

THE BABBLER

Newsletter of



BirdLife Zimbabwe
The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

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Subscriptions

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. 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** or Birdlife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Branch account at **CABS (Chisipite branch) Account No: 9012703755**. 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-mail or by telephone or your payment may not be recorded.

BLZ Office Shop

In stock we have beautiful: - BLZ Official Calendars for 2014

-Bush shirts - in Khaki, Olive and Stone - all sizes

-Caps

-BLZ Branded face towels

-BLZ Branded Golf Balls

-Bird Paintings by Lin Barrie

-Ground-hornbill T-Shirts are now on sale at \$5.00 each

Please hurry!!!!!! While stocks last. Thank you

Sylvia

**BRANCH ACTIVITIES
Mashonaland Branch**

Babbler - October And November 2013

Mukuvisi	Sunday 6 th October 2013	0630
	Sunday 3 rd November 2013	0630
Chivero	Sunday 10 th November 2013	0630
Monavale Vlei	Sunday 20 th October 2013	0700
	Sunday 17 th November 2013	0700

4th Sunday Outings

Sunday 27 th October 2013	Wild Geese	0630
	Meet CABS Northridge Park	
Sunday 24 th November 2013	Birding Big Day (More information to follow)	

2nd Sat Outings

Saturday 12 October 2013	Haka Park	0700
Saturday 9 th November 2013	Greengrove Dam	0700

3rd Thursday Meetings at Avondale Sports Club 1730 for 1800

17 th October 2013	Report back on Hwange/Vic Falls/Chobe Trip By T Alegria	1800
21 st November 2013	“Sounds of the Bush” by Derek Solomon	1800

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.

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

2013 BLZ Mashonaland Away Outings

When all are sweltering in the heat at the end of October we will be going to a “cool place” in the Bvumba Mountains where full board and lodging will be provided. This outing is scheduled for the fourth weekend of October, arrive Friday 26th, leave on Monday 29th after the morning birding session. This is a repeat trip of last year's successful outing and again we look forward to seeing Green Twinspots, Narina Trogons and other Bvumba specials.

We will be staying at Madrugada and Roger Castelin will be our host. Although more accommodation has been built since the last trip, there will be a maximum limit of 14 birders. A deposit of \$50.00 secures a booking for this outing.

Book by email to: talegria@zol.co.zw by 15th of October 2013. All BLZ Members are invited.

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

4 October: Quiz

Everyone enjoys the challenge of a quiz so we hope many of you will come and join in at our quiz with a birding theme. The quiz will begin promptly at 7 p.m. in the Coffee Café at Banff Lodge (Banff Road, Hillside). Maximum of 4 people per team, with an entrance fee of \$5 per team. Teams must register in advance – no entries on the night please! To register entrants need to submit to Karen Learmonth the name of their team and names of their team members; payment can be made on the night.

An early supper will also be available from 18:00 at a cost of \$12 per person - beef or chicken burger with chips and salad, vegetarian option on request (anyone who has been to the Coffee Cafe will know this is will be a good meal) with ice cream and chocolate sauce for dessert. Cash Bar. Again pre-booking, and preferably pre-payment, for the meal is required.

For more information and to register/book phone Karen Learmonth – work 244990 or mobile 0772231819, or email afspeg@yoafrica.com

12 October: Walk at Hillside Dams

The Hillside Dams Conservancy is always good for birding, and even though the lower dam is now dry there will still be a chance of some water birds at the top dam. We will meet in the car park at the top dam at 6:30. We need an early start as the days are already scorching hot, and there will still be time to do some Saturday morning shopping if required. It is always a very slow meander, with frequent stops, so it takes a long time to cover even a short distance; consequently those who are not early risers can come later and will soon catch us up. For more information contact Adele Edwards, phone home 882242 or mobile 0712 366917.

Other Areas

Mashonaland South – Margaret Parrock 068-22005 or 0773-263673

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.

Lowveld - contact Clive Stockil 0772-219204 or clives@senuko.com

Recent Reports and Sightings

Mashonaland

A visit to Chipinda Pools (2131B2) and Chilojo Cliffs (2132A3) Gonarezhou National Park 11- 15 July 2013

The Rockingham-Gills and Dennisons hired a tented campsite at Chipinda Pools for four nights. It had all we needed with solar heated shower/loo and gas stove/fridge and was very comfortable. These have been built by the Frankfurt Zoological Society in conjunction with National Parks. Over the five days we identified 130 species of birds and 20 species of mammal.

Breeding birds were Double-banded Sandgrouse with 3 chicks near Chivilila Falls, Natal Spurfowl with two chicks near Chipinda Pools and a pair of Verreaux's Eagle sitting on their nest at Chilojo Cliffs. It would be nice to know the history of this nest, as it must have been noticed by thousands of visitors by now. Nearby we were lucky to see a Red-crested Korhaan on the road.

For the African Waterbird Count we saw a good 20 African Darter at Chipinda Pools - they were common here and nice to see, having been netted out of Lake Chivero. There was a Goliath Heron near Fishans camp, 3 Woolly-necked Storks at Massasanya Dam (maybe mum, dad and youngster), 3 Hadedda Ibis, 40 Egyptian Goose and a female African Finfoot at Chipinda Pools. We couldn't have surveyed 10% of the pools, due to walking restrictions. Among the raptors we saw a pair of Secretarybirds and a pair of Tawny Eagles near Massasanya Dam. African Hawk-

eagle, Martial, Bateleur, African Fish-eagle and Little Sparrowhawk were seen at Chipinda and Dickinson's Kestrel was seen near Chinguli camp. We saw a pair of Crested Francolin near Massasanya Dam. White-crowned Lapwing was the noisy plover at Chipinda and Massasanya, while the Crowned Lapwing was in short dry grassland near Fishans. About 60 African Green-pigeon were in fruiting trees near Chipinda and 10 Brown-headed Parrots were always nearby, with another flock of 7 seen near Massasanya Dam.

The Senegal Coucal was common in the reeds at Chipinda and we must have seen about 20 from our tent veranda. Twenty Speckled Mousebird were seen every morning in a fruiting Waterberry Tree. The Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill was commonest (20), followed by Red-billed (10); Trumpeter (3), and a Southern Ground-hornbill (1) - but we heard the Ground-hornbill every morning. The Rock Martin was seen at both places, but one had to look for them. The Mosque Swallow was not common but seen near Baobabs at Massasanya Dam. The Sombre Greenbul, White-browed Scrub and Bearded Scrub-robin were seen and White-browed Robin-chat and Red-capped Robin-chat were heard. The Yellow-breasted Apalis and the Long-billed Crombec were frequent at Chipinda. In the bush we thought we saw Tinkling Cisticola near Massasanya, which surprised us but it needs verification by the more expert on the Cisticola species. Among the flycatchers in camp the commonest was the Ashy and we also saw Black-throated Wattle-eye and a male African Paradise-flycatcher in breeding plumage, which must be of the *grantii* race from further down the east coast of Africa.

