



**BirdLife Zimbabwe**  
The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

**ISSUE # 117 – April 2014 /May 2014**

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### \*\*\*SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL TIME\*\*\*

**MEMBERS** – the new membership year begins on 1 April and I appeal to you all please to renew promptly. Whether you attend meetings and outings or not, your membership is important and supports our goal to protect biodiversity and conserve birds and their habitats through education, lobbying decision-makers and interaction with international organisations. In addition, your involvement with data collection through atlassing and submission of record cards is invaluable. As a member you get the newsletter, *Babbler*, every two months and two issues of *Honeyguide*, our internationally acclaimed journal, every membership year. All for a very reasonable annual fee. Donations towards these or any of our projects are always much appreciated.

Individual/Family members (incl. children under 17)	US\$ 25.00
Pensioners (65 & over), Students	15.00
Youth Club	5.00
Schools (high density)	25.00
Schools (private), Educational Institutions	50.00
Rest of Africa	40.00
Rest of World	50.00
Corporate members - contact Julia Pierini	<a href="mailto:JuliaPierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org">JuliaPierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org</a>

Payment can be made direct to the BLZ office at 35 Clyde Road, Eastlea.Harare or by deposit into **BirdLife Zimbabwe** at **NMB Bank, Borrowdale branch. Account No. 260092014** or the **BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Chisipite branch** account at **CABS Account No. 1002399955**. It is VERY IMPORTANT please that you include your name on the deposit slip so it appears on the bank statement AND advise Carolyn Dennison by e-mail or phone, or your payment may not be recorded. Please contact me, the national membership secretary, for all membership-related issues – new, renewals, payments, change of details, queries [CarolynDennison@birdlifezimbabwe.org](mailto:CarolynDennison@birdlifezimbabwe.org)

BLZ notices are now arriving from a new address [blzpublications@birdlifezimbabwe.org](mailto:blzpublications@birdlifezimbabwe.org) Add this to your address book/safe senders so your e-mail programme displays the messages correctly. You can also update your preferences and change your details online.

Please look on our Facebook page for great pictures and recent bits of birding news [www.facebook.com/BirdLifeZimbabwe](http://www.facebook.com/BirdLifeZimbabwe) and our informative website [www.birdlifezimbabwe.org](http://www.birdlifezimbabwe.org)

### THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE IS TO BE HELD IN THE BVUMBA AT SELDOMSEEN ON 31 MAY 2014.

Book EARLY to avoid disappointment!

Please email [mhumhe@zol.co.zw](mailto:mhumhe@zol.co.zw) to book your accommodation at Seldomseen and visit [www.seldomseen.co.zw](http://www.seldomseen.co.zw) for details of each self-catering cottage. The discounted price for BirdLife members will be USD\$30ppp night (inclusive of 15% VAT and Tourism Levy)

Another accommodation option is to stay at Roger Castelin's Madrugada.

Please contact [madrugada@zol.co.zw](mailto:madrugada@zol.co.zw) to book there.

Madrugada is offering three different rates:

1. Lodge accommodation at \$25 per person per night (\$40 with dinner and breakfast) – Max no 25
2. Cottage Accommodation at \$15 per person per night (\$30 with dinner and breakfast) – Max no 8
3. Camping at \$5 per person per night – Max no 15

**Branch Activities**  
**Mashonaland Branch**  
**MASHONALAND BLZ – OUTINGS APRIL 2014 AND MAY 2014**

<b>MUKUVISI</b>	Sunday 6 <sup>th</sup> April 2014	0630
	Sunday 4 <sup>th</sup> May 2014	0630
<b>CHIVERO</b>	Sunday 13 <sup>th</sup> April 2014 MAY – No Outing	0630
<b>MONAVALE VLEI</b>	Sunday 20 <sup>th</sup> April 2014	0630
	Sunday 18 <sup>th</sup> May 2014	0630

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

<b>WIDGEON PAN/ DRIEFONTEIN</b>	Sunday 27 <sup>th</sup> April 2014 Meet at Mukuvisi Woodlands Office This venue is approximately 180 km from Harare.	0630
<b>MCDONALD TIMBERS RUWA</b>	Sunday 25 <sup>th</sup> May 2014 Meet at Mukuvisi Woodlands Office	0630

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

	APRIL – No Outing	
<b>HAKA PARK</b>	Saturday 10 <sup>th</sup> May 2014 Entry fee \$3 per person for BLZ members	0700

**3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday Meetings at Avondale Sports Club 1730 for 1800**

<b>AMUR FALCONS</b> Iain MacDonald	Thursday 17 <sup>th</sup> April 2014 Avondale Sports Club	1730 for 18.00
<b>BIRDING IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY</b> Celesta von Chamier	Thursday 15 <sup>th</sup> May 2014 Avondale Sports Club	1730 for 18.00

*BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Branch organises regular bird walks for its members and non-members free of charge (however there may be entry fees e.g. National Parks or a tip required depending on the location). For further information please contact Tony Alegria, [talegria@zol.co.zw](mailto:talegria@zol.co.zw) 0772 438697, (h) 490375*

**Evening Meetings are on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday** of each month 5.30 p.m. for 6.00 p.m. 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 150 metres on the left. Bring a reasonable tip for the guard,

taking into account the value of your vehicle! Don't forget refreshments for after the walk when we record the number of species.

**Chivero and Rainham Dam** – Meet at Prince Edward School car park on Josiah Tongagara Ave

**Monavale Vlei** – Meet on the B.S Leon side of Fenella Drive

For info: Tony Alegria [talegria@zol.co.zw](mailto:talegria@zol.co.zw) cell: 0772-438697, (04) 490375

## **Matabeleland Branch**

### **Forthcoming Events:**

12<sup>th</sup> April: Early morning walk at Lakeside, off Kabot Drive just past the old Hotel Rio. Meet at the home of Peter and Verity Mundy in Kabot Drive at 7.00 a.m. This is always a rewarding birding venue. With the dam holding a substantial amount of water for the first time in many years, various waterfowl species can now be seen, and in relative close proximity. Please contact Peta Ditchburn or Judy Ross should you need transport, or any further information.

11<sup>th</sup> May: An outing to Vernon and Shirley Tarr at their small holding in Ntabazinduna area. Meet at Qalisa, Suburbs at 8 a.m. Bring chairs, hats, and your refreshments. Fires will be lit for those wishing to stay for a lunch braai. If you would like to come and need transport, or need any further information please contact Judy Ross or Peta Ditchburn.

## **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](mailto:pgwidibira@gmail.com) for details.

**Lowveld** – contact Clive Stockil 0772-219204 or [clives@senuko.com](mailto:clives@senuko.com)

## **National Office**



*BirdLife Zimbabwe website launch on 28 February 2014*



### **BirdLife Zimbabwe has launched its new website!**

BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ) has a history of being involved in promoting ecotourism in Zimbabwe by training bird guides, as well as helping to draw up checklists and interpretive material for areas, which attract birdwatchers and nature-lovers. On 28 February 2014, BLZ launched its new website: [www.birdlifezimbabwe.org](http://www.birdlifezimbabwe.org). We have updated our 'about us' page and our conservation/projects pages listing all the projects we are currently working on. Bird outings are also listed on the calendar on the website as well as the special species surveys and projects that all members and bird enthusiasts can join as citizen scientists to make a collective contribution to birding with a purpose! But what is especially exciting about our new website is the section called 'Birding Zimbabwe' directed at both our local birders but also at visitors to Zimbabwe wanting to know where to go to see which birds and where to stay when they are there. Pages have been created describing the many birding hotspots around Zimbabwe with bird lists and links to the various accommodation options. And if you need a guide to help you tick that particular bird off your life list, specialized guides have been included too. We have gone to great lengths to provide what we believe is a comprehensive array of information for the birder wanting to know about birding in Zimbabwe but we would love to have feedback from both local birders as well as visitors to be able to improve the service.

A cocktail event was organized on the lawn outside BLZ offices for the launch and it was very well attended by members, staff and invited guests including corporate sponsors/supporters, safari operators that have been included in the Birding Zimbabwe section of the website, the Press, interested residents, University of Zimbabwe students and staff and National Parks reps.

The young men from the Dzikwa Trust (BLZ is introducing the students of Dzikwa to the Bird Awareness programme) Marimba Band were invited to play at the event and provided a great performance at the function. The video of the Marlborough Vlei World Wetlands Day event that took place in Harare on 7 February 2014 was played for the audience to update those present of some of BirdLife Zimbabwe's activities.



*Dzikwa Trust Marimba Band playing at BLZ website launch*

Heartfelt thanks go to Jessica Wen Grimault for the website design, implementation and on-going administration. This is the second website Jessica has created for us free of charge. We are humbly grateful to her for her generosity. Many thanks also to Celesta von Chamier and Ian Riddell for all their professional work in assisting with this project together too. We couldn't have done it without you!

**Julia Pierini** [pierinijulia@gmail.com](mailto:pierinijulia@gmail.com)

### **Demonstrating ecosystem service values in Africa through shared learning.**

Togarasei Fakarayi attended the second workshop on 'Demonstrating ecosystem service values in Africa through shared learning', held from 11-14 February 2014 in Thika, Kenya. The aim of the

workshop was to share the experiences on the use of a Toolkit for Ecosystem Service Site-based Assessment (TESSA) used for site assessment for the first time in Africa. A total of 11 participants from across Africa attended the workshop, all being first users of TESSA in Africa. Most of the sites where the Toolkit was applied were IBAs in Burundi, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Madagascar, Uganda and Zimbabwe across a range of habitats including tropical forest, miombo woodland, grasslands, wetlands and coastal mangroves. There was vast sharing of experiences and knowledge on the use of the Toolkit. The Toolkit is used for measuring ecosystem services, which include determining current and future change, and their economic value. Information on ecosystem services, translated into policy context, is vital for influencing positive policy change towards biodiversity conservation. Major challenges faced by different species of birds are habitat loss and/or conversion of sites to other uses. The same habitats, which are rich in birds, support important ecosystems that are essential for human well-being but there is very little recognition of economic values of this natural capital. Various case studies presented at the workshop revealed huge ecosystem service values in Africa for various sites. Understanding and practical sharing of information on ecosystem service values at site level has a high potential of promoting conservation of sites and species for the benefit of birds, people and other biodiversity.

**Togarasei Fakarayi**

### **BirdLife Zimbabwe Youth Project**

UNHABITAT Youth fund sent out calls for proposals to which BirdLife Zimbabwe youth club is putting a response. UNHABITAT Youth fund provides funds for youths who are into nature conservation, specifically for youth empowerment, gender equality and sustainable urban development. BirdLife Zimbabwe youths are putting together a proposal to rehabilitate public Parks and green areas in Harare and were given permission to rehabilitate Ballantyne Park and Greengrove. The permission was granted by Mr Mtisi in the Parks office under Housing section of City of Harare. Saturday 22 March 2013 saw a group of youths touring Ballantyne Park on a fact-finding mission. There is a wide range of issues from invasive/alien plant species, plant growth on the dams, leaking dam wall, exotic tree species to illicit activities by humans in the Park. The project seeks therefore to collaborate with local communities and businesses in restoring Ballantyne Park to its original beautiful state. Considering the amount of work to be done at Ballantyne, Greengrove will be left on hold for now. Members are welcome to come on-board with advices and any other contributions.

**Innocent Magunje.**

## **Protecting Harare's Wetland Ecosystems for Nature and the City's People Update February / March 2014**

- A most successful celebration of **World Wetlands Day 2014** was held on 7<sup>th</sup> February at **Marlborough Vlei** with 350 school students, teachers, BirdLife Zimbabwe staff and members, Mukuvisi Woodlands Ecoschools team, EMA, Marlborough Environmental Action Group, COSMO, Prof Magadza and Councillor Bango. Much rain fell the night before providing a perfect setting for this important event. Read more about this at this link: <http://www.birdlife.org/africa/news/world-wetlands-day-celebrations-marlborough-vlei-harare-zimbabwe> Also find a link to the video of this occasion on BLZ website on the Wetland Page under the Conservation Page. Thank you to Julia Pierini for donating the funds from calendar fundraising for the making of this video. An excellent brochure on Marlborough Vlei was published in time for this event.
- Also a great success was the training workshop on **Harare's Wetland Ecosystem Services** which was held on 6<sup>th</sup> March at BLZ Library and attended by 26 people, including the Member of Parliament for Warren Park (including Monavale) Hon Elias Mudzuri, Chairperson of City Council Environmental Committee Cllr Chris Mbanga and Monavale Councillor Paula Macharangwanda as well as officials from EMA, UZ, National Parks, Marlborough, Avonlea and Monavale Residents. Presentations were given by Toga Fakarayi, Dorothy Wakeling and Katy Lannas with Fadzai Matsvimbo the very able facilitator. Behind the scenes Sylvia Muzavazi, students Clever and Fadzai and Vengai Dengu coordinated the event. Those in attendance participated actively in the proceedings and departed with a greater understanding of and concern for the state of the City's wetlands. Cllr Mbanga suggested a similar workshop be given to the City of Harare councillors and officials as soon as possible. This is slated for the 2<sup>nd</sup> April at Town House.
- Radio and TV interviews have been given, the latter on Monavale Vlei on 12<sup>th</sup> March. A link will be sent out once known. All these events are also covered by the press.
- University of Zimbabwe Biological Sciences staff and students, led by Professor Isla Grundy, conducted their first plant survey on the Monavale Vlei.

