

# THE BABBLER

Newsletter of



## BirdLife Zimbabwe

The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

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#### **SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION**

#### **\*\*SUBSCRIPTIONS NOW DUE\*\***

**Membership subscriptions are now due.** Even if you don't attend meetings and outings, your membership is really 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.

***Please note:*** Council agreed not to increase the fees for the 4<sup>th</sup> year. However a number of our members prefer their newsletter, *Babbler*, in printed form and it was decided those members be requested to pay an extra \$5 per year to assist with the costs of printing and distribution. This publication is now much improved and more interesting with colour pictures.

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](mailto:JuliaPierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org) for info about inclusion under 'Birding in Zimbabwe' 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 **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](mailto:CarolynDennison@birdlifezimbabwe.org)

And 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)

## Special Notices

### Branch Activities

#### 2015 BLZ Mashonaland Away Outings

##### First Outing of 2015

There will be an away outing to Outward Bound, **Chimanimani** over the fourth weekend in April 2015, arrive Friday 24<sup>th</sup>, leave on Monday 27<sup>th</sup>. This trip is over the school holidays thereby giving teachers an opportunity to participate in these outings. All BLZ members are invited.

Outward Bound will provide us with all our meals and teas as well as accommodation at \$50.00 per person per night. However you should take cereal if you need to have breakfast before you go birding first thing in the morning.

Besides seeing some special birds, we are going to search for the Bokmakierie which I believe was seen in these parts a while ago.

Those interested in going on this trip should email: [talegria@zol.co.zw](mailto:talegria@zol.co.zw) – latest date 16<sup>th</sup> April. A \$50.00 deposit secures a slot for this trip.

A one week's birding holiday is at the planning stage to see the **Shoebill in Zambia** in July. A deposit of \$200 is required but please contact Tony Alegria.

Please note – although these outings are organised by the Mashonaland branch, ALL members are welcome.

## Mashonaland Branch

### MASHONALAND BLZ – OUTINGS February 2015 March 2015

*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*

#### BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Calendar of Events APRIL 2015

Saturday 4 <sup>th</sup> April 2015	BirdLife – Marlborough Vlei Walk	Meet at 7 a.m.
Sunday 5 <sup>th</sup> April 2015	BirdLife – Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk	Meet at 6.30 a.m.
Saturday 11 <sup>th</sup> April 2015	BirdLife – Greystone Park Nature Reserve HALFORD ROAD off GAYDON ROAD	Meet at 7 a.m.
Sunday 12 <sup>th</sup> April 2015	BirdLife – Lake Chivero Walk	Meet at 6.30 a.m.

Thursday 16 <sup>th</sup> April 2015	<b>BirdLife - Presentation on Bird Ringing</b> By Damian Newmarch/Julia Pierini	5.30 for 6 p.m.
Sunday 19 <sup>th</sup> April 2015	<b>BirdLife – Monavale Vlei Walk</b>	Meet at 6.30 a.m.
Friday 24 <sup>th</sup> April to Monday 27 <sup>th</sup> April 2015	<b>Birdlife Outing to Outward Bound Chimanimani</b>	

### **BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Calendar of Events MAY 2015**

Saturday 2 <sup>nd</sup> May 2015	<b>BirdLife – Marlborough Vlei Walk</b>	Meet at 7 a.m.
Sunday 5 <sup>th</sup> May 2015	<b>BirdLife – Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk</b>	Meet at 6.30 a.m.
Saturday 9 <sup>th</sup> May 2015	<b>BirdLife – Haka Park</b> Meet at entrance to the park, Opposite Pick ‘n Pay/Old Jagers Warehouse (Cleveland Dam, Msasa). \$3 Entrance Fee for BLZ members	Meet at 7.00 a.m.
Sunday 10 <sup>th</sup> May 2015	<b>BirdLife – Kamba Park, Lake Chivero</b> Mother’s Day Breakfast or Lunch Menu is available at a nominal cost.	Meet at 6.30 a.m.
Sunday 17 <sup>th</sup> May 2015	<b>BirdLife – Monavale Vlei Walk</b>	Meet at 6.30 a.m.
Thursday 21 <sup>st</sup> May 2015	<b>BirdLife Presentation – A slideshow of photographs</b> By Roger and Ali MacDonald	5.30 for 6 p.m.
Sunday 24 <sup>th</sup> May 2015	<b>BirdLife Outing - Val d’or (Valley of Gold) Ruwa (Bill Clarke)</b> Meet at Mukuvisi Woodlands Main Carpark at 6.30 a.m.	

