streaky-tipped Acraea

Comments: This has to be one of the most gorgeous drives in the country. Fantastic roads which cut through a mosaic of Teak forests as well as thorn scrub teeming with birds such as Black-faced and Violet-eared Waxbills, Meves's Starlings and White-browed Sparrow-weavers. We were thrilled to finish off at the lodges with a hunting Bat Hawk over the river and a beautiful duet from a pair of Collared Palm-thrushes.

Day 3 – 29 April 2013

Route: Vic Falls – Shankara Lodge on the Caprivi – Tel: +264 855 548 051 (N\$380 pppn – Self-catering)

Weather: Hot and Sunny

O/N Accommodation: Shankara Lodge

Restaurants: Self Catered

Interesting Birds: Martial Eagle, Hartlaub's Babbler, Swamp Boubou, Cape Glossy Starling, Greater Blue-eared Starling and loads of Burchell's Starling, Rufous-bellied Tit and Green-capped Eremomela.

Interesting Creatures: Elephants, sable, kudu, warthog, Chacma Baboons and southern giraffe

Butterflies observed: surprisingly nothing on the wing but the very common species.

Comments: Another stunning drive to the Caprivi, from the time one leaves the falls you drive through gorgeous bush for about six hundred kilometres on not only the best roads in Africa but the world! We stopped in some very decent looking habitat to look for the Souza's Shrike and Sharp-tailed Starlings but alas only managed to find a Rufous-bellied Tit. We knew they were close but the former is a very rare bird that is surprisingly confiding making it very difficult to spot or flush. We finished our lovely afternoon off at a little shop that sells biltong and very cold beer. We then headed for Shankara, our fantastic accommodation for 2 nights. There are a series of lodges that Terrence, the farmer, has built on his property overlooking the magnificent Okavango River.

Day 4 – 30 April 2013

Route: Caprivi

Weather: Hot and Sunny

O/N Accommodation: Shankara Caprivi – Tel: +264 855 548 051 (N\$380 pppn – Self-catering)

Restaurants: Shankara provided a delicious home cooked meal of chicken, pork chops, potato bake and a salad laden with olives and feta cheese!

Interesting Birds: Southern Ground-hornbill, Bradfield's Hornbill, Black-throated Canary, Gabar Goshawk, Little Sparrowhawk, Rufous-bellied Tit and Hartlaub's Babbler.

Interesting Creatures: None

Butterflies observed: None

Comments: We worked extremely hard for the Souza's Shrike and Sharp-tailed Starlings – bearing in mind we have a three-month-old baby with us. We retired back to the lodge for lunch and had crippling views of the Hartlaub's Babbler and Swamp Boubou. Coppery-tailed Coucals called tantalizingly close across the river in Angola but never showed themselves. We decided in the afternoon to visit Mark Paxton and his lovely wife Charlie who assured us that if we stayed with them on our return journey we would see the Souza's and Sharpies! This put a spring in our step and we went off into the woodlands to search one more time, just in case – we failed once again...



Rufous-bellied Tit

Day 5 – 1 May 2013

Route: Shankara – Kunene River Lodge

Weather: Hot and Sunny

O/N Accommodation: Kunene River Lodge – Tel: +264 65 27 4300 (N\$830 pppn B&B)

Restaurants: Kunene River Lodge cooked up a feast of Peppered beef fillet and chicken cordon bleu, divine!

Interesting Birds: White-tailed Shrike, Monteiro's and Damara Hornbill, Violet Wood-hoopoe and Rufous-tailed Palm-thrush



Rufous-tailed Palm-thrush

Interesting Creatures: Loads of dead snakes on the road including Pythons and Brown House Snakes.