Only 3 sunbirds were seen – White-bellied were commonest, Collared (only 2) and Scarlet-chested (only 1). The Red-billed Buffalo-weaver was not often seen but many nests were evident, a Spectacled Weaver was heard and its nest found. Red-billed Quelea were very abundant and in their thousands coming into and leaving from the reed beds each evening and morning. Only one Green-winged Pytilia was seen, the Red-billed Firefinch was common and the parasite of the Red-billed Firefinch the Village Indigobird was there too. The Golden-breasted and Cinnamon-breasted Bunting were common and we came across a flock of 40 Lark-like Buntings at the Massasanya Dam which may be an easterly range extension for them. We looked in vain for the Southern Boubou, the Common Myna and the Golden Weaver, but maybe this last will be easier to see in a January count.

Among the animals a big Nyala ram was at Chipinda Camp, a Sharpe's Grysbok was nearby and a herd of Lichtenstein's Hartebeest was about 10km south of the Malilangwe HQ. A Spotted Hyena was near Chipinda Pools and a pair of Black-backed Jackal was near the Runde River crossing between Chinguli and Fishans. A Gonarezhou predator project operates there and reports of sightings of wild dog, lion, leopard, hyena and cheetah are to be sent to Dr R. Groom. rosemary@africanwildlifeconservationfund.org
David Rockingham-Gill rgill@zol.co.zw

Our President In Ottawa

Our President Tony Wood addressed the evening meeting of Thursday 15 August. He was primarily reporting on his recent trip to Ottawa where he attended the once-every-four-years World Conference of BirdLife International at the expense of BirdLife International. This was an enormous gathering of some delegates from what has become the largest wildlife organization in the World. The size and scope of the organization really had to be experienced to make little Birdlife Zimbabwe appreciate that we do have a very BIG global backing. BirdLife International has 127 partners whose own combined membership exceeds 13 million of whom over 250 000 are regarded as active volunteer workers. BirdLife International is actively engaged in helping to save 115 critically endangered species from extinction and in the management of over 4.3 million hectares of reserves. The combined budget of all the partners exceeds US\$539 million per annum.

Our man from Zimbabwe had the opportunity to make face to face contact with leading figures in organizations that finance and co-ordinate the financing of major conservation projects throughout the world and has good expectations of bringing in more support for our needs in this country. The Critical Ecosystems Partnership is already putting \$170 000.00 towards community work around our Afro-Montane forests in the Eastern Districts and the Jensen Foundation is very interested in our wetlands work. A lot of time was also spent on how to spread an appreciation of the economic value of environmental protection. V.I.P.'s at the Gala Banquet were Prince Albert of Monaco, David Attenborough, the President of Senegal and Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamako of Japan.

The evening was rounded off with a short promotional film on BirdLife International and the countries in which it functions and by a most fascinating video on the Wallcreeper of the mountains of southern Europe across to the Himalayas. The bird inhabits the steepest rock slopes, constantly flicks its brightly coloured wings and squeaks just like our Spotted Creeper. The film was the product of dangling at the end of various ropes for hundreds of hours over a three-year period.

Alex Masterson anbmas@gmail.com

Birdlife Zimbabwe, Mashonaland Branch week-long excursion to Hwange, Victoria Falls and Chobe National Park, Kasane, Botswana, August 17th-24th 2013

Part 1 Hwange National Park



Boarding for a cruise at Imbabala photo Tony Alegria

In the end we were 8 in 2 sturdy, fully laden vehicles, one driven by our esteemed Chairperson and expedition leader, Tony Alegria, and the other by Tim Morgan, a member from Mazwikadei. We left Greendale at 6 a.m. and Gold Dust Township at 4.30 a.m. on a cool breezy morning. In Kadoma, Margaret Parrock, a Country Districts member, joined us to complete the party. It had been decided after much discussion to take the 'shortcut' from Kwekwe to Lupane to save us 165kms and about 2 hours travelling time. Along the way we passed a family of Southern Ground-hornbill. Thanks to this we reached the Main Camp turn at 13.45 and were immediately reminded of the proximity of the Park by 3 Roan, 50 Elephant, 2 Zebra, a Wildebeest and some Impala on the access road. Some of us saw Roan Antelope 4 times on the trip.

At 2 p.m. our journey was complete and we were all excitedly noting Cape Glossy Starling, Red-billed Buffalo-weaver, Spotted-backed Weaver, African Grey and Red-billed Hornbill, Long-billed Crombec, Crimson-breasted Bush-shrike and a Grey Go-away-bird, and that was just the Office Car Park. Unwittingly, the organiser had booked 'Chalets' the comfort and facilities of which left something to be desired so we had to upgrade one group to a 'Lodge', which had cooking facilities.

After settling in we made our first sortie into the Park, meandering along the minor roads – where we saw our first Dark Chanting-goshawk, Red-crested Korhaan and Black-faced Waxbill – to Nyamandhlovu Platform, which was as busy as a platform at Clapham Junction due to the presence of elephants of all ages taking advantage of the water and mud. Birds noted were

Grey Heron, Kittlitz's Plover and African Pipit, Blacksmith, Crowned and Wattled Lapwing. On the way back to camp one group was lucky enough to see a Cheetah resting in the dry grass near the road.

Our first meal, like all the others, was greatly appreciated by all of us. After this our friends from Bulawayo, Julia Duprée and Helen Lewis, in Hwange for the Water Fowl count, joined us and we spent a pleasant hour renewing acquaintances and boasting about our respective sightings. For our Sunday circuit, both groups chose the 150km south circular via Kennedys 1 and 2, Ngweshla and Jambile which never fails to offer rich and diverse birding and game viewing. The cold morning meant birds were even slower than us to become active but we saw both Racquet-tailed and Purple Roller and Bradfield's Hornbill was locally common like the Golden-breasted Bunting and Emerald-spotted Wood-dove on the road. The White-browed Scrub-robin were confusing because some of them were of the *ovamboensis* race that does not have any streaking on the breast and a different call from the common race and were initially confused with Kalahari Scrub-robin. At Kennedy 1 there was only enough water to attract African Jacana, Egyptian Goose and African Fish-eagle. We saw Sable, Hyena and Buffalo carrying Red- and Yellow-billed Oxpecker, a Tawny Eagle, a Kori Bustard and Red-crested Korhaan. Smaller, welcome additions were Bearded and Kalahari Scrub-robin, Violet-eared Waxbill, Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler and Swallow-tailed Bee-eater. At Ngweshla, so lovingly tended by the ranger, we stopped for tea and snacks and for fully 10 minutes watched an Ovambo Sparrowhawk bathing in a birdbath. Canaries, weavers, sparrows and waxbill that had been cowering in the foliage above invaded when it finally flew off the other birdbath. On the road to Jambile a few raptors appeared, African Hawk-eagle and Bateleur among them and a family of Southern Ground-hornbill, but the abiding memory will be of the 5 or 6 Racquet-tailed Rollers cavorting in the woodland. Lunch was taken there at Jambile Picnic Site at about 2 p.m. and by then it was hot which probably explains why we saw so few birds on the last stretch but 2 Martial Eagle, a pair of Double-banded Sandgrouse with chicks and a Purple Roller are worthy of note we were joined by Bruce Bolnick, his wife and brother at the 2 stops. They added their sightings to our list.



