

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: 1002399955**. 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.

The next BirdLife Zimbabwe AGM has been set to take place in the Bvumba on 30-31 May- 1 June 2014 at Seldomseen (and Madrugada). More info to follow.

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
DECEMBER 2013 AND JANUARY 2014

MUKUVISI	Sunday 1 st December 2013	0630
	Sunday 5 th January 2014	0630
CHIVERO	December 2013	NO OUTING
	Sunday 12 th January 2014	
	Waterfowl Count	
	Meet at Prince Edward School	0630
MONAVALÉ VLEI	Sunday 15 th December 2013	0700
	Sunday 19 th January 2014	0700
<u>4th Sunday Outings</u>		
DECEMBER 2013	NO OUTING	
Sunday 26 th January 2014	Hideaway/Darwendale Meet at Prince Edward School	0630
<u>2nd Sat Outings</u>		
DECEMBER 2013	NO OUTING	
Saturday 11 th January 2014	Rainham Dam Meet at Prince Edward School	0700
<u>3rd Thursday Meetings at Avondale Sports Club 1730 for 1800</u>		
2ND Thursday		
12 th December 2013	Christmas Social/ <u>Bring and Share</u> snacks	1800
Thursday 16 th January 2014	ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING MASHONALAND BIRDLIFE	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

Matabeleland Branch

7 December: Annual Bistro

We will wind up the year with our ever-popular bistro – always an enjoyable evening with good food shared by people with a common interest. Venue and price to be confirmed.

For more information contact Jean Cranston, phone 242921, or Cecilia Hubbard, phone 0772433733.

11 January: Aisleby

We start the year with a visit to one of the best birding spots near Bulawayo. Aisleby offers a variety of different habitats, including several dams and ponds, thick riverine vegetation, cattle feedlots, and ploughed lands – and a corresponding variety of bird species. And it nearly always produces a few surprises. Meet in the car park at Zonkizizwe, Bradfield at 6:30 or at the Aisleby entrance at 7:00. Bring a chair and mid-morning refreshments – plus lunch if you want to make a day of it! For more information, or assistance with transport contact Adele Edwards, phone 0712366917.

15 February: Matabeleland Branch AGM

Please note the next branch AGM will be held on Saturday 15 February. Details will be advised nearer the time. At least three of the current committee will not be standing for re-election so we are really going to need to see some different faces on committee. Everyone enjoys the BLZ activities and wants to see the branch continue but this will not happen unless some members are willing to step forward and be prepared to take a turn at running the show. Don't be shy. If you are willing to stand for committee please let us know.

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

BLZ Sunday outing to Wild Geese/Mazowe Springs.

BirdLife returned on 27 October, following a successful visit on 27 May 2012.

About 25 people turned up and split into two groups, one towards the dam and grassy surrounds, and the other headed to the Miombo and Acacia woodland, and riverine section.

The terrain was very dry and fairly rugged going as we followed the fence towards the river. Loose stones and the up and down sections contributed to this. A notable feature was the many broken trees caused by Eland bulls putting on a show of strength. It looked as if there were a few resident Elephant - not unlike the broken Mopane trees in the Hwange National Park.

One of the features of Wild Geese is the Mazowe Spring, which is the source of the Mazowe River. Such a major river starts from water oozing out of black clay. People who don't understand the importance of wetlands would do well to observe this.

On the way out, we were treated to a close-up view of a Reedbuck, which stood perfectly still, allowing photographs to be taken.

The birding was very good with a few 'specials' seen. These included a brief glimpse of a Black-throated Wattle-eye, Red-chested Cuckoo, Three-banded Plover, 6 sunbirds (incl. Purple-banded and Copper), Brown- and Black-crowned Tchagras, Miombo Tit, African Pipit, Pale, Ashy, Black, Spotted and Paradise Flycatchers, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, Southern Hyliota, Red-throated Twinspot, Jameson Firefinch, Streaky-headed Seedeater, Yellow-fronted Canary, Willow Warbler, Black Cuckooshrike, Golden Oriole, Violet-backed Starling, Red-headed

Weaver, Black Sparrowhawk, Steppe Buzzard, Long-crested Eagle, Black-chested Snake-eagle, Jacobin Cuckoo, and many others - 96 species in all.

Our grateful thanks to Bob Codrington for opening all the gates and making this morning possible.

James Ball



BirdLife Zimbabwe hosted **Szabolcs Nagy of Wetlands International** at a 2-day meeting on 5th & 6th Nov. The purpose of the meeting was to strengthen waterbird monitoring in Zimbabwe and a successful meeting it was as in conclusion we will be forming a committee to organize the activities which will include BLZ staff, reps from the University of Zimbabwe and Chinhoyi and National Parks to pool our resources and increase our capacity.

For more info contact: Dave Rockingham-gill rgill@zol.co.zw

BLZ Mashonaland Branch visit to Hippo Pools 27th – 30th September 2013

As our first activity was to be an afternoon walk, we left Harare at about 10 a.m. and had a leisurely 3-hour drive to our destination. Our only stop was at the disused Amm's Mine to look for the Lanner Falcon and Black Stork which both regularly nest there. The former was perhaps briefly seen flying by and the latter not present at the nest site but spotted by Carla, perched on top of the winding gear superstructure. The 12 km through the Umfurudzi Safari Area provided no excitement except for a drowsy herd of half-tame pensioner buffalos sprawled beside their feeding area. Apparently there is another wild herd but they failed to appear during our stay. The ground was dry and stony, the trees leafless: it was hot and still, hence the absence of birds and mammals. In contrast the camp was green and spring-like, thanks to the generous watering from the Mazowe. Another welcome feature was the labelling of the trees, recently completed by 2 NUST interns. Early arrivals also pointed out Giraffe, Kudu, Eland, Zebra and Impala on the opposite bank in the extension to the park.

We ate our packed lunch and greeted the other members as they arrived. I soon saw my first African Paradise-flycatcher of the season and Black-headed Oriole and Yellow-breasted Apalis were noted. At 1530 we had a cup of tea before making our first sortie into the upstream riverine woodland led by Tadius, the extremely knowledgeable camp guide. We had not gone far before we could clearly hear loud machinery in action ahead of us. This, we were told, was a de-silting exercise being carried out by a Chinese company. The more sceptical among us, including a miner, suspected it might just be a mechanised gold-panning operation. Certainly, it

was illegal but had survived 2 attempts by the EMA to stop it. Anyway, it was unpleasantly noisy and no doubt contributed to the reduction in bird activity. Species we did see included Klaas's Cuckoo, Green Wood-hoopoe, White-crested Helmet-shrike, Yellow-throated Petronia, Scarlet-chested and White-bellied Sunbird, Trumpeter, Red-billed and African Grey Hornbill, Bearded Scrub-robin and Lesser Honeyguide.

Our delicious, copious supper was served at two long tables by the river. It was there that we became aware that one of our 2 South African members represented KWV wines in Harare and insisted we taste both white and red. It would have been churlish to refuse, we decided, and there was soon a very convivial ambiance. I then recalled that the same generous gentleman had plied us with wine at the sponsored Golf Day at Chapman and the Art Auction. The count was fairly raucous but unimpressive at 44 species.

The night was blessedly cool and we were all ready for the off at 0630, one group heading upstream again and a smaller one down. The early hour obviously meant birding was more rewarding. We picked up Giant and Pied Kingfisher, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Senegal Coucal, Green-backed Heron and both male and female Narina Trogon before we reached the camp site and soon heard our first European Bee-eater. No sign or sound of the Pel's Fishing-owl, but Livingstone's Flycatcher flitted through the leaves above the path while a Red-throated Twinspot was spotted among the dry leaves under a bush. A very special Hippo Pools bird, the Racquet-tailed Roller, was heard and then seen in the more open area away from the river where we also found Swallow-tailed Bee-eater and Ashy Flycatcher. There was very little water in the Umfurudzi but we saw Three-banded Plover and the uncommon Green Sandpiper. Groups of Cinnamon-breasted Bunting appeared sporadically. As it was now getting very hot we drifted back camp-wards for brunch, another excellent spread. The downstream group were rather disappointed with their morning's tally but having brought together both lists our count was now 83.

