

THE BABBLER

Newsletter of



BirdLife Zimbabwe

The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

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*****HAVE YOU RENEWED YOUR SUBSCRIPTION?*****

MEMBERS – the BLZ membership year runs from April to March and I appeal to you all please to renew without delay. 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 records 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	75.00*

*Contact Julia Pierini JuliaPierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org for info about inclusion on our website

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 of 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

And look on our Facebook page for great pictures and recent bits of birding news www.facebook.com/BirdLifeZimbabwe and our informative website www.birdlifezimbabwe.org

Branch Activities

Mashonaland Branch

MASHONALAND BLZ – OUTINGS OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER 2014

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, 0772 438697, (h) 490375

BirdLife (BLZ) Zimbabwe Mashonaland Calendar of Events October 2014

Saturday 4th October 2014 **Birdlife Marlborough Vlei Walk** Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Meet on Newstead Road (driving to the bottom of Princess Margaret Road, off Harare Drive, follow the road round to the left).

Sunday 5th October 2014 **BirdLife Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk** Meet at 06.30 a.m.
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.

Saturday 11th October 2014 **BirdLife Haka Park** Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Meet at entrance to the park (Cleveland Dam, Msasa).

Sunday 19th October 2014 **BirdLife Monavale Vlei Walk** Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Meet on the BS Leon side of Fenella Drive, at the platform.

Friday 24th October to Monday 27th October 2014 Birdlife Weekend outing to Mavuradonha Wilderness – See below for details

Meet at CABS Northridge Park, Borrowdale, at time to be advised to members booked on trip. 20 Persons only.

BirdLife (BLZ) Zimbabwe Mashonaland Calendar of Events November 2014

Saturday 1st November 2014 **Birdlife Marlborough Vlei Walk** Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Meet on Newstead Road (driving to the bottom of Princess Margaret Road, off Harare Drive, follow the road round to the left).

Sunday 2nd November 2014 **BirdLife Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk** Meet at 06.30 a.m.
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.

Saturday 8th November 2014 **BirdLife Harare Botanic Gardens** Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Meet in the car park at Botanical Garden off Fifth Street.

Sunday 9th November 2014 **BirdLife Lake Chivero Walk** Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Meet at Prince Edward School car park, Josiah Tongogara Avenue.

Sunday 16th November 2014 **BirdLife Monavale Vlei Walk** Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Meet on the BS Leon side of Fenella Drive, at the platform.

Sunday 23rd November 2014 **BirdLife Ngomakurira Domboshawa** Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Meet at CABS Northridge Park, Borrowdale.

Saturday/Sunday 29/30 November 2014 BirdLife Birding Big Day

Teams of 4 people to compete in the annual event.

3rd Thursday Meeting at Avondale Sports Club

Thursday 16th October 2014 **Cleveland Dam** 17.30 – 18.00 p.m.
By Tony Alegria and various members

Thursday 20th November 2014 **Birdlife Gonarezhou Presentation** 17.30 – 18.00 p.m.
By Richard Dennison

Bird Outings

The third and final birding outing for this year is to take place over the fourth weekend in October 2014.

This outing is scheduled for the fourth weekend of October, arrive Friday 24th, leave on Monday 27th after the morning birding session.

We will be staying at the Mavuradonha Wilderness Camp, which can accommodate twenty birders. A deposit of \$100.00 secures a booking for this outing. The camp will supply beds and bedding – you can take a favourite pillow if you have one. You need to take your own drinks, meat for braaiing, snacks, torch

and a folding chair. Also your own cereal if you need something before the morning walks.

Your deposit will buy the food to provide you with a full English breakfast after the morning walks and sadza, gravy, tomatoes and onions for the evening braais. Also tea, coffee and rusks before the morning walks.

Book by email to: talegria@zol.co.zw by 15th of October 2014. All BLZ Members are invited.

Evening Meetings are on the 3rd 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:

Marlborough Vlei – Meet on Newstead Road (driving to the bottom of Princess Margaret Road, off Harare Drive, follow the road round to the left).

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 Tongogara Ave.

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

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

Matabeleland Branch

Forthcoming Events:

- 1) There will be an early morning bird walk at Tshabalala Game Reserve on Saturday, 27th September at 8.00 a.m. Please will all participants gather at the entrance gate.
- 2) There will be an early morning bird walk at Whitestone School on Saturday, 18th October at 7.00 a.m. Participants to meet in the car park outside the school hall.
- 3) Richard Peek has offered to host a bird walk at Stonehills Wildlife Sanctuary on Saturday, 22nd November. Further details still to be finalised, as this will probably be an all-day outing.

Other Areas

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

Eastern Districts – Monthly outings are on the last Sunday of the month and depart at 7.30 a.m. from the Mutare Museum. Spare binoculars and field guides are available. Members with a vehicle are encouraged to attend and fuel can be provided. Contact Peter Gwidibira 0773-524844 or pgwidibira@gmail.com for details.

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

National Office

Driefontein Community Wetlands Awareness Day

Togarasei Fakarayi

A community awareness workshop on wetlands was conducted at Shashe Community Business Centre in Driefontein Grasslands on the 18th of July 2014. The workshop was organised by BirdLife Zimbabwe in partnership with the Environmental Management Agency (EMA), World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF-Zimbabwe), Gutu Rural District Council (RDC) and the local communities in Driefontein Grasslands. The Driefontein Grasslands, located in central Zimbabwe and characterised by extensive wetlands, is an Important Bird Area (IBA), an area that is rich in birds and other biodiversity. The area was designated a Ramsar site in 2013. It is the only site among the seven designated sites in Zimbabwe that is communally managed.