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:**

CABS Northridge Park – From town drive along Borrowdale Road, turn right into Whitwell, next right into Ridgeway North, next right into Northend Road and first right into Northridge Close. Drive to the end of the road and go through a security boom into Northridge Park.

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

Mukuvisi Woodlands – 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.

### **Matabeleland Branch**

1) Ant and Ali Randall have invited birders to their Umguza farm on 11<sup>th</sup> April for a birding day. Participants to assemble at 8 a.m. sharp at the Umguza turn-off (first turning left after the toll booth). Bring a picnic basket/ packed lunch and chairs.

2) Birders are invited to a camping weekend at the Nichol’s farm in Gwanda, 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> May. A circular has already been sent to members with full details.

3) The annual dassie count will take place from the 23<sup>rd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> May. If you have not already registered to take part, please get in touch with Cecilia Hubbard as soon as possible.

### **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 [clive@chilogorge.com](mailto:clive@chilogorge.com)

## National Office

### RECENT REPORTS AND SIGHTINGS NATIONAL



#### Harare Province World Wetland Celebrations

**Date** 6 February 2015

**Venue** Monavale Vlei

**Guests of Honour** ZANU PF Deputy Secretary for Environment and Tourism in the Politburo, Mrs Auxillia Mngangwa, Environmental Management agency (EMA) Provincial Manager Mr Robson Mavondo: Harare Province (Main Speaker)

**2015 Wetland Celebration Theme** *“Wetlands for the future; enticing youths to come and experience wetlands for themselves”*

#### Background

The Ramsar convention is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. Wetlands Day Celebrations are held globally every year on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February. This day marks the date of the adoption of the Ramsar Convention in an Iranian city of Ramsar in the year 1971. 2015 celebrations came with a wetland youth photo contest. Entrants (15-24) were asked to snap and upload a picture taken in a wetland location between 2 February and 2 March. The Photographic challenge was to highlight one of the many ways wetlands ensure our future.

Zimbabwe joined the rest of the world in celebrating this important day. National celebrations were held on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> February at Rainbow Towers in Harare. The Environmental Management Agency (EMA) organised a wetland symposium for the day. At Provincial level for Harare, EMA, BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ), Conservation Society of Monavale (COSMO), Wildlife and Environment Zimbabwe (WEZ) and Mukuvisi Woodlands joined forces and arranged for schools to celebrate the day on Monavale Vlei. Monavale Vlei is among seven Ramsar sites in Zimbabwe. It serves well as a case study for wetland restoration and protection.

A total of twenty seven schools from Harare and one from Chivhu came for the celebrations. Each school was given information packs. Amongst the materials were BirdLife Zimbabwe and COSMO calendars, two different wetland pamphlets and a map of Harare's gazetted wetlands. Students were treated to a tour of Monavale wetland before they settled down for the formal programme. COSMO, BLZ and Mukuvisi Woodlands spoke to the students on their respective efforts towards wetland rehabilitation and conservation. COSMO and BLZ had a few prizes to give away to the students who answered questions correctly. EMA provincial Manager, Mr Robson Mavondo read out the main speech which further emphasised on the need for responsible citizenship when issues to do with critical systems as wetlands come to the fore. Mrs Auxillia Mngagwa, ZANU PF Secretary for Environment and Tourism, graced the occasion saying they as a party will not tolerate wetland degradation by individuals hiding behind her party.

The Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) ran several interviews and so did Harare News and several independent journalists who walked on the mud for Wetlands Day Celebration coverage. Besides schools, Belvedere Technical Teachers College attended, as did representatives from Bindura and University of Zimbabwe. Community-based organisations were represented by Marlborough Environmental Action Group (MEAG). MEAG is pooling its resources to reclaim and protect Marlborough Vlei and at the same time addressing other social issues in Marlborough.

Students urged environmental organisations to work with school children whose parents will heed the conservation message if it comes through their own children. There were suggestions from the students that we build upwards and leave wetlands to perform their natural life supporting functions. One Belvedere Teachers College student suggested that more action be taken to spread the message around and hoped the government will prioritise wetland issues as much as it does HIV and AIDS.

**Innocent Magunje Education Officer**

## **Protecting Harare's Wetland Ecosystems for Nature and the City's People Mid-February to Mid-March Report**

The past two months have been very productive with a number of activities reaching completion as the end of the Project draws near on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2015.

The High Court appeals are still underway for Marlborough, Ashbrittle and Borrowdale Wetlands. Two World Wetland Day commemorations took place and a WWF representative arrived on Ramsar business and this was accompanied by a number of National Wetland Committee Meetings. Wonderful rains were received until 1<sup>st</sup> February which was marked by flooding which seriously impacted those living on wetlands in northern and western Harare. Breeding conditions were perfect for Streaky-breasted Flufftail on Monavale Vlei. Many maize crops on Marlborough Vlei have failed due to the heavy rains received. However, since that first week in February only a few millimetres of rain have been recorded.

### **Highlights during this period**

The World Wetland Day 2015 national event was commemorated on 2<sup>nd</sup> February at the Rainbow Towers and took the form of a symposium with a number of presentations given by different stakeholders from the constructions industry, town planning, academia and national and local government. It was agreed that wetlands are important for Harare's water provisioning and that they are being impacted. However, no resolution came from the meeting as to what could be done to address the plight of the wetlands.

The World Wetland Day 2015 Schools Event organized by The Conservation Society of Monavale, BirdLife Zimbabwe and Harare Province of EMA with support from EcoSchools of

Mukuvisi Woodlands was held on Monavale Vlei on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2015. The theme for this year 'Wetlands for Our Future: Enticing Youth to Experience Wetlands for Themselves' was fitting as nearly 400 school children from 28 schools attended with their teachers. They thoroughly enjoyed splashing about in the pools and learning about the functions and services of Harare's wetlands from COSMO and BLZ staff and members who took them on guided walks on the Vlei. After the walks the crowd gathered on Sherwood Golf Course under a large tent donated by Nyaradzo Funerals for the formal commemoration. Schools made presentations of poems, drama and songs. COSMO Kids Club teacher Linda Bromley donated solar chargers to those children able to answer questions on wetlands posed by Jimmy Muropa, the Monavale Vlei Conservation Field Officer. The usual speeches were given, ending with Mrs Auxillia Mhangagwa, Deputy Secretary for Environment and Tourism for the Politburo making a good speech in favour of wetland protection. It was another wonderful day for wetland awareness which was covered by ZBC TV with two airings and viewers are still reporting they saw the programme. Check the Conservation Society of Monavale Facebook Page for lovely photos of this day and Harare News online for its report.

Visits by Community Based Organizations to Monavale Vlei were organized by Project staff together with Community Water Alliance who brought residents from 7 communities living in or near wetlands: Westlea, Warren Park, Dzivarasekwa, Kambuzuma, Rugare, Budiro and Glen View. The Combined Harare Residents Association brought residents from Tafara and Mabvuku. They learnt about Monavale Vlei, a restored and preserved wetland and the importance of Harare's wetlands and their biodiversity. They discussed the state of their wetlands and how they would take what they learnt at Monavale back to their communities. They enjoyed walking on the pristine wetland. CWA has requested COSMO visit these communities to guide them in restoring their wetlands. Councillors representing these communities plan to visit Monavale as a group next week. Engaging CBOs has been a very rewarding aspect of the Wetland Project.