Butterflies observed: None

Comments: Another magical drive from the Caprivi to Kunene along the finest road I have ever driven – the C45! As you leave Rundu you travel along the Okavango for a fair distance. For the first four hours into the trip there is no human habitation, just massive tracts of Teak and Manketi woodlands with the odd Camel Thorn on the edge. The largest population of people live in the Oshikati region which is a little south of the Angolan Border so there is not much of any natural habitat left but the area is alive with Ilala palms which gives the place a somewhat tropical feel (thank goodness). We were a little disappointed at the devastation in that area; it has also experienced its first drought in a few years and the goats have ravaged every last shrub and blade of grass remaining. To our delight, as we passed the sleepy town of Ruacana, with no warning at all we suddenly dropped into this massive valley which creates the Kunene River. We could not believe how spectacular and unspoilt it was and the lifers rolled in! Firstly was the White-tailed Shrike, a bird I had longed to see for so many years – it has the most piercing yellow eyes and really does have a very short vividly white tail. The Monteiro's and Damara Hornbills followed. Not long after the vehicle jammed to a screeching halt as a small family of Violet Wood-hoopoes flew across the road in front of us. These birds can be tricky to find and we had to make sure they were not the Green Wood-hoopoes so played their calls and they came shooting back showing off their completely violet plumage with no hint of green at all.

The next stop was camp and they had ice-cold beers, which washed down all the adrenaline that had accumulated in our bodies. Whilst unpacking the vehicle we heard the distinctive call of a palm-thrush, we knew this was the Rufous-tailed Palm-thrush so abandoned our chores and went in search of this elusive skulker. We did not have to walk far. There it was, on the emerald green lawn only a few yards from the vehicle. He has an awesome rufous crown with rufous wings and a rufous tail but has a most stunning call typical of Palm and Mourning Thrushes. We could not believe our eyes and struggled to sleep that night with the anticipation of what the morning may reveal brewing up within!



White-tailed Shrike

Day 6 – 2 May 2013

Route: Kunene River Lodge

Weather: Hot and Sunny

O/N Accommodation: Kunene River Lodge – Tel: +264 65 27 4300 (N\$830 pppn B&B)

Restaurants: KRL chicken cordon bleu stuffed with cheese and bacon with a side of roast veg.

Interesting Birds: Bare-cheeked Babbler, Chestnut Weaver, Rufous-tailed Palm-thrush, White-tailed Shrike and Rosy-faced Lovebirds.



Bare-cheeked Babbler

Interesting Creatures: Stripped tree Squirrel, Namibia Ground Agama

Butterflies observed: Topaz Arab, Buquet's White and Veined Orange

Comments: We searched for the Cinderella Waxbills but to no avail, the area has been severely affected by the drought and the usual afternoon drinking haunts are no longer visited by the waxbills. We had crippling views of all the other Kunene specials but sadly did not get a sighting of the Grey Kestrel that hunts the lands at Swartbooisdrift a few kilometres downstream of the camp. Our next day however was a big one; we were going to look for the recently discovered Angola Cave-chat, which used to be an endemic of Angola but was discovered last

year in the Zebra Mountains. Pete and Hillary who own and run the camp could obviously sense my nervousness about the chat and the waxbill. Pete told us it took him 10 days to locate the bird in the harshest wastelands ever, I was even more nervous after that brief chat and went straight to bed ready for our early start.

Day 7 – 3 May 2013

Route: Kunene River Lodge – Zebra Mountains.

Weather: Hot and Sunny

O/N Accommodation: Kunene River Lodge – Tel: +264 65 27 4300 (N\$830 pppn B&B)

Restaurants: KRL

Interesting Birds: Angola Cave-chat, Cinderella Waxbills, Rüppell's Parrots, Chestnut Weavers, Red-headed Finch, Carp's Tit, Violet Wood-hoopoe and the **Bennett's Woodpecker subspecies *buysi*.

Interesting Creatures: Dassie Rat, Rock Hyrax and a tiny little baby Scrub Hare which had been separated from its mother (we hope they were reunited).

Butterflies observed: none but there was a lot of mistletoe growing on the Mopane trees so I am sure something special will be found there.