The purpose of the wetlands awareness day workshop was to raise awareness about Driefontein Grasslands designation as a Ramsar site in 2013, and importance of conservation of wetlands and biodiversity in the area. The workshop was attended by a wide range of stakeholders who included Chief

Serima, Chief Chirumanzu, the Gutu District Administrator, officials from Gutu RDC, EMA Officers from Harare, Masvingo Province, Midlands Province and Mashonaland East Province, BirdLife, WWF-Zimbabwe, members of the media, three local schools, members of the National Wetlands Committee, other Civil Society Organisations, four Local Conservation Groups (community groups) in Driefontein Grasslands, and other community members.

On this day, BirdLife Zimbabwe led participants on an interesting tour of the wetlands, from the old Driefontein Mission Dam along Shashe River. Four Grey Crowned Cranes were sighted during the tours. Following the tours, various speeches about wetlands and Crane Conservation were presented. Mrs Alleta Nyahuye (EMA) on behalf of the Minister of Environment, Water and Climate delivered a keynote address. In her speech, she expressed gratitude to the work done by BirdLife Zimbabwe, communities and local authorities in Driefontein Grasslands IBA in promoting Crane and wetland conservation. The Local Conservation Groups and local schools were awarded certificates by the Environmental Management Agency in appreciation of their active participation on Crane conservation.



The Driefontein community wetland awareness day was an eye-opener to most stakeholders both local and from outside the Driefontein area. The event had provided a platform for knowledge sharing and generated more interest among stakeholders in wetland and bird conservation in the area. More on this event was captured in a video produced, and is available on the BLZ website.

Protecting Harare's Wetland Ecosystems for Nature and the City's People Update

Just a few of the many activities achieved under the Jensen Wetland Project are mentioned below:

Meetings on Marlborough Vlei with former cultivators. Regular meetings were held during this period between former cultivators on Marlborough Vlei and EMA, City of Harare Environmental Officer and District Officer, Marlborough Environmental Action Group (MEAG) and BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ) to follow up on the Local Environmental Action Plan of November 23rd 2013 when the cultivators agreed they would halt cultivation. The interaction between the authorities and the Marlborough Community has been positive with the responsibility for the preservation of the Vlei being shared, offering the best outcome for the residents, the wetland, its flora and fauna and water provisioning. Alternative livelihoods options such as recycling of waste and composting to boost vegetable growing at household level are being considered for the former cultivators and Marlborough residents generally.

University of Zimbabwe Wetland Research on Monavale and Marlborough Vleis continues with aerial insect traps being placed on the vleis for a week a month being an additional component. The insects collected are sent to the National History Museum in Bulawayo for identification. Water monitoring and ground invertebrate collection continues. The water survey is recording serious sewage inflows into the Gwebi River upstream of the Marlborough Sewage Works.

Chris Chapano from the National Herbarium joined MEAG and Project staff to undertake the first vegetation survey on Marlborough Vlei. 32 plants were recorded and specimens collected in 2 hours, which is good for a dry season count. Monthly bird walks on both Vleis took place.

Wetland Awareness, Lobbying and Advocacy. The National Wetland Stakeholders Meeting of 6th August was held at the Rainbow Towers. This was held in fulfilment of requirements for the accession of Zimbabwe to the Ramsar Convention. Recommendations to the Minister of Environment Water and Climate arising from this meeting can be found on the following link:

COSMO was invited to exhibit at the Global Environmental Facility Small Grants Programme UNDP Exhibition of 20 years work achieved by its grantees in Zimbabwe on 27th August and was awarded a prize for its display on its programme on Monavale Vlei. The Minister of Environment Water and Climate and the Small Grants Programme Director, Tsitsi Wutawunashe gave recognition to COSMO for its work on wetland restoration and its on-going wetland awareness campaign.

A MEAG petition is circulating to prevent development from taking place on Marlborough Riding Stables. Lobbying for the protection status of both Monavale and Marlborough Vleis continues.

Appreciation is extended to BLZ staff and Council, COSMO and MEAG, BirdLife International and AAGE V Jensen Charity Foundation, for supporting the protection of Harare's wetlands. The involvement of EMA and City of Harare is acknowledged and appreciated.

Dorothy Wakeling, Project Coordinator cosmo@yoafrica.com; 0772 376506

Matusadona exercise Report done by Innocent Magunje

8-12 August 2014: Innocent, Damian, Carl and Markeron

Date	Sightings/ UTM coordinates	Activity
08.08.2014	Western-banded Snake-eagle seen around Siakobvu area. Saw Klipspringer. Camped at Gubu River crossing (35K0662730; 8128660)	The day mostly spent travelling from Harare through Gokwe to Matusadona. Shadreck Zipikule of National Parks requested reading materials on birds.
09.08.2014	Saw remnants of possible poachers' camp (35K0664178; 8127122), Retz's Helmet-shrike (35K0665157; 8126472); Livingstone's Flycatcher (35K0665395; 8126364)	Went hiking the mountains to camp in the mountains Went all the way to the springs. Bird lists have been compiled on a BirdLife Zimbabwe field card.
10.08.2014	Chopped up elephant skull, possibly poached (35K0665966; 8126216). Unknown den full of leaves and Ant-lions, therefore unused. There was a Warhog tusk there; maybe it was pulled out by a lion. (35K0665256; 81261310) Collected tusks from an elephant carcass (35K0665915; 8126230) 4 Klipspringer, 2 Slender Mongooses; 2 Kudu Bulls, Kudu Bull kill (35K0664366; 81227609); 5 Kudu cows, 35 Impala (35K0660576; 8129571)	Descent from the mountains to Kariba lakeshore Walked 17km from the campsite to lakeshore. Tiger Fish away from the lake on a small water body. Bushbuck
11.08.2014	Hippo carcass (35K0658377; 8130488); colony of Mosque Swallows (35K0657807; 8130657); Hippo calf with back injury walking back into the water (35K0658112; 8130986) 4 elephants (35K0658888; 8131862); Pel's Fishing-owl (35K0658947; 8131756) and (35K0658798; 8130399); Leopard (35K0657675; 8130738), 4 more elephants at the campsite; African Fish-eagle nest (35K0657852; 8130754)	Waterfowl counts from Gubu Mouth along lakeshore
12.08.2014	White-backed Vulture on nest (35K0663808; 8130423); Rhino spoor at a spring	Trekking back to Gubu river crossing and driving back to Harare

BirdLife Zimbabwe Library Report

After a quiet time the BLZ Library is up and running again. Memory Manzongo, who completed her NUST library student placement year at BLZ Library from 2009 to 2010, is back for three months to assist with the backlog of work. She is working Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 8.30 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.