- Intense lobbying of authorities continues behind the scenes to halt proposals to develop Harare's wetlands. A Wetlands Survival Forum Trust meeting was held on 18<sup>th</sup> February at Town House.

Grateful thanks, once again, are extended to BLZ staff and Council, COSMO and MEAG, BirdLife International and Jensen Foundation. The involvement of EMA and City of Harare is much appreciated.

**Dorothy Wakeling**, Project Coordinator [cosmo@yoafrica.com](mailto:cosmo@yoafrica.com); 0772 376506

## RECENT REPORTS AND SIGHTINGS

### **Mashonaland**

#### **Visit to Aberdeen Farm, Zvimba District, 17°49.529'S, 30°39.879'E. 26 January 2014**

13 of us from Mashonaland Bird club went to visit "Hideaway" a well-known fishing camp on the north bank of Lake Manyame for the African Waterbird Count. I was a little disappointed in the numbers and variety of species. But that is what there was. There was water all over the place. Getting there from Nyabira, there were running rivers and gravel pits full of water, all the way. Near the lake the grass was not tall, but very thick to walk in. No fire there last year.

We saw no Great Egret, Yellow-billed or Little Egrets and no Egyptian Geese. Pat Cox tells me there are so many in Hwange; he doesn't know where they all come from? So maybe this is the year to prove the Hwange pans are the "Duck Factories of Zimbabwe".

It seems we did about 4 hours' work and walked about 5 km of shoreline. We were well rewarded; the most common bird was the African Jacana, followed by the Blacksmith Lapwing and the White-faced Duck. I counted 22 Hottentot Teal and 21 African Openbill. A Purple Heron ate a barbel about 30 cm long. There were 11 Wood and only 3 Common Sandpiper. There were three pairs of African Purple Swamphen and only two Grey-headed Gulls. On an offshore sandbank we noticed a Collared Pratincole and a pair of African Skimmer resting in the midday sun. We looked for Little Bittern, African Pygmy-goose, Lesser Jacana, and Marsh Sandpiper without success. There was lots of habitat for them. Close by were 3 Western Marsh-harrier and an African Marsh-harrier. I expected many more swallows, but we only saw about 50 Barn, 2 Wire-tailed and two Brown-throated Martins. Thrush Nightingale was heard and 4 Yellow Wagtails seen, with some good snaps taken. The Sedge Warbler and the Willow Warbler were other visitors. Yellow-mantled Widowbird and African Quailfinch were also recorded.

Of the normally dry land birds we saw Gabar Goshawk, Spotted Eagle-owl, both Speckled and Red-faced Mousebirds, the Lesser Honeyguide, a Cardinal Woodpecker, a Rufous-naped Lark carrying nesting material, an Ashy Flycatcher, an African Pipit with a limp, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow in the vicinity of the buildings and Brimstone Canary (90 species in all).

Next visit we should do for SABAP2, as Hideaway is in the very corner of 4 Pentads.

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

#### **Greystone Park Nature Preserve – Saturday 8 February**

Five of us met at Greystone Park Nature Preserve and after the tremendous rains that we have been having, the dam was very full and in fact we were told it had recently spilled. The surrounds are looking beautiful and lush but there is no shoreline at all for any waders at the moment.

On arrival, a few regulars were spotted or heard such as White-browed Robin-chat, Kurrichane Thrush and Speckled Mousebird and there were a few Red-collared Widowbirds floating amongst the tall grass. Also in the grass and reeds were Bronze Mannikins and Common Waxbills, and Lesser Swamp-warblers were heard calling. Black Crakes could be heard amongst the reeds and there were a few Common Moorhens gliding along the water as well as, rather unusually for this venue, a Spur-winged Goose flying over. On the far side of the dam was a large colony of Village Weavers making quite a racket while they worked on their nests. A Hamerkop passed by and African Yellow White-Eyes could be seen moving around the tree canopy nearby. Purple-crested Turacos, the Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and Tropical Boubou could be heard too.

Near the spillway, we saw a Thick-billed Weaver on his beautifully constructed nest spanned between two reeds and a Dark-capped Yellow Warbler was perched on a reed nearby. A Golden Weaver flew past too but the special of the day had to be the Buff-spotted Flufftail that was heard in the thick grasses a little way away from the dam.

A walk through the forest below the dam didn't yield much at all and we were only able to add a couple

more species, for example Terrestrial Brownbul and Fork-tailed Drongo. Surprisingly, no raptors were seen at all, so there must be lots of food around for them at the moment!

Our thanks once again to the Greystone Park Nature Preserve for protecting and maintaining this little gem of a venue!

**Debbie Wiggins**

### **Annual Vlei Walk led by Alex Masterson. Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> Feb 2014 on Bluff Hill Vlei**

Many of the 20 participants came armed with recent rainfall statistics at their respective homes, most reporting 160 mm in the previous few days so it was not surprising that gumboots or no boots at all was the order of the day. The vlei that lies between Bluff Hill, Sanganayi Park and Bloomingdale was in fact mildly flooded but provided an interesting venue on a beautiful morning. Although surrounded by encroaching development and even what looks like a new road worming its way into it, little cultivation mars the extensive vlei which consists of large areas of impenetrable bulrush, some open ponds and a large stretch of various short grasses dotted with bushes.

We were fortunate to have a guide who knew the area well and how to avoid water over gumboot depth. He also knew the birds of the vlei and was able to identify for us the calls of Levillant's Cisticola, Red-chested and Streaky-breasted Flufftail, Little Rush-warbler and Lesser Swamp-warbler and African Rail and crakes, none of which we saw. Birds that were obvious and abundant were Cattle Egret, Yellow-mantled and Red-collared Widowbird, Southern Red Bishop (which were orange) and White-faced Duck. There is a large colony of Cattle Egret on the vlei, which also contains many African Sacred Ibis.

First we slogged our way along a huge bulrush bed that had Thick-billed Weaver, bishops and widows while Little Rush-warbler called from within. Turning round to face the short grass area we could pick out lots of species on higher grass, isolated plants and bushes; African Stonechat, Black Coucal, Yellow-throated Longclaw, Diderick Cuckoo which parasitizes Southern Red Bishop, Common and Orange-breasted Waxbill and our only wader, a Wood Sandpiper. Larger individuals flying over were Black-headed and Purple Heron and Reed Cormorant. We then followed a long and circuitous route through the short grass in the hope of flushing flufftails or crakes but only succeeded in disturbing a Marsh Owl, which was harassed by a Black-shouldered Kite and a Gabar Goshawk.

Having reached the western boundary, we searched the lines and found European Bee-eater, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow, Laughing Dove, Copper Sunbird and a Red-breasted Swallow. In this drier, more open area we spotted Grey-rumped Swallow, Bronze Mannikin, Red-faced and Speckled Mousebird, Rattling and Red-faced Cisticola and a Dark-capped Bulbul.

Back at the cars, we made a list of about 60 and thanked Alex Masterson for once again inviting us into his kingdom.

**Ken Dixon**

### **Mashonaland Branch Outing To Manda Hills – Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2014**

A new venue to all of us, Manda Hills is a 1,000 ha property on the road to Mutorashanga just after the mine at Concession and opposite those huge grain silos. Empress Kudzy, who kindly came with Chipu to meet us and show us the way in, is currently leasing it. The habitat is well-treed rocky kopjes with many small streams. As it has not been farmed for years, the area has become prey to hunters, woodchoppers, gold panners and all sorts of nefarious characters. Unfortunately, the result is that the wildlife, including birds, has largely disappeared. However, with protection, perhaps its biodiversity can be revived. It is certainly a gorgeous bit of Zimbabwe and worthy of further exploration.

The party of 20 members split up into two for the 3 hours of rough walking which produced only 32 species but was enjoyed by all, especially those who knew their trees. The Mountain Acacias that predominate are most impressive. Shame they didn't seem to attract birds. An early and unforgettable sighting was a Barn Owl perched on a hanging vine in a narrow gap between two towering vertical rocks. Not far away we spied two Yellow-fronted Canaries building a nest in the top of an *Erythrina*. Sounds around us in the long grass suggested Grey-backed Camaroptera and Tawny-flanked Prinia but they were difficult to see. Above we could hear and see European Bee-eater. Then on the top of distant rounded rocks we saw a Dassie and were able to confirm that calls we'd been hearing came from Mocking Cliff-chats, four of them.

At one point we emerged from the 'jungle' onto a clear track with grassland beside it, which held Rattling Cisticola. There we also met the guide, Grosite, and his 5 dogs that helped him patrol the perimeter. Led by the intrepid Mr Dennison, we soon headed back into the dense interior and took time to identify a Greater Blue-eared Starling. Next, beside a panners' stream running through a graveyard we found a nest with 3 eggs, probably belonging to a Blue Waxbill, which was churring with alarm nearby.

At this point we realised it was time to head back and Grosite took the lead. Up into the rocks once again but this time to see some high quality, well-preserved cave paintings of which there are many on the property. On the return scramble we came across Swainson's Spurfowl, startled 5 Helmeted



Guineafowl and saw Whyte's Barbet.

We took our snacks to a large smooth rock where a count was made. Extra birds seen by the other group, which took a different route, were Black-chested Snake-eagle, Flappet Lark, Ashy Tit, Chin-spot Batis and an African Paradise-flycatcher. We were thanked for our visit and encouraged to come again when security has improved. We offered our thanks in return for an enjoyable morning in a beautiful area.

**Ken Dixon**

Dear Ken

Thank you very much for the wonderful write-up about Manda. I would like to ask your permission to share this on a Facebook page we are creating and with some clients we are inviting.

We enjoyed having you and BLZ group and hope to see you back soon.

Regards

**Chipo**

### **Monavale Vlei - February March 2014**

The good rains that were expected arrived at the end of January and there was heavy flooding on Monavale Vlei. Pools of water characterised the whole Vlei and how wonderful it looked. With this an influx of birders from across the globe was experienced. Notable bird species seen or heard included Little Bittern, Dwarf Bittern, Copper Sunbird, Yellow-billed Kite, Yellow-billed Stork, White-faced Duck, Egyptian Goose, African Black Duck, European Honey-buzzard, Steppe Buzzard, Kurrichane Buttonquail, Corn Crake, African Crake, Streaky-breasted Flufftail, Levillant's Cuckoo, Black Coucal, Marsh Owl, Malachite Kingfisher, Red-breasted Swallow, Lesser and Greater Striped Swallow, Marsh Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Pale-crowned Cisticola, Spotted Flycatcher, Cuckoo Finch and Brimstone Canary, to mention these only. Two pairs of feet and legs belonging to the Striped Crake were found along the Vlei paths at different locations. Not a single feather was in sight. A few suggestions of its predator were given, such as Serval Cat, Slender Mongoose, Marsh Owl, and Giant Bullfrog.

Gentle birders what do you think has developed a taste for Striped Crake? Anyone has any idea? In our small way the COSMO Kids Club commemorated World Wetlands Day by having a walk on the flooded Vlei (1<sup>st</sup> February 2014). It was fun for the children who enjoyed splashing about in the pools. Tortoises are being seen, so are our usual grassland snakes, with a bold Egyptian Cobra intent upon staying put in amongst the bags at the Tree Nursery. Surprise, surprise, a Vervet Monkey was seen a couple of times on the woodland edges across Fenella Drive.

The second phase of invasive alien plant species removal exercise was successfully completed on 18<sup>th</sup> March. Till next time....

**Jimmy Muropa**, Monavale Vlei Scout 0772 772 771; [cosmo@yoafrica.com](mailto:cosmo@yoafrica.com) [www.monavalevlei.com](http://www.monavalevlei.com)  
*Conservation Society of Monavale Facebook Page*

### **2014 Vlei Walk Sunday 9 February 2014 Bluff Hill/Phillipa's Dam**

The rains for this summer season did not really begin until late December on this west side of town and almost disappeared in January. But February has started with some 200+ mm in ten days. So conditions for the vlei walk were good with plenty of shallow squelch in the extensive short grass/thigh-waist high sections.

This vlei, however, has a huge belt of perennial marsh running some 800m down the slope to the small dam from where the cars are left at the bottom of Flame Lily Drive. This marsh is dominated by 3 metre tall bulrush/cattails/*Typha* – terrible to walk into or through, but crawling with Little Rush-warblers: "Tillup, tilup, tilluptiluptiluptilup" Lesser Swamp-warblers, Dark-capped Yellow Warblers and other warbling warblers were to be heard and Red-chested Flufftail, African Rail and Black Crake all had their say. Half a dozen White-faced Duck were feeding on the fringes and there were a couple of pairs of Levillant's Cisticola. Orange-breasted Waxbill, fading-to-orange Southern Red Bishops and No-Red-collared Widowbirds abounded. Cattle Egrets were beginning to set up their breeding colony in the *Typha*-choked dam but no African Sacred Ibis or other herons participating yet. A large 2m x 2m ditch has been dug right across the vlei from the vicinity of the Friends Foundation/Phillipa's Kennels. Goodbye another Harare Wetland?

The mealie field encroachment down from the Bluff Hill side had however been greatly reduced and the extensive short grass wetland running down from Lorraine Drive was looking super for crakes and little brown cisticolas. But no Warren-Codrington and no Rommel-dog to point them out was unfortunate. Nevertheless one African Crake did get up and a couple of Streaky-breasted Flufftails did give short bursts of toots quite unlike their signature tune "boop . . . . boop . . . (NB long pause) boop" call. There were however plenty of Black Coucal and several Red-faced Mousebirds – now much less common than Speckled (two only). Yellow-throated Longclaws, Yellow-mantled Widowbirds, European Bee-Eaters and a Diderick Cuckoo did add colour but numbers were down. Marsh Owls did not disappoint and got buzzed by a Gabar and a Black-shouldered Kite.