Having explored pretty thoroughly the riverine area, we decided a change was due and for the afternoon excursion drove to the African Crowned Eagle's nest a few kilometres inland and much higher. Again there was little to see on the way but the nest itself was impressive, high on the mountainside in a tall tree commanding a great view of the valley. The bird unfortunately flew off as we approached and wasn't seen again but Tadius assured us a single egg was being incubated. It was a hot, rough climb to the viewpoint but well worth it. He told us they have now found and identified 214 raptor nests in the concession.

On Sunday morning, wanting to explore another habitat, we drove to the Mopane woodland above the Umfurudzi. Our first stop was the Big Tree, a magnificent hollow Baobab, over 20m in circumference and the location of the Pel's Fishing-owl's nest for the 2 two previous years but in the winter. From there we walked through fairly open grassland seeing Cinnamon-breasted Bunting in numbers, a Golden-breasted Bunting, Yellow-throated Petronia, Miombo Blue-eared and Violet backed Starling. The rocky river bed seemed almost devoid of birds. We found the Hamerkop nest but the hoped for Dickinson's Kestrel was absent. Again there was evidence of gold panning but not the mechanised Far East version. On returning to the cars some members went back to camp but the rest searched the Mopane woods and came across Retz's and White-crested Helmet-shrike, Green Wood-hoopoe, a putative Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill and a Fork-tailed Drongo. On the drive back, a Lizard Buzzard was spotted.

As we were eating brunch, we paused to watch a hippo with a tiny baby on the far bank and then enjoyed watching the tame monitor lizards finishing off the remains of the Saturday night braai. Immediately afterwards, a small group set out for the distant Palm Camp, others slept and I wandered back to find the Trogon, Paradise and Livingstone's Flycatcher, Racquet-tailed Roller, big flock of Helmeted Guineafowl and a Black Cuckooshrike. At 1530 we regrouped to be taken by canoe across the river to the new part of the camp. As Ian Jarvis explained at supper that night, the expansion is being funded by a wealthy British donor and comprises a game park, camp site, luxury honeymoon A-frame and a plant and tree nursery. Much infrastructural work was going on but already the park was stocked with Giraffe, Kudu and Impala. We were all enchanted by the month-old baby Giraffe and hoped this was a good sign for the future of the project and it made up for the dearth of birds.

The wind had increased in intensity steadily all day and Mon morning was cold and cloudy but we opted for a last riverside walk. But first, Tadius in a canoe flushed the nesting White-backed Night-heron, a lifer for all but the Hippo Pools regulars. What an attractive bird in

breeding plumage. Once again we split into groups. I went downstream and was rewarded by a healthy count of about 40 species including our first Greater Honeyguide, an Osprey over the weir, Southern Black Tit, a Red-throated Twinspot, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater and Jameson's Firefinch. At brunch the final count crept over the century mark to 106 species. It had been a most enjoyable trip, very relaxed and sociable. Thanks were offered to Tony Alegria for his usual excellent organisation and to Ian Jarvis and his team, especially Tadius, whose knowledge of the birds, trees and plants was most impressive.

Ken Dixon



Narina Trogon Photo- Debbie Wiggins

Hippo Pools Weekend

For the last weekend of September a group visited Hippo Pools Camp in the Umfurudzi Safari Area. The camp lies within a specially designated area that has more in common with a National Park, than a safari area where hunting is permitted.

The camp is on the banks of the Mazowe River; about two and a half hours drive northeast of Harare. The bulk of the journey is on wide tar. The last hour is on a mixture of old tar and very well maintained dirt. After leaving the wide tar the road dodges in and out of a growth point and passes the mining gear of several derelict mines.

The river that flows beside the camp is about a hundred meters wide and has been artificially widened as a result of a weir down-stream of the camp. The banks are high and steep and at night hippo come ashore to crop the grass which is kept green by sprinklers which are at work all through the day. The camp has a lush welcoming aspect to it after the arid bush surrounding the camp. A wide variety of leafy indigenous trees provide shade through the hot time of the day and shelter and food for a large variety of birds. Most of the trees have their names spelled out in beautiful script on the front and back of circular disks pinned to their trunks.

The camp can accommodate more than a hundred guests either in their own tents or in large spacious tents and cottages. The camp provided a brunch and dinner for the group and tea and coffee round the fire at six in the morning. We were especially lucky to have in the group George Thomson from KVV who brought along several cases of delicious wine that we all enjoyed to the full.

At night African Wood-owls visited us as we sipped our wine and Freckled Nightjars called.

Once in bed the night apes screeched their raucous cries from the trees above the tents.

The camp has done a magnificent job creating walking trails that criss-cross the area all extremely well signposted. Some trails stretch for seven or eight kilometres and take the walker into the rocky hinterland that resembles the Matopos in many aspects. We were taken to see an African Crowned Eagle nest on the side of a crag which had one egg. On another walk we found a Wahlberg's Eagle's nest. Ian Jarvis who runs the camp mentioned Verreaux's Eagles and Bat Hawks nesting in the hills.

The highlight of the trip for me was seeing an Osprey sitting in a tall acacia. It flew only after I had taken some reasonable shots of it. We found it again later and another was spotted at a small dam above a swimming pool that has been built into a rocky gorge above the camp. I also managed to get a few shots of Narina Trogons that can be seen early in the morning. Right in camp a party of Livingstone's Flycatchers entertained us during brunch one day.

In the three nights we spent at the camp, we hardly scratched the surface of what is available to guests at the camp. Tadius is the birding guide and he is a very pleasant person and very knowledgeable. On walks he is provided with a bird caller and this makes a great difference. Butterflies are also plentiful wherever you go. On our walks around the camp we saw kudu, wildebeest, impala, duiker and waterbuck.

In the time we were at the camp we recorded just over a hundred birds. Some, like the European Bee-eater were in the vanguard of the intra-African migrants. Livingstone's Flycatcher, when it stayed still for a second, was fun to watch. For me the Narina Trogon, the Osprey and Dickinson's Kestrel were very special.

The camp provides for the waders and divers; those that enjoy the heights of leafy trees, the thick undergrowth or rocky cliff faces. It has it all. We all enjoyed ourselves immensely and must thank Ian Jarvis and his team for doing such a wonderful job for conservation in the area. He has a project on the opposite bank that is evidence that wild animals alive can provide great value to impoverished communities. The planting of indigenous trees is another example of how to enrich the environment depleted by poor land-use practices.

Iain McDonald

"Sounds of the Bush", an illustrated talk by Derek Solomon, BirdLife Zimbabwe, Evening Meeting, Thursday, 21st November 2013

Despite the heavy rain late in the afternoon a large audience was attracted by the name and reputation of yet another Zimbo made good in South Africa. Most of those present were of the generation that recalled either joining one of Derek's bird outings or at least reading his *Birds of a Feather*, later *On Safari*, booklets. It was appropriate that Dave Gray who often accompanied the guided walks was present to reintroduce Derek and Sarah.

The subject of 'Animal Communication' sounded almost banal but the content was fascinating and scientific offering much new and surprising information but presented so that it was accessible by all. We have all heard lions roaring, leopards barking, elephants trumpeting but very few have studied the other more subtle messages transmitted from male to female, parent to young, one animal to the herd. This is mainly because this communication is at either too high or too low a frequency for the human ear. Nor did we know that the hippo is closely related to the whale and dolphin and can send messages in the form of clicks long distances under water. It would seem a male lion can sniff out a female in oestrus from urine traces and a female jumbo can choose the strongest, most potent male for miles around.....??????

Where birds are concerned, the latest research explains why Turacos call so loudly and raucously; to make themselves heard from within the leafy canopy, why birds feel the need to wake us all at 5 a.m.; because the air is clearer and transmits their voices more effectively before other sounds begin to drown them, why certain species call from certain levels; because their message is for possible mates or rivals at the same level. All these interesting findings were illustrated with clear audio examples.