Thanks to the fundraising efforts of Julia Pierini on behalf of the BLZ membership, the cataloguing software has been upgraded and a new desktop computer had been purchased for the Library. What with the upgraded Internet facility the BLZ Library is catching up with 21st century information technology!

The BLZ Library is primarily a reference library with some materials available on loan.



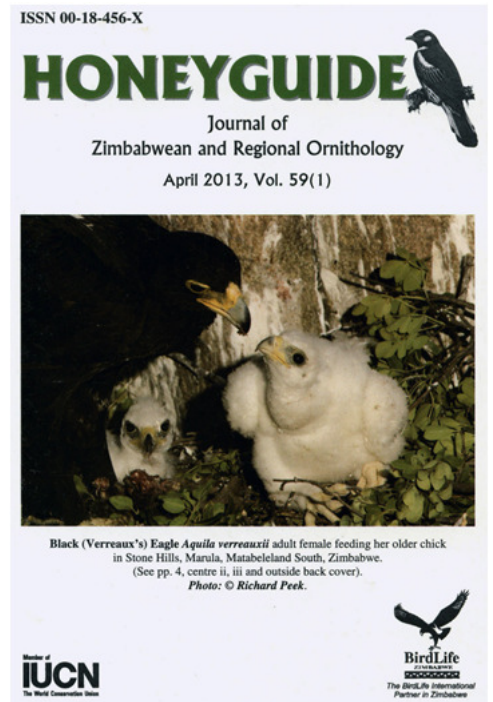
BLZ Library welcomes returns of unwanted back issues of *Honeyguide*.

Dorothy Wakeling

Librarian, BirdLife Zimbabwe Library

library@blz.co.zw / piumosso@zol.co.zw

0772 376 506



Black (Verreaux's) Eagle *Aquila verreauxii* adult female feeding her older chick in Stone Hills, Marula, Matabeleland South, Zimbabwe. (See pp. 4, centre ii, iii and outside back cover).
Photo: © Richard Peek.

African waterbird counts – July 2014

Our co-ordinator, David Rockingham-Gill, is working on a report for *Babbler*, which should appear next issue. But briefly, nearly 100 sites were counted this July, a great achievement and thanks are due to all those who took part – *well done indeed!*

By January it is hoped that the scheme is ready to go 'Observado'. This is where Wetlands International plans to have all our sites defined on this web site; that is boundaries will be drawn around them so counters know exactly what area they need to cover at each site. And if you only cover a small part of a site it will be easy to see what percentage coverage has been attained. This is very necessary if we want meaningful analysis of the birds on these sites in future. At present and in the past our sites have been, in the main, very vague – it is often unclear if, for instance, a count at Marlborough Vlei included the sewage ponds, the ponds and some of the vlei (but how much?), or just an unspecified part of the vlei. When it comes to places like Hwange, Kariba and Mana Pools... well some of the data becomes meaningless when we try and extrapolate bird densities.

I plan to get in touch with some of our dedicated observers in Hwange to see what makes sense when it comes to delimiting various sites. If you have Google Earth it is very simple to store your favourite sites in the programme – I can simply send you a file attachment which will be automatically stored there when you open it, though of course if Observado comes on line all will be revealed there. It is all very easy for the computer-literate but for the others we can always send you a jpg of where we think your site is – some sites are still a mystery – Joe's Dam may be quite clear to you but to the rest of us, well... murky waters!

There were also new forms for July and I see that some observers are still using old ones and filling in information no longer required. By January I hope that all these will have been tossed!

Thanks and appreciation again to all you observers and keep up the good work in January.

Ian Riddell, Secretary AfWC

(Ian has taken over the task of secretary from me. Many thanks – Carolyn)

RECENT REPORTS AND SIGHTINGS

Mashonaland

WHY BIRDS MIGRATE PRESENTATION BY JULIA PIERINI – 21ST AUGUST 2014

This was a very informative presentation and most of it deserves to be repeated!

Migration is to go from one country, region, place or climate to another periodically. And it's not only birds that migrate; many thousands of animal species migrate too: insects, fishes, frogs and mammals.

The Great Wildebeest migration route traverses part of the Ngorongoro Conservation area and the Serengeti National Park in Tanzania to the Maasai

Mara Game Reserve in Kenya. The principal players are 1.5 million White-bearded Wildebeest (*Connochaetes taurinus mearnsi*) with 350,000 Thomson's Gazelle, 200,000 Zebra and 12,000 Eland. The Wildebeest journey is dictated primarily by their response to the weather. They follow the rains and the growth of new grass.

Studies of animals that migrate on foot, by swimming or on the wing demonstrate that these modes of travel differ considerably in speed and energy consumption. Walking may consume less energy than flight but it sacrifices speed and thus distance.

Female Loggerhead Sea Turtles (*Caretta caretta*) which are ectothermic (cold-blooded) reptiles migrate some 11,500 km as they return to their traditional sandy beaches every two to four years to lay their eggs. Unlike terrestrial animals, aquatic animals are suspended in a buoyant medium, which makes swimming quite cost-effective, but speed is still a major consideration.