Further invasive alien plant removal exercises have taken place on both wetlands and another ringing session took place in February. Research took place in February and March. Marlborough Environmental Action Group, BLZ and COSMO organized successful visits to Marlborough Vlei by the environmental clubs of Marlborough Primary and High Schools and Arundel Girls School. Plans are underway for more schools to visit this wetland.

Once again, thanks are 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](mailto:cosmo@yoafrica.com); 0772 376506**

## **News!**

***Last year in October, BirdLife Zimbabwe pledged to donate US\$1 to Mukuvisi Woodlands for every BLZ 2015 Calendar sold to support the conservation of this precious pristine Miombo Woodland in the centre of Harare.***



***And so it happened. On 18 March 2015, BLZ Finance and admin officer, Sylvia Muzavazi handed over US\$1627 to Mukuvisi Woodland's Estate manager, Mathew Hativagone. All smiles! ☺ Many thanks to our sponsors and to all who generously supported our calendars by buying them to enable us to do this too!***

## **Negotiation Skills for Sustainable Protected Areas**

One of the major challenges to birds and biodiversity conservation in this fast changing planet is increasing pressure from various human activities. Many governments in the region are focussing on economic growth and poverty alleviation through increased exploitation of natural resources and infrastructure development. Creating a balance between conservation and development remained a major gap in most areas. How this can be achieved is a question that still requires more answers.

In an effort to gain more knowledge and skills for addressing conservation challenges, Togarasei Fakarayi was among the 33 people from 12 African countries who participated in a Negotiation Skills for Sustainable Protected Areas regional training workshop held in Pretoria, South Africa from 22-27 February 2015. This workshop was organised by IUCN BIOPAMA and the Sustainability Challenge Foundation. Participants were trained in negotiation skills for sustainable development from a Mutual Gains Approach perspective. The training was centred on the negotiation model for consensus building that help reach sustainable solutions for addressing challenges faced in protected and/or biodiversity-rich areas. Teaching methods comprised of presentations, discussions and simulations, equipping participants with practical negotiation skills and techniques for problem solving in the sustainable management of protected areas. Participants also got an opportunity to share case studies on conservation challenges and experiences from their areas of work. Knowledge gained from this training is very useful and will apply the skills acquired in my work especially on stakeholder engagement in birds and biodiversity conservation.

**Togarasei Fakarayi**

## **Waterbird Count Report January 2015**

Maybe half the active membership of BLZ took part in the January counts, which included data from mid-December to mid-February from the official count and incidental sightings. They again did a marvellous job at some risk (roads, mud, crocs, bilharzia, malaria, etc.). Thanks to Carolyn Dennison and Ian Riddell for computer expertise.

More than 75 sites were visited and maybe we will get 80. A welcome new place was Mukumbura in the Guruve District. The four reports on Kariba covered 20 of 2000 km of shoreline. At some time in the future we need a big push on Kariba to try and find out what is there, in say 100 km of shoreline.

Would some people go to Nottingham Estate in Beitbridge and Sebakwe Poort in Kwekwe District in July please?

Seen in January 2014 but not seen this year: Great White Pelican, Cape Teal, Spotted Crake, Greater Painted-snipe, Black-winged Pratincole, Senegal Lapwing, African Skimmer and Pel's Fishing-owl.

Seen in January 2015 but not seen last year: Slaty Egret at Kazungula, flamingos over Musango Camp, Kariba, Woolly-necked Storks in Hwange, Hurungwe, Guruve and Mwenezi, Maccoa Duck at Aisleby, Striped Crake at Monavale Vlei, Allen's Gallinule at Kazungula, Vic Falls, Greengrove and Carswell, Bronze-winged Courser at Monavale Vlei, Lesser Black-backed Gull at Trichilia Camp, Mana Pools, and White-winged Tern at Kariba in the rainy weather.