But the ABSENCES and GAPS were alarming. No Zitting Cisticolas, one only Pale-crowned and no

more than a couple of Croaking, Levaillant's, Red-faced and Rattling all morning. No BARN SWALLOWS, no Rufous-naped Larks, no harriers. I know my eyes and ears are fading but numbers and varieties on these west-of-town vleis are all DOWN, DOWN, DOWN. Did the birds all get themselves established on the north and east of town earlier in the season when those parts got more rain?

For all that, the rain held off, the sun shone, a nice male Copper Sunbird arrived late and the twenty or so members had a pleasant walk – even if the going was sometimes hard and wet.

**Alex Masterson**

*[Comment: swallows generally were noticeably sparse over this period in all parts of the city. Perhaps the long dry spells forced them to move to other parts of the country. ICR]*

## **NIGHTJARS presented by Tony Alegria on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> February 2014 at Avondale Club.**

There was a good turnout (40-50) on the night for this bird talk. In fact this was the second time Tony Alegria has delivered this presentation. The first time round was some years back when he first put the presentation together. His first slide was what he called the "boffin stuff" where the Caprimulgiformes order was shown to consist of five families. He then told us the characteristics of the order and the origin of the name Caprimulgiformes meaning goat suckers:

***The European Nightjar is one of the most widespread nightjars. With an entirely insectivorous diet, it tends to feed in areas with a good food supply; in the past, this often meant foraging around livestock, including goats, especially in places where the animals had been corralled for the night. During the summer, it would not be uncommon for at least some of the livestock to be in breeding condition or have newly born offspring, and females would therefore often have milk dripping from their teats. The shepherds and country people, seeing the shadowy nightjars around their animals at dusk and noticing the milk early in the morning, put the two circumstances together and believed that the birds were sucking milk during the night and that, as a result, their animals would eventually be sucked dry and go blind.***

Tony then talked about each family and showed quite a few photos of each showing us that the birds of the different families do look alike. Of interest is that the Oilbird family, which only has a single species, roost communally in a cave, echo locates and only eats fruit, which is taken on the wing.

Excess protein is stored as fat in the nestlings which were eaten by the South Americans and the fat was used for oil lamps. This species is now protected.

He then went onto the other families (Frogmouths, Owlet-Nightjars and Potoos) before discussing the Nightjars in depth.

Nightjars have been around for some 45 – 55 million years. The name "night-jar" undoubtedly has its origins in the loud, churring call made by the European nightjar that lasts several minutes and "jars one in the night."

Nightjars have evolved a special grooming comb, called a 'pecten', on the claw of the middle toe of each foot. The comb is used for preening the feathers, for scratching, and for removing parasites, as well as straightening out the long bristles around the bird's gape at the base of the bill, which are used to channel insects into the mouth. Herons, egrets, bitterns and cormorants have evolved a similar claw comb.



He concluded the evening's talk by going into the identification of the seven Nightjars found in Zimbabwe. He had their calls as well as their illustrations.

This was a very interesting and informative presentation.

Thank you Tony.

**Report by Andy and Linda Fussell**

### **Widgeon Pan**

This is situated on the Chivu to Gutu / Mupandawana Road that turns south just after the police station on the southern outskirts of Chivu. In the area some 25 to 35 kms south of Chivu you pass through wide treeless (almost) flat areas where you can often see Wattled Cranes in the vicinity of the 32 km peg (if you can see it in the long grass and about 500metres down on the right of the road to Gutu there is Widgeon Pan , which is mostly overgrown with water weeds so not much water is initially visible. It only fills once in every ten years or so, but this year it is full and overflowing.

The Pan and it's surrounds have several birds that we do not usually see I the Mashonaland area at the beginning of March about a dozen Whiskered Terns has started to nest and Lesser Jacanas had taken up residence. Golden Bishop Birds also visit this pan but were not then present and it is possible that Wattled Cranes will breed there when the water begins to drop. Around the pan you should be able to see Melodious Larks ,which fly some 30mteres up singing a lot of the time and including all sorts of calls of other birds. Secretary Birds . Kori Bustards and Saddle Billed Storks along with half a dozen different ducks are also about.

If you are passing that way it is well worth stopping and having a look. Please report further sightings to the Babbler.

**Alex Masterson**



*Wattled Crane Photo Celesta von Chamier*

**AFRICAN WATERFOWL CENSUS ZIMBABWE (excluding MATABELELAND)**  
**January 2012, 2013, 2014**

SITES COVERED	DISTRICT	NO. BIRDS RECORDED / SPECIES TOTAL		
		January 2012	January 2013	January 2014
ART Farm Vlei (Agricultural Research Trust)	Harare	75/9	64/7	149/8 153/18
Ballantyne Park (small dam)	Harare		22/6	25/14
Biri Dam (large)	Zvimba			86/10
Blair dam (small)	Harare		2/2	13/8
Bluff Hill Vlei	Harare			147/16 352/14
Borrowdale Brooke Golf Course	Harare			212/16
Brookfields (3 small dams)	Harare		34/5	35/5
Canon Kopje Farm (2 small dams)	Zvimba		29/9	28/10
Carswell Farm Dam (small)	Zvimba			72/12
Charara (NAUZ)	Kariba			82/20
Chegutu Sewerage Ponds	Chegutu			5/1
Chikokorana Pan	Seki		106/18	66/10
Chikwenya, Zambezi River	Hurungwe			No count
Chipinda Pools, Runde River,	Chiredzi			No access. River in flood
Chirama Lodge Dam (small)	Kadoma			31/9
Chishakwe Dam	Bikita			No count
Chitsua Dam, Ngezi Mine	Chegutu			30/13
Claw Dam	Kadoma			106/15
Cleveland (large dam) Ramsar site	Harare			51/16
Connemara Lake (3 small dams)	Nyanga			72/11
Country Club Golf Course	Harare		35/6	37/11
Crowborough Municipal Dam	Harare			196/11
David Whitehead Settling Ponds	Chegutu		130/14	114/12 66/14
Driefontein (dam) Ramsar site	Gutu			No count
Eiffel Flats Sewage Ponds	Kadoma			26/11
Gletwyn (small dam)	Harare		26/6	51/6
Greengrove (small dam)	Harare		218/14	295/19
Greystone Park Nature Reserve (small dam)	Harare		13/8	16/6
Hippo Pools Camp, Mazowe River	Shamva	44/9	10/6	65/7 92/19
Imbwa Sewage Ponds	Zvimba			25/1
Kariba Dam Wall to Charara	Kariba			1001/28
Koala Park Dam (small)	Harare			13/4
Kwechimsoro Dam	Harare			170/15
Lake Chivero (large lake) Ramsar Site	Zvimba			1576/30
Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary	Zvimba	363/22	97/8	501/20
Lake Manyame (headwaters) Norton Ramsar Site	Zvimba		902/37	1790/30 136/15
Lake Manyame – Aberdeen Farm, Darwendale	Zvimba		499/32	514/29
Lanark Farm (3 dams)	Harare			202/19
Mana Pools, Zambezi River Ramsar Site	Hurungwe			264/30
Mare Dam	Nyanga			6/3
Marlborough Vlei East	Harare			16/7
Masasanya Dam Gonarezhou National Park	Chiredzi			No access. River in flood
Monavale Vlei Ramsar site	Harare	209/22	47/21	229/19
Mongwe Camp, Zambezi River	Hurungwe			No count
Mteri Dam (large)	Chiredzi			293/28



<b>Mukuvisi Woodland (2 small dams)</b>	<b>Harare</b>	<b>39/8</b>	<b>23/10</b>	<b>28/10</b>
<b>Mvurachena Dam</b>	<b>Harare</b>			<b>207/19</b>
<b>Ngamo Dam</b>	<b>Gweru</b>			<b>68/9</b>
<b>Ngezi Dam (large)</b>	<b>Chegutu</b>			<b>227/23</b>
<b>Ngezi Mine Sewage Ponds</b>	<b>Chegutu</b>			<b>22/8</b>
<b>Nyamepi Camp – Mana Pools, Zambezi River Ramsar Site</b>	<b>Hurungwe</b>			<b>No count</b>
<b>Nyamungai Pan</b>	<b>Seke</b>		<b>578/25</b>	<b>316/19</b>
<b>Nyanyana Shoreline</b>	<b>Kariba</b>			<b>329/25</b>
<b>Osborne Dam</b>	<b>Mutare</b>			<b>302/29</b>
<b>Pomona Rubbish Dump</b>	<b>Harare</b>			<b>471/5</b>
<b>Pamuzinda Lodge (dam)</b>	<b>Chegutu</b>			<b>No count</b>
<b>Pamuzinda Lodge (river)</b>	<b>Chegutu</b>			<b>No count</b>
<b>Purdon Dam</b>	<b>Nyanga</b>			<b>6/2</b>
<b>Rainham Dam</b>	<b>Zvimba</b>			<b>284/21</b>
<b>Rukodzi Farm Dam</b>	<b>Marondera</b>			<b>14/7</b>
<b>Shozolozza Lodge Dam (small)</b>	<b>Kadoma</b>			<b>32/7</b>
<b>Turf Sewage Ponds, Ngezi Mine</b>	<b>Chegutu</b>			<b>137/13</b>
<b>Wigeon Pan</b>	<b>Gutu</b>			<b>123/10</b>
<b>Wamba Dam (Aberfoyle)</b>	<b>Mutasa</b>			<b>163/16</b>
<b>Xanadu Farm (2 small dams)</b>	<b>Goromonzi</b>			<b>162/26</b>

These figures may have to be amended.

#### **GREBES**

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*. Common. 206 birds seen at 18 sites. In small numbers everywhere, with 40 on Lake Chivero and 21 on Rainham Dam. Some breeding recorded. During breeding they are aggressive and disperse to smaller water bodies. From 22-24/10/2013, before the rainy season, there were 694 Little Grebe on Lake Chivero.

#### **PELICANS**

Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocratalus*. Rare. 103 birds seen at two sites on Kariba. Three were seen on a survey from the Dam wall to Charara. c.100 presumed to be this species, were at the National Anglers Union headquarters (NAUZ) near Charara.

#### **CORMORANTS & DARTER**

White-breasted Cormorant *Phalacrocorax lucidus*. Common. 531 birds seen at 11 sites. On some dams in small numbers but very abundant on Lake Chivero, where Fadzai Matsvimbo counted 408 in February 2014 and 581 in October 2013. The Manyame lakes remain a stronghold and have more than 1% of the population.

Reed Cormorant *Phalacrocorax africanus*. Common. 553 birds seen on 26 sites. Some dams have 5, 6, or 7, but on Lake Chivero they are very abundant. 175 on Lake Chivero in February 2014, but Di Rushforth, counting by boat on Lake Manyame, saw only 3 where she used to count 1000s.

African Darter *Anhinga rufa*. Now uncommon. Only 24 birds seen at 4 sites, the biggest count being at Mteri Dam in the southeast lowveld, near Hippo Valley. 5 were seen at Claw Dam, Kadoma and only one was seen at Mana Pools. In the past, 100s were seen on Lake Manyame and have now disappeared due to uncontrolled netting.

#### **HERONS & EGRETS**

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*. Common. 135 birds seen at 23 sites; 71 at Lake Chivero and 76 from the Kariba Dam wall to Charara but only 10 seen by Di Rushforth at Lake Manyame, counting by boat.

Black-headed Heron *Ardea melanocephala*. Common. Only 24 seen at 11 sites. They are a dry land heron but often forage close to water. They also breed inland, away from water, in the tallest trees like Cypress and Kenya Coffee Shade trees. A breeding bird near the Borrowdale shopping centre feeds daily on the Vainona Primary School sports fields.

Goliath Heron *Ardea goliath*. Uncommon. 24 birds seen at 7 sites. Always nice to see – 7 were counted at Lake Manyame by Di Rushforth and 3 at Nyamungai Pan. Their stronghold must be the Zambezi River and now the larger water bodies, like Mteri Dam and Lake Chivero. They also occur on our larger rivers and I once saw one eating hatching crocodiles in the Angwa River.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*. Frequent. 40 birds seen at 14 sites including 10 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary and 22 on the Lake as a whole. They inhabit high reeds and bulrushes and are difficult to see except when in flight.

Great Egret *Egretta alba*. Frequent. 57 birds seen at 10 sites; 13 at Claw Dam, Kadoma, 13 at Mteri Dam, Chiredzi district, 6 were at both Lakes Manyame and Chivero and 2 at Mana Pools and at Nyamungai Pan.

Black Heron *Egretta ardesiaca*. Uncommon. 60 birds seen at 11 sites; 26 were seen on Lake Chivero but only 7 on Lake Manyame and 8 at Nyamungai Pan. Most reports are of individual birds feeding by themselves with other waterbirds nearby.