Time is of the essence in migration. The journey itself serves only to move the animal from one place to another, where it will linger until a change in the environment stimulates a return trip. A voyage that takes too much of a species' annual cycle is not practical. Consequently swimming or walking is too slow for most species to feasibly make a round trip of 10,000 km or more. Speed of travel is key and this brings up the issue of FLIGHT! Although flight is an energetically expensive means of locomotion, it yields the fastest speed over ground, thus making it ideal for long-distance travel. Yet the Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) can fly 200 km on a single gram of fat. Emperor Penguins (*Aptenodytes forsteri*) which walk across the ice on the first leg of their journey from breeding grounds to feeding grounds, use about 1,500 times as much energy.

That is why long-distance migration is most pervasive among flying animals – birds, bats and insects.

The Willow Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochilus*), with a population of between 300 million and 1.2 billion, is thought to make up of more than 15% of passerines moving between Eurasia and Africa. One population of this 10g waif makes the longest migration of any songbird. Birds of the *yakutensis* subspecies breed in the far northeast of Siberia and after crossing much of Siberia, Kazakhstan, Iran and Saudi Arabia, over the Red Sea, entering

Ethiopia, arrive to spend the winter in Southern Africa after travelling 11,300km.

BIRDS TRIUMPH IN THEIR MIGRATORY FEATS.

Over the past 150 million years, every system in their bodies has been honed to increase lift and reduce drag, to maximize power and minimize weight. Their flapping wings drive them headlong through the slipstream, fuelled by turbocharged respiratory and cardiovascular systems designed to deliver oxygen to their muscles at amazingly high rates. Many species can beat their wings continuously for days without rest.

Migration is movement with a purpose. The main driver is the need to exploit the best food resources, especially during the breeding season. The timing of migration is triggered by changes in day length, as yet not fully understood hormonal changes and local weather conditions.

We still don't fully understand how birds navigate but several mechanisms are used:

- the sun, moon or stars as 'compasses'
- an ability to read the Earth's magnetic field
- the skill to interpret the landforms they are flying over
- and learnt familiarity with terrain that has been visited before

The global movements of birds are now tracked and plotted using radar imaging, satellite telemetry, genetic analysis and feather isotope chemistry. These tools have the power to explain not only where birds go when they migrate but also differences in migratory tendencies among populations, sub-populations, genders and even individuals.

Almost 10,000 species strong, birds are only second to fishes in species numbers. Approximately 4000 species of birds migrate with songbirds, waterfowl, waders and shorebirds in the majority.

The Migration Flyways – 9 major flyways form conduits for the huge transfer of continental birds from the Northern Hemisphere to the tropics and beyond.

BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE MASHONALAND BRANCH VISIT TO DOUBLE RO RANCH (CARSWELL MEATS), ZVIMBA; 1730D2, SUNDAY 24TH AUGUST 2014

Our select group of 13 members and 1 friend arrived at Nyabira at 8 a.m. on a sunny but cool and breezy morning to be met by our fellow member and host, Robyn Gilmour. First we drove down to a large expanse of open grassland with scattered trees and then walked to the upper dam, which was virtually dry except for an arc of open water in the reeds. On the way there in the scattered trees and bushes we encountered a large group of 40 Red-faced Mousebird (10 Speckled Mousebirds were also counted), Little Bee-eater, Grey Go-away-bird and African Stonechat and heard Tropical Boubou and a total of 6 Swainson's Spurfowl. In the thick

dry grass and reeds of the dried out dam were Lesser Swamp- and Little Rush-warbler and Levallant's Cisticola while on or near the open water were African Rail, Common Moorhen, Black Crake, a lone Wood Sandpiper, Blacksmith Lapwing, Black-headed Heron, African Jacana and a Senegal Coucal.

From there we clambered through more thick dry grass towards distant woodland. The long, hot tramp revealed only Zitting and Rattling Cisticola, Tawny-flanked Prinia and 6 Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters in a clump of gums. The woodland consisted of small copses of trees and bushes where we, as a

result of hard work, eventually discovered Lizard Buzzard, Chin-spot Batis, both Purple-banded and Marico Sunbird (7 species were recorded with also 1 Copper, Variable, White-bellied, Scarlet-chested & Amethyst), Arrow-marked Babbler, Jameson's Firefinch, Golden Weaver and a Crested Barbet. Red-eyed Dove however were abundant everywhere. Our wander through the woodland led us back to the cars, a brief rest and then on to the two lower dams and settling ponds, on the way to which we noticed a large raptor nest in a tall eucalyptus. A little later when we met raptor guru Neil Deacon and his family we learned that this was the nest of an African Fish-eagle on which the female was incubating her egg, a bit out of breeding season (May being when most birds lay – *Birds of Zimbabwe* – no August records).

Maybe 1000 Red-billed Queleas were by the old cattle pens, 2 Green-winged Pytilia, 6 Orange-breasted Waxbill and a Brimstone Canary. The small dam had water, reeds, water lilies and a large croc that took no interest in the Egyptian Goose pair

A TRIP TO THE EASTERN HIGHLANDS – 17TH- 20TH SEPTEMBER 2014

My wife Carolyn and I joined two friends from Australia on a trip to the Eastern Highlands from 17th to 20th September 2014. Our friends were not birders and the main purpose of the trip was to visit places around Mutare that the husband remembered from growing up there. So most of the birding was done before breakfast and in the evening around the three places we stayed. For the first two days the weather was fine, hot and hazy and on the last two days the south-easterly blew in cool, cloudy and windy weather.