Outstanding were: 894 Wood Sandpipers at Chitungwiza 15/1 by Innocent Magunje, 460 Abdim's and 150 White Storks were photographed by Innes & Riana Louw on the Runde River in February and 40 Yellow-billed Kites were at Inyankuni Dam 13/12 by Gaynor Lightfoot.

Commonest birds (these figures do not include late reports): 2940 Cattle Egret, 1457 Wood Sandpiper, 1199 White-faced Duck, 993 Red-billed Teal, 881 African Jacana, 720 Blacksmith Lapwing, 698 Red-knobbed Coot, 562 Egyptian Goose, 437 Reed Cormorant, 406 African Sacred Ibis and 382 Marabou Stork.

We need volunteers to get on the worldwide specialist groups like grebes, cormorants, pelicans, herons, stork, ibises & spoonbills, ducks, cranes & waders. It is only by counting birds (and not ticking them on a field card) that we can spot the trends and KEEP COMMON BIRDS COMMON.

**David Rockingham-Gill for African Waterbird Counts in Zimbabwe.**



## Mashonaland

### Marlborough Vlei Walk, Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> February 2015 7 A.M.

After taking local schoolchildren on a muddy vlei walk on Friday as part of the Monavale Wetlands Extravaganza, an event graced by the presence of many local worthies, it seemed rather over the top to do an even muddier wade on Marlborough vlei the next day. However, both occasions were equally pleasing, enjoyable and productive and both gave important publicity to the campaigns to save Harare's vital wetlands and hence its water from greedy, predatory, anti-environmental gangs intent on making money at all costs.

Monavale, providing you don't object to getting your feet wet, is always accessible and paths are regularly cut by the management but Marlborough, while similar in some respects, has few paths and deeper streams. Between 10 and 20 of us, aged from 15 to 75, beginners and experts, councillors and students, came together to demonstrate solidarity with local residents opposing development plans for the area. After identifying Southern Red Bishop, Common Waxbill, Yellow-mantled Widowbird and other common vlei dwellers from the roadway we set off along mainly flooded paths through the grass and mealie patches. In the distance we could hear Streaky-breasted Flufftail, Swainson's Spurfowl, Black Coucal and Diderick Cuckoo whilst African Palm-swift and Little Swift flew overhead with African Sacred

Ibis, Cattle Egret, Hamerkop, Black-headed Heron, Reed Cormorant and Pied Crow. Deeper into the vlei and the water we heard Little Rush and Lesser Swamp-warbler in the reeds and then spotted an African Marsh-harrier quartering the reedbeds in search of prey. A Marsh Owl was the next cause of excitement. We realised when we reached the usual crossing point that the swollen stream would bring an untimely end to our wandering. So, we made our way back towards the cars.

After some discussion it was decided to see if we could obtain permission to visit the nearby sewage ponds that have recently been rehabilitated. An excellent decision: permission was kindly granted and we were very soon scanning an array of species: African Jacana, Wood Sandpiper, Common Moorhen and Lesser Moorhen, Blacksmith Lapwing, Black Crake, White-faced Duck, Red-billed and Hottentot Teal and an African Purple Swamphen. A Purple Heron and an Amur Falcon flew by as we moved to the other ponds which had less open water and held no new species.

Ronny, a local resident and talented young birder, made the count that comprised 51 species – rich reward for a fascinating morning's birding.

**Ken Dixon**

### BLZ Mashonaland Branch First Visit to Ballantyne Park Nature Reserve, Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> February 2015

My first priority this damp and cloudy Saturday was to help the England Cricket XI beat the Aussies in the opening match of the World Cup. However, at 0645 the bright start made by the old enemy and a pricking conscience motivated me to join the visit to my local reserve. A good decision; the Aussies thrashed the Poms and the birding was amazingly good.