We are most grateful to Derek and Sarah for bringing the results of their research back to BLZ and providing us with such an interesting presentation.

Ken Dixon

BirdLife Zimbabwe Art Auction Saturday 9 November 2013



From Left : Professor Amon Murwira, Tim Broderick, Fraser MacKay

BirdLife Zimbabwe organized an evening of art and conservation on Saturday 9 November. The theme of the evening was 'water and wetlands', which is a very topical issue in Harare at this point in time. Grateful thanks to Professor Amon Murwira, lecturer of GIS, Remote Sensing and Earth systems at the Dept. of Geography and Environmental Sciences, University of Zimbabwe and Mr Tim Broderick, Geologist who were our guest speakers. Many thanks also to Fraser MacKay who not only put in a painting but was also our MC for the evening.

The artists represented at the auction during the evening were all internationally renowned African- based Wildlife painters. They included Graeme Arnott, Peter Fogarty, Ingrid Weiersbye, Lin Barrie, Ant Fynn, Fraser Mackay, Debby Hart, Darryl Nero and Sue Jarvis. Please go onto the website: www.artforbirdlife.com to read up on the artists and see the paintings that were auctioned and those that were not which are still for sale. Contact juliapierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org for further details.

***Important Appeal * – NATIONAL WATERBIRD COUNTS**

The following Mashonaland report is longer than usual because Dr Szabolcs Nagy from Wetlands International in the Netherlands visited Zimbabwe from 5-7 November. We had a 2-day workshop followed by a field trip for our guest to Hideaway on Lake Manyame. Zimbabwe has recently ratified the Ramsar Convention and to remind you, the designated wetland sites are Mana Pools, Monavale Vlei, Cleveland Dam, Driefontein Grasslands, Lakes Chivero and Manyame, Victoria Falls National Park and Chinhoyi Caves. Ramsar sites are wetlands of international importance, recognised globally due to the Ramsar Convention, which is an international treaty for the conservation and wise use of wetlands.

The meeting highlighted the importance of regular and increased coverage of waterbird counts – not only so we can assess the population of birds but also to monitor the state of our vleis and dams, which are being destroyed rapidly, due in part to uncontrolled development and agriculture, domestic and industrial pollution, extensive use of boreholes and illegal netting, resulting in a decline of some waterbirds such as darters and grebes. Lake Chivero, Harare's

main water source, is 40% silted. There are also problems with coverage of counts due mainly to the agricultural revolution and being unable to access areas e.g. there are thousands of potential farm dams and rivers in Mashonaland, Manicaland (Osborne Dam) Kyle, Kariba and the Midlands, but only 25 sites in Mashonaland (mainly by 2 people) and 7 in Matabeleland were surveyed in July 2013 and only 2 of the 14 most important wetlands in Zimbabwe are covered.

A committee was formed to endeavour to strengthen the network of observers and improve coverage for these counts that traditionally take place in **January** and **July** every year. However, Zimbabwe has the greatest number of migrants in February for example, so waterbird counts could be done at any time, thus enabling a more accurate assessment of numbers. So if for example, you are in Kariba over the Christmas season or the Zambezi in late June or early August, please submit a form. Members are therefore urged to participate in the African Waterbird Census and those who submit data to the SABAP2 project are requested to send in a form – you would just have to record numbers seen. To encourage observers, the current waterbird count form has been redesigned showing mainly waterbirds found in Zimbabwe. It is important to maintain consistency when counting and approximately 4 hours coverage or 5km along a shoreline is recommended to keep comparison standard. Anyone with a special interest in certain species can also make a valuable contribution.

So get a friend or a group and go out and enjoy yourselves – you don't even have to get up at the crack of dawn! For more information or to be sent the forms, please contact Carolyn Dennison or Dave Rockingham Gill- details on the front of *Babbler*.

Many thanks in advance for your help! Have a good Christmas and a great New Year.

DVR-G

AFRICAN WATERFOWL CENSUS, MASHONALAND BRANCH
January & July 2012; January & July 2013

SITES COVERED	NO. RECORDED & SPECIES TOTAL			
	January 2012	July 2012	January 2013	July 2013
Art Farm Vlei, Harare District	75/9	917/9	64/7	548/13
Ballantyne Park, (small dam) Harare		8/3	22/6	
Biri (large dam), Zvimba District		929/36		
Blair (small dam), Harare			2/2	
Borrowdale Brooke Golf Course, Harare District				235/14
Brookfields, (3 small dams) Harare		12/7	34/5	36/8
Canon Kopje Farm, (2 small dams) Zvimba District			29/9	
Chegutu Sewerage Ponds, Chegutu District				16/5
Chikokerano Pan, Seki District			106/18	46/5
Chikwenya, Zambezi River, Hurungwe District				205/31
Chipinda Pools, Runde River, Chiredzi District				124/15
Chishakwe Dam, Bikita District				109/18
Chitsua Dam, Ngezi Mine, Chegutu District				20/8
Cleveland (large dam), Harare District (Ramsar site)		36/10		58/10
Country Club Golf Course (small dam), Harare		33/7	35/6	27/4
Crowborough Municipal Dam, Harare District				303/11
David Whitehead Settling Ponds, Chegutu District		41/4	130/14	8/2
Driefontein (dam) Gutu District				408/18
Gletwyn (small dam), Harare District			26/6	21/6
Greengrove (small dam), Harare		95/19	218/14	1038/12
Greystone Park (small dam), Harare			13/8	

Hippo Pools, Mazowe River, Shamva District	44/9	14/8	10/6	91/17
Imbwa Sewerage Ponds, Zvimba District				6/1
Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary (large dam), Zvimba District	363/22	227/16	97/8	
Lake Manyame (headwaters), Norton, Zvimba District		2355/39	902/37	274/29
Lake Manyame, Aberdeen Farm, Darwendale Zvimba District *		3036/33	499/32	447/29
Masasanya Dam, Gonarezhou National Park, Chiredzi District				121/22
Monavale Vlei, Harare District ** (Ramsar site)	209/22	109/11	47/21	88/9
Mongwe Camp, Zambezi River, Hurungwe District		122/22		
Mukuvisi Woodlands, (small dam) Harare	39/8	11/4	23/10	15/6
Ngezi (large dam), Chegutu District		139/11		
Nyamepi Camp, Mana Pools, Zambezi River, Hurungwe District		191/22		
Nyamungai Pan, Seke District			578/25	293/16
Rainham Dam, Zvimba District				224/27
Pamuzinda Lodge (dam) Chegutu District		38/4		
Pamuzinda Lodge (river) Chegutu District		14/17		
Turf Sewerage Ponds, Chegutu District				144/11
Widgeon Pan, Gutu District				53/7

*Two teams saw different birds ** seen in one month

Highlights of the July, 2013 survey

Tony Alegria recorded the African Pygmy-goose *Nettapus auritus* at Lake Manyame, Norton, and the same observer noted none on Cleveland Dam, from where they have been chased by a canoe safari operation. They were always there in good numbers in the past.

African Black Duck *Anas sparsa* were found at Lake Manyame, Norton & Aberdeen Farm; Borrowdale Brooke Golf Course; Driefontein Dam; Hippo Pools and Monavale Vlei. The Black Duck may be changing its habits, slowly occupying dams, when it was essentially a river duck. We looked for it at Art Farm, Gwebi River, but there was too much uncontrolled gold panning there.

Cape Shoveler *Anas smithii* (4) and 10 **Maccoa Duck** *Oxyura maccoa* were recorded at Nyamungai Pan, by Innocent Magunje (IM) on 10 July 2013.

Wattled Crane *Bugeranus carunculatus* (2) were found at Chikokerano Pan on 10 July 2013 (IM). He spoke to the kraal head there and found that they visit at this time of the year every year.

One **Grey Crowned Crane** *Balearica regulorum* seen at the Crowborough Municipal farm on 3 July 2013 (IM).