Our first venue was Leopard Rock Hotel in the Vumba where we spent the night of the 17th. On that first evening we went for a short walk on the golf course and identified Samango Monkey, White-necked Raven, Livingstone's Turaco, Collared and Western Olive Sunbird and White-eared Barbet while 4 African Black Duck were on the dam. The next morning two of us went for a walk in the gardens and the evergreen forest at dawn. In the first hour we identified 16 species including Thick-billed Weaver, Ashy Flycatcher, Miombo Tit, Red-capped Robin-chat, Eastern Saw-wing, Red-backed Mannikin, Yellow-bellied Waxbill and African Emerald Cuckoo. In the next hour we added Sombre Greenbul, Cape Batis, Stripe-cheeked Greenbul, African Goshawk, Gorgeous Bush-shrike and Yellow-throated Woodland-warbler. Later we added White-tailed Crested Flycatcher, African Dusky Flycatcher and Dark-backed Weaver. Our total count by the time we left that morning was 33 species.

We were booked into Forest Hills Hotel for the night of the 18th and we visited Manchester Botanic Gardens next door on the way there. It was nearly midday when we arrived so it was hot and we only

and their 6 goslings, Cattle Egret, Black Crake, Moorhen, and African Jacana feeding among the vegetation. Richard saw a Black Heron fly in but was unable to locate it after landing. 5 African Sacred Ibis glided elegantly in and a few Hamerkop too. Other waterbirds of interest included a Yellow-billed Egret and African Purple Swamphen, and birds missed that were seen by Rolf and Alex on a Waterbird Count on 11/8/2014, were 1 Reed Cormorant, 1 Great Egret, 8 Red-billed Teal, 2 pairs of Hottentot Teal and a pair of Spur-winged Goose with 7 goslings. Other birds of interest were 8 Wattled Starling, 4 Magpie Shrikes and African Quailfinch was heard.

A very loud Red-faced Cisticola serenaded us as we did the list, which totalled 82 species plus a Common Duiker. Grateful thanks are due to Robyn for inviting us and then leading us.

Double Ro Ranch is in *Babbler* Nos. 4 (Oct 1994), 21, 37, 45, 60, 73, 84 & 96 (no report).

Richard Dennison & David Rockingham-Gill

stayed for an hour or so, during which we recorded 17 species. We added White-starred Robin, Cardinal Woodpecker, Common Waxbill and Cabanis's Bunting. The rest of the day was devoted to visiting old haunts in Mutare and Tony's Coffee Shop. A veld fire was burning on the Vumba and adding to the haze and Tony had been helping to fight it earlier that afternoon.

The next morning I did a solo walk around the hotel grounds and in the surrounding forest and recorded 23 species between 7 and 10 a.m. Little Swifts were nesting in the eaves of both the Leopard Rock and Forest Hills Hotels and Red-winged Starling and Brimstone Canary were the only new birds. In the Mukuvisi Woodland I once called up a White-browed Robin-chat by imitating the call of the Narina Trogon and in evergreen forest I have used it to call up the Trogon. When I tried it here four White-tailed Crested Flycatchers appeared and one flew close to my head.

Our next destination was the Inn on the Rupurara and on our way we had lunch at Montclair Hotel. Red-winged Starling and White-necked Raven were on the lawn within 10 metres of us and I was pleased to see a small group of Cape Canary, as the last time that I had seen them was probably on Mount Nyangani about 25 years ago. We arrived at the Inn at about 3 p.m. and I went on another solo bird walk up the hill behind the hotel on a path leading to the staff quarters. In about two hours I counted 26 species and added Whyte's and Black-collared Barbet, Violet-backed Starling, Southern Masked and Golden Weaver, African Stonechat, African Firefinch, Cape Grassbird, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, Yellow-fronted Canary, Red-chested Cuckoo, Brubru, Chin-spot

Batis, Purple-crested Turaco and Blue-spotted Wood-dove. The Cape Grassbird was special for me, as I had only seen it once before even though it is commonly heard in the Highlands.

At dawn on the 20th, our day of departure for home in Harare, I went up the hill for an hour and added Verreaux's Eagle, Black-crowned Tchagra, Cape Robin-chat and Streaky-headed Seedeater – and another Cape Grassbird! Then I returned to our lodge to take Carolyn up the hill for an hour and we added Red-necked Spurfowl, White-bellied Sunbird, Wailing Cisticola, Southern Black Flycatcher and

Tawny-flanked Prinia. I also saw a flock of about 20 Yellow-bellied Waxbill which was interesting, because it confirms that our edition of *Roberts' Bird Field Guide*, a condensed version of *Birds of Southern Africa VII*, is incorrect when it states that the ranges of Sweet Waxbills and Yellow-bellied Waxbills do not overlap, as Sweet Waxbills have also been seen here on more than one occasion.

Our final count for the whole trip was 78 species.

Richard Dennison

Monavale Vlei – August-September 2014

As we look forward to the new season of migrants, much has been happening on the vlei in terms of bird observations and other activities. The few early migrants that have been seen/heard so far include the Red-breasted Swallow, Klaas's Cuckoo and African Paradise-flycatcher. Local resident species that have been observed are as follows: Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Black-chested Snake-eagle, African Stonechat, White-browed Scrub-robin, Black-crowned Tchagra, Levaillant's Cisticola, Zitting Cisticola, and the White-winged Widowbird. Marsh Owls can easily be flushed from the still remaining grasslands. It should be noted that the "rigid" Red-collared Widowbird and the Yellow-

mantled Widowbird were observed on Monavale vlei.

The recently added mammal to our list in the form of the "grey mongoose" was once again seen.

Our current research project with the University of Zimbabwe Biological Sciences Department on both Monavale and Marlborough Vlei is progressing well.

Lastly it is with great pleasure we announce that one of our Cosmo kids club members, Angeline Malunga won first prize in a painting arts competition "Vanishing Wetlands", held a few months ago. This was hosted by The National gallery and the Italian Embassy. Congratulations Angelina!