Ovambo Sparrowhawk in a bird bath photo Tony Alegria

Since Monday night's booking was at Robins Camp, we packed up our gear and left at 7 a.m. for the long drive through various habitats like teak forests, Mopane and vleis to arrive there mid-afternoon. The vehicle I was in avoided the tar road and was rewarded by the sight of 2 Burchell's Sandgrouse and 3 Coqui Francolin, groups of Kudu and solitary Steenbok now and then. At Garakama Pan Saddle-billed Stork and Little Grebe were present but once again no waders or ducks and there was a flock of Lesser Masked-weaver building and refurbishing nests in thorn bushes. If I have omitted to mention Elephant it is because they were everywhere in large numbers and the same goes for Magpie, Crimson-breasted and Southern White-crowned Shrike. Just before lunch we came to Shumba Pan and were thrilled to see 3 Grey Crowned Crane, 8 Egyptian Goose, a Spur-winged Goose and a Little Grebe. The next adrenalin releaser was a large number of vultures both circling and sitting in the trees around a vlei. By following our noses we finally discovered a stinking jumbo carcass crawling with Hooded and White-backed Vultures and the inevitable Marabou Stork. Masuma Pan contained African Sacred Ibis, 1 Wood Sandpiper and 1 Black-winged Stilt, waders at last. It is worth noting too that during this section the Cape Glossies gave way to Meves's. On arrival at Robins we found the rest of the

team relaxing in front of the lodge and they were eager to point out a tiny African Scops-owl a few metres away sitting close to the slim trunk of a tree only about 4 m up. This bird remained there for a couple of hours calling to another some distance away before it finally flew off to join it. They also reported very good water bird viewing at Shumba Pan where dozens of Burchell's Sandgrouse and Cape Teal were seen and at Mandavu and Deteema Pans where Goliath Heron, Yellow-billed Stork, Lesser Flamingo, Spur-winged Goose and Little Stint in transition plumage were seen. As evening approached we made a tour of the camp ending up at Robins tower that, originally his workshop, has become a museum. Robins bequeathed his 2,500-acre estate to the State in 1939. It became part of Hwange National Park 10 years later.

Our destination on Tuesday was Zambezi National Park at Victoria Falls, which could be reached via Nantwich and the Matetsi Safari area. Hence, a leisurely 7.00 start sufficed. It was intended to do a tour of the Robins area before heading north but the vehicle I was in became confused trying to follow the ever-rougher tracks we chose and ended up at Nantwich without touching the Robins vicinity. Some of us, however, did get a fleeting glimpse of a Cheetah and cub and we saw a Kurrichane Buttonquail on the track, Malachite Kingfisher on the river and Jameson's Firefinch, Black-crowned Tchagra and Red-billed Buffalo-weaver. At one point we climbed down from the truck and up to the top of a hill from where we had superb 360-degree views of the park. Anyhow, at 10.30 we found ourselves at Nantwich Lodges, a sorry sight but a reminder of how much excellent accommodation had once been available. We made tea on an old Dover stove in front of a lodge while watching Waterbuck, Kudu and Impala on the parched dam floor. We eventually turned south and visited Little and Big Tom's back at Robins. The former was very quiet but we spotted Double-banded Sandgrouse and a Pied Kingfisher. The latter, in contrast, was alive with game; a herd of perhaps 500 buffalo stretched across the horizon while 50 Elephant jostled one another around the viewing platform. When they had moved away we were able to settle in for a well-earned lunch during which we spotted a Black-backed Jackal, a Martial Eagle and 2 White-headed Vulture performing their courtship ritual. Next we briefly visited a Salt Pan and Robins Dam, which held Grey Heron, Black-winged Stilt and our first Common Sandpiper. It was now late so we returned to Nantwich and took the good dirt road through the Matetsi Safari area to join the Byo-Vic Falls road near the airport, which was abuzz with UNWTO activity. We felt like arriving VIPs on the newly tarmacked, neatly lined approach to Vic Falls.

BLZ Mash Branch trip to Vic Falls etc. Part 2 (from Wed 21st Aug 2013)

Tony's team, having arrived early at Vic Falls, bought meat for the braai and sorted out the accommodation which consisted of 2 well-equipped lodges with a Zambezi view and excellent fridges. Then they had to go out collecting firewood, which was not on sale there. This task completed, the fire was laid but not lit initially as the matches were in our truck so we had to heat up toilet paper on the electric hot plate.

That afternoon we had our first views of Collared Palm-thrush, that were abundant, and African Skimmer that were on a sandy spit in front of us. In the evening, Darryl Tiran, ex-Harare member, now guiding in Vic Falls, came to outline the exciting programme he and Tony had arranged for us during our stay. Not only did he do this but he also supplied a delicious chocolate cake made by his cook. How lucky we were to have him to guide us and to have his cake and eat it.

It was a refreshing change to be woken by Bearded Scrub-robin and Collared Palm-thrush instead of Harare's White-browed Robin-chat. Our first activity on Wednesday was a Zambezi birding cruise early in the morning. We were spoilt both by the wealth of birdlife and the superb 'continental' breakfast on board the KA Isane, a 16-seat luxury pontoon. My idea of a continental breakfast from European experience was slices of baguette or a croissant and a tiny espresso. Not so in VF: we had fruit, cereals, cheese, cold meats, muffins, biscuits, yogurt and coffee or tea. Had the birding not been so good we could have spent the whole 3 hours eating. But there was plenty to see: 30-40 African Skimmers, 3 female African Finfoot, African Openbill, herons, Hooded Vulture, kingfishers and 2 newly-arrived Rock Pratincole. No great distance was covered but we criss-crossed the river visiting both the Zambian and Zimbabwean banks and lots of islands that revealed different species. "What a pleasure".

Back at camp for 10 a.m. we made a second sortie to see the birds local to the lodges. The thorny patches offered up lots of Green-backed Pytilia, Red-billed and Jameson's Firefinch, Collared Palm-thrush and Terrestrial Brownbul. An Acacia Pied Barbet was located in a tall

Teak but proved difficult to nail so most of the group concentrated on the Bearded Scrub-robin that was enjoying a shower in a lawn spray.

After lunch we had a rendezvous with Darrel at the Kingdom Hotel. He led us through the gardens and down to the precipitous gorge which rash tourists with money to burn cross on a foofy-slide for \$140. Our objective was to view the Peregrine Falcon on its nest high on the cliff opposite. From there we drove out of town towards the airport to visit Gorges Lodge, an upmarket venue comprising 14 charming chalets perched high above the river, each with its own vertiginous balcony. Having refreshed ourselves in the bar, we wandered down to a point on the gorge rim from where we could see a pair of Verreaux's Eagles perched in a tree waiting for the lodge manager to provide supper. They gave us a magnificent aerial display for the next half hour and we saw them again from the lodge as we were watching Peregrine Falcon swoop past, preparing to feast on the hosts of African Black, Horus and Little Swift still much higher above them.