Comments: We left camp at five a.m. sharp, wife, baby, Pete and his two dogs. We were brimming with expectation and asked Pete non-stop questions. The Mountains cover several thousand square kilometres and are largely inaccessible and inhospitable. We passed a few local Himba villages, which comprised of a few rudimentary huts; how they live there is a miracle, black rocks, barren black earth and a few stunted Mopane trees. Strangely there are a few seeps that hold water for most part of the year but usually dry up towards the end of the season; these are where the Cinderella Waxbills come to quench their parched African thirsts! We followed a track which Pete had made in an extremely eco-friendly manner in that he never cut down a tree in the making of it. We arrived just before dawn, the warm orange hue of the sun just touching the horizon. We were very quiet and placed our chairs at the base of the massive boulder strewn mountain – how we were going to see this mega special bird amongst a jumble of giant black boulders baffled me! Pete made us a coffee and as we sat there he explained that when the sun's rays kissed the rocks and warmed them up the birds would pop up and bask in the warmth. We had not been there for ten minutes when I spotted a pair for Cave-chats dashing about the rocks chasing each other. It was as if they were floating like fairies over the rocks with their striking black and white plumage amongst the Rüppell's Parrots, African Red-eyed Bulbuls and Grey Go-away-birds basking in the morning sun! We were stunned and felt so uniquely privileged to be witnessing this rare event. There turned out to be three of them, which was quite something, as Pete had never observed three together! Flocks of Rosy-faced Lovebirds also joined in the "sun bathe". What a sight to behold. Pete knows the call of the chats, which is very important because you can follow the calls and anticipate where they next reveal themselves – as quickly as they show, they go. A bird came within earshot of where we were sitting and Pete imitated the call perfectly – next minute thirty feet in front of us was a single adult sitting on a branch watching us just as intently as we were watching it! Then the bird dropped to the floor and nonchalantly bounced about, calling and feeding as though we were not there. We were the 44th, 45th and 46th people to ever see these birds in Southern Africa so they definitely had no fear of humans and man certainly has not persecuted them yet. Elated, we thought things couldn't get better until we heard the sound of a Cinderella Waxbill! Pete wasn't convinced as it had a strange finish to its typical call. We went to investigate and found a group of Blue Waxbills and Pirit Batises. On our way back to the car Pete mentioned that he was becoming rather anxious that we had not found the Cinderella Waxbills yet. In that instance my wife froze. Her body stiffened like a heron ready to strike some poor unsuspecting prey – she lifted her binos and exclaimed with a quivering voice that she had a small grey bird with a crimson rump! Pete and I could not yet see a thing. I had mentioned to him before that my wife has the ability to spot Pitta in the thickest bush without them calling or feeding and I felt this might be one such sighting. I became really anxious when Sausages (my wife's name of endearment) stated that the bird was preening and flicking its wings. I dropped to my knees to try and get a better view and lo and behold... there it was – a female Cinderella Waxbill in all her glory. It is one of the most stunning estrildids with a soft grey breast and upper-parts and a bright crimson rump and lower belly. The males have a soot black belly with the red extending onto the wing – what a morning! The drive back to lodge produced another lifer, the Carp's Tit, which finished off a truly spectacular morning!

**** Appearance**

Male differs from all other woodpeckers in the region by having an all-red forehead, crown and moustacial stripes. Male of north-western race (*buysi*) has mostly unmarked, pale peach-coloured underparts. Female is readily identifiable by the brown throat and ear coverts. Juvenile resembles female.

Day 8 – 4 May 2013**Route:** KRL**Weather:** Hot and Sunny**O/N Accommodation:** Kunene River Lodge – Tel: +264 65 27 4300 (N\$830 pppn B&B)**Restaurants:** KRL**Interesting Birds:** Cinderella Waxbill, Violet Wood-hoopoe and Short-toed Rock-thrush.

Cinderella Waxbill

Interesting Creatures: Angolan Fruit Bat**Butterflies observed:** None

Comments: This was our day of departure back to the Caprivi but Pete informed us that he had found a flock of fourteen Cinderella Waxbills on the boat cruise the previous night. We really wanted to get a crippling look at them once again so we headed up river searching every reedbed and depression that might hold grass seeds. After about 2 hours we decided to call it a morning, my wife stopped to feed our baby Mana and simultaneously we both heard the tell-tale trill of the Cinderella Waxbill. I looked up and immediately spotted the group feeding on the banks of the Kunene. They were as colourful as the daintiest Christmas decorations and much more beautiful. They were hanging upside down with utmost dexterity and were an absolute joy to watch in the morning light. After much discussion regarding the various routes back home it was decided that we would spend a night at Dolomite in Etosha, kindly booked on our behalf by Kunene River Lodge, therefore affording us an extra night at Kunene. We absolutely loved our stay at KRL, Pete and Hillary are a delightful couple and were so accommodating and Roleen and the rest of the staff were awesome! It truly is a piece of paradise!