Jimmy Muropa

Visit to Tsindi Ruins, Lekkerwater Farm, Marondera District. Pentad 1805_3140 21st September 2014

About 13 of us from BLZ Harare and 5 from Mashonaland East Natural History Society met at Jacko's house in Marondera. Then 15 km east we turned down the Theydon Road, and all piled out to look at the Bernard Mzeki (1869-1896) Shrine, where a prominent gum tree houses the nest of an African Crowned Eagle. Then 3 km down from there, we got to the Tsindi Ruins, a stone hill refuge; from the top of the hill, one can see 360°.

Jacko told us it was from 1100-1500 AD, and the place has been dug three times, the last time in the early 1980's. He also said there are early Iron Age smelters in Goshu Park, from much the same time.

For no obvious reason the birds kept away [*the chill wind in Marondera perhaps*], but White-necked Raven, Yellow-billed Kite, Lizard Buzzard and Verreaux's Eagle were seen. Speckled Pigeon, Cape Turtle-dove and Emerald-spotted Wood-dove were common. Black-collared Barbet, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and Whyte's Barbet were recorded. A few Rock Martins were around the top of the Ruins and Mocking Cliff-chat and Boulder Chat were recorded. Of the LBJs we had Bar-throated Apalis and Tawny-flanked Prinia calling. In the scraggly eucalyptus plantation near the cars Chin-spot Batis, Southern Hyliota and Brown-backed Honeybird were active. Natal Spurfowl

seems new since Sabap1. A first for me was finding an African Dusky Flycatcher nest surrounded by old man's beard lichen. The perfect habitat for Cinnamon-breasted Tits, which Jacko told us he had seen here before. (For more on CB Tits read Anthony Cizek, Counting an uncommon species, *African Birdlife* Sept/Oct 2014 pp 22-24, in which he tells of our count of 4 or 5 pairs, by 60 people in Goshu Park in 2012).

The Miombo Double-collared, Variable, Amethyst and White-bellied Sunbirds were there, but no Scarlet-chested Sunbirds. Inside the pentad on the way home we saw Yellow Bishop, in breeding plumage, near the Granite Quarry.

Penny Raynor said African Paradise-flycatchers reached Marondera on 12 September 2014. She also told of two *Erythrina* species on the Tsindi kopje, *E. abyssinica* and *latissima*. There was evidence of new ring-barking of trees to take the bark for beehives and tree cutting on the hill above the Interpretive Centre, where Ian saw Rufous-cheeked Nightjar. A pity as the place should be under the protection of Museums and Monuments.

All in all a spectacular destination and Jacko said we must come back after rain, in January/February.

David Rockingham-Gill

Matabeleland

Small Raptor Identification – 23 August

This identification talk was given to us by Vernon Tarr with the assistance of his wife Shirley and was held at the Natural History Museum. It was well attended by thirty people made up of our members, Friends of the Museum members and a couple of members of the public. Vernon deliberately covered only six small raptors so that those attending were not bombarded with too much information, on too many species! Identification of small raptors relies primarily on rump and upper tail patterns, and on the colour of eyes, cere and legs. Other helpful

features are the extent of barring on the underparts, size of the bird (Vernon compared each species to a Laughing Dove in size), and the habitat in which it is seen. Females are always larger in size than the males, and just to confuse us all, juveniles have very different plumage to that of the adults, with the exception of the Lizard Buzzard! The first part of the talk was given using diagrammatic drawings of the raptors drawn by Shirley. The six raptors covered were:

Little Sparrowhawk

Sexes alike. Bright yellow eyes, cere, eye ring and legs; white rump seen in flight and two white central tail spots on upper tail. Barring on breast is rufous. This bird is the size of a Laughing Dove, being about 25 cm. It can be confused with the male African Goshawk.

Shikra (formally known as Little Banded Goshawk)

Bright cherry-red eyes for the male, dull orange eyes for the female. Both sexes have yellow cere and legs, pale grey rump, and pale all-grey central tail feathers with no white spots or barring. Barring on breast is pale rufous. The average size is 29 cm.

Gabar Goshawk

Sexes alike. Dark red eyes, red cere and legs, with a prominent white rump, plain grey throat and upper chest. They have a grey tail with four or five dark bars. A melanistic form or dark morph may be seen. It is entirely black with white bars on the wing and tail feathers, and red eyes, cere and legs. The average size is 32 cm.

Lizard Buzzard

Sexes alike. This buzzard resembles the Gabar Goshawk, but is stockier and has a diagnostic black vertical throat stripe through its white chin. It has a red cere and red legs and dark red eyes. In flight white rump and single white tail bar are conspicuous. Rarely, specimens occur with two white tail bars. The average size is 36 cm.

Ovambo Sparrowhawk

Sexes alike. Dark red-brown eyes, the legs and cere are usually yellow to orange-pink. The underparts have fine dark grey barring from throat to vent; it has no white rump. Upper tail pattern has dark grey barring with 3 diagnostic vertical central white lines (white feather shafts). The average size is 36 cm.

African Goshawk

Sexes differ in plumage but both have deep yellow eyes and legs and a pale greenish-grey cere. Adult male has a grey head and upper parts, white underparts finely barred rufous, and tail indistinctly barred with two white spots on central feathers. Adult female has brown head and upper parts and white below with brown barring. Her tail is brown with 4 darker brown bars and no white spots. The female is considerably larger than the male in this species: average size for the male is 38 cm, and for the female 45 cm.

In the second part of the identification talk, Vernon showed us photographs of the six species depicting the diagnostic features and a couple of juveniles. It was an interesting and informative talk. Thank you

to both Vernon and Shirley. I certainly learnt a lot and look forward to the next presentation of another six small raptors.