Later that evening Darrel reappeared with a lemon meringue pie, just as delicious as the cake. This time he introduced us to Drew Connibear, formerly the Nat Parks Ecologist and now a consultant and guide who accompanied us to Imbabala.

On Thursday, we began by searching the Big Tree area for Brown Firefinch and hoping to see the Rock Pratincole again but without success. From there we moved back inland to Chamabonda National Park, a narrow finger of vlei pushing westward towards Botswana. In fact the thorny scrub and trees leading in to the vlei were more productive than the dry grassland itself. Both Hooded and White-backed Vulture were breeding and a Tawny Eagle sat atop a baobab. The pans had so little water there were no birds but we found Flappet and Fawn-coloured Lark, Capped Wheatear and African Pipit. Desperate, last minute preparations for the UNWTO meeting were taking place; pumps and viewing platforms being repaired and a temporary boma had been erected to hold game imported for the VIPs' visit. On our way back to town we called in at the municipal sewage ponds that attract huge numbers of Baboon and Marabou Stork as well as a few Wood and Common Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilt, Little Grebe and Cattle Egret. Needing a more alluring vista and some fresh air we made our way to the Falls. Initially there had been some reluctance: "Been there, seen it, and got the tee-shirt. We're not tourists! Etc." but no one can resist the draw of that magnificent tribute to nature for long and we all forked out our \$7 or \$4 (Yes, some were that old!) and in the debrief admitted it was as good as ever and still unspoilt. What is more Richard showed us a Schalow's Turaco in the rainforest, a lifer for most, and Rock Martin could be picked out against the cliffs in the spray.

That afternoon the Zambezi National Park was our destination; an easy drive for once but rather disappointing in terms of birds and mammals but it was very hot and dry. A Cardinal Woodpecker noisily excavating its nest-hole is my abiding memory but we were rather blasé by now concentrating mainly on new species. And thirsty and hungry so we went to join Vic Falls residents, Darrel and Drew, at The Boat Club on the bank of the river near our lodges. What a pleasant evening and no cooking called for!

Our relatively sparse Thursday meant we were eager for some more rewarding birding on Friday and we were not to be disappointed. At 7 a.m., after a passport check, accompanied by Darrel, we took the road to Kazungula, the border post for Botswana. Just short of this a stop was made in an area of woolly caper bush to have another look for Brown Firefinch and Burchell's Starling but to no avail though there was no shortage of birds and fresh lion spoor. Imbabala Lodge was nearby and our first boat awaiting us after coffee and rusks. The papyrus swamps on the Zambezi here are alive with waterbirds, crocs and hippos and as we explored the creeks we found new species for our list such as Coppery-tailed Coucal, Chirping and Luapula Cisticola and various warblers. Black-crowned Night-heron, Green-backed Heron and various kingfishers were spotted time and time again and, on the bank, Waterbuck, Warthog and Impala grazed among Hooded, White-backed and Lappet-faced Vulture. The 3 hours passed quickly and soon we were scoffing toasted sandwiches on the lodge veranda. An unexpected treat was an African Barred Owlet sitting unconcerned in a nearby tree.

Next stop the border, a tad easier than Beitbridge we all agreed, and on to a posh Hotel, Mowana Lodge, at Kasane on the Chobe. Drinks again but the main attraction for us was the **Northern** Grey-headed Sparrow and Brown-throated Weaver and, at last, on a walk through the extensive grounds and over the golf course, Richard finally nailed the Brown Firefinch to the delight of our esteemed leader. Not an overly impressive LBJ but pretty and full of energy

scrabbling through the leaves in search of insects and seeds. It has a red bill and white spots but no red rump like our firefinches.

Finally, after a 5km drive, at 3.15pm we boarded the boat for our Chobe cruise. We had the boat to ourselves but the river was populated by a flotilla of other boats of all shapes and sizes. Someone remarked that it was like the Thames on Jubilee Day, without the rain of course. However, the game and birds were unfazed by the spectators and we had 3 hours solid bird and game watching ahead of us among the grassy islands and along the banks of the Chobe. It is difficult to pick out the highlights – Elephants a go-go, Buffalo, Puku, Lechwe, Waterbuck, Giraffe, and Sable etc. Many water based birds including large numbers of African Skimmers and one solitary Slaty Egret. After watching the sun set we returned to our mooring via the main channel passing numerous Pied Kingfishers at their nest holes in the bank. One bird that eluded us was the Half-collared Kingfisher but that left us a reason to return to this birding Mecca.

Unfortunately, disembarking at 6.15 p.m. meant we had to return in the dark along a road also used by large, dark-coloured mammals which made it a rather hairy ride. As we were now well behind schedule, there was no time to return to base to dress for dinner so we went directly to The Boma for our final event of the trip. Draped in kangas and with our totems neatly painted on our cheeks we gorged ourselves on the amazing variety of meats, salads, vegetables and desserts while being entertained by traditional music and dancing; a fitting end to a splendid week.

Thanks must go to all who contributed to our enjoyment but especially to Tony Alegria, who conceived the idea, made the bookings and drove his vehicle and to Darrel Tiran who organised the 4 days in Vic Falls and gave us unstintingly of his time and expert knowledge. Thanks also to Tim Morgan for supplying and driving the other vehicle.

The return journey was long but safely completed.

Ken Dixon



The Boma photo Tony Alegria

Chilo – August Weekend 2013

The Chilo self-catering chalets at Nhambo, some 300 meters downstream from the main all-in Chilo Lodge, were our home for the recent long weekend. Yellow-bellied and Sombre Greenbuls and Terrestrial Brownbuls were all calling around the cottages and many of the aloes were in full flower. 570km from Harare all on tar save for the last 43kms of reasonable – any car – dust road. Say 6 ½ hours via Gutu, Jerera and the Quinton Bridge across the Save. Weather was fantastic – not too hot and not too cold. Both the Save and the Runde were easy to cross in 4 wheel drive land rovers provided along with driver/guide by the House at a reasonable charge for a party of 6 – 10 people.

To me there are three principal parts to visit in this south-eastern corner of the country. There are the pink Chilojo Cliffs (formerly Clarendon), the pans just above the Save-Runde Junction and the forest and reedbeds on the north bank of the Save in the vicinity of the actual confluence.