While 55 sites were visited in the Driefontein Grasslands, 9 breeding pairs of **Wattled Cranes** and 9 pairs of **Grey Crowned Cranes** were recorded in July and August 2013 – showing the decline of these two birds in that area (IM).

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* (15) were at Aberdeen farm, Lake Manyame on 22 August 2013 (DVRG).

Goliath Heron *Ardea goliath* was recorded at Driefontein Mission Dam (IM) and at Chishakwe (TA & GL). It must be time that we can estimate the population of this huge heron for Zimbabwe.

Only one **Black Heron** *Egretta ardesiaca* was seen at Aberdeen Farm, Lake Manyame (DVRG).

Black-crowned Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* and **White-backed Night-heron** *Gorsachius leuconotus* were recorded at Hippo Pools, Shamva District. The latter had three white eggs on 12/10/2013 (see facebook.com/Birdlife Zimbabwe) (Tadious Ndadzira).

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* – 449 flew over Art Farm, Harare late evening 5 July 2013 – they came from the Pomona Rubbish Dump and flew to roost somewhere. Another 228 were roosting with the **African Sacred Ibis** at Willies Dam, Greengrove, where they were pushed off the island by the ibis' breeding.

African Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* (761) were nesting at Willies Dam, Greengrove – some building and some with eggs (July). A month later (August) they had many chicks – some

wading in the water and some being fed at nest sites. A further month later (September) there were 34 left – only the youngest – and they were still being fed, but flying. During the August visit some dead Sacred Ibis chicks were being eaten by **African Purple Swamphen** *Porphyrio madagascariensis* (DVRG).

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* were at Hippo Pools and it was reported that 14 were at the dam there on one occasion.

Three **Woolly-necked Stork** *Ciconia episcopus* were at Masasanya Dam, Gonarezhou National Park, on 12 July 2013 (Bruce & Doreen Bolnick).

An **African Rail** *Rallus caerulescens* and a **Red-chested Flufftail** *Sarothrura rufa* were at Rainham Dam (Debbie Wiggins). This dam was once surveyed for years but is now being slowly taken over by the march of people and time.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* (45) were on the Borrowdale Brooke Dams on 6/7/2013 (CB).

Three **African Finfoot** *Podica senegalensis*, two **Rock Pratincole** *Glareola nuchalis* (a restricted range bird in Zimbabwe) and c.30-40 **African Skimmer** *Rynchops flavirostris* were seen on a boat trip above the Victoria Falls, when 10 BLZ Mashonaland Branch members visited northern Matabeleland on 21 August 2013. **African Finfoot** was also recorded from the southeast Lowveld at Chipinda Pools and Chishakwe Dam.

Debbie Wiggins *et al.* saw an **African Marsh-harrier** *Circus ranivorus* at Rainham Dam.

Comments

Art Farm is a well-known vlei/wetland but few IWC forms are available from there.

Chikokerano & Nyamungai Pans have been visited for years, erratically, but some good records exist.

Chikwenya is a camp on the Zambezi River and this is the first record from there.

Chipinda Pools was well known to Cathy Sharpe, who must have sent in 100 field cards from there. Further down river at Tambahata Pan, we have good counts from Ferdie Couto, in the past.

A booklet on the birds at Rifa Camp, near Chirundu will be produced shortly.

Chishakwe Dam is a new venue for us, very out of the way and very interesting.

Chitsua (island) Dam, built 2012/2013 for Ngezi Mine is a new venue. We visited it to have a look at a brand new dam. Turf (Ngezi) Sewage Ponds was the same, notable for many crocodiles.

The bird sanctuary at Lake Chivero must have 40 years of records since the place was first visited, but it is now rather degraded and needs policing and fencing as fish poachers are common.

Country Club Golf Course, Borrowdale Brooke, Brookfields and Gletwyn are small dams, but have permanent water.

Crowborough Municipal Farm was visited a lot by the Mashonaland Branch of BLZ in the past.

David Whitehead Settling Ponds have been well visited and many good records have come from there over time, but it is now dry and the company is no longer working. So Innocent Magunje went to look at the Chegutu Sewage Ponds instead, a new place for waterbird counts.

Driefontein has been the subject of International Crane Foundation grants for the last 5 years or more and George Archibald is well known to us.

Greengrove Nature Reserve (Willies Dam) would be hardly known but for the fact hundreds of African Sacred Ibis have been found breeding there in the last few years. All these Harare wetlands are under threat.

There is a good selection of field cards and waterbird count forms from Hippo Pools over the last 10 years.

Imbwa Sewage Ponds were also visited often up to the year 2000. There used to be large and useful counts there, but no longer (the ponds are no longer in use and are dry).

Mana Pools is well known for its game counts, which lie outside the July count – but there are about 20 years of records of big birds from there, on the game count forms. The big birds are the ones under threat.

The Manyame lakes have had many visits over time, including some full counts by the Coutos and BLZ staff.

Masasanya Dam in Gonarezhou National Park was visited twice in July 2013 and the counts were essentially the same, but a week apart.

Monavale Vlei has good monthly counts for the last 10 years and is a recent Ramsar site, so should be a star of our show.

A few records exist for Mongwe.

Rainham Dam was very well known in the past. Good records existed in the early 1950's to about 1975. Records and visits were recently revived but the area is degraded.

Widgeon Pan is well known from birding talk, but I have never seen records from there. They would not be easy to come by – mining hard rock might be easier.

Bird lists exist for Kariba but we seldom get lists from there. It is the ultimate challenge.

We only touch the Zambezi here and there and very often not in January and July. Maybe BirdLife Zambia sends in more records from there than we get. For example we now get nothing from the Victoria Falls, but Zambia has 17 years of records from their side of the river.

Manicaland and Midlands Provinces remain almost unknown.

Our Red Data booklet says the -

African Skimmer and **African Marsh-harrier** are endangered; **Rock Pratincole** and **Woolly-necked Stork** are threatened; **Slaty Egret** and **Double-banded Courser** are of least concern.

The **cormorants and darters** are doing badly because of netting. I wonder if the Little Grebe is too? The **waders and shorebirds** are doing badly from pollution and invasive floral species. We know too little about the **rallids** living in our vleis, which are being continuously encroached upon.

- Our rivers and pans are not well known. The dams were well known up to the year 2000 and our vleis, which are not well recognised by IW Counts are little known.
- It would be good if we could fit the African Waterbird Census into the Southern African Bird Atlas Programme.
- There is a desperate need to write up the data we have. Any volunteers?

Some Literature – Since my last report a good article by David Ewbank on the Distribution and Status of the Black-necked Grebe in Zimbabwe appeared in *Babbler* (The Botswana BirdLife Journal). In recent years some excellent articles on waterbirds have summarised what we know on some waterbirds in Zimbabwe:

Chirara, C. 2011. The Status of the Wattled Crane in the Driefontein Grasslands of Zimbabwe. *Honeyguide*, 57(1): 10-14

Ewbank, D.A. 2012. The Status of the African Finfoot in Zimbabwe. *Honeyguide*, 58(1): 59-64.

Ewbank, D.A. 2012. The effects of rainfall on the numbers of waterbirds in the Matobo National Park. *Honeyguide*, 58(2): 131-135

Marshall, B. 2011. The Slaty Egret in Zimbabwe. *Honeyguide*, 57(1): 19-21.

Tree, A.J. 2011. The Black-winged Stilt in Zimbabwe. *Honeyguide*, 57(1): 5-9

Tree, A.J. 2011. Recapture rates of Ruff at two Southern African localities. *Honeyguide*, 57(2): 116-120

Another mine of information is Field Observations by Colin Baker, which has appeared for years in every copy of *Honeyguide*.

Drs Rob Rees and Neil Deacon (2012. Conservation: Plotting a way forward. *Babbler* 104: 8-9) asks members to become involved in Special Interest Groups around the world like cormorants, cranes, ducks, grebes, flamingo, herons, pelicans, rails, storks, snipes, Wader Study Group, etc.