Day 9 – 5 May 2013**Route:** KRL – Dolomite in Etosha**Weather:** Hot and Sunny**O/N Accommodation:** Dolomite (must pre-book) Tel: +264 65 68 5115 LNelumbu@nwr.com.na (N\$900ppn B&B) – cuts off approx. 450km to enter the park through Dolomite but entrance is restricted to those staying at the lodge.**Restaurants:** Dolomite**Interesting Birds:** Black-chested Prinia, Rufous-eared Warbler, Pirit Batis and the bizarre Hartlaub's Spurfowl.**Interesting Creatures:** Hartmann's Mountain Zebra, Damara Dik-dik, Burchell's Zebra, African Elephant, Gemsbok, Red Hartebeest, Black-backed Jackal and Southern Giraffe**Butterflies observed:** none

Comments: We stayed in this stunning private camp overlooking the plains. At a viewpoint overlooking a pan, my wife spotted the Hartlaub's Spurfowl alongside a Dassie Rat (another lifer). Early the following morning I woke up to the call of Tit-babblers and decided to get a better view of the francolin. I stepped out of the room and there were two pairs in duet not three meters from where I was standing. These birds have a reputation of being notoriously difficult to find but this was a breeze. Our aim was to drive through the entire length of the park to overnight at Namutoni where we could leave very early the following morning to hit Grootfontein for the Black-faced Babblers and then get up into the Caprivi to search for the Souza's Shrike and Sharp-tailed Starlings.

Day 10 – 6 May 2013

Route: Dolomite – Namutoni

Weather: Hot and Sunny

O/N Accommodation: Namutoni Tel: +264 61 285 7200 (N\$600 pppn B&B)

Restaurants: Namutoni

Interesting Birds: Namaqua Sandgrouse, Double-banded Sandgrouse, Monteiro's Hornbill (in the North), Damara Hornbill (in the North), Southern Red-billed Hornbill, Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Bradfield's Hornbill, Kori Bustard and Northern Black Korhaan, Sociable Weaver, Scaly-feathered Finch, Red-necked Falcon and many more!

Interesting Creatures: Lion, Springbok, Black-faced Impala, Greater Kudu, Damara Ground Squirrel and Yellow Mongoose.

Butterflies observed: none

Comments: A stunning drive through Etosha and such a special treat for us having last been there in the early 90's. The general game viewing and birding was spectacular and we stopped off at Okaukuejo camp for a delicious salad lunch before arriving at Namutoni.

Day 11 – 7 May 2013

Route: Namutoni – Shamvura via Roy's Camp – Tel: (+264 67 240 302 royscamp@iway.na)

Weather: Hot and Sunny

O/N Accommodation: Shamvura +264 812 417 473 shamvura@iway.na (N\$500 pppn Self-catering)

Restaurants: Self-catered Calamata olives, battered Hake fillets with a side of stir fried veg.

Interesting Birds: Black-faced Babbler (whew), Retz's Helmet-shrikes, Red-faced Crombec, Chin-spot Batis, Golden-tailed Woodpecker and Cardinal Woodpecker.



Black-faced Babbler

Interesting Creatures: Slender Mongoose, Banded Mongoose

Butterflies observed: Large blue, Bushveld and Green Veined Charaxes, Trimen's Sapphire, Bushveld Scarlet and Black-Tipped Acraea.