Peta Ditchburn

Mashonaland South

Charama Leisure resort Kadoma August 2014

This wilderness has a strong pull for us three lady birders. For a small entrance fee, we are at liberty to watch and explore with environment discretion.

The warm sunny morning of Wednesday 27th was perfect to sit under a big tree by a small water hole and wait for activity. Indentations in the mud allows for clean water filtration. African Wattled lapwing 1 pr., Red-throated Twinspot 1 pr., Yellow-bellied Greenbul many, Red-billed Firefinch, flock Bronze Mannikins, 1 pr Golden-breasted Bunting +1, Natal Spurfowl 4, Green-winged Pytilia, Jameson's Firefinch 1 pr., Blue Waxbill, Red headed Weaver, flock of Red-billed Quelea, Emerald-spotted Wood-dove, many Laughing Doves, Cape Turtle-dove, Yellow Bishop, White-browed Robin-chat.

All the birds had undisturbed drinking/washing time during the mid-day sun. Then a breath-taking

Zambian Birding Trip of note

Miombo birding is some of the most exciting birding one can experience in Southern Africa. There are many rarities that one hopes to see and tick on any Miombo excursion but Zambia takes it to another level! We went on a three-day trip to our friend's camp in the Mkushi area, which they are developing. Their camp, which does not have a name yet, borders onto a massive forestry reserve, which is in excess of one hundred and twenty thousand hectares. The woodlands in the north are so rich and diverse; one has to remember that the further south one goes the more marginal the miombo becomes and the less birds, bugs, bees and trees there are.

In front of the camp is a small stream that flows for the better part of the year but usually dries up in spring. There is gorgeous riverine forest on both banks which holds good numbers of Ross's Turaco, Little and Grey-olive Greenbul, Yellow-throated Greenbul, Square-tailed Drongo and Dark-backed Weaver. The greenbuls were all lifers for my wife so we started off with a huge bang! A short distance from camp lies 'cathedral' miombo of note. In a single bird party we located Yellow-breasted Hyliota, Green-backed Woodpecker, Rufous-bellied Tit, Arnot's Chat, Böhm's Flycatcher, Green-capped Eremomela and Miombo Wren-warbler. Tree and Wood Pipits were already calling and displaying everywhere! We heard Red-capped Crombec but failed to get a visual. There are magnificent rocky ridges, which have Striped Pipit, Mocking Cliff-chat and Miombo Scrub-robin. Sadly, no trees were in fruit but the calls of Miombo Pied Barbet rang out from the canopy.

surprise, 1 mature male bushbuck appeared, unaware of our presence, spent 15 minutes drinking then ambled away.

Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Black-collared Barbet, Crested Barbet, Yellow-fronted Canary, White-bellied Sunbird, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, Chin-spot Batis, Southern Black Tit, Terrestrial Brownbul were all heard or seen in the vicinity of the water.

Before departure at the main lodge by the dam: 1 pair Pied Kingfisher, 2 juvenile African Fish-eagles, 1 Great Egret, 60+ White-faced Duck were enjoying the expanse of water.

We are always made welcome; so many thanks to the proprietor and staff.

Margaret Parrock.

The following day we decided to go and explore some dambos, which have thick armpits of forest in them. We hit some huge parties, which gave us several lifers each. The first for me was a monotype, the Bar-winged Weaver (*Notiospiza*) followed by Red-capped Crombec. These are both really good birds to get and there were plenty more. Souza's Shrike, Black-backed Barbet, Yellow-bellied Hyliota, Chestnut-mantled Sparrow-weaver, Miombo Blue-eared Starlings, Anchieta's Sunbird and Rufous-bellied Tits. We then entered the forest patches, which had good numbers of Blue-and-white Crested-flycatcher and Laura's Woodland-warblers. We heard Brown-headed Apalis but did not get a sighting of it. The dambos themselves had Hartlaub's Marsh Widowbirds and Coppery-tailed Coucals but we failed to locate Fülleborn's Longclaw. We are sure that it will be a hotspot for the Long-toed Flufftail during the breeding season!

The following morning we had one of the mega ticks right in camp, the Black-necked Eremomela that was playing with a pair of Western Violet-backed Sunbirds! A Western Banded Snake-eagle circled above us with a huge green snake, which we sadly, never managed to identify. We were also shocked to see several afro tropical migrants already in like the African Cuckoo, African Golden Oriole and Wahlberg's Eagle. We were so impressed with the diversity of the Northern Miombo Woodlands. It was very refreshing and stimulating to see so many special species and it drives us to get out there and just enjoy this magnificent continent! Happy Birding

Jono and Jen Francis

BEYOND ZIMBABWE: *The Elusive Roberts*

'You have to have a Roberts'.

This was the advice I received shortly after arriving in Harare in December '81. It was hot and rainy and there were a bewildering variety of birds everywhere but no way as far as I could tell of identifying them. The local bookshops were no help apart from the above advice. "When will you be receiving them?" I asked innocently – still unaccustomed to semi-permanent penury. Not any time soon was the invariable reply. So I made the tour of the second hand and antique shops; there were a surprising number of these in the centre of town, selling Batonka stools and rattles, English furniture and knick-knacks, and of course, old books. I soon became a familiar face at these establishments' doors – "No we still don't have one, try again next month", or just a shake of the head as I poked mine around the door. The blessed book had become my Holy Grail and meanwhile all these birds were getting away unidentified, although I'm sure they didn't mind or even care in the least. Finally 'halleluiaah', my patience was rewarded with a well-thumbed old copy and I was able to spend a very frustrating few hours trying to remember exactly what I had seen during all this time, which apart from a few very obvious contenders proved almost impossible. Still, I had my copy and we were inseparable for the short time remaining on that particular visit.