Acknowledgements

The following observers took part and are thanked for their efforts: Tony Alegria, Colin Baker, James Ball, *Bruce & Doreen Bolnick, Richard & Carolyn Dennison, Ken Dixon, Andy Fussell, Innes Louw, Geoff Lowe, Alison & Roger MacDonald, Innocent Magunje, Peter Mundy, Tadius Ndadzira, Maggie Ndowa, David and Penny Rockingham-Gill and Debbie Wiggins. * Bruce Bolnick's wife Doreen would come to the birding venues but peel off into the bush with her artists' pack and draw/paint a flower. She recently published a book on the wildflowers of Zambia. Sadly they have returned home to U.S.A. and we wish them well.

D.V. Rockingham-Gill, 4 Fernleigh Road, P.O. Borrowdale, Harare rgill@zol.co.zw
National Co-ordinator, African Waterbird Census in Zimbabwe

General overview of my first birding trip with BLZ to Hwange, Vic Falls and Chobe

August 2013.

After booking my place on this trip in March I eagerly awaited the departure date. Collected at 6 a.m. by Bev and Tim we drove to pick up Richard and were on our way by 6.30. We drove to Kwekwe and then turned right to follow the road which was a shortcut to Lupane – very exciting – always nice to go on a new road and see a different part of Zim. We stopped for lunch and were saying how nice the road had been when the only other vehicle we had seen in ages comes flying past. It was the other group with Tony at the wheel. It took him so long to

recognize us before he screamed to a halt, reversing in a cloud of dust. Talk about delayed reactions! From there on to Lupane and Hwange with a total of 8 hours travelled in all.

On checking in we discovered that our wonderful leader had booked us into rooms with no cooking facilities whatsoever, so a further delay as he returned to negotiate a solution. This was that Margaret and Robin would share the lodge with the kitchen and the rest of us would stay where we were for one night and then move the next night to different rooms. I would add here that Richard, after checking in and seeing all the birds in the immediate vicinity would go and sit in the car – usually a general ‘hint’ for the rest of us to get moving! This time he proceeded to sit in the wrong car!! Not only the wrong TYPE of car but also the wrong colour!! Much hilarity followed with apologies to the relevant car owners! My job was dinner the first night so, after a quick trip into the Park, I settled down to ‘do my bit’ with much to-ing and fro-ing between the ‘catering lodge’ and our accommodation. That night we had a visit from the ‘Bulawayo crowd’ and I must say it was very nice meeting them all.

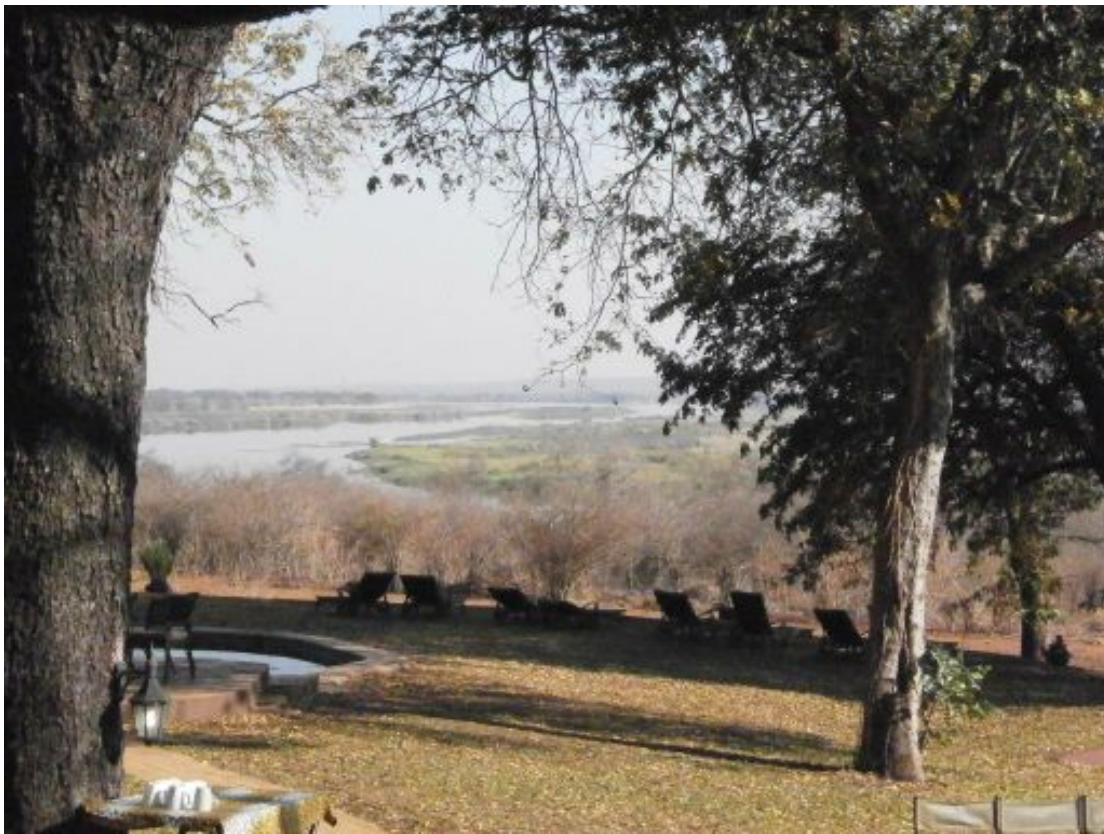
Next day at the crack of dawn we were off to do a day’s birding with most of us having to move out of our accommodation first and leave everything at the ‘catering lodge’. It was a beautiful day driving past Kennedy 1 & 2 and finally having lunch at Jambile Pan with comparing of notes and sightings. Bruce and Doreen Bolnick and Howard also were loosely connected to our group and, as a beginner, I was amazed to see how different groups could see so many different birds whilst travelling along the same road. We drove back to camp around 5 to pick up our stuff and move into a different room. I must mention that at Main Camp there is not a single ladies’ shower in the entire place!! Only baths. My greatest saviour was Bev who kept cavy for me whilst I showered in the men’s ablutions!

Next morning early we all swapped cars and were off to Robin’s Camp, birding along the way. This time I was with Tony, Margaret and Richard. We went via Shumba, Guvalala and Masuma arriving at Mandavu at lunchtime. We had a beautiful site overlooking the dam. We got to Robin’s Camp late afternoon and were unpacking when a bird called from a tree just outside the lodge (with cooking facilities this time!!) This had the most electrifying effect on all the birders – I was amazed with the instant reaction of all present! While we were all scrambling for binos the bird obligingly called again another two or three times. It turned out to be an African Scops-owl sitting fairly low in a leafless tree right outside the lodge. What a treat. It was unconcerned and plainly visible (without binos!) and was thoroughly enjoyed by all present.

We were leaving Hwange the next day completing a loop for a couple of hours first. Our car explored the Deka River and Big Toms and left the Park at 11.30. Whilst the others were exploring, getting lost, and finally leaving at 3.30, we arrived at the Vic Falls Lodges around lunchtime. The lodges were beautifully kitted out with teak furniture and kitchen appliances that worked perfectly. We had the afternoon to explore which Richard, Margaret and I did going upstream in amongst the lodges. Darryl Tiran, a birder who lives at the Falls came to our braai that night and explained the arrangements he had made on our behalf for the following 4 days that we would be at the Falls. It all sounded exciting to say the least.

Next morning bright and early we went to meet our boat and go on a river cruise upstream. The boat was exclusively booked for us and it was lovely to be able to ‘sneak’ up on the birds as and when we needed to. We saw birds that I never knew existed! My Lifers List was growing by the second. We were given a beautifully prepared Continental breakfast but only after we’d gone back to the harbour to get the plates! What a lovely couple of hours cruising around the islands. Later that day Darryl took us to visit the lovely gardens of the Kingdom Hotel, the Gorge swing, etc. where Margaret made good friends with a black goat! We then drove out of town to the Gorges Hotel with a beautiful setting on the lower gorges where the views of the Zambezi on its way to Kariba were stunning.