Comments: We arrived at Roy's Camp just before lunch and kindly asked the manager if we could have lunch there and then look for the babblers but sadly the chef was not around; however, he was only too helpful and was quite excited we were there looking for the babblers. He did mention they are elusive during the day and it was very hot so we thought our luck might just run out? We walked throughout the camp checking birdbaths and thickets with no joy. We ventured out into the bush and heard frantic rustling in the leaf litter. A closer look revealed the Black-faced Babblers foraging quietly just chatting ever so softly to each other. What a bird, what a tick and what a place. We wandered back to the camp with a spring in our step to tell the owner we had accomplished our mission and bumped into a typically noisy group of them in camp and even managed to get a couple of great photos. We still had 400km to go and some shopping in Rundu so left briskly and headed on our journey.

Day 13 – 8 May 2013

Route: Shamvura and surrounds

Weather: Hot and Sunny

O/N Accommodation: Shamvura +264 812 417 473 shamvura@iway.na (N\$500 pppn Self-catering)

Restaurants: We joined forces with Mark and Charlie who cooked up a killer roast chicken and we provided veg and stuffed chicken breast with spinach and feta.

Interesting Birds: Allen's Gallinule, Coppery-tailed Coucal, Greater Swamp-warbler, Little Bittern, White-backed Night-heron, Southern Brown-throated Weaver and heard the Chirping Cisticola.

Interesting Creatures: a pair of Vine Snakes, Cape Clawless Otter and Spotted-necked Otter, the latter I have only seen on Lake Victoria in Uganda and the former I have only ever seen once vaguely. It was an unforgettable experience. I hooked but did not land a huge Thin-faced Largemouth under the careful guidance of Mark but sadly I was all far too eager and excited.

Butterflies observed: Queen Purple Tips, Red Tips, Bushveld Scarlets, Brown-veined White, African-veined White and a Trimen's Sapphire laying eggs on a Tapinanthus Mistletoe.

Comments: Mark and Charlie have a stunning little patch of heaven on the banks of the Okavango with a fair amount of Teak and Manketi woodland behind their home. We had a breath-taking trip on the water with birdlife dripping out of every bush and reed bank. Although we did not land any fish I certainly hooked a few but sadly did not boat them for that fisherman photograph. Seeing the two species of otter was incredible and I doubt anything like that can happen again! Mark had agreed to take us to look for the elusive and rare Souza's Shrike and Sharp-tailed Starlings the following morning early as we had a 500km drive back to Katima Mulilo.

Day 14 – 9 May 2013

Route: Shamvura and surrounds – Katima Mulilo

Weather: Hot and Sunny

O/N Accommodation: Namwi – Tel: +264 66 254188 or +264 81 284 7676 (N\$375pppn Self-catering)

Restaurants: Self-catered, not great but with Calamata olives and cold beer everything is divine!

Interesting Birds: Souza's Shrike, Sharp-tailed Starling, Rufous-bellied Tit and Shelley's Sunbird.



Souza's Shrike



Sharp-tailed Starling in flight



Sharp-tailed Starling

Butterflies observed: Blue pansy, Yellow pansy and White Lady Swallowtail.

Comments: The morning air was cool and crisp; we were pumped and ready for action but sadly full of anxiety because we only had a few hours to look for these very tough creatures. We started off at a water point on the edge of the river; swathes of starlings were coming in to drink, Wattled, Greater Blue-eared, Burchell's, Cape Glossy and Meves's Starlings but no Sharpies? We moved back inland and were traveling along the road when Mark shouted "Sharpies, got them!" We spent about three quarters of an hour just watching them and listening to their cheerful banter. The light was absolutely beautiful and the starlings shone like gems in the trees and on the ground. They were indulging themselves on the fruit of the Large False Mopane and I managed to get a shot of one flying off with fruit in its beak. I was on fire and thrilled to the core, my wife had been changing a nappy in the vehicle and was incredibly anxious that she was not getting in on the action but finished quickly and enjoyed another splendid lifer! Time was of the essence and we needed to go and look for the Souza's Shrike so we headed off to the spot. The habitat was similar to that which I had spent days working, but