Our group of 23 consisted of regular BLZ birders, representatives of the Save Ballantyne Park Conservancy Committee, interested local residents and Innocent's Youth Club who had recently taken part in the clean-up. There is much evidence of the good work carried out to rehabilitate the area which comprises 3 dams, Ballantyne, Blair and Staley; we were able to visit all 3 following newly cut paths through the

long wet grass. And they all had water thanks to recent rains.

Not only water but water birds like Common Moorhen and Lesser Moorhen, Red-knobbed Coot, White-faced Duck, African Black Duck, Black Crake and Little Bittern (Dwarf Bittern also seen recently!). In the reeds and other waterside vegetation we saw or heard Senegal Coucal, Red-faced and Levaillant's Cisticola, Little Rush, Lesser Swamp and African Reed-warbler, lots of Southern Red Bishop and Thick-billed Weaver and their nests. Southern Masked-weavers were numerous, attended by Diderick Cuckoo. At Ballantyne Dam a rather bedraggled Yellow-billed Kite sat motionless in a tree as we trooped past, the only raptor apart from the ubiquitous Black-shouldered Kite and Amur Falcon.

Among other birds in the grass, gums and gardens were African Stonechat, Little Bee-eater, Red-billed Quelea, Southern Black Flycatcher, Fork-tailed Drongo, Green Wood-hoopoe, Common Fiscal, Pin-tailed Whydah, Spectacled Weaver and a Black-backed Puffback eating a Painted Reed-frog. In all the

group identified an impressive 70 species. We shall visit this venue again as it can only get better given the effort put in to its refurbishment by the local group.

By the way, you can visit Ballantyne Park Conservancy on Facebook to learn more.

**Ken Dixon**

### **A New Species for Monavale, Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> February, 2015**

At the end of our Sunday wade on the vlei the dozen or so of us, gathered for the count below the viewing platform, were treated to a fine display by a male **Long-tailed Paradise-whydah** which flitted from tree to tree showing off its beautiful tail to an accompanying female. When Jimmy Muropa returned a little later we learnt that this was the latest first for the ever-expanding Monavale list.

This was a much needed antidote for me, personally, who had spent the previous 15 minutes witnessing the intensive, unremitting harassing of the temporarily resident Streaky-breasted Flufftail by a local dog and its owner

aiding and abetting a visiting SA birder using a phone app at high volume and a separate loudspeaker hidden in the grass! If I were a visiting flufftail on my annual Monavale stay I would certainly make a mental note not to grace this spot with my presence next year. Harare may be losing its wetlands but there is still a wide choice of local venues for species like me despite all the mealie growing and development. I must add that this is my personal view of this practice and not necessarily the official line of BLZ.

**Ken Dixon**

## **Matabeleland**

### **BirdLife Zimbabwe, Matland Branch, Outing to Falcon College – 14.02.15**

It was a clear, sunny Valentine's Day when seven BirdLife members met at Ascot Shopping Centre to journey out to Falcon College, Esigodini, at the kind invitation of Gordon and Heather MacDonald. Arriving shortly before 9.00 a.m., we met up with another four members, five guests



*Adult female Black Sparrowhawk belonging to Mr Reg Querl of Falcon College*

from The Dambari Trust, two Falcon school boys (both involved in the school's falconry programme), and a guest of the Macdonald's from Lomagundi College. We all grabbed a quick beverage before settling in the MacDonald's beautiful garden, under the shade of 75 different species of indigenous trees, to listen to Reg Querl give us a fascinating talk on falconry. He brought with him an adult Black Sparrowhawk on the glove, and two young Peregrine Falcons (one male and one female) who had been successfully bred last year from a captive pair at the school. Both birds' chest barring was still vertical; these

markings will become horizontal in adulthood. Reg had hardly begun when the MacDonald's two cats, thinking that there were easy pickings for breakfast, were spotted under the chairs, lurking with

malicious intent towards the two falcons on the perch! The cats were quickly dispatched to a spare room and locked up until Reg had finished!