The next day we visited the Chamabonda Park then the Vic Falls rubbish dump and sewage ponds and, finally, my long awaited trip to the Falls itself. I can never get enough of looking at the Falls – it really has a certain magic. I would mention here that the town of Victoria Falls has had the most amazing spring-clean, all in aid of the big tourism conference that was starting that Sunday. The road from the airport was new tar with yellow lines, cat’s eyes – the works. Every shop had spruced up its image and even the Police Station looked spick and span. What a difference compared to the last time I was there.



Imbalala Lodge Marshy area looking upstream Photo- Dee Appel

Our last day at the falls was Friday and we left bright and early to travel to Imbabala Lodge just inside Zimbabwe where we had our second river cruise of the trip. This was in the marshy area on the river just before the border. It was really amazing, with me writing the names of the birds so fast I could hardly keep up! This was my favourite part of the trip. The area was unspoiled and beautiful. Again Darryl had organized that the cruise was for our party only so the concentration was intense!

From Imbabala we crossed the border into Botswana and drove to outside Kasane where we picked up our third and final boat cruise of the trip. This was up the Chobe River also kindly organized by Darryl. I would say here that our leader, on each and every cruise, right at the start would inform the boat drivers that our party was not interested in any animals whatsoever!! This always brought a smile to my face, as he would then go into great detail to such an extent that some of us lost interest – at one point he conceded that if they happened to see a giraffe eating a lion then they could take us to the kill!! Chobe was interesting and beautiful but the flotilla of boats was very much like the traffic on First Street! Darryl assured us that there were not many boats on the water that afternoon but it was still too many for me. The flat grassy plains seemed to stretch for miles on one side and on the other were desert-type Kalahari vegetation, quite a contrast. The sad part was when we got to the Namibian side of the river and saw the amount of netting that is going on there – a great pity.

Then the race was on to cross the border back to Zim and drive back to the Falls in time to go for dinner at The Boma. We only just made it and had a wonderful evening eating game meat and playing tom toms in a great atmosphere of fun and laughter. The evening was a perfect end to a great trip.

On the down side I have to say I was disappointed at being unable to complete any pentads on the trip. I would have liked to be able to contribute to science just a little bit. Also I felt there was too much travelling in cars every day with no time to sit or walk quietly in the bush and just listen. As a complete novice I was absolutely amazed by the depth of knowledge held by many members of our party. There is so much to learn and I am both inspired and intimidated by it all. I would like to thank everyone who took me under his or her wing to show me this and that and especially to Tony and Darryl for organizing such a super trip for us all.

Dee Appel



Doing a bird count Mowana Hotel Botswana Photo- Dee Appel

Monavale Vlei Report: October November 2013

The onset of the rains brought some relief and with it the grass has turned to lush green. Various vlei flowers that are blooming have brought a unique charm to the vlei. Birding has been fantastic with some of the following species seen: Abdim's Stork, Black-chested Snake-eagle, Wahlberg's Eagle, Black Sparrowhawk, Common Moorhen, Meyer's Parrot, Red-chested Cuckoo, Levallant's Cuckoo, Black Coucal, Marsh Owl, European Bee-eater, European Roller, Barn Swallow, White-throated Swallow, Lesser Striped Swallow, Willow Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Red-backed Shrike, Cuckoo Finch, White-winged Widowbird, Groundscraper Thrush and Yellow-fronted Canary.

A Common Myna was sighted on the vlei on 19th November 2013, perched on an acacia tree.

It is with regret I report that there has been a case of a man hunting mammals on the vlei with a pack of six dogs. However he has been stopped from this illegal activity after a formal report to the police and the intervention of Veterinarians Animal Welfare Zimbabwe (VAWZ) officials who took away some of his dogs. The case is before the courts.

Despite odds heavily stacked against the vlei Duiker it is still surviving and has been spotted regularly since the hunting incident. In fact, according to recent sightings there are two duikers. Scrub hares have also been flushed.

We continue to receive various schools to the vlei for their wetland education.

Lastly we had an alien plant removal exercise on Monavale vlei. It took five days and went very well.

Wishing you all the best during the festive season.

Jimmy Muropa __ Monavale Vlei Scout 0772 772771

www.monavalevlei.com

Mavuradonha Eco lodge

A mere two hours from Harare we pulled into the Mavuradonha Eco lodge (Bookings: George 0772766118) after enjoying views of the breath-taking escarpment from a layby close by. A very friendly learner professional guide who runs the camp met us. The camp falls under Zimbabwe's campfire scheme and consists of 2 bedroom chalets with their own bathroom (\$35 per room), 1-bedroom chalets with shared ablutions (\$32 per room), "A" frame bashers with

shared ablutions (\$15) and camping. The chalets are very basic, yet clean and comfortable. There is a communal kitchen where Lamek can rustle up local cuisine or cook food brought in by the guests. The camp is serviced by ZESA and backup generator and is equipped with 2 deep freezers and an upright fridge.

We sat at the picnic tables under the deep shade of a *Ficus lutea* listening to the sprinklers irrigating the emerald green lawns whilst sipping on ice cold beers supplied by the camp. We were fortunate enough to coincide our relaxing afternoon with a hatching of flying ants which offered epic birding right under our noses.

Cabanis's Bunting, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, African Paradise-flycatcher Bearded Scrub-robin, Crowned Hornbill, Violet-backed Starling, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Blue Waxbill, Common Waxbills, Jameson's Firefinch, Dark-capped Bulbul, White-browed Robin-chat, Wahlberg's Eagle, Red-throated Twinspot, Spotted Flycatcher, Willow Warbler, Yellow-fronted Canary, Black-collared Barbet Klaas's Cuckoo, Red-chested Cuckoo, Lesser Honeyguide, Yellow-throated Petronia (with perfect visuals of the yellow throat), Tropical Boubou, Spectacled Weaver, African Pygmy-kingfisher, Eastern Saw-wing, African Palm-swift, Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Terrestrial Brownbul, Ashy Flycatcher, Purple-crested Turaco, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Lesser Striped Swallow, Grey Tit-flycatcher, Steppe Buzzard, Brown Snake-eagle, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, Black-backed Puffback, Black-crowned Tchagra, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Red-backed Mannikin, African Yellow White-eye, Black Cuckooshrike, European Bee-eater, Mottled Spinetail, Cardinal Woodpecker, White-bellied Sunbird, African Grey Hornbill, Helmeted Guineafowl, Trumpeter Hornbill, Green Wood-hoopoe, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Laughing Dove, Chin-spot Batis, Bronze Mannikin, Augur Buzzard, Retz's Helmet-shrike, African Hawk-eagle, Emerald-spotted Wood-dove, African Harrier-hawk, African Cuckoo Hawk, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Striped Pipit, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Golden-breasted Bunting, Red-winged Starling, Black-headed Oriole, Red-faced Cisticola, Barn Swallow, Wire-tailed Swallow, White-rumped Swift, Pennant-winged Nightjar, African Wood-owl, African Barred Owl.

The following morning after a great cup of coffee in the garden, Lamek took us for a walk to the nearby Sohwe falls. The waterfall is fed by a freshwater spring up in the hills and crystal clear, cool water flows all year round. We swam in the stream, which was very refreshing in the early November heat. It is not far to walk to the falls but the path is a little steep in places.

Lamek tells us there have been recent reports of, buffalo, leopard, lion and elephant in the area; however we were not fortunate enough to encounter any of these animals. We will definitely be returning to Mavuradonha soon and would recommend a visit to anyone who wants to escape the hustle and bustle of town.