Yellow-billed Egret *Egretta intermedia*. Frequent. 68 birds seen at 6 sites. 32 were reported at Nyamungai Pan and 16 at Lake Chivero and 9 at Mteri Dam. Mostly they occur singly or in pairs like the 2 at Xanadu Farm, Goromonzi district.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*. Common. 229 birds seen at 12 sites; 146 at Lake Chivero, 38 between the Kariba Dam wall and Charara, 34 seen at Claw Dam, Kadoma and 19 at Nyamungai Pan. Usually they forage in small numbers like 1s, 2s & 3s.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*. Very abundant. 1584 birds seen at 38 sites. 300 were breeding in the Bluff Hill Vlei in February and 392 were on a small part of the Pomona Rubbish Dump. A large herd of cattle on ART Farm have a large following, but otherwise they are in small numbers everywhere from 15-20 and sometimes in 1s & 2s. In recent years they have taken to hunting in Harare's road servitudes, where they are not bothered by dogs inside residential properties.

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*. Common. 151 birds seen at 10 sites. Probably under-recorded because they are difficult to see when their wings are folded and counting from a boat. 72 at Lake Manyame (64 on 19/1/2013) and 56 at Lake Chivero, where they like the extensive water lilies which have come in with sewage discharged into the lakes. Otherwise 1-4 would be a normal count. Two were seen in the Chiraura stream dam at Mukuvisi Woodland, which is a first for the bird list there, where records have been kept for about 35 years.

Rufous-bellied Heron *Ardeola rufiventris*. Uncommon. Only one bird was recorded from Mana Pools on the Zambezi River which is their stronghold, but they sometimes can be seen on Mashonaland dams.

Green-backed Heron *Butorides striata*. Frequent. 15 birds seen at 7 sites. A small heron of our rivers. It was recorded at Hippo Pools, Mazowe River and Mana Pools on the Zambezi River and also recorded at NAUZ HQ at Charara and at Lanark Farm Harare, as well as Mteri Dam. They like wood in their area. People have to look carefully and they very often give their presence away with a harsh call when they fly.

Black-crowned Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*. Uncommon. 7 birds seen at 2 places. One at Rainham Dam, Harare, and 6 at Xanadu Farm, Goromonzi. These herons may be more common than we think because they are night herons, but they are definitely uncommon in Mashonaland, so I think their status is not yet properly determined.

White-backed Night-heron *Gorsachius leuconotus*. Rare. A pair found at Hippo Pools, Mazowe River, Shamva/ Murewa, border built a nest on an island and laid two clutches. Both failed – the second one due to flooding of the river. These birds are mostly found on quiet places on the rivers. *Roberts Nests and Eggs of Southern Africa* by Warwick Tarboton has it with a pale blue egg, but like many herons, the eggs at Hippo Pools were pure white.

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*. Uncommon. 4 single birds seen at 4 sites. Not seen often but may be seen more often than we suppose. Seen at ART Farm dam, Monavale Vlei, Marlborough East Vlei and at Claw Dam Kadoma. It would need a bit of research to determine which subspecies are seen. The European bird is *Ixobrychus minutus minutus* and a hot-wet season visitor to our area and the less common African resident, is *Ixobrychus minutus paysesii*.

Dwarf Bittern *Ixobrychus sturmi*. Rare. 4 birds seen at 2 sites only; 3 were recorded at Lake Chivero and one at Claw Dam, Kadoma from where it was not reported in the past.

## **STORKS**

Yellow-billed Stork *Mycteria ibis*. Uncommon. Only 30 birds seen at 2 sites – all on the Zambezi; 20 on the survey from the Kariba Dam wall to Charara, 8 at Nyanyana also on Kariba and 2 at Mana Pools. They may be more common than we suppose but the Zambezi River is not well covered in the hot-wet season, because of bad roads. Essentially they are non-breeding visitors, but were found breeding in the lowveld some years ago, by E J L Bemont with the African Waterfowl Count.

African Openbill *Anastomus lamelligerus*. Common. 168 birds seen at 6 sites – 90 at Lake Manyame, 47 were on Kariba, 5 were at NAUZ HQ Charara, and at Mana Pools.

Abdim's Stork *Ciconia abdimii*. Abundant. 380 birds seen at 23 sites. The average flock size is 17. They roost in the tallest trees in Harare, huge gums or mature Kenya Coffee Shades, where they sometimes chatter as they land. 24 were on a small portion of the Pomona Rubbish Dump and 60 were on the much cleaner Borrowdale Brooke Golf Course. Essentially a dry-land stork, they are often close to water because their bills have to penetrate soft ground. The most common stork in our hot-wet season. Peter Dean sent some first summer sightings at St Georges College (28/10/2010 and 16/10/2011) and 27/10/2013 at the Polo Grounds, Mazowe Road, all in Harare, where they arrive generally a day or two after the first rains.

White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*. Frequent. 61 birds at two sites; 53 at a small portion of the Pomona Rubbish Dump and 8 at Carswell Farm, Zvimba district. In addition 6 were seen in a tobacco land north of Centenary at the end of January and a flock of approx. 300 at Avalon Farm, Makonde, near Chinhoyi. Since the White Stork Census of 1984/1985 visiting birds have greatly declined in numbers. Or, are they overflying Zimbabwe to better foraging in the agricultural areas of South Africa?

Marabou Stork *Leptoptilos crumeniferus*. Frequent. 391 birds at 4 sites; 377 from the Kariba Dam Wall to Charara, probably attracted by the crocodile farms, 9 were at Carswell Farm, Harare (which has a slaughterhouse) and only 2 on the Pomona Rubbish Dump (maybe the same two were seen at ART Farm which is only 1-2km from the Pomona Rubbish Dump, which often has 100). Only 1 noted at Mana Pools.

## **IBISES & SPOONBILLS**

African Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus*. Abundant. 368 birds seen at 15 sites. At Greengrove Dam, Harare where they bred last June, July & August, 185 were recorded; 97 were along the Kariba shoreline from the dam wall to Charara. They have greatly increased in numbers over the last 15 years around Harare particularly and 3 were at the Pomona Rubbish Dump. Their long bills need soft earth to hunt in and 25 were seen at the nearby ART Farm in composting manure and 22 at Borrowdale Brooke Golf Course, which is often soft.

Hadedda Ibis *Bostrychia hagedash*. Uncommon. The Zambezi River is their stronghold in Zimbabwe and only 3 birds were seen at Mana Pools, Hurungwe District.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*. Frequent. Only 31 birds seen at 5 sites – 11 along the Kariba shoreline from the dam wall to Charara, 12 on Lake Manyame and 2 at Mteri Dam, Chiredzi. This is another bird that has greatly increased over the last 50 years in Mashonaland. Their stronghold is definitely the shallow Lake Manyame where they can sometimes be seen flying in larger flocks of 40-60 birds.

African Spoonbill *Platalea alba*. Uncommon. 4 birds seen at 2 sites, but more common than figures suggest. In February 2013, 10 birds were seen at the Chikokorana Pan in Seki district. However their numbers are probably below 500 pairs in the country and my guess would be that they are more common than the Hadedda Ibis.

## **HAMERKOP**

Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta*. Frequent. 41 birds seen at 12 sites. Four were on 29km of shoreline on Osborne Dam, Mutare district, 3 at Xanadu Farm, Goromonzi (probably a family party), 3 at Lake Manyame, otherwise mostly seen singly. Despite their visibility and the size of their nests, they are certainly not as common as we think. They have also come into Harare and there are several places where two nests are in one tree – Mukuvisi Woodland being a perfect example. Does this happen in the wilder places in the country? In Harare nests are used for breeding by Egyptian Geese and at Hippo Pools by Barn Owls and Dickinson's Kestrel.

## **CRANES**

Grey Crowned Crane *Balearica regulorum*. Only 2 birds reported in this period, by Tony Wood at Wigeon Pan.

## **DUCKS**

Fulvous Duck *Dendrocygna bicolor*. Uncommon. 18 birds seen at two sites; 17 were at the Mvurachena Dam, near the Harare Airport and 1 was seen at Lake Chivero.

White-faced Duck *Dendrocygna viduata*. Very Abundant. 846 birds seen at 35 sites. At this time of the year they are in small numbers and raising ducklings. 253 were at Lake Manyame and only 38 seen at Lake Chivero, 84 were at the Kwechimsoro Dam and 69 at Mvurachena Dam close to Harare airport. They can inhabit and breed on very small waters, like the Chiraura stream in Mukuvisi Woodland, which has a pair with 6 ducklings (2/3/2014). Non-breeders are very mobile and they can often be seen/heard flying over on moonlit nights. For some reason Kariba is not attractive and between the dam wall and Charara only 10 were counted.

White-backed Duck *Thalassornis leuconotus*. Frequent. 27 birds seen at 4 sites, being 13 on Nyamungai Pan at Seki, 10 at Rainham, 3 on Lake Manyame and 1 was at Lanark Farm, all surrounding Harare. They are often difficult to see in the floating vegetation they inhabit.

Spur-winged Goose *Plectropterus gambensis*. Uncommon. 15 birds seen at 7 sites; 5 at Xanadu Farm near Ruwa, 3 at Lanark Farm, 2 at Chikokorana Pan and 3 were seen at Mana Pools.

Comb Duck (Knob-billed) *Sarkidiornis melanotos*. Frequent. 18 birds seen at 8 sites – 7 at Mana Pools. The pans in the Zambezi Valley are probably their stronghold while breeding at this time of the year. Two were at NAUZ HQ and 4 at Nyanyana and 3 at Osborne Dam, Mutare district.

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*. Abundant. 367 birds seen at 19 sites, mostly in small numbers. 86 were at Mana Pools, 65 at Osborne Dam, only 1 was seen at Lake Manyame and Lake Chivero only 12, so most were in the lower-lying areas at this time of the year. I understand huge

numbers are on the pans of Hwange. On the survey of the Kariba Dam wall to Charara, which might be 20km, 20 birds were seen – would that make 2000 on Kariba as a whole? In Harare they breed on Hamerkop nests.

African Pygmy-goose *Nettapus auritus*. Uncommon. Only 10 birds counted at 2 sites. 8 were at Mteri Dam in the southeast lowveld and 2 were at Chirama Lodge, Muraga Wilderness in the Kadoma district. Maybe they like only good quality water.

African Black Duck *Anas sparsa*. Common. 20 birds seen at 9 sites. Most reports are from Manicaland – the Mare and Purdon dams at Nyanga, Osborne Dam and Wamba Dam (Aberfoyle) in Mutasa. Also seen at Hippo Pools, Shamva and Goshu Park, Marondera, Kwechimsoro Dam and Mukuvisi Woodland, Harare. Once known as the Black River Duck they have now taken to pans and dams to survive. They are always in singles and family parties. They never congregate like teal.

Cape Teal *Anas capensis*. Rare. Only 1 bird seen at 1 site – the David Whitehead Settling Ponds at Chegutu, which is one of our slightly saline water bodies, sometimes attracting birds that like that sort of water, like flamingos. 5 were at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary in November 2013.

Red-billed Teal *Anas erythrorhyncha*. Abundant. 307 birds seen at 27 sites. Mostly in small numbers from 2-10, but concentrations were 57 at Nyamungai Pan and 40 at Chikokorana Pan, Seki. 2 seen at Greengrove, 2 at Cleveland and 1 at Rainham Dams.

Hottentot Teal *Anas hottentota*. Frequent. 42 birds seen at 5 sites including 22 at Aberdeen Farm, Lake Manyame, 7 at Mvurachena, Seki and near Harare 2 were at Greengrove, 2 at Cleveland and 1 at Rainham Dams.

Cape Shoveler *Anas smithii*. Uncommon. Only 14 birds seen at 2 sites – 8 at Mvurachena and 6 at Nyamungai Pan, Seki. As ducks fly, these two places not far from each other. One was seen in November 2013 at the Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary

Southern Pochard *Netta erythrophthalma*. Frequent. Only 33 birds seen at 3 sites. 18 at Mvurachena, 5 at Nyamungai and 5 at Aberdeen Farm, Lake Manyame, Zvimba District.

## **RAILS, GALLINULES & COOTS**

African Rail *Rallus caerulescens*. Rare. Two sites. Birds were not seen but heard at the Bluff Hill Vlei site in Harare and 1 was seen at Wamba Dam in Mutasa district.

Red-chested Flufftail *Sarothrura rufa*. Uncommon. 7 birds recorded at 6 sites mostly vleis. Greengrove Nature Reserve, Rainham Dam, Bluff Hill Vlei, Marlborough East Vlei and Monavale Vlei, all around Harare. Another record came from Wamba Dam on Aberfoyle Tea Estate (1).

Streaky-breasted Flufftail *Sarothrura boehmi*. Uncommon. At two sites. One was heard at the Bluff Hill Vlei and it was first heard at the Monavale Vlei on 6/1/2014. They were reported from there January to March 2013 and in January 2012. A grassland flufftail not encountered as often as it was in the 1990s.

Buff-spotted Flufftail *Sarothrura elegans*. Uncommon. It was recorded at Greystone Park Nature Reserve, in Harare. 3 were seen at Wamba Dam, Aberfoyle Tea Estate, in Mutasa district. I found it breeding late January 2001 at Seldomseen in the Vumba, Mutare District. We should get counts from such places, even if they have a very short list, because they are a good distribution record.

Striped Flufftail *Sarothrura affinis*. Rare. Heard at Wamba Dam (Aberfoyle) in Mutasa district by Morgan Saineti.

Corn Crake *Crex crex*. Rare. Only three records – at Monavale Vlei and Wamba Dam in Mutasa district. One was recorded in the Monavale Vlei in January 2012. One of the grassland crakes that have got much rarer over the last 50 years. I also heard of it seen by Tony Wood at Dhlo Dhlo Ruins, Matabeleland.