surprisingly more degraded. It was not great bush at all and there were not many of our feathered friends in the area either. We wondered around for hours checking each and every perch and each and every tree. We even had to change nappies in this wild hectic spot; me on all fours, my back as the changing table (a real sight to behold). All this time our baby just quietly enjoying the ambience from vantage point of her front pouch. We had given up and were walking to the vehicle resigning ourselves to the fact that this cunning little bird had beaten us and we would have to return one day to get it. In the baking heat every step we took was laboriously slow. My eyes were exhausted from the search and I was anxious that we still had a 500km journey ahead of us. Suddenly I happened to look up and there was what appeared to be ANOTHER Pallid Flycatcher but it had a longer thinner tail so I trained my binoculars on it and shouted "GOT IT!" There a few meters behind Mark and in front of me was this magnificent beauty. A petit shrike with a long thin tail, black mask and a warm brown back with a white chevron built into its shoulders! I have only ever seen these shrikes in robust Miombo woodland in Zambia but was desperately in need of it for my Southern African list. What a sighting it was and what great pictures we took of it! We had done it and the feeling of euphoria flowing through our veins sent us straight to utopia! Mark stated that the bird was rare and difficult to find and it truly was; wow! We cracked a cold beer in celebration and then headed back to camp to pack up. What a delightful place and so much to see and do. On our arrival at Nimwe whilst my wife was checking in I heard a familiar sound and rushed out to confirm it... yes, a male Shelley's Sunbird in full colour. It was not a lifer sadly because we have been incredibly fortunate to find it at Mana Pools but a good bird none the less.

Day 15 – 10 May 2013

Route: Nimwe – Vic Falls

Weather: Hot and Sunny

O/N Accommodation: National Parks Cottages – Tel: +263 13 42294 (\$80 for a cottage sleeping 4 pax – Self-catering)

Restaurants: Self-catered.

Interesting Birds: Miombo Blue-eared Starlings and Brown Firefinch

Interesting Creatures: Warthogs, banded mongoose, Chacma Baboons and bushbuck, a dead hyena (killed by a vehicle on the road) and elephants

Butterflies observed: Lightning Charaxes

Comments: Homeward bound!!

We had a spectacular holiday and were privileged to meet many great people and at the same time clocked up some awesome lifers. My wife added 43 new birds to her list, which takes her up to 637 species for Southern Africa, and I managed to get 9 lifers, which has taken me up to 842 species!

Jono Francis

The Mock of the Mocking Cliff-chat

On a recent visit to Malilangwe in the Lowveld of Zimbabwe we observed a Mocking Cliff-chat mimic **twenty-one** species of bird and a Mopane Squirrel in a single call. Below is the list of birds that it mimicked with perfection.

Thick-billed Cuckoo

Levaillant's Cuckoo

Red-faced Mousebird

Greater Blue-eared Starling

Red-winged Starling

Southern Grey-headed Sparrow

Natal Spurrow

Meves's Starling

Crowned Hornbill

African Grey Hornbill

Yellow-throated Petronia

Little Sparrowhawk

White-faced Duck

Red-billed Oxpecker

Dark-capped Bulbul

African Yellow White-eye

Kurrichane Thrush

Southern Carmine Bee-eater

Meyer's Parrot

Green Wood-hoopoe

Black-backed Puffback

Mopane Squirrel alarm call

Not called the "Mocking Cliff-chat" for nothing!!!

Jono Francis

**Subject: Cape Vulture tag No: C104, 18/05/2013, Gonarezhou National Park.
May 2013**

I was in Gonarezhou, when I came across what looked like a kill (female Impala) from the wild dogs. There were approximately 7 Lappet-faced Vultures, 20 White-backed Vultures and then these 2 Cape Vultures, one of which was tagged. The CV's were not particularly interested in mixing with the other vultures and was actually very stand-offish, they also moved off a bit on our arrival. Other than that they looked in very good condition.



*Cape Vulture,
juvenile White-backed
Vulture behind*

Bradley Mark Fouche, Head Guide Singita Pamushana Lodge, Malilangwe Trust

Lat.: 21° 26' 11.4"S

Long: 32° 04' 29.3"E

Alt: 214m

Tail Feathers

Buff-spotted Flufftail

In the March 2011, Vol. 57(1) edition of *Honeyguide* I published a short article describing how I found 4 chicks of the Buff-spotted Flufftail in my garden in Harare. The chicks were trapped on a stone step in the garden. I helped the chicks up the step and they immediately disappeared into some dense shrubbery, and were not sighted again. This happened on 18 March 2010. During the next two rainy seasons the adult flufftails were seen and heard regularly, but no chicks sighted.