Jono Francis

Matabeleland Recent Reports

Walk at Hillside Dams Conservancy – 12 October

A cooler, early morning start at six-thirty after a warm, barmy night was the best time of the day for bird watching. Eight members met at the Upper Dam car park and immediately noticed, forging under the newly leafed, large *Acacia (Vachellia) galpinii* trees, the African Hoopoe and Kurrichane Thrush. Blue Waxbills with their distinctive calls and Red-billed Firefinch were busy fossicking around in the dust and among the rocks. As we headed up into the aloe garden, White-browed Robin-chat and a male Black-backed Puffback displaying his powder puff were sighted. The flowering *Erythrina latissima* and *Combretum paniculatum*, both with bright red blooms, attracted Dark-capped Bulbul, Crested Barbet, Black-headed Oriole and the White-bellied, Marico and Miombo Double-collared Sunbirds. The monotonous and continuous calls of the Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird as well as Black-collared Barbet were heard and then the birds observed. The cry of the Grey Go-away-bird and the cawing of Pied Crow added to the cacophony of birdcalls. As we reached the recently burnt area, Lesser Striped Swallow, African Palm-swift, Red-faced Mousebird, Streaky-headed Seedeater, Yellow-fronted Canary, Laughing and Red-eyed Doves, Tropical Boubou and White-browed Scrub-robin were seen. Nearing the Upper Dam, Southern Masked-weavers who are frantically busy nest building at this time of the year, and a Golden Weaver were observed. From the dam wall, we could see a Black-headed Heron perched at the top of a large tree, a Yellow-billed Kite circling above us, three Hamerkop flew by making their trill like call, an African Sacred Ibis and a Grey Heron also flew past. Oddly, very few waterfowl were seen at the half full Upper Dam. Moving down into the thicker and

greener vegetation below the dam wall, Grey-headed and Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Chin-spot Batis, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Bar-throated Apalis and African Yellow White-eye appeared to be enjoying the lush vegetation. A male African Paradise-flycatcher, trailing his long tail, flashed past us. Terrestrial Brownbul was first heard and then pursued resulting in some excellent views of this rather elusive bird. As we approached the dry Lower Dam we saw Cape Glossy Starling, a pair of Long-billed Crombec and heard the plaintive call of the Emerald-spotted Wood-dove. The highlight of the morning was seeing a Black Cuckooshrike with its diagnostic orange/yellow gape and a Spotted Eagle-owl who hooted loudly at us when we passed under his perch. This alerted us to its presence. A total of forty-six species were seen.

Peta Ditchburn



Spotted Eagle-owl Photo-Cindy Sellick

Visits beyond Zimbabwe

WWT (Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust)

Martin Mere Wetland Centre

In August 2013 while visiting our family in the UK, we were privileged to visit the Martin Mere Wetland Centre situated near Ormskirk, in Lancashire, UK. This Centre is one of nine WWT (Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust) projects in the UK to protect and restore existing wetlands and encourage the creation of new ones to replace the many thousands lost in recent years.

The WWT environmental policy is the conservation of over 2600 hectares of wetland in the UK. WWT is active around the world. WWT recognizes that many of our activities have some negative impact on local, regional, national and global environment. Their aim is to minimise this impact and wherever possible to reflect sustainable practices. A wetland is an area where water covers or saturates the ground for prolonged periods resulting in the presence of specially adapted plants, animals and soils. This covers a vast range of places such as bogs, estuaries, lakes, meadows, ponds, rivers and streams.

The Martin Mere visitor code is “Where ever we go and whatever we do, we have an impact”. The Martin Mere nature reserve has around 100 species of international water birds swimming and feeding in the wetlands, custom designed to mimic their natural homes. There is also a beaver lodge with CCTV cameras following the day-to-day routine of the beaver family. An otter enclosure provides much entertainment for the public, especially the children who seem to enjoy the antics and playfulness of the otters.

A survey in 2002 recorded well over 2000 different species of birds, mammals, insects, fish, reptiles and other animals living in and around the mere which gives the site its name. There are also many indigenous Lancashire plants in the area.

Many thousands of migrant wild ducks, geese, waders and swans over winter at this Ramsar rated marshland.

Specials in this area are the migration flocks of Eurasian Wigeon and thousands of Pink-footed Geese that come each winter. Hen Harriers, Eurasian Hobby, Merlin and Peregrine Falcons all hunt the marshes. The wintering Whooper Swans cover the marshlands as well as Northern Lapwings and redshanks.

We arrived mid-morning on a bright and sunny day to a very organized reception and visitors centre. Guides were available if required. But we decided to use the very well detailed guide program to wander through this amazing nature reserve. The walks took us past the otter enclosure where a talk on the otters was in progress. One can stop and listen or just wander on. We continued on past the Oriental Pen, Eco garden, South American, North American and Africa Pens. Canoe safaris were in progress on one of the pans and viewing platforms gave us an opportunity to look over the pens and bird enclosures. Boat tours progress around the wetlands where warblers and many wild flowers can be seen. We stopped briefly at the *Mere tun roundhouse village* where the children were encouraged to participate in various nature activities i.e. den building using branches and leaves to make a shelter. We then walked through the Europe, Australasia sections on the well-maintained user-friendly paths. Spring gates separated the sections although ducks tend to fly and visit other sections of the park. The children were encouraged to feed the ducks with seed bought in the reception shop. This resulted in the ducks coming right up to our feet to forage for seed or them digging at the bottom of the pond for food. The Harrier Hide and observation point was an amazing sight. A huge structure with plenty of inside seating was available to observe over the Pat Wisniewski reed bed and its many migratory birds. We had purchased a new pair of binoculars just for this trip and spent some time looking at all the fascinating 'new' birds in the reed bed – to us anyway.

Our walk continued with visits to the Janet Kear Hide, Gladstone Hide and Swan Link Hide (the longest hide in Europe). We also passed through the Raines Observatory, Hale Hide, Kingfisher Hide and Ron Barker Hide. These were all beautiful structures with plenty of seating in front of glass fronted windows overlooking the Carum field, The Mere, Top Mere, Kingfisher Pool and the reed bed filters. There were plenty of signs and photo plates along the route explaining the different sections with a picture gallery of the ducks we would see in that particular section.

An onsite binocular shop offered binoculars to buy or to rent. They also offered courses and advice on the purchase of scopes, telescopes and binoculars.

Martin Mere advertises many adult and children activities during the day included guided walks, flamingo talk; the beaver and otter talk as well as fun activities for the children. A huge playground and a restaurant proved very appealing to visitors. While we sipped on hot Cappuccino we reviewed our amazing 4 hours experience. This could have been a whole day outing as well as further visits, but unfortunately we had limited time and we had our small grand children with us.

This was a very worthwhile visit and I am sure that the other sites around the UK equal rewarding.

The next time I visit the Monavale Vlei in Harare, I will be much more appreciative towards the environment and all the work carried out to return this beautiful area to a pristine wetland. This area was once covered in house hold garbage and had been ploughed and the stream bank cultivated.

Visit the Monavale vlei on the 3rd Sunday of the month at 7 a.m. for a guided walk.

Linda Fussell

I have used references from WWT Website on Environmental Policy, and What are Wetlands.
www.wwt.org.uk/conservation/all-about-wetlands/what-are-wetlands/

Pelagic Birding Trip off Cape Point, South Africa

As a highlight of our trip to South Africa, my wife and I scheduled a pelagic birding trip off Cape Point through Cape Town Pelagics (www.capetownpelagics.com/index.htm), an affiliate of Birding Africa (www.birdingafrica.com/). A week ahead of the scheduled date of Saturday, October 5, CT Pelagics informed us that the trip would depart from Hout Bay rather than Simons Town. But the weather turned against us, with a cold rain and strong winds, and the trip was deferred to Sunday. Fortunately, the winds diminished just enough on Saturday evening for the trip to go ahead next day.

On Sunday morning we met our group at the dock at 7 a.m. In addition to us, the group included 4 Norwegian bird photographers (with very impressive cameras), one English birder, and one South African, plus the guide, Cliff Dorse (whose day job is Biodiversity Coordinator for the City of Cape Town), and the skipper, Dave Christie. Cliff and Dave proved to be incredibly knowledgeable and helpful. Our boat, the 28-foot Obsession, was much smaller than I had expected, with just enough space for the group to sit huddled under the canopy without much elbow room or knee room. (See: <http://www.tosf.co.za/about/boats/>).