African Crake *Crecopsis egregia*. Uncommon. 9 were seen at 5 sites. It may be more common than we think, recorded at ART Farm, Monavale Vlei (arrived 21/12/2013) and Bluff Hill Vlei and at Xanadu Farm, Goromonzi. They are difficult to see – another one of the grassland crakes which are much rarer than they were years ago.

Black Crake *Amauornis flavirostra*. Abundant. 245 birds seen at 32 sites. So very common and easy to see where there is entangled aquatic vegetation which they like. They are on pans, lakes, dams, rivers, streams and golf courses.

Striped Crake *Aenigmatolimnas marginalis*. Rare. 1 recorded dead at Monavale Vlei (now a Ramsar site) in January 2014. The legs only of a bird were found – no feathers – and suggestions are that the predator may be a Black-headed Heron, Marsh Owl or Giant Bullfrog. Another grassland crake certainly less common than they were.

Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana*. Rare. May be our rarest crake, or is that Baillon's? Innes Louw was lucky to record it at the Greengrove Nature Reserve, Harare.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*. Abundant. Like the Black Crake it can be found on any waterbody. Di Rushforth counted 241 from a boat on Lake Manyame and Colin Baker saw 56 at the Borrowdale Brooke Golf Course. 7 were counted at the two little dams on the Chiraura Stream, in Mukuvisi Woodland.



Lesser Moorhen *Gallinula angulata*. Uncommon. One was seen at Hideaway, Aberdeen Farm, Lake Manyame on 19 January 2013 and Colin Baker reports he was lucky to see one at Borrowdale Brooke Golf Course Dam. Colin Baker's Recent Reports section in *Honeyguide* is a mine of information on all our birds, including waterbirds.

African Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio madagascariensis*. Frequent. 137 birds seen at 5 sites. Abundant at Lakes Chivero (52) and Manyame (76). These concentrations must be something to do with water quality and the consequent aquatic weeds due to the sewage pumped into these two lakes. I heard a vet had amputated a leg and has given the bird an artificial one.

### **FINFOOT & JACANAS**

African Finfoot *Podica senegalensis*. Uncommon. One bird seen at Hippo Pools on 19 January 2014 by Tadious Ndadzira and Morgan Saineti at Aberfoyle saw 2. These birds are seldom seen even at Hippo Pools, where there is a constant presence of staff and visitors. Maybe the same bird was reported from there in February 2013. Has anyone ever seen one fly, from one place to another? I have only seen them flap their wings and paddle furiously to get to cover on the other side of the river or weir. Seldom seen on dams. I had an unusual report from Stretch Ferreira of one on Long Pool (an inland pool) at Mana Pools – this some time ago.

African Jacana *Actophilornis africanus*. Very abundant. 1128 birds seen at 26 sites. Mostly in small numbers everywhere, but Lake Manyame had 423 amongst the water lilies and Lake Chivero 212. I think they disperse from the large dams in the hot-wet season, and take advantage of other wetlands available during the rains, like the ART Farm Dam, where the dam was dry in the hot-dry season, the advantage being fewer predators at the annual waterholes. They can occupy very small places like the bird hide dam in the Mukuvisi Woodland.

Lesser Jacana *Microparra capensis*. Uncommon. Only 12 birds recorded from 3 sites. One on Lake Manyame, 1 at Kwechimsoro Dam, while 10 were seen at Nyamungai Pan in Seki where they are known to breed. (14 at Nyamungai and 2 at Chikorana pans seen by Innocent Magunje, 3 February 2013)

### **WADERS & SHOREBIRDS**

African Snipe *Gallinago nigripennis*. Rare. Only 1 bird seen at ART Farm by Colin Baker.

Greater Painted-snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*. Rare. Only 1 bird seen by Jono Francis and James Varden at Mana Pools.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*. Frequent, but only 20 seen at one site – the David Whitehead Settling Ponds in Chegutu district, where they were seen by two sets of counters, Innocent Magunje and Innes Louw. 30 were counted at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary in December 2013.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*. Rare. 1 bird was seen by Innes Louw on the more saline David Whitehead Settling Ponds in Chegutu. Both the Black-winged Stilt and the Avocet may have gone somewhere else. Fadzai Matsvimbo had 15 Pied Avocets and 99 Black-winged Stilts on Lake Chivero on 22-24 October 2013, before the onset of the rainy season. 18 were at the Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary in November and 40 were there in December 2013.

Water Thick-knee *Burhinus vermiculatus*. Frequent. 34 birds seen at 6 sites; 12 were at Hippo Pools, Shamva, 1 at Claw Dam, Kadoma, 3 at Osborne Dam, Mutare, 7 in the Kariba eastern basin and 8 were at Lake Chivero. They like water and large rocks, like Bird Island at Lake Chivero. One of the few birds that have been seen to eat chongololos [millipedes].

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*. Frequent. But only 5 birds seen at 2 sites. 1 bird was seen on a sandbank with a pair of Skimmers at Aberdeen Farm, Lake Manyame and 4 were seen on the shore at Nyanyana, Kariba by Cherrith McAdam – a much more likely place. Sometimes numbers erupt and they can be seen in 50s, 100s & 200s. In the hot dry season they can be spectacular at a bush fire.

Long-toed Lapwing *Vanellus crassirostris*. Uncommon. 7 birds were seen on a survey from Kariba Dam Wall to Charara River in the eastern basin by Pioneer Gamundani with other participants on 28 January 2014.

Blacksmith Lapwing *Vanellus armatus*. Abundant. 345 birds seen at 18 sites. When I was a child I never saw this bird in Mashonaland and saw my first one when I went to school in Matabeleland, on the Ncema River in about 1961. Since then they have colonised most places hereabouts. So they have changed their status from 0 to abundant in 50 years. David Whitehead Settling Ponds had 39, Antelope Park in Gweru saw 4, Nyamungai Pan 36, Aberdeen Farm, Lake Manyame had 67, 15 were at Mana Pools, 18 were on the Lake Kariba shoreline from the dam wall to Charara and other places had 2-20. They were not recorded at Osborne Dam, Mutare, and only 4 were seen at Mteri Dam, Chiredzi district. They seem not to be in the Eastern Highlands. They have greatly benefitted from farm dam building.

White-crowned Lapwing *Vanellus albiceps*. Common. 44 birds seen at two sites, both at Kariba. They were not recorded on this count at Mana Pools, but they are a common breeding bird there. They will be common and noisy all along the Zambezi River.

Senegal Lapwing *Vanellus lugubris*. Rare. Only 3 birds were seen at one site – Mteri Dam, Chiredzi district, near Hippo Valley by Marianna Mostert's team. Mteri Dam was surveyed by 7 teams from Hippo Valley, all in different places on the same day (1/2/2014). This is really a dry-land plover and not often seen, but the southeast is where we find it in this country.

Crowned Lapwing *Vanellus coronatus*. Common. 17 birds seen at 2 sites – 15 were at Nyamungai Pan and 2 at Xanadu Farm, Goromonzi. It is a common bird of dry, short grasslands, not a wetland bird at all. Its stronghold must be the communal grazing lands all over the country. It particularly colonises newly burnt grassland. I have found them in Mana Pools where they have bred successfully – in the past they were not there. Mana Pools near the river is overgrazed and therefore attractive to the Crowned Lapwing now.

African Wattled Lapwing *Vanellus senegallus*. Abundant. 190 birds seen at 18 sites; 23 were at Lanark Farm, 36 at ART Farm, 20 at Crowborough Farm, 15 at Borrowdale Brooke Golf Course and 26 at Osborne Dam, Mutare district. It seems that in the hot wet season they congregate at places of short grassland and then later they get into pairs and breed. Maybe the Blacksmith Lapwing does this too. While the Blacksmith Lapwing is definitely a shorebird of mud, the African Wattled Lapwing is a grassland bird. But they can feed in shallow water. Small dams are often occupied by a pair and the two dams in Mukuvisi Woodland, which are really stock-watering dams, each have a pair.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*. Rare. 3 birds recorded at 1 site – Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary, seen by Richard Dennison and BLZ members on their visit there in January 2014.

Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius*. Common. 48 birds seen at 4 sites. 42 were at Osborne Dam, Mutare, 2 at Crowborough, 2 were at David Whitehead Ponds and 2 on the survey from the Kariba Dam Wall to the Charara River. It seems they like the hotter areas in the middle and lowveld. Instead of using the shoreline they also use the dry sand away from the soak zone. Look for birds with rings – see Tony Tree [tony@zeane.com](mailto:tony@zeane.com) in *Babbler* 116.

Three-banded Plover *Charadrius tricollaris*. Common. 29 birds seen at 7 sites. 18 were counted at the Osborne Dam, 3 were at Hippo Pools where they live on the sandy junction of the Umfurudzi/Mazowe Rivers and other records were at Xanadu Farm, the Bluff Hill Vlei, Aberdeen Farm, Lake Manyame and at Rainham Dam. Maybe all these singles mean another bird somewhere else.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*. Uncommon. 11 birds at 4 sites. 5 were at Claw Dam, Kadoma, 2 were at Eiffel Flats Sewage Ponds and 1 at Mana Pools. They have longer bills than other sandpipers and need softer mud to probe in.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*. Frequent. 19 birds seen at 6 sites but I think numbers have reduced in recent years. 8 were at Connemara Lakes, 4 were noted at the David Whitehead Settling Ponds, Chegutu, 2 were at the Eiffel Flats Sewage Ponds, 1 was at Osborne Dam Mutare, 1 was at Ballantyne Park, Harare and 1 on the shoreline at NAUZ HQ, Charara, Kariba.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*. Rare. 6 birds seen at 3 sites – 3 at Lanark Farm, Harare, 1 at David Whitehead Settling Ponds at Chegutu and 1 at Hippo Pools, Shamva. Probably the same bird was seen at Hippo Pools by the BLZ Mashonaland members on their visit there 27-30 September 2013. Green Sandpiper stronghold in southern Africa is northern Mashonaland and if one gets to South Africa they are quickly subject to a rare bird report.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*. Common. 86 birds seen at 17 sites. Our most common sandpiper. All these migrant sandpipers seem to have decreased in recent years. 26 were seen at Osborne Dam by Gary Douglas and party who explored, for the first time, 29km of shoreline. 11 were at Aberdeen Farm, Lake Manyame – otherwise they were in small numbers of 1-4 at different sites, mostly dams. 3 were at Nyamungai Pan. None were recorded at vleis, golf courses or sewage ponds.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*. Frequent. 85 birds seen at 5 sites. They used to often be seen bobbing their tails at dams, rivers, lakes etc. Generally everywhere, the Wood Sandpipers outnumber the Common Sandpipers. There must be something going wrong in their Palearctic breeding grounds as fewer are seen these days. 8 were at Mana Pools, 17 at Osborne Dam, Mutare district, 5 at Mteri Dam, Chiredzi and 3 at both Lakes Chivero and Manyame, both in Zvimba district.

Little Stint *Calidris minuata*. Uncommon. 16 seen at 2 sites. 12 birds were at the David Whitehead Settling Ponds, Chegutu, and 4 at Crowborough Farm, Harare. They have also inexplicably decreased. They normally like the shallowest water at any site.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*. Sometimes common. 103 birds seen at 2 sites – 1 was at the David Whitehead Settling Ponds and 102 were seen at Mana Pools on the Zambezi River. In a different season one would expect more records than found in January 2014. Maybe they passed through Zimbabwe to South Africa. Fadzai Matsvimbo noted 11 at Lake Chivero 22-24 October 2013.

## **GULLS, TERNS & SKIMMER**

Grey-headed Gull *Larus cirrocephalus*. Common in their habitat with 134 birds seen at 4 sites. Their stronghold is Lake Kariba – 80 were on the survey between the dam wall and Charara, 9 were at the NAUZ HQ at Charara and only 1 at Nyanyana. Over time, with the building of large dams, they have improved their status immensely. They are now breeding residents.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*. Uncommon. Only two reports of 4 birds on the Mteri Dam, Chiredzi. It may have been only two birds seen by two different teams at different places around the dam. Their stronghold is the pans of western Matabeleland where they breed. The last report I had was "lots" in March 2013 at Mbazhe Pan, Nkayi by Alex Masterson. Myles Standish-White tells me his late brother added a small wall to this pan to deepen it and make it better for duck shooting.

African Skimmer *Rynchops flavirostris*. Frequent. They are one of the Threatened birds of Africa. 30 birds seen at 2 sites. The Zambezi River is their stronghold and they are sometimes seen on the dams of northern Mashonaland. 13 were between the Kariba Dam wall and Charara, 15 may be the same ones at the NAUZ HQ at Charara, and 2 were at the Aberdeen Farm, Lake Manyame (6 were seen here 19 January 2013).

## RAPTORS

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*. Uncommon. 10 birds were seen at 5 sites. 4 were recorded at Osborne Dam, Mutare district, at least 2 at Mteri dam, Chiredzi where it has been seen before, 1 at Hippo Pools, Shamva district, 2 at Ngezi Dam, Chegutu District and 1 at Aberfoyle Tea Estate in Mutasa district. It may be that the 50 migrant Osprey that stay in this country over the hot-wet season come back to the same place every year where they made a living in previous years. Celesta von Chamier had a first photo of one with a tigerfish in its talons. Their diet in this country is unknown. Less than a handful of specimens are in our museums and most are not from this country. So a good photo of a bird with a ring on it would be useful to find out where our birds come from. A photo of a bird with prey may help us identify what they eat in this country. [They also eat *Tilapia* on the Zambezi: ICR]. Two Ospreys reported at Lake Manyame 19 January 2013 by Di Rushforth. An Osprey reported by Ian MacDonald at Hippo Pools 27-30 September 2013 (*Babbler* 115). An Osprey seen in the bush away from water, is probably feeding away from pirating fish eagle.