The Cliffs present a unique sight different to any other in this country. We approached this point from the downstream side coming round behind the cliffs with no obvious climb though the vegetation changes. I was however, very taken with the approaches to the top and we passed through stretches of pretty, open woodland where giraffe, eland and roan are to be seen – but not by us. There are also lots of different trees – and we saw a couple of Bateleur. You come across the cliffs quite suddenly at the upstream viewpoint where the massive pinky-orange pillar stands detached from the main cliffs and covered in Sabi (?) Lundi (?) Stars. There were not actually in flower but the silvery bases were very obvious. The cliffs did produce Verreaux's Eagles. Somebody said Black Stork too, but I missed that. Big, dark, no-white-rump swifts were presumably African Black Swifts. The river itself had eight African Spoonbills but the rather long drives between the cliffs and the pans produced little. There nevertheless lots of impala, some nice kudu bulls, a few nyala and several elephants amongst which one mama gave very convincing displays of what it is to be charged. Most interesting was a Brown Snake-eagle. It flew off from just in front of us gliding down into the tops of the Mopani scrub and quickly emerged with a writhing snake. Even quicker however, was a Tawny Eagle that dived down at full speed, attacked the snake-eagle from below and flew off with the snake now in its claws. It took this to a nice exposed perch on the other side of the road and proceeded to tear it to bits and eat it – not swallowing the whole thing like a snake-eagle.

Tambahata Pan is a big depression that fills from the overflow of the Save and the Runde when the two rivers meet in flood. It does have a small input river of its own but the backflow of the main floods produces a pool some 2 – 3 km long and a good kilometre across. It had numerous stretches of open water and a lot of emergent greens that looked like sedges standing up to a meter above the water. There was very little in the way of muddy banks. African Openbill, Yellow-billed Stork, and Saddle-billed Storks were nice to see as always but ducks – mostly White-faced and Spurwing - could not have reached 80. Little Grebes – a few – Grey Heron and a wading Black-headed Heron, several Squacco Herons and a couple of African Darters – rare birds these days – suggested a supply of fish in the water.

Another big pan across on the south bank of the Runde carried a couple of Woolly-necked Storks. All very restful in the shade of their surrounding trees, Mucha, *Faidherbia albida*, Mahoganies and what was *Lonchocarpus*, the rain tree, before it changed its name to *Philenoptera violacea*. They would make these surrounds a great retreat on a hot day. Take a telescope.

But to the birder, I believe that the area alongside the actual confluence, some 12kms further down from Chilo has the greatest potential. Our guide, Thomas who knows his trees and birds well, talked of an abundance of Gorgeous Bush-shrikes, African Broadbills and Narina Trogons as well as the Yellow-bill /or Green Coucal, now called the Green Malkoha. The trees included a couple of *Fernandoa* in their magnificent flower.

Blue-throated or Plain-backed Sunbird, and even African Pittas though they are presently unrecorded, should be about, along with Pale and Woodward's Batis, Pink-throated Twinspot, Grey Sunbird and Black-headed Apalis are all things to look out for. One should keep an eye open for Brown-throated Weaver and Rufous-winged Cisticola in the reed beds. Brown-headed Parrots, close cousins of Meyer's Parrot, are common throughout the area but are to be found only here within Zimbabwe. It is also the best locality for the Lemon-breasted Canary. The two Spinetail, Mottled and Böhm's, are also about but be careful which coucal you can see or hear: Senegal or Burchell's? [Look out for the Mangrove Kingfisher! It was seen at the confluence in July 1999 by Richard Boon, and is a new bird for Zimbabwe]

Quite a large portion of this forest is imbued with spiritual overtones – “Kunoera” – casual visitors are not welcome. Much of that area is actually also very thick and difficult to work but the forest further down and on sand is more open and should be just as good. A guide from Chilo Lodge would certainly save much time blundering about in the wrong places.

In conclusion I would suggest that Birders confine a Chilo trip to that confluence area and the pans across the rivers. The Cliffs may be better approached from the greatly improved Chipinda Pools camp that is a lot closer to civilisation and can be accessed from Chiredzi. But you can get to the Cliffs from Chilo. The Lodge will make you a picnic lunch and it is on a trip like this that you are more likely to see the cats, wild dog, giraffe, more nyala and more eland. It is also nice to see Sharpe's Grysbok but where are the Livingstone's Suni? - Concealed by the Spirits of the Forest?

Alex Masterson

Snakes: A talk by Steve Durrant Thursday 19th September 2013 Avondale Bowls Club

I sincerely hope that all who attended Steve's talk went away as I did, persuaded that the common conception of the snake as a slippery, slimy, sinister, silent killer is quite wrong. Those who held the Brown House Snakes Steve brought along can testify that they are soft and dry, peaceful and non-threatening. Without them our home, yard and town would be overrun by rats and mice. I almost felt ashamed that our beloved birds of prey devour hundreds of thousands of them every year. Every citizen of Zimbabwe should be given this basic education concerning our reptile friends.

There are about 75 species of snake in Zimbabwe, none of which will attack us. A snake will bite only in defence, even a cobra or a python. Snakes breed once a year, a few having live young, most laying eggs in December to hatch before winter. The young survive on the 'yolk' through the winter to appear in spring.

Snakes are either front-fanged like mambas, cobras, adders and vipers, or solid-toothed or back-fanged like the Boomslang and Vine Snake. As tea-pickers in the Honde Valley will tell you the Gaboon Vipers hiss a lot but don't normally bite. Puff Adders bite only if you put a hand on them. If you are unlucky enough to be bitten go to the Avenues Clinic where some serum is held but rarely given. Never put a tourniquet on a bite!

Harare's commonest species is the Egyptian or Snouted Cobra that feeds on the abundance of rats in the capital. There have been no reports of humans being bitten although dogs may be. Also common is the Brown House Snake; apparently most of us have them living peacefully among us. Whatever is claimed, Black Mambas are not in town: they shun buildings. Nor is there Spitting Cobra: they do not exist at such high locations. Cobras love Dandaro: all those ponds dug to manage the surface water are full of delicious frogs and toads. You will find snakes only where there is a food supply – rat, mice, birds, frogs and toads. Steve feeds his huge collection on day-old chicks supplied by local breeders.

Honde Valley has the largest concentration of snakes in Zimbabwe. On one of his snake safaris, he collected 30 species in 10 days from the locals. It is only here that the Green Mamba occurs.

Other interesting facts gleaned were that snakes are cold-blooded and therefore do not incubate their eggs. They live long lives (Steve has a 30 yr.-old House Snake and a python can reach 100!) Really big snakes are no more: we have wiped them out. However, they grow all their lives, quickly when they're young, shedding skins every month or two because it gets too tight, and slower as they mature. They are not territorial and they do not fight, just posture to show their superiority to rivals and gain the attention of a sleek female. Black Mambas forage up to 10kms from their home area. Although snakes aren't dangerous, do beware the Stiletto Snake that can stab sideways from its jaw. Like the rest of our wildlife snakes are under threat: the Rinkhals seems to have disappeared from its Troutbeck habitat.

If you are unfortunate enough to be bitten by a Boomslang no need to rush off South. Make for the nearest life-support machine, but within 4 days.

Steve Durrant's contact number for the removal of snakes or to see his collection at home is 0772251684.