Although the weather had improved, we still faced a stiff headwind and very choppy seas for the jolting trip of more than two hours to just beyond the continental shelf, about 30 km south of Cape Point. There, Skipper Dave spotted a long-line fishing boat on the horizon – a sure indication that we would find a swarm of pelagic birds. Dave raced to the fishing boat. When we were directly alongside he cut the engine and let us drift and bob on the rolling seas surrounded by hundreds of birds soaring low or sitting in the water at very close range. Then we raced back to the fishing boat and repeated the drift, over and over for several hours of birding dreamland. The trip back to Hout Bay took more than two hours again, but this leg was more comfortable because we were going with the wind and the seas.

We were extremely lucky to get excellent views of 6 species of albatross: Shy, Black-browed, Atlantic Yellow-nosed, Indian Yellow-nosed, Northern Royal, and the elusive Wandering. Other sightings included 8 species of petrels or storm-petrels, including Black-bellied Storm-petrels, which migrate past the Cape for only a few days each October. For Cliff's full trip report, see: http://www.capetownpelagics.com/cape_reports_TR1316_06octCD.htm.

I did a similar pelagic trip off Cape Point once before, in 2001. Still, this second trip added 10 birds to my life list. The difference was partly due to luck and partly to the fact that the previous trip was on a much bigger boat that was higher above the water, and with much less personal attention from the guide. (By the same token, the boat was also more comfortable and big enough so that passengers could stroll around on the deck.)

Aside from the pelagic trip, we had four days of other outdoor activities during the trip, including a climb up Table Mountain on a chilly, misty day with Callan Cohen, who is a principal in Birding Africa. These excursions brought my trip total to 118 species. Non-pelagic highlights included Ground Woodpecker, Greater Flamingo, Great Crested Grebe, Common Chaffinch, Cape Grassbird, Cape Sugarbird, Orange-breasted Sunbird, Rock Kestrel, Cape Rock-thrush, Grey-winged Francolin, and, of course, the African (formerly Jackass) Penguin.

In conclusion, pelagic birding off of Cape Point is a magical experience that should be high on the wish list for every member of Birdlife Zimbabwe.

Bruce Bolnick

Tail Feathers

Arrow-marked Babblers built a nest in a creeper under our bathroom window and were sitting on 2 turquoise eggs. Last week (mid-November) there was a very noisy commotion and I watched two **Levaillant's Cuckoos** being mobbed and chased by at least 6 babblers. These plucky little birds managed to drive away the much bigger birds, which were obviously trying to parasitise their nest. I read in *Roberts* that they do not evict the host's eggs or young but trample them. Unfortunately the cuckoos must have succeeded, as a few days later the babbler nest was abandoned and a crushed nearly hatched egg was found on the ground.

Carolyn Dennison

Gifts – Don't know what to give relatives and/or friends for Christmas – or any other occasion? A subscription to BirdLife Zimbabwe is a reasonably-priced gift, which will be enjoyed by anyone with an interest in birds and conservation.

Being unable to go to outings and events is not an important issue, as it is being a member, which BLZ appreciates, and so supports our goal to protect biodiversity. Members get the *Babbler*; more interesting now we have added photos, every two months and the *Honeyguide*, twice a year. Please contact Carolyn – rolly@zol.co.zw for more information.

We have had a pair of **Little Sparrowhawk** floating around the garden for several weeks (one is always resident). Saw what I thought was a nest, but it always seemed unoccupied - hard to see when it is 15m up a pine tree. Last week one of the birds was seen sitting on the nest and on 14 Nov a youngster poked his head out. Only one seen so far, but exciting to have at the bottom of the garden.

There are two chicks in the nest - one somewhat larger than the other.

James Ball



4th November

Little Sparrowhawk Photo – James Ball



14th
November

Little Sparrowhawk Photo – James Ball



17th
November

Little Sparrowhawk Photo – James Ball



This is hot out of the nest - 15 minutes ago.

*This is the eldest chick - you can just make out the head of the other in the nest.
25 th November 2013*

The **Long-crested Eagle** chick at Brookfield continues to develop and it can't be long (maybe next week), when it attempts a maiden flight. Looks like a male bird. Can't be there all the time, but hopefully will get some pictures.

James Ball

P.S. For those members who want to get close up and personal to most of our Raptors and Owls, a visit to Kuimba Shiri Bird Park, Lake Chivero is a must. Whilst I don't agree with confining these magnificent creatures in small cages, it is certainly one way of getting to know the difference between the various birds.

Top two pictures taken 4th November



14th November

Accolade – I received this from eminent ornithologist Peter Steyn, when he received the last issue of *Babbler*.

"I am absolutely blown away, yet again, by this issue of Babbler. The amount of interesting material is really impressive and shows clearly that BLZ is in very good health indeed.

Congratulations to all concerned.

Kind regards,

Peter".

Carolyn Dennison

Birder Biographies

Thank you to those who reacted to our first note about the new start to this project. We still ask for more notes on people who you think merit mention in a final work on Zimbabwean and Rhodesian birders of the past.

Meanwhile: Photos Please!

We have notes for the following people (See attached list). Does anyone have photos of any of him or her?

Arnott	Graeme	Mansons	Alex and ???
Ashton	Dr Hugh	Marshall	G. A. K.
Booth	James	Miles	H. M.
Borrett	Raymond Paul	Murray	Jacobs
Boulton	Rudyard	Mwadziwana	Peter (Seldomseen)
Bourlay	Reginald Arthur	O'Donoghue	Fin
Cannell	Ian Charles –(Roads Midlands)	Oatley	Terry Dr
Chiweshe	Ngoni	Odendaal	D. P. S.
Colahan	Brian D.	Paterson	Mary (Ball)
Cuthbertson	Margaret B.	Paul	Raymond
Fisher	Alfred Charles Dr	Priest	Captain C. D.
Fisher	Cyril F. T. (Selinkwe)	Rankine	Ronald William
Forder	Charles	Reid-Henry	David Morrison
Gerros	Charles R.	Rushforth	Dianne
Graylin	John C.	Rushworth	Dave
Hamling	H. H.	Saunders	Robert Benjamin
Hale	Percy Egerton	Sievi	J. R.
Hartley	Ronald Russel	Solomon	Derek
Hustler	Kit	Stevenson	Roy H. R. Captain
Howells	Billy	Tredgold	Robert C.
James	H. W.	Vernon	Carl
Kennedy	John Noble	Weiersbye	Ingrid
Lees	Stephen	Whittington	Peter –(Secretary Peak Mine)
Magwizi	Boneface	Woodall	Peter
Makawa	Jali		

Alex Masterson

All responses via Editor of Babbler please. fiona6@zol.co.zw

Waste management has become a serious issue in Zimbabwe in recent times. We've all noticed it. It has become too glaringly obvious to try to ignore. Several organizations and concerned citizens are attempting to address the problem but clearly more needs to be done. (And it can be done! We need only to look at the example set by Rwanda. The authorities there have practically banned the use of plastic bags in that country). Let's face it, the rubbish we produce is a major threat to the health of people and to wildlife.

The photo was taken of the bird flying over Chobe National Park, Botswana but reality is that it could easily have been feeding in the Victoria Falls rubbish dump or got caught up in the bag along the Zambezi. We've seen it happen in Kariba – birds getting their bills and feet stuck in fishing nets abandoned along the shoreline, in Harare's Lakes Chivero and Manyame – African Fish-eagles getting entangled with nets and bags, etc. Each and every one of us can make a difference by starting to think what we are doing and what we are throwing away. Let's all take ownership of the problem and get involved in finding a solution!



A Marabou Stork with a plastic bag stuck to its foot. Photo-Dave Glynn, African Albida Tourism



*Adult and juvenile African Goshawk at a pan at Mana Pools, September 2013.
Photo Carolyn Dennison*

Contributions for The Babbler 116 February 2014 / March 2014 may be sent to the Editor anytime between now and 14th January 2014.