African Fish-eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer*. Common. 133 birds seen at 18 sites. 50 were counted at Lake Chivero (56 in October 2013) where many birds are immature and they can be considered abundant. 26 were at Mteri Dam, Chiredzi, 8 were at Lake Manyame. 7 were at Nyanyana on Kariba. Zambezi River is their breeding stronghold, but they are moving up to the Highveld. Interesting to me was the record from Wamba Dam, Mutasa. Dam building has improved their status dramatically. When the African Sacred Ibis were breeding at Greengrove Nature Reserve a pair of fish-eagle fed on them through their breeding season. They will pirate fish from Osprey.

African Marsh-harrier *Circus ranivorus*. Rare nowadays. 2 birds at 2 sites. As a boy in Borrowdale at junior school in the 1950's I remember seeing them over the vleis and wetlands of Borrowdale frequently. Now all our counters are lucky to see one. The only records were one at Aberdeen Farm and one at Rainham Dam, both places in the Zvimba District and not far from each other. One seen at Nyamungai Pan 3 February 2013. Some years we have no record of this bird at all, so seeing them again is encouraging.

Western Marsh-harrier *Circus aeruginosus*. Uncommon. 5 were seen at 2 sites. 4 were seen at Aberdeen farm on a BLZ Mashonaland outing and 1 was seen by Di & Basil Rushforth when they surveyed Lake Manyame by boat. Now more common than our African bird and this has been the case for some years.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*. Rare. Seen at 1 site. Two birds seen at Wigeon Pan, Gutu district by Ian Riddell and Celesta von Chamier.

Marsh Owl *Asio capensis*. Common. Only 5 recorded at 3 sites. 2 were at the David Whitehead Settling Ponds, Chegutu, 2 were at the Monavale Vlei and 1 was at Bluff Hill Vlei, while another was picked up dead at ART Farm on Harare Drive, 17°44.530S; 31°03'798E, 17 February 2014. The vleis of Harare are crisscrossed by many people. The congregations of flying Marsh Owls which we used to see walking the dog in the evening are an event of the past.

Pel's Fishing-owl *Scotopelia peli*. Rare. Two recorded at Aberfoyle in Mutasa District by Morgan Saineti, which maybe a new distributional record. Not recorded at Hippo Pools, Mazowe River, Shamva where it bred successfully in a baobab tree, last year, about 3 km from the river. May be only 100 pairs in this country. They are on the bucket list of birds to see of many people. When seen they are awesome.

Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius*. Uncommon. 3 seen as singles at 3 places. Xanadu Farm, Goromonzi District, Osborne Dam in Mutare and at Mana Pools, Hurungwe. Not really a bird of the wetlands, but we see them most at the Zambezi River and they do take fish for themselves, and particularly from unwary fishermen/women. They breed in the Mana Pools National Park.

Status Key: Very Abundant = >100 seen daily; Abundant = 10-100 seen daily; Common = 1-10 seen daily; Frequent = quite often seen or heard; Uncommon = 10 or fewer seen in a year; Rare = unlikely to be seen in several years or ever; Vagrant = only a few records exist; some birds are locally extinct.

## Summary

Generally the count went well and we received forms from more than 60 sites in 15 districts, involving about 100 people. Of particular note are explorations of some large dams/lakes – Osborne, Claw and Mteri Dams and Lakes Chivero, Manyame and Kariba. We also had 2 rivers, smaller dams, pans, sewage ponds, vleis, streams, golf courses and a large rubbish dump. Kariba remains our most unexplored place, our rivers and vleis our most unexplored wetlands.

Good rainfall was received in most areas to mid-February 2014 with dams filling, apart from Kyle and Mazowe.

More than ⅓ of the species on the Zimbabwean waterbird form were seen or heard. Some of the more common birds were Reed Cormorant, Cattle Egret, Common Moorhen, Blacksmith Lapwing, White-faced Duck, Wood Sandpiper, African Fish-eagle and the Grey-headed Gull. Some of the rarest recorded were the Dwarf Bittern, Cape Teal, Spotted Crake, Senegal Lapwing, Green Sandpiper, Whiskered Tern and African Marsh and Montagu's Harriers.

Most surprising was that no Saddle-billed Storks or White-winged Terns were reported this time, and the number of Osprey seen, especially in the east. Generally over the last 80 years we have had about 83 species increasing, 27 are stable, and 27 are decreasing and it is these last that we need to keep an eye on.

This has been a very good response and our sincere thanks go to all involved. We hope you will all be able to continue this good work in the future.

## Acknowledgements

The following report compilers and their team members:

Natalie & Derek Adamson, Tony Alegria, Colin Baker, James Ball, Phyl Banks & Marondera members, Rolf Chenux-Repond, Richard Dennison, Ken Dixon, Gary Douglas, Jono Francis, James Varden, Andy Fussell, Pioneer Gamundani, Innes Louw, Cherrith McAdam, Alex Masterson, Fadzai Matsvimbo, Innocent Magunje, Jimmy Muropa, Morgan Saineti, Tadius Ndadzira, Chris & Sandy Payne, Marc Ribeiro and 7 teams from the Chiredzi/Triangle area, Di & Basil Rushforth, Ruth Paice, Siggie Stone, Debbie Wiggins, Dave Hasluck, Tony Wood, Antelope Park guides, Ian Riddell, Celesta von Chamier, Tawanda Tarakini, Dorothy Wakeling and BLZ members.

Many thanks to Carolyn Dennison and Penny Rockingham-Gill for their computer expertise.

**David Rockingham-Gill**

**National Waterbird Census Co-ordinator**

## **AFRICAN WATERBIRD CENSUS (AfWC) 2014**

Matabeleland

### **JANUARY CENSUS REPORT**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The following is a summary of Julia Duprée's report to members at the Matabeleland AGM held on 15 February 2014.

Firstly, BirdLife will now report direct to Wetlands International, rather than via BirdLife International as before. Results from the regions in Zimbabwe will be sent by the respective co-ordinators to Harare for the BLZ Conservation Officer who will dispatch the information to our Wetlands International rep. Tom Langendoen.

Secondly, we in Zimbabwe are required to expand our coverage of water bodies, and increase the network of surveyors by encouraging the participation of residents further afield and local communities, particularly those living in the vicinity of pans and dams.

Finally, Dr Nagy said that there was sponsorship of up to 1600 euros available for specific projects towards the expansion of the survey, but not for expenses. Our Matland project – of which more anon – has been awarded 1000 of these euros.

A new national committee has been formed with David Rockingham-Gill as Chairman & National co-ordinator for all provinces except ours; myself as Matabeleland co-ordinator; Carolyn Dennison as Secretary and 9 other members.

Our Wetlands project for the grant of 1000 euros is production of an ID booklet featuring most species of waterbirds in Zimbabwe. This is for distribution by the co-ordinators, free of charge, to anyone interested in the survey – or waterbirds in general – who cannot afford a field guide. It's not for sale. If we can produce enough copies within our budget, we in Matland will also hand some to the Conservation Clubs in the schools, which come under our umbrella. On top of this, the National Co-ordinator is appealing to BLI to donate a telescope and some binoculars to the Matland survey. If we



want people to join in and possibly take on our surveys in the long-term, we have to at least make sure they've got the tools they need.

The Chairman of the Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Fund informed me that they feel our booklet is a worthwhile project that they will support and granted us permission to use specified colour plates and text from the 2007 *Roberts Bird Guide*. They will prepare all the material ready for printing.

Printing will be handled by Directory Publishers who have also offered their kind support by looking into cost economies to enable us to produce the maximum number of booklets possible within our 1000 euros.

#### **PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF MATABELELAND JANUARY 2014 CENSUS**

The National Co-ordinator has set a country target at a minimum of 50 reports. We in Matland have received **107 reports**.

This achievement is fantastic and the enthusiasm and dedicated support of all our team members is quite incredible. It should be noted that for the 4<sup>th</sup> year running there was no funding, so they did all this entirely at their own expense. One team covers over 1000 km twice a year.

#### **Areas covered & teams:**

Hwange NP	Helen Lewis & Tawanda Tarakini, Main Camp base: <b>52 reports</b>
Hwange NP	Arnold Tshipa, Wilderness Concession: <b>16 reports</b>
Hwange NP	Gavin & Marjorie Blair, Robins, Nantwich: <b>10 reports</b>
Hwange NP	Stephen and Sue Long, Sinamatella, <b>4 reports</b>
Matopos NP	John & Jenny Brebner, Game Park & Recreational Park: <b>8 reports</b>
Esigodini	Laraine King, Gordon & Heather Macdonald, Jeff & Gwen Calvert, Upper Ncema & others: <b>9 reports</b>
Esigodini	Peta Ditchburn, Howard & Cindy Sellick: Lower Ncema & Inyankuni: <b>2 reports</b>
Bulawayo	Sandy McAdam, Val Fielder, Julia Duprée & Cindy Sellick, Aisleby: <b>5 reports</b>
Bulawayo	Julia Duprée, Helen Lewis, Alan & Christina Gillott, Sandy McAdam, Peta Ditchburn, Cindy Sellick, SAST: <b>1 report</b>

The rain tried but failed to prevent any counts except Cowdray Park, though road conditions for some if not all of our observers were atrocious. We are considering counting at Cowdray in March.

There's one dam that eluded us – Mayfair (Insiza) Dam, Insiza District, a very large water body. The AfWC Committee were advised in November that we wouldn't make it in January as the time was too short to organise it, but we will try and get there in July.

**Julia Duprée**  
Matabeleland Co-ordinator

#### **Matabeleland Matabeleland Branch AGM**

Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> February the Annual General Meeting of the Branch was held at the home of John and Jenny Brebner.

It was especially wonderful to be hosting the President, Tony Wood, and his good wife, Jan at our meeting. A total of 34 members and guests were present.

Reports on all Branch matters and surveys were presented by the members responsible for them.

As is usual for our Branch, the meeting was followed by a 'bring and braai' with all members staying on to enjoy the 'fellowship' on offer. The unpredictable weather made no difference to attendees, as the loan of a really large marquee (or was it a "Circus Tent"?) by a friend of the Branch meant everyone was protected come rain or shine.

An interesting meeting, followed by an enjoyable afternoon. Our thanks to John and Jen Brebner for allowing us to once again invade their home, and to Tony and Jan for driving down to attend our AGM.  
**Cecilia Hubbard**

#### **Tshabalala Sanctuary – 9 February**

The rain held off for our early morning walk in the Tshabalala Sanctuary situated on the southern outskirts of Bulawayo. Seven members met under the *Acacia karoo* trees at the entrance gate and watched the White-browed Sparrow-weavers building their nests, the Greater Striped Swallows diving

in and out of the disused guards hut and the Red-billed Buffalo-weavers entering their untidy twiggy nest. Magpie Shrikes with their distinctive call and a female Red-backed Shrike were also seen at the gate. As we headed north towards the Bulawayo boundary we saw a Lilac-breasted Roller, Common Scimitarbill, Grey Go-away-birds, Scarlet-chested and White-bellied Sunbirds, Violet-eared Waxbill, African Palm-swift and Yellow Bishop. Near the northern boundary we encountered a bird party and saw Brown-crowned Tchagra, male and female Violet-backed Starling, European Bee-eater, numerous Red-backed Shrikes, an Acacia Pied Barbet, a pair of Black-collared Barbets perched near their nesting hole and White-winged Widowbird. We took a short walk along an overgrown road and saw Long-tailed Paradise-whydah, a Hamerkop flying over, Spotted Flycatcher, Senegal Coucal, and a Pearl-spotted Owlet with its distinctive false eyes. Heading south we spotted our only bird of prey, a hovering Black-shouldered Kite, saw a small flock of Black-throated Canary feeding in the long grass, Crested Francolin, Swainson's Spurfowl, Green-winged Pytilia, Fork-tailed Drongo, Barn Swallow, Willow Warbler and heard a Chin-spot Batis. We stopped at the derelict hide and heard Dark-capped Bulbul, Little Grebe, Rattling Cisticola, Rufous-napped Lark and Crested Barbet. After tea we made our way towards the borehole in the middle of the Sanctuary seeing Cape Turtle-dove, Laughing and Red-eyed Doves, Southern White-crowned Shrike, Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, African Hoopoe, Marico Flycatcher, Blue Waxbill and Arrow-marked Babbler. From the borehole we walked along the river hearing and then seeing Black-backed Puffback and Black-crowned Tchagra. We had an excellent sighting of a Grey-headed Kingfisher with its chestnut belly, Common Waxbill, Green Wood-hoopoe feeding a youngster and heard the Grey-headed Bush-shrike. On our way back towards the gate, we saw Greater Blue-eared Starling, Red-billed Quelea, Levillant's Cuckoo and a brilliant Crimson-breasted Shrike. A total of fifty-seven species were seen.