Ken Dixon

Hwange / Vic Falls Birding Holiday Aug 2013

It was a privilege to visit parts of Zimbabwe I would never otherwise see. Our team commander, Tony Alegria, was just the right person for all the team organizing. We, all 8 of us, 4 men and 4 ladies got to know each other during the week. I thought that 8 was a good number. I didn't feel embarrassed asking questions and our group was friendly, with no in-house arguments.

Our three boat trips, Zambezi River, Imbabala swamps and Kasane/Chobe River were a

highlight. Darryl Tiran of Vic Falls was a perfect host / leader who not only knows the birds of the area, but the best places to visit and observe. The sunrise cruise on the Zambezi gave me a first and stunning view of the African Finfoot with his bright orange legs and feet. He was casually strutting along the overgrown riverbanks, relaxed and feeding as he trod his big feet. National Parks Chamabonda reserve at Vic. Falls has future potential. At present the park is pretty devoid of animals, although some had recently been released. We observed a good variety of raptors and grassland birds. There were many nests of White-backed Vulture and siblings. A pair of Tawny Eagles on nest was seen, they were also seen near Robin's Camp and this is encouraging. The melodious song of the Collared Palm-thrush at Vic Falls was truly refreshing.

For myself, I learnt the identification of many new birds and also their calls. Thank you Tony and our team members.

Margaret Parrock

Matabeleland

RECENT REPORTS

Bush Walk at NUST – 18 August

A seven o'clock meeting on a Sunday morning seemed a crazy idea but preparing for the morning, the sunrise was certainly worth getting up to see – an absolutely stunning deep, rosy pink vista and the bird song was just unbelievable. Eleven members of BLZ Matabeleland plus Chippy, the dog, met at the NUST gates off Cecil Avenue and while waiting for the late comers to arrive, participants started birding along the semi lawned piece in the middle of the roadway which was alive with LBJs. A Crested Barbet was sitting trilling in a nearby thorn tree while Dark-capped Bulbuls, Laughing Doves, Scaly-feathered Finches, a couple of Green-winged Pytilia as well as two Red-billed Firefinches fossicked around on the lawns and amongst the rocks. Several African Hoopoes were industriously digging away with their long, sharp beaks and a Crimson-breasted Shrike, first heard and then seen, was spotted just off the road as the vehicles set off to the sports fields.

The sports field was littered with birds flitting in and around a small flock of Helmeted Guineafowl that were diligently scratching the dry grass. Several Red-faced Mousebirds flew noisily by as a Swainson's Spurfowl suddenly launched itself out of cover with a loud squawk, giving everyone an early morning adrenalin rush! Thirteen African Sacred Ibis flew overhead as everyone was trying to decide on the swallows at rest which turned out to be Greater Striped. Other swallows seen were Lesser Striped, Red-breasted and Wire-tailed along with African Palm-swifts, Little and White-rumped Swifts. Blue Waxbills, Black-cheeked Waxbills, Streaky-headed Seedeaters, Black-throated Canaries, Yellow-fronted Canaries and Jameson's Firefinches were seeking breakfast along the roadsides along our walk quite oblivious to the piles of rubbish everywhere, with several Grey Go-away-birds, the odd Black-headed Oriole, White-browed Robin-chats, Tropical Boubou, a Brown-crowned and a Black-crowned Tchagra adding to the cacophony of sound. Leaving the road and going on through the bush we saw several Yellow Bishops, a Southern Yellow-billed and a Red-billed Hornbill, Emerald-spotted Wood-doves, a Rattling Cisticola or two and a Lilac-breasted Roller. A magnificent Black-shouldered Kite was proudly perched atop a dead branch for all to admire and a Speckled Pigeon was spotted on the roof of one of the hostels. The sunbirds – White bellied, Marico and Miombo Double-collared – were also out in force. On our way back towards the vehicles and a much needed cup of tea, two Long-billed Crombec, a Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler, a Burnt-necked Eremomela and a Brimstone Canary were all seen and a Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird was observed gathering food and diving into (we assumed) its nest hole in an old, gnarled bit of tree trunk. Doves were aplenty with Laughing, Cape Turtle and Namaqua making the list. While having tea, a Fork-tailed Drongo swooped about the top branches of a thorn tree and an African Grey Hornbill flew by issuing its haunting cry. A couple of Magpie Shrikes started calling and making the final slot on the list was a Village Weaver. Seventy-one species were seen altogether.

Several of the members had to leave but seven intrepid explorers then set off towards Turk Mine, in search of a White Stork! BLZ Matabeleland had had a communication from a Jan Gugh from Slovakia regarding a satellite tagged White Stork which, it would seem, had not moved for some time although the transmitter was still transmitting. The request was to try and discover the reason for the demise of the bird and to obviously try and retrieve the transmitter. Despite "following" the GPS reading that we had been given, we missed the turn off and had rather a circuitous trip before getting on the Rosebank road, finally coming to a full stop against a game fence and two large and intimidating looking locked gates. Our GPS reading was telling us that

we were within 1.7 km of our target but we had no means of getting in there without trespassing. Knowing the owner of one of the farms, it was agreed that someone would get in contact with him to see if there was any possibility of a team being allowed to go in to see if anything could be discovered. There is nothing further to report at this time.

Jenny Brebner

Verreaux's Eagles at Nungu: Talk by John Sullivan – 7 September

On a lovely spring afternoon all roads led to Tom & Jean's for the talk by John Sullivan on Verreaux's Eagles at Mount Inungu. Twenty-four members arrived and we all filtered into the lounge for the talk and presentation. John's opening slide was his telescope on his dining room table focused on his Verreaux's Eagles' nest. What a way to go birding! From the comfort of your home, not trekking through long grass and over rocky kopjes to get to see these lovely birds. The late George Banfield introduced John to this study. George's ashes were scattered at the base of Mount Inungu in 2000. It is John's opinion has two categories of birds: 1) eagles, and 2) birds that flap their wings to fly. John has had some awesome experiences with his eagles and taken pictures that most other Verreaux's Eagle teams were envious of. He has devised a stick to which he can attach his camera enabling him to take photos of the eggs, chicks and eaglets. The climb down to the nest is not for the faint hearted – one slip of the foot and that is that.

John has noted some of these observations over the years:

- Retrieved the body of a Verreaux's Eagle that had been killed in a power line
- Seen them fly overhead and below when on the mountain
- Heard a pop of wings when an eagle attempted to snatch John's little Jack Russell.
- Seen the nest washed off the rocks during the rains. Seen it rebuilt.
- The devotion of the incubation the feeding and the lucky survivor of the Cain and Abel struggle.
- Trailed a juvenile in its maiden flight, clinging helpless and exhausted on a sapling.
- Parental care of escorting and encouraging their young one.
- Banishing of offspring for the next generation.
- John wrote a book called "The Eagle and the Cross" on the life of late Father Odilo who often climbed Mount Inungu.

John gave us a lovely slide show of eagles and eaglets of Inungu.