However on 16 March this year 4 chicks were found trapped on exactly the same stone step! My wife helped them up off the step and they vanished into the flowerbeds and have not been seen again. Close examination of the stone step revealed that the backing of the step, a teak railway sleeper, had rotted and there were several holes in the wood, with a cavity behind. Thus it is possible that the birds nested in this cavity, the chicks emerging through the hole and onto the stone step.

Rhett Butler

African Pygmy-kingfisher in the suburbs

On April the 14th 2013, I was surprised to stumble across an African Pygmy-kingfisher in an Avondale garden. The bird was probably on passage. Before being disturbed, it was hawking insects from some Bauhinias bordering a disused tennis court. It eventually disappeared into some dense exotic vegetation, which probably provided some suitable habitat for it amidst the urban jungle that is Harare.

Luke Wilson

FYI I got a message from bird guide Morgan Saineti, Aberfoyle Lodge, Honde valley with these sightings:

Isabelline Wheatear on top of Gleneagles on 25 March 2013 (he was with BLZ member, Enrico Leonardi)

Anchieta's Tchagra breeding in Gleneagles, Wamba Vlei, Pungwe River and Katiyo Estates. (Message received today 5/4/2013)

He goes on to report today (5/4/2013) that Wamba Vlei is currently no longer good for Moustached Grass-warbler. Red-winged Warbler and Short-winged Cisticola are very common, however, in the Katiyo Estates. He saw them there with Tony Wood.

Julia Pierini

Thanks Julia,

Of course as I mentioned this is a mega rarity, only 1 doubted record in southern Africa, so needs a really definitive report.

Ian Riddell

Seen in Mandara

Two weeks ago a group of approx. 8 Arrow-marked Babblers started building a nest in a Fir tree in my garden. Since then they have paid regular trips and presumably one or more of them is now sitting on eggs. Amazing how they contribute as a group to all activities. Watching with interest. (Pic attached of bird with twigs)



Arrow-marked Babbler

A pair of African Green-pigeons appeared about 3 weeks ago, feeding on the fruit/berry bearing trees in the neighbourhood.

My Gardener spotted a lone female African Paradise-flycatcher on 9 May. What chance that this is the bird I rescued from a cat, restored to health by Kamfinsa Vets plus Jackie, and flew away from her care several weeks ago during a storm? Perhaps it now has to spend winter in Zim?

James Ball

More Suburban Red-throated Twinspots

On 19 May my wife and I were inspecting part of our garden where about 15 cypress trees had been cut down a few days previously. All the trunks had been removed but plenty of small branches and foliage remained. There were many different garden bird species enjoying this newly-opened space, with much activity on the ground, in the cut branches and on other shrubs. While we were watching, a number of Red-billed Firefinches flew up from the ground and several perched on our perimeter wall. With them was a slightly larger and darker bird, and in the binos we saw it was a male Red-throated Twinspot. This was our first garden record of this bird.

The following weekend I was at Greystone Nature Reserve and came across another male of this species. It was also associating with Red-billed Firefinches.

I have many previous records of this Twinspot from Glen Forest and Chinamora, and given Ian Riddell's Glen Lorne record in November last year, it seems this bird is now one to look for in Harare gardens.

Colin Baker

Records of Road kills- 'Any owl'

Kindly forward any sightings (id confirmed or not) of *any owl* – approximate site and date.

Records from the Midlands, Bulawayo, Hwange/Victoria Falls regions most welcome.

Send to: innes@batteryworld.co.zw

I saw this female (I think) Red-throated Twinspot in my garden in Glen Lorne on Sunday.



Red-throated Twinspot



White Stork

The White Stork I saw on the 1st May in the Zambezi Valley all on its own.

Leanne & Michael Cannon

Contributions for *The Babbler* 113 August 2013/ September 2013 may be sent to the Editor anytime between now and 14th July 2013.