### **Peta Ditchburn**

## **MATABELELAND January-December**

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### **Summary**

#### **Survey area**

**QDS 2028 B1 = 6 gardens**

**QDS 2028 B4 = 1 garden**

**QDS 1725 D3 = 1 garden**

**Total gardens monitored = 8**

**Total species listed = 224**

**Total species recorded = 188**

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## **OVERVIEW**

This Survey has just completed its third year in Matabeleland. Most gardens are based in Bulawayo – 6 in QDS 2028 B1 plus 1 in Kinghaven, Esigodini QDS 2028 B4 and 1 in Victoria Falls QDS 1725 D3. All participants sent in regular reports and many took the time and trouble to add additional comments and information over and above that requested, some of which are included in this report. We thank them for their dedication and enthusiasm.

During the year updated checklists were distributed, which included additional species recorded by our participants. Now another version has been produced for use during 2014, which has 13 species added and 2 dropped.

In order to keep this short, below are summaries of who saw what when. But if anyone would like copies of the detailed reports please let me know. On offer are:

- Species by Location by Month, January-December 2013
- Species by Location by Year, 2013.

Unless otherwise specified, these will be provided electronically.

This survey is very rewarding to run and fun to take part in. It produces interesting information and all reports are submitted to Harare for inclusion in *Babbler* and the national database. We look forward with the hope that more of you will join us this year.

### Observers & number of species recorded per garden

Name	Location	No. Months	No. Species
Judy Ross	Ntaba Moyo	12	129
Sandy McAdam	Hillside	12	104
John & Jenny Brebner	Burnside	10	102
Laraine King	Esigodini	12	91
Marjorie & Gavin Blair	Victoria Falls	7	85
Peta Ditchburn	Morningside	11	71
Joy Kets	Hillside/Ilanda	11	60
Gwen Attwell & Helen Lewis	Burnside	11	58

### Species most reported

#### IN 8 GARDENS

Red-eyed Dove	Pied Crow
Laughing Dove	Dark-capped Bulbul
Red-chested Cuckoo	Yellow-bellied Greenbul
Red-faced Mousebird	Kurrichane Thrush
Brown-hooded Kingfisher	White-browed Robin-chat
European Bee-eater	Tawny-flanked Prinia
African Hoopoe	Tropical Boubou
Green Wood-hoopoe	White-bellied Sunbird
Black-collared Barbet	Scarlet-chested sunbird
Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird	Blue Waxbill
Crested Barbet	Bronze Mannikin
Black-headed Oriole	

#### IN 7 GARDENS

Yellow-billed Kite  
 Grey Go-away-bird  
 Levillant's Cuckoo  
 Barn Owl  
 Golden-tailed Woodpecker  
 Arrow-marked Babbler  
 African Paradise-flycatcher  
 Black-backed Puffback  
 Grey-headed Bush-shrike  
 Red-winged Starling  
 Miombo Double-collared Sunbird  
 Southern Grey-headed Sparrow  
 Red-billed Firefinch  
 Cut-throat Finch

Species	Raptors reported Reported by
Hooded Vulture	Marjorie & Gavin
White-backed Vulture	Judy, Marjorie & Gavin
Yellow-billed Kite	Gwen, Jenny, Peta, Joy, Laraine, Sandy, Marjorie & Gavin
Black Kite	Jenny
Black-shouldered Kite	Judy
Bat Hawk	Judy
Wahlberg's Eagle	Jenny, Sandy
Brown Snake-eagle	Judy
Black-chested Snake-eagle	Judy
African Fish-eagle	Jenny, Judy, Marjorie & Gavin
Lizard Buzzard	Jenny, Laraine, Sandy, Marjorie & Gavin
Little Sparrowhawk	Jenny, Peta, Sandy
Black Sparrowhawk	Jenny
Shikra	Jenny, Peta, Laraine, Sandy, Judy
African Goshawk	Gwen, Jenny, Judy, Marjorie & Gavin
Gabar Goshawk	Gwen, Jenny, Peta, Judy
African Harrier-hawk	Jenny, Peta, Sandy, Marjorie & Gavin
Peregrine Falcon	Sandy
Barn Owl	Gwen, Jenny, Peta, Laraine, Sandy, Judy, Marjorie & Gavin
African Wood-owl	Marjorie & Gavin
African Scops-owl	Gwen
Pearl-spotted Owlet	Laraine, Judy
Spotted Eagle-owl	Gwen, Laraine, Sandy, Judy

### Observers' Comments

#### January

**JOY:** Up to 5 **Hamerkops** visit every morning and evening, attracted by a neighbour's disused pool, the ideal habitat for frogs.

**LARAIN:** **Grey Go-away-bird** sat in birdbath for nearly 10 minutes. **Black Cuckoo** sat in tree in garden. **Jacobin Cuckoo** totally black except for white wing bar. **Southern Grey-headed Sparrows** breeding fast. 35 male **Long-tailed Paradise-whydahs** feeding together. Many birds, particularly **Red-faced Mousebirds**, feed on the berries on a *Rhus pyroides* in the garden.

#### February

**LARAIN:** **Jacobin Cuckoo** chick being fed by **Dark-capped Bulbul**. **Klaas's** and **Diderick Cuckoos** not seen or heard since first week. **Jacobin Cuckoo** still around.

#### March

**JENNY:** Has not noticed **Arrow-marked Babblers** in the garden for quite some time; they used to be daily visitors!

**LARAIN:** **Southern Grey-headed Sparrows** lost their last two chicks. No cuckoos seen or heard this month.

#### April

**PETA:** **Grey Go-away-bird** nesting in *Acacia galpinii*.

**LARAIN:** Juvenile **Levaillant's Cuckoo** seen with **Arrow-marked Babblers**.

**SANDY:** Last heard and saw **European Bee-eaters** on 6<sup>th</sup>.

**JUDY:** Last saw **European Bee-eaters** on 8<sup>th</sup>.

#### May

**GWEN & HELEN:** **European Nightjar** found dead identified by tail feathers.

**PETA:** Two **Shikra** chased each other. **African Harrier-hawk** ate eggs in **Grey Go-away-birds'** nest in *Acacia galpinii* then flew off. **Grey Go-away-bird** returned and removed eggshells.

**LARAINÉ:** Two **Egyptian Geese** flew over – what a noise! Four furious **Meyer's Parrots** chased a couple of raptors – possibly **Lanner Falcons** –, which didn't appear to be carrying anything.

#### June

**LARAINÉ:** Five **Meyer's Parrots** come often into garden. **Long-tailed Paradise-whydah** still in breeding plumage!

**JUDY:** Two **White-backed Vultures** flew over from east to west.

#### July

**GWEN & HELEN:** **Crested Barbet** breeding.

#### August

**LARAINÉ:** **Tropical Boubou** courting a female very loudly in a tree.

#### September

**LARAINÉ:** Two **Meyer's Parrots** at bird bath drinking and rubbing heads and beaks together. Could be little parrots as a spin-off?! Extensive and protracted "war of words" between a **White-bellied Sunbird** in a *Bauhinia* and **Marico Sunbird** in a *Syringa*. Would not have believed that two such small birds could make such a noise.

#### October

**LARAINÉ:** **Black Cuckoo** first heard on 9<sup>th</sup>. **Lilac-breasted Roller** nesting in a pole and dive-bombed her. **Crested Barbets** lost their chicks when a tree blew down in a storm, killing them. **African Hoopoe** feeding frantically in the lawn was closely followed by a **Crested Barbet** for several minutes until they flew off in opposite directions. Opportunistic feeding? A **Kalahari Scrub-robin** was a first for Laraine who described it as a definite robin which lifted its tail each time it stopped, tip of tail black, white stripe over eye and slightly buffy mottled belly and chest.

**SANDY:** **European Bee-eaters** flew over garden on 11<sup>th</sup>, **Barn Swallows** on 22<sup>nd</sup> and **African Paradise-flycatchers** also on 22<sup>nd</sup>.

**JUDY:** **Red-chested Cuckoo** heard on 16<sup>th</sup>. **White-bellied Sunbird** nesting in shrub 1 metre up. **Scarlet-chested Sunbird** nesting 2 metres up in tree.

#### November

**PETA:** **Red-chested Cuckoo** first seen 16<sup>th</sup>. **Levaillant's Cuckoo** first seen on 1<sup>st</sup>. **Klaas's Cuckoo** first heard on 30<sup>th</sup>. **Diderick Cuckoo** first seen on 7<sup>th</sup>. **Cut-throat Finch** nesting in weaver nests.

**LARAINÉ:** When listening to bird tape, **Pearl-spotted Owlet** gave voice from tree near verandah and continued long after tape was stopped. **Common Myna** at birdbath was chased away.

**JUDY:** **Purple Roller** sat in tree for over 3 minutes early morning. Both **White-bellied** and **Scarlet-chested Sunbirds'** chicks fledged on 1<sup>st</sup>.

**GAVIN & MARJORIE:** **Ashy Flycatcher** seen with chicks.

#### December

**LARAINÉ:** **Lilac-breasted Roller** nesting regularly in electricity pole is very defensive, dive-bombing, and seen chasing off **Yellow-billed Kite**. **White-throated Swallows** seen sitting on power line.

**SANDY:** Three **Yellow-billed Kites** flew over – they may be two adults and one juvenile, as the birds are known to breed close by every year.

**JUDY:** **Dark-capped Bulbul** nesting in naartjie tree. Three species – **Kurrichane Thrush** and two **sunbird** spp. – nesting in same Jacaranda tree.

**GAVIN & MARJORIE:** **Grey-headed Bush-shrikes** and **Northern Grey-headed Sparrows** seen with chicks.

## Tail Feathers

### Lanner Falcons

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of February as I was passing through the intersection of Cripps and Kelvin Roads in Graniteside I was surprised to see a pair of Lanner Falcons circling in front of Kelvin Corner building. It all became clear as to why they were doing this when one of them landed on their nest in the “O” of the neon “Kelvin Corner” name sign near the top of this building. This is a busy intersection and the nest is not very high above the ground. If you happen to be driving passed this nest site and you want to look for it please make sure that you are stopped long enough by a red light to avoid an accident!

**Richard Dennison**

### A Series of Species Pairs

We recently visited Dhlo Dhlo ruins near Shangani and encountered an interesting series of species pairs. In the trees within the perimeter of the ruins were both Streaky-headed and Black-eared Seedeaters. (As an aside the type specimen of the Black-eared Seedeater came from somewhere along the Shangani River.) In the sky were several male Broad-tailed Paradise-whydahs and two or three Long-tailed Paradise-whydahs. Marico and Pale Flycatcher were both seen, as were Marico and Miombo Double-collared Sunbirds.

However the most unexpected encounter, this time a single species, was when we flushed a Corn Crake from a well-grassed depression also within the ruins perimeter!

A most productive half an hour in the rain.

**Tony Wood**

### Hamerkops and Others

We spent Christmas 2013 at Connemara at a cottage on the Corib Lake. The owners of the cottage had brought their delightfully playful *Canis afrikaanis* with fairly short legs. I was sitting out on the deck when I saw the dog come hell-for-leather round the small coppice of wattle at the bottom corner of the property, closely followed by a small squadron of 7 Hamerkop flying low over the back of the dog, which raced up to the cottage. Most of the birds peeled off over the garden but 2 birds continued in hot pursuit to the house and then perched on the roof for a while before flying back to the lake. I certainly do not know what the dog had done to provoke such a reaction.

Last year when we were there, I counted hundreds of White-faced Ducks but not so many at Christmas, but in every cove and between rocky outcrops there were 3-4 Hamerkop. I have never seen such a concentration and no one could tell me where their nests were. Interestingly also, I saw 2 fully-grown White-necked Ravens encouraged out of their nest by their raucous parents. They struggled to fly gracefully but managed to reach the electricity pylon at the edge of the property where I had a good view of them. Eventually they both left confidently having been called further by their parents.

I was also lucky to see a Cape Canary close by, on a rock feeding on overhanging grass seeds. Daily we saw Olive and Bronzy Sunbirds at the flowering shrubs in the garden.

There are not many birds there, but enough to occupy one and add to the owner's list!

**Jeanette Cross** – Bulawayo



**From:** Pat Hodgson [<mailto:hoddy@mango.zw>] **Sent:** 27 February 2014 10:40 AM **To:** Colin Saunders **Subject:** Crows – interesting.

Another study provides outstanding results. Environment Officials admitted they found about 200 dead crows on the highway between Prince Albert and Kimberly where there was concern that they may have died from Avian Flu. The Government approved and the Provincial Environment Ministry contracted a bird pathologist to examine the remains of all the crows and he confirmed the problem was definitely NOT Avian Flu, much to everyone's relief. However, he determined that 98% of the crows had been killed by impact with trucks, and only 2% were killed by car impact.

The Government then hired an Ornithological Behaviourist to determine the disproportionate percentages for truck versus car kills. After 18 months of research and \$2.7 million spent, the Ornithological Behaviourist determined the cause of the deaths. When crows eat road kill, they always set-up a lookout crow in a nearby tree to warn of impending danger. His conclusion was that the lookout crow could say "Cah", but he could not say "Truck". I just wanted to make sure that you knew your tax money was being well spent.