After the talk all members moved into the garden to relax and enjoy each other's company whilst awaiting for the delicious meal prepared by the Cranstons and Lightfoots, of curry and rice with trimmings followed by a dessert of meringues, fruit salad and ice cream. After supper and a lovely evening folk drifted off home. Thanks to Tom and Jean for opening their home to the society for this event.

Gaynor Lightfoot

African Waterfowl Census 2013 In Matabeleland

For the fourth year in a row, no funding was available, and it was only due to the generosity of a handful of members that counts were undertaken. We believe that maintaining regular counts of waterfowl in our area is of great importance not only to us but also to Wetlands International. Our frustration is that we are covering only about 60% of the water bodies we should be covering; and unless we can obtain a reasonable contribution towards the cost of fuel and accommodation, this situation is likely to remain as such.

Last year we recorded the highest total – 10,465 – since the inception of the census in Matabeleland. This year, we've gone back to our more usual level – 6636. In 2012 Red-billed Teal numbered 1936 birds, Little Grebe 1447 and Southern Pochard 1233. Compare those figures to this year's – 343, 567 and 740 respectively. Cattle Egret were down to half their usual number; we had only 1 African Darter (very rarely seen nowadays), but African Sacred Ibis numbers were about average. On the other hand, two large flocks of Abdim's Stork set a record of 1151 at Aisleby, apparently attracted by a termite eruption; Pied Avocets increased their numbers twentyfold to 214; and unusually we recorded 4 Black-necked Grebe in the Region.

January

This month we covered 4 sites and totalled 3624 birds compared to 6 sites and 7021 birds in January 2012.

We suggest two main factors contributed to the reduction in numbers. Firstly, we covered only 4 sites out of 7; Hwange counts were reduced to 50% due to illness in one team; Cowdray Park was omitted due to impassable roads. Secondly, as most dams and pans contained a

reasonable level of water, there was plenty of choice and many species dispersed to other areas. By the same token, there were very few available shorelines or shallow dams for the waders.

Aisleby produced the highest count at 2482 birds of 32 species. Hwange came second with 947 birds and first with a species count of 47.

Species found in all 4 Matabeleland survey sites in January were White-breasted Cormorant, White-faced Duck and African Jacana. In 3 areas were Little Grebe, Reed Cormorant, Grey Heron, Cattle Egret, African Sacred Ibis, Egyptian Goose, Blacksmith Lapwing and Common Sandpiper. Collared Pratincole (46) and Black-winged Pratincole (23) were not unusual in Hwange, but 5 Collared at Aisleby were a first record in the last 16 years.

July

We covered 7 sites, totalling 3012 birds compared to July 2012 with 7 sites and 3444 birds.

Aisleby again led the way with a total of 1535 birds of 30 species. Second was Hwange National Park, Sinamatella with 451 birds of 27 species.

Recorded in all 7 Matabeleland sites were Red-billed Teal and Blacksmith Lapwing. In 6 sites were Little Grebe, Hamerkop and African Jacana.

Absent in all areas on census days throughout the year were Fulvous Duck, Curlew Sandpiper and all 3 courser species; and astonishingly we recorded only 2 African Purple Swamphen and 3 Great Reed-warblers.

SUMMARY BY SITE TWO YEARS: JANUARY AND JULY 2012 & 2013

SITE	January				July			
	Total birds		Total species		Total birds		Total species	
	2012	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013
Aisleby	3909	2482	32	32	1896	1535	26	30
SAST	436	171	31	19	274	269	21	19
Cowdray Park	640	0	24	0	662	379	21	19
Matobo National Park	54	24	13	9	177	207	19	20
Hwange Balla Balla	480	0	32	0	-	83	-	20
Hwange Ngweshla ¹	227	0	24	0	100	88	2	8
Hwange Sinamatella ²	1275	947	54	47	335	451	31	27
TOTAL	7021	3624			3444	3012		

¹ - including Main Camp

² – including Robins

COMPARATIVE TOTAL BIRDS & SITES FOR FOUR YEARS: 2010-2013

	2010			2011			2012			2013		
	Jan.	July	Total	Jan.	July	Total	Jan.	July	Total	Jan.	July	Total
Total sites	6	6		6	7		7	6		4	7	
Total birds	5732	2776	8508	3322	3204	6526	7021	3444	10465	3624	3012	6636

TOP SIX SPECIES BY COUNT – JANUARY AND JULY 2013

Species	January 2013	Species	July 2013
Abdim's Stork	1151	Little Grebe	493
Cattle Egret	499	Southern Pochard	392
Southern Pochard	348	Blacksmith Lapwing	280
African Sacred Ibis	229	Red-billed Teal	277
Egyptian Goose	188	Pied Avocet	214
Blacksmith Lapwing	154	Black-winged Stilt	199

Finally, many thanks to all our volunteers who worked cheerfully, patiently and diligently to produce valuable data – and all at their own expense.

Gwen Attwell, Gavin & Marjorie Blair, John & Jenny Brebner, Jean Cranston, Adele Edwards, the Gillot family, Cecilia Hubbard, Helen Lewis, Gaynor Lightfoot, Sue and Stephen Long, Sandy McAdam, Judy Ross, Bruce & Jenny Stevens.



Hwange August 2013 - Oxpeckers fleeing the sinking ship (hippo)!

Julia Duprée

Co-ordinator

19 September 2013

Monavale Vlei Report August September 2013

During this fire season the Vlei surprisingly only burnt once and consumed a third of the Vlei along the Marimba Stream. Otherwise the rest of the Vlei is still intact and looking good. The burnt area provided ideal habitat for African Pipits that have since been observed. Crowned Lapwings and African Wattled Lapwings can also be seen in these areas. A Crowned Lapwing nest – just a scrape on the ground with 3 eggs was found.

Bird species observed lately include Red-breasted Swallow, Lesser Striped Swallow, Lanner Falcon, Egyptian Goose, African Black Duck, Black Sparrowhawk, White-winged Widowbird, Marsh Owl, Wahlberg's Eagle, African Hoopoe, African Cuckoo Hawk, Long-crested Eagle, Black-chested Snake-eagle Lizard Buzzard, Helmeted Guineafowl, Black Crake, Little Bee-eater, Yellow-throated Longclaw, Klaas's Cuckoo, Lesser Swamp-warbler, Little Rush-warbler, Levillant's Cisticola, Croaking Cisticola, Yellow Bishop and the occasional Groundscraper Thrush.

Special mention is made of a Side-striped Jackal seen a couple of times in the early mornings and which for now has made the Vlei its sanctuary.

Looking forward to the new season and its migrants.