One of the species that needed no *Roberts* introduction was of course the roller; my experience with rollers in Africa is that you see one on a wire or a bush, you drive right up to him, stick your head and camera out of the window, exchange pleasantries and take all the close up pictures you want without him being in the least concerned or disturbed – they positively love having their picture taken.

Now I can almost hear you, dear reader, wondering where on earth this all going; well here it is one of things you come to realize, newly born to the wonders and delights of Southern Africa, is that you

Chobe

While on a river cruise along the Chobe last month, we saw an abundance of animals and birds but one that was of special interest was the African Skimmer. They were plentiful in the area and we had excellent views as they skimmed along the river surface. Along one stretch were some sandy banks where we noticed a couple of African Skimmers sitting and as we approached they flew off. It turned out that they had been sitting on a nest and left behind two newly hatched chicks and one egg. Both chicks and egg blended perfectly into the sandy background such that it was very hard to pick them out.

are at the other end of the great migratory routes of so many English birds. All these birds I grew up with in England, the swallows and swifts, martins and cuckoos and so on, had all come down to escape the joys of an English winter. And of course there are others that find that going all the way up to England is probably just a wee bit too far and get waylaid by the delights of the French countryside. One of these is the roller, European variety. There are several that nest every year in the valley here, where I live now, not far from Arles. The roller's legendary ease in front of the camera, however, turns out not to be the case with European Rollers here – or perhaps they only like having their picture taken while they're down south. They are often to be seen on a phone wire near the house but quickly scarper as you approach. We put this down to the local bird population's natural prudence – the French still make Starling pâté for instance. The most we have seen together is seven and recently watched five hawking silently on the wing together at dusk.

And as for that *Roberts*, faithful companion on many subsequent southern African trips? I've turned the house upside down and can't find it anywhere.

I worked for Clinton & Evans in 1981 and now run an architectural and interior design company here in the south of France – hence my being there then!

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As soon as the parents flew off, the chicks immediately scuttled a couple of metres from the nest and tried to burrow under the sand to conceal themselves from passing predators. What an interesting adaptation for survival. It was our guide who pointed the chicks out otherwise I wonder if we would have spotted them!

Debbie Wiggins

African Skimmers next to nest

Tail Feathers

An African freshwater fish regularly captures Barn Swallows in flight

30 Jun 2014 – 18:02 – Eduardo de Juana

A population of African tiger fish (*Hydrocynus vittatus*) actively preys on Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) in flight. This behaviour was discovered during a radio telemetry study and documented using a motion picture video camera at the Schroda Dam, a man-made lake in Limpopo Province, South Africa. During a 15-day survey in February 2011 as many as 300 swallows that were feeding or drinking while in low flight above the lake were preyed upon by the local tiger fish population.

FROM HBW ALIVE (ON-LINE VERSION OF HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF THE WORLD)

Lots of activity in and around my Mandara garden at the end of August/beginning of September.

There are Sparrowhawks building a nest that was visited by a Giant Kingfisher for the first time. Started seeing Marabou Storks flying overhead and on 27 August there were 31 storks being herded by about 50 crows. Have never seen Marabou Storks on this side of town. [Occasional birds have been seen over Mandara/Chikurubi in the past – ICR]

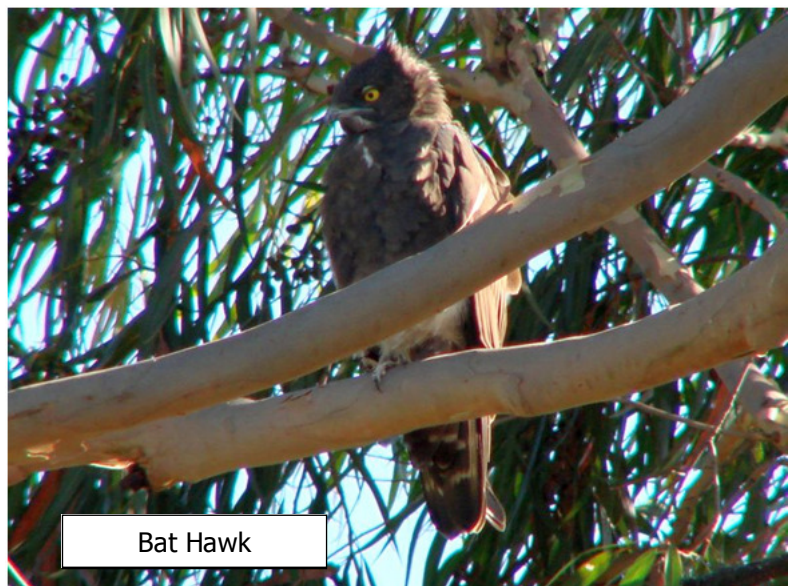
On the morning of 8 September, 37 species were counted in the garden within 2 hours. These included Meyer's Parrots, Thick-billed Weaver, Green Wood-hoopoe, Lizard Buzzard, African Grey Hornbill, African Green-pigeon, Red-winged Starling, plus all the regular garden birds.

In addition to this, I finally managed to visit Jo Scott at her Borrowdale home to see Bat Hawks for the first time. There is a resident pair which can be heard calling during the day, and are normally seen resting up in a Eucalyptus Tree.

If anyone wants to plant an indigenous tree to attract birds to their garden, the *Schotia brachypetala* will do the job. Tony Wood has one in his garden and 20 different birds have been seen visiting it whilst it is in flower. This includes 6 sunbirds and 5 weavers.

Forgot to mention that there were a number of European Bee-eaters overhead on 9 September. Not sure if these are the first arrivals?

James Ball



Bat Hawk

Scarlet-chested Sunbird (Tony's tree)



Lizard Buzzard with rodent kill



Meyer's Parrot eating flowers of *Erythrina caffra*

Contributions for *The Babblers* 121 December 2014 / January 2015 may be sent to the editor anytime between now and 14th November 2014.