**Books for sale  
(Deceased estate)**

All first edition books except the title marked with \*\*

Calburn's *Birds of Southern Africa*. 1969 (with inscription by friends).  
*Black Eagle Fly Free* – J.A. Cottrell. 1970.  
*The Golden Eagle* – Michael Everett. 1977.  
*A Bird called Cousin* – Alan Weaving. 1977.  
*The Birds of Zimbabwe* – M.S. Irwin. 1981 (signed)  
**\*\*Nests & Eggs of Southern African Birds** – Warwick Tarboton. 2001.  
*Country Life Book of Birds of Prey* – Gareth Parry & Rory Putman. 1979.  
*Birdlife in Southern Africa* – Kenneth Newman. 1971.  
*Birds – An Illustrated Survey of Bird Families of the World*. 1975 (Personal inscription).  
*The African Fish Eagle* – Leslie Brown. 1980.  
*African Birds of Prey* – Leslie Brown. 1970 (Personal inscription).  
*Sunbirds of Southern Africa* – C.J. Skead. 1967 (Contains record).  
*Garden Birds of Southern Africa* – Ken Newman. 1967 (Personal inscription).  
*The Birds of East & Central Africa* – John Williams. 1963.  
*Butterflies of Southern Africa* – Dr E. Pinhey. 1965 (Signed).  
*Eagle in fact & fiction* – Johanna Johnston. 1966.  
*The Birds Around Us* – C.K. Broekhuysen. 1965.  
*Checklist of Birds of Southern Rhodesia* – Smithers, Irwin & Patterson. 1957.  
*A first Guide to Birds of Southern Rhodesia* – E.L. Gill. 1940 (Second edition).

Contact: **Julia Duprée:**  
09-246269  
email: [daliadupree@gmail.com](mailto:daliadupree@gmail.com)

Dear Mr Riddell

I came across your name recently on the Birdlife Zimbabwe website and I wanted, first of all, to let you know how useful I have found the Haka Park Checklist, which I discovered a few days ago. Recently I have been entering my Rhodesia/Zimbabwe bird lists on a spreadsheet and it was very interesting to compare my sightings for Cleveland Dam with the above-mentioned Checklist. From what I can gather from the description of Haka Park its bird list should incorporate pretty well all the species occurring at Cleveland Dam – would I be correct in assuming this?

Assuming my assumption is correct then I wondered if you would be interested in, and could let me have your comments on, the observations below. Most of these observations were made in the period 1958-1961 during which I was completing my final 4 years of senior schooling at Churchill School – incidentally, for the last couple of those years my family lived at 56 Clyde Road, very close to where you live now. I joined what was then the Rhodesian

Ornithological Society as a junior member in mid-1958 and over the next three and a half years went on many excursions with the R.O.S. as well as with R.W. Rankine, who used to take a number of us youngsters out birding whenever he could. As you would know, Cleveland Dam is not far from Clyde Road by bicycle and I went there quite often on my own. In 1962 I went to Kitwe where I worked for a year as a Student Engineer before going to UCT. Thereafter I made only sporadic visits to Salisbury/Harare to see my parents and sister.

1. I note that Black-crowned Night-heron doesn't feature on the Checklist. In 1960 and early 1961 a few could often be found in the thick vegetation below the dam wall, where they may even have bred, though I never confirmed this.
2. The Checklist makes no mention of White Storks (occasional at or over the dam in 1959-1961), Black Storks (present in small numbers in November-December 1960), or Saddle-bill Stork (once in May 1959).
3. Comb Duck isn't mentioned in the Checklist – seen once in January 1961.
4. Bateleur Eagles were quite a frequent sight over Salisbury (and Cleveland dam) in the 1958-1961 period – have they disappeared from the area now as this species is not on the Checklist? Neither is the Martial Eagle that was also occasionally seen then (one record at the dam in May 1960) but I wouldn't be surprised if it has retreated to less densely inhabited areas.
5. Osprey is also missing from the list – these were occasional round Salisbury then (two records at Cleveland dam – January and November 1960).
6. A pair of Wattled Cranes – with a youngster one year – was present at Cleveland Dam on occasions during 1959-1961.
7. Little Stint were occasional around Salisbury during the 1958-1961 period and one was seen at Cleveland Dam in January 1960.
8. A Kittlitz's Plover was present at Cleveland Dam in January 1984.
9. An African Pygmy-kingfisher (the only one I have ever seen) was present in the woodland area near the car park in January 1990.
10. Other surprising (to me) absentees from the Checklist include Flappet Lark (not uncommon round Salisbury in 1958-1961 and seen at Cleveland in November 1960 and January 1984); Sand Martin (regular around Salisbury in 1958-1961 and present at Cleveland in December 1959 and January 1961); Cabanis's Bunting (present in woodland at Cleveland in May and August 1961); and African Quailfinch (these had fairly specialised damp short grass habitat requirements and were only found on a couple of visits (December 1959, November 1960) when I ventured away from the dam wall/car park area towards the upper reaches of the Dam).

I should also be interested to know what the present status of Rainham Dam is. It used to be such a rewarding place to visit and many uncommon or rare species used to turn up there. I still recall watching a flock of 70 Wattled Cranes flying in to the Rainham Dam area at sunset one evening – what an amazing sight!

Finally, can I say how much I appreciated being able to access on the website copies of the *Bulletin* of the ROS relating to the period 1958-1961 – they brought back many memories of the people active in the ROS at that time, such as Richard Brooke, Richard Knight and Captain Bourlay.

All the best

**Mike Connor** Email: [maconnor@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:maconnor@unimelb.edu.au)

**[Comment:** I have added some of Mikes' records to an updated list but how to handle *locally extinct* birds? My plan is to mark these accordingly or, if they are unlikely to ever occur again, leave them off. The idea of these checklists is to reflect birds one may see nowadays rather than what has ever occurred. Innes Louw is going to send me his records from the dam wall area and other 'proven' records are welcome; some of the lists are certainly incomplete at this stage.

Another person has said he would prefer to see family demarcations on these checklists so I will (gradually) add these. The family orders will follow the *HBW & BirdLife International Illustrated Checklist of the Birds of the World*, due out later this year. But the species order within families may remain jumbled as they follow the older *Roberts* order. ICR]

### **Leopard Rock birds**

I was asked by the director of Leopard Rock Hotel to compile a checklist of the birds found on their property. My trips into their forest, which I conducted, on daily basis have produced

exciting sightings: 6 pairs of Swynnerton's Robin with 2 old nests on the *Dracaena fragrans*. Red-faced Crimsonwing, Chirinda Apalis, Orange Ground-thrush, Silvery-cheeked Hornbills, Stripe-cheeked Greenbuls, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher are the most sought after birds which you come across when you take a walk in the forest. It's a good birding forest where you can find many more endemic Eastern Highlands specials because it is well protected. Birds could not fly away when you lift up your binoculars.

**Peter Magosvongwe** <[petermagosvongwe@gmail.com](mailto:petermagosvongwe@gmail.com)> +263779749336

### **Waterbird counts – Kariba**



*Great White Pelicans offshore of Mica Point Kariba*

I thought I would mention that I did enjoy an unusual sighting this month that you may find of interest.

At 7.30 a.m. on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> January I saw a flock of approx. 100 Great White Pelicans just offshore of Mica Point (where I live here in Kariba) on the water. The weather was hot and sunny. They appeared to be resting and showed no sign of fishing but stayed together in a tight bunch. I watched them for about an hour as they swam leisurely past Mica Point and headed up the gorge mouth towards the Kariba dam wall. Unfortunately as I had to leave for work I do not know where or when they departed but they were not seen again. I attach a picture taken with my phone, which you may be able to enlarge for clarity. Pelicans have been seen in Kariba before but not in such a large number as far as I have been able to determine.

It was a very good and exciting start to my day that morning!

**Cherrith McAdam – Kariba**

### **Where have all the birdies gone? Reflections on recent outings.**

I've been bird watching in Zimbabwe for the last 23 years and have never failed to be amazed by the number of birds and variety of species to be found either in the garden or further afield. However, this autumn has been rather disappointing; 23.2 Manda Hills (Concession), a long walk through varied habitats and 32 species; 14-17.3 Hippo Pools for 4 days with Tree Society and Tony Alegria so plenty of time for birds but only 29 species; 23.3 Bally Vaughan Game Park, long walk and 23 species seen by my group. Given that species count is not the be-all

and end-all of birding, breeding is over and there is plenty of food and water everywhere and that some summer visitors have left, Hippo Pools had been subject to severe flooding, I find those numbers worryingly low. Or have I been spoilt by this beautiful country and its birds and expect too much?

**Ken Dixon**

**The Zambezi Society – Books are for sale:**

Proceeds will go to conservation organisation

(i) *Shrikes of Southern Africa*, Tony Harris, Graeme Arnott

(ii) *Birds of Southern Africa*, The SASOL plate collection, Peter Hayman, Norman Arlott, Text by W. Tarboton

(iii) *Eagle Days*, Peter Steyn 1973

(iv) *SASOL Birds of Southern Africa* second edition 1997

(v) *Key to the Trees of Zimbabwe*, Meg Coates Palgrave

(vi) *Fishes of Rhodesia*, Graham Bell-Cross, illustrated by Hilda M. Jubb

(vii) *Tom Manson's New garden Book*

Few *Africa Calls Magazines* and its predecessor *Rhod calls*

Phone **Mrs. Leslee Maasdorp** Harare phone (04) 883316 Cell: 0776 745 883

**The Zambezi Society**

Conserving the valuable wildlife and wilderness resources of the Zambezi River and its basin.

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Web: <http://www.zamsoc.org>

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**Fish-eating ducks hard hit by severe winter, ice**

Read more: <http://www.ctvnews.ca/sci-tech/fish-eating-ducks-hard-hit-by-severe-winter-ice-1.1731150#ixzz2xW4g6Qj2>

DELMAR, N.Y. -- The Niagara River corridor from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario is renowned as a spectacular winter haven for hundreds of thousands of water birds. But this year's bitterly cold season has made it notable for something else: dead ducks.

Biologists say carcasses began piling up by the hundreds in early January after the plunging temperatures started icing over nearly the entire Great Lakes, preventing the ducks from getting to the minnows that are their main source of food. Necropsies on dozens of birds have confirmed the cause: starvation.

"All have empty stomachs. They're half the weight they should be," said Connie Adams, a biologist in the state Department of Environmental Conservation's Buffalo office who has personally seen 950 dead birds.

"This is unprecedented. Biologists who've worked here for 35 years have never seen anything like this," she said. "We've seen a decline in tens of thousands in our weekly waterfowl counts."

It's a phenomenon that has been seen elsewhere along the Great Lakes, with news reports of diving ducks and other waterfowl turning up dead by the hundreds along the southern part of Lake Michigan. They've also been found in Lake St. Clair between Lakes Erie and Huron.

"It's a hard winter for ducks, like everything else," said Russ Mason, wildlife director with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Necropsies and toxicity analyses showed many of the Michigan ducks were subsisting on invasive zebra mussels, which caused the birds to have potentially toxic levels of selenium in

their bodies, Mason said. Zebra mussels filter toxins from the water and pass them up the food chain.

Most of the dead ducks seen in the upstate New York are red-breasted mergansers, which breed in northern Canada and Alaska and come south for the winter to the Great Lakes region. In most years, there are periods of freezing and thawing, providing enough breaks in the ice for them to dive for minnows.

But this winter, it's been so bitterly cold for so long that the ice had pushed across 92.2 per cent of the Great Lakes' surface area earlier this month, according to federal monitors, just short of the record 94.7 per cent set in 1979.

Biologists say the Niagara River also has ice extending up to 100 yards off shore, creating a shelf where minnows and shiners can hide.

There is evidence some waterfowl gave up and tried to fly farther south but were too weak to do so. Dead birds have been seen along shorelines, on docks and on the ice, their carcasses feasted upon by gulls and bald eagles.

Two weeks ago, Adams said, there were 240,000 water birds in her area's weekly count. Last week, there were 43,000. It's unknown how many birds -- which also included such species as scaup, canvasbacks and grebes -- migrated elsewhere and how many died.

At the DEC's Wildlife Health Unit near Albany, biologist Joe Okoniewski has refrigerators stuffed with bags of red-breasted mergansers sent by wildlife biologists on Lakes Erie and Ontario. The diving ducks are black and white with a rusty speckled breast, orange bill and an iridescent green head with a shaggy crest on the back.

"The skin is stuck tight to the body wall because there's no layer of fat underneath," Okoniewski said, running a scalpel along the breastbone of a dead merganser. The gizzard and intestine were empty, except for a few normal parasites.

"I've seen a couple with stomachs full of feathers and feathers all the way down through their intestines," Okoniewski said. "They're desperate for anything to eat. It's really sad."

Unlike mallard or black ducks, mergansers won't eat bread or other food people may offer. They only eat live fish.

While the bird deaths are a natural event that can be documented but not changed, wildlife rehabilitators are trying to save birds that people find near death in snowbanks and parking lots.

"We've had over 160 since the beginning of January," said Dawn Mazierski, a wildlife technician at the Erie County SPCA in Tonawanda. "We have to tube-feed them a liquid diet three to four times a day until they're strong enough to eat on their own."

The birds, which spend all their time on water, can hardly walk, and often their natural waterproofing is damaged by dirt or road salt so they can't swim either. "They soak up water like a sponge and sink," Mazierski said.

So the birds rest in a quiet room on net hammocks called loon beds, preening their feathers back to condition. When they're ready, they go into tubs of water stocked with minnows donated by bait shops.

"A merganser can eat 200 to 250 fish per day," Mazierski said. "We go through thousands of fish a day."

After anywhere from three days to a couple of weeks, the birds are ready for release.

"Once their weight has increased and they're real spunky, and we have a decent weather day, we take them back out," Mazierski said. "And we hope they'll find enough food to bulk up for their flight north in spring."

**Contributions for The *Babbler* 118 June/July 2014 may be sent to the editor anytime between now and 14<sup>th</sup> May 2014.**