Jimmy Muropa

Monavale Vlei Scout 0772 772771

www.monavalevlei.com

Tail Feathers

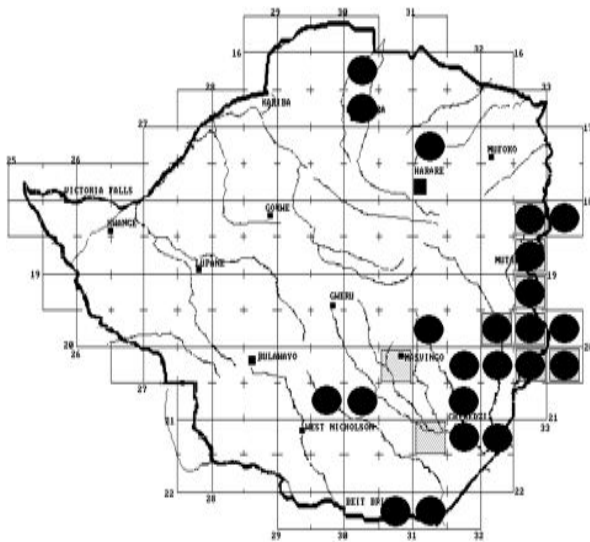
Scaly-throated Honeyguide in Harare?

Last month and at the start of this month, I caught several glimpses of a larger honeyguide flying off from trees in my garden in Westgate. I finally caught a brief sight of it perched, and seeing the green back identified it as a Lesser Honeyguide. However, while it was present, I kept hearing an insect-like birdcall, which sounded like a Scaly-throated call I thought. The song of the Lesser Honeyguide was not heard. I checked it on the Roberts' CD and confirmed that the call I was hearing did sound a lot like the Scaly-throated call. I know this has a similar green back to the Lesser, and the scaling may have been missed in a brief sighting. So my question is, is there a possibility of seeing this bird in Harare, perhaps spreading from the Eastern districts as several other species have already done?

Alternatively, maybe the Lesser Honeyguide does have an alternative call that sounds like the one of the Scaly-throated? I saw nothing in the books, but perhaps some of the more experienced birders than myself have indeed heard the Lesser making such a call? Or rather, was it just a coincidence that I was hearing what sounded like a Scaly-throated

Honeyguide at the time this honeyguide with a green back was visiting. Perhaps a thrush or robin was making this strange call? However, bear in mind that I have not sighted this honeyguide for a week or more now, and have not been hearing the insect like call

I would highly appreciate anyone sending in his or her opinion to lukejulian263@gmail.com
[Luke Wilson](#)



Map of Scaly-throated Honeyguide from unpublished Zimbabwe Atlas (Kit Hustler)

Roberts says this honeyguide is sedentary but note the accepted records away from the eastern highlands and the record north of Harare. Alec Manson identified it at Ngezi in 1967 but rejected his record as unlikely to occur – it could indeed have been something else! There is a record from Dichwe Lemon Forest (Feb 1990; D. Rockingham-Gill). Irwin (1981) mentions a Banket record. A bird was apparently seen at Rocara, Chivero (10 Jan 2001; *Babbler* 41)

The Scaly-throated is the size of a Greater and bigger than the Lesser, which should also help in

identifying it. It is not impossible that Luke saw it but more evidence and a good sighting would be good.

I. Riddell

Crows eating pecans

After the pecan tree in our garden started dropping nuts onto the lawn, we saw Pied Crows many times pick up the nuts and swallow them whole. This struck me as puzzling behaviour because these nuts have such hard shells that I usually need a nutcracker or a hammer to get at the delicious nutmeat inside. The crows obviously knew what they were doing, but I needed an Internet search to study up on some basic bird physiology. The bird's stomach has three sections: a crop for storing food, a gizzard (or ventriculus) to grind it up, and the stomach itself for digestion. As explained by one veterinary website:

“...Birds don't have teeth, but they still have to masticate food before it can be passed into the intestine. The gizzard is the avian solution to the problem. Birds in the wild tend to pick up gravel and small stones in their food. These pass through to the ventriculus, where they're retained for a while. The ventriculus is extremely muscular, and the contractions of the walls grind the food to a fine pulp by mashing it with these swallowed rocks.” (Source:

<http://www.vetmed.vt.edu/education/curriculum/vm8054/Labs/Lab22/lab22.htm>.)

I also learned that there is nothing unusual about crows eating pecans. In fact, crows are a major pest for pecan growers. Another point of interest that I discovered while seeking information on dietary habits of crows is that chocolate is deemed to be the worst thing to feed them: “Chocolate poisoning first affects a bird's digestive system, causing vomiting and diarrhoea. As the condition progresses, the bird's central nervous system is affected, first causing seizures and eventually death.” (Source: <http://www.avesnoir.com/the-10-best-and-worst-things-to-feed-a-crow/>.) I have no problem letting the crows share our pecans as long as they leave my chocolate alone!

Bruce R. Bolnick

August 2013

Long-crested Eagles

On 20 August I was fortunate to witness the mating between Long-crested Eagles – and get a photograph! This happened at Brookfield, Chisipite, and Harare 30m up in a Eucalyptus tree. They were a known pair who probably last mated and reared a youngster towards the end of 2012. They have since started using their old nest and the egg(s) should hatch in early October.



Long-crested Eagles mating photo James Ball

On a Houseboat trip on Kariba in early September, at least 26 vultures were observed circling above the shore near Binga. It was difficult to identify the type of vultures as they were flying extremely high. From one photograph, a Lappet-faced Vulture was positively identified, but I was assured that there would be more than a few of these in the group.

On 25 August, two White Storks were seen flying overhead in Mandara, Harare.

James Ball

Birders in Zimbabwe

Some twelve years ago Colin Saunders called upon lots of people in the birding world to provide short biographies on themselves and other birders. The idea was to put together a WHO'S WHO IN ZIMBABWE BIRDING going back to the 1890's and up to present times.

Julia Duprée, Brian Marshall and I are looking to resuscitate the exercise. We need more information. Who can help with: -

1. An article on birds in Zimbabwe's postage stamps. –
What bird stamp issues have there been?
Who did the illustrations? - Any particular birdy stamps of particular interest?
2. Information on those who have kept and bred Zimbabwe wild birds in aviaries?
Can anyone report on Harry Scott of Larvon, Mr Uglietti, Geoff Wood and others?
Who can write up the aviary keepers?
3. Isobel Mount - Mount Road, Avondale. - She illustrated C. D. Priest's very first book and painted very good antelope for Union Castle menu cards. The pictures used to hang in Salisbury Club. The Mounts had a son-in-law (?) who was an active and senior man in The Herald offices - Who was he? What descendants?
4. Who knows anything about Walter Krienkic from Beatrice? He did have family in Bulawayo in the early 1960's.

There's a start. More queries will follow.

Kind regards

Alex Masterson
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Who is the real mother?

January 16/17th 2011 Northern banks of the Zambezi River



Above : Chick in nest

*African Paradise Flycatcher with
chick 16th January 2011*



Mother and child sitting side by side. 16th January 2011



Child finally departing Nest! January 17th 2011



Time to meet up with the real parents? But who are they?

Contributions for The Babbler 115 December 2013/January 2014 may be sent to the Editor anytime between now and 14th November 2013.