Reg's talk focused on the differences between the two species, the first being the difference in size. The female Peregrine is roughly a third heavier than the male, and both are dense, compact birds. The sparrowhawk, whilst considerably larger visually, only weighs about 100g more than the female Peregrine, with a much larger tail and wingspan. Reg has found the sparrowhawk to be fiercely independent, still-hunting from an elevated position and not too concerned with what the pointer dogs are indicating. It has immense

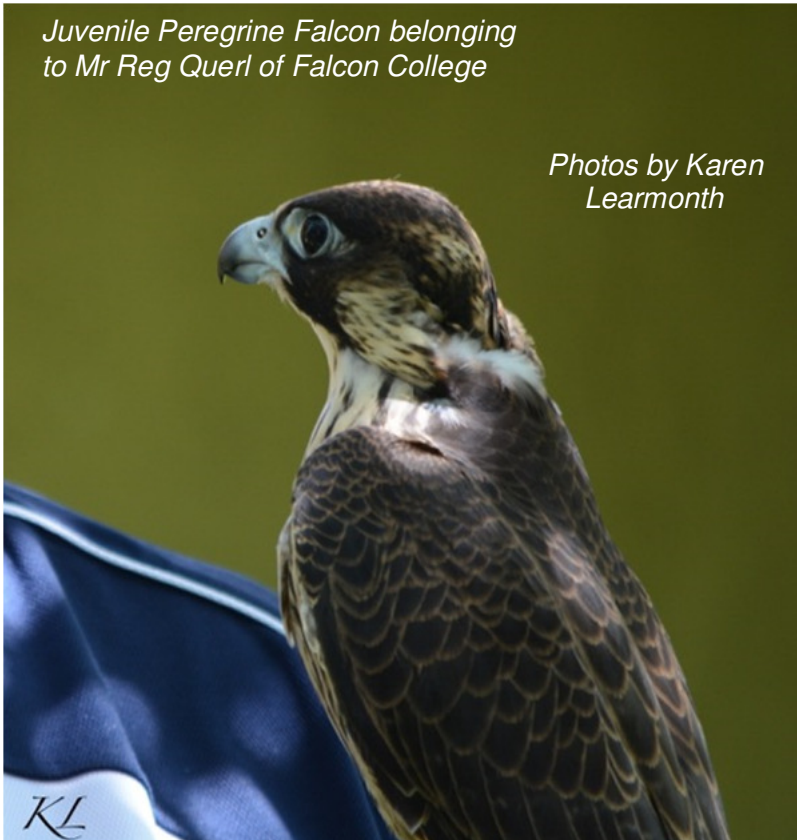


*Mr Reg Querl, Headmaster of Falcon College with his female Black Sparrowhawk*

staying power and, being more flexible, can pursue its prey through dense foliage or take it on the ground. The Peregrine on the other hand is much easier to handle, reliant on its handler, and very aware at all times of the dogs and the lure. When it has selected its prey, this "emperor of the sky" goes into a stoop and, travelling at great speed, winds its prey, killing it instantly on impact or piercing it with its rear talons. It does not take prey on the ground as it cannot afford to damage its flight feathers in a combat with its prey. The falcon's bill is also much chunkier than the

sparrowhawk's.

*Juvenile Peregrine Falcon belonging to Mr Reg Querl of Falcon College*



*Photos by Karen Learmonth*

Gordon MacDonald then handed out maps detailing the roads and trails that we could meander on to do a bit of bird spotting, before all congregating later for a braai lunch at their Pumula Picnic site. Members were able to identify 62 bird species during this interval, with very few waterfowl sighted.

Lunch over, and with a build-up of clouds and the rumble of thunder, Gordon then took us across to the *Quest* facility. Will Randle, ex-British Army and in charge of the facility, had just returned from five days in the bush with a group of 17 participants, mostly non-Zimbabwean, and didn't have a hair out of place! He gave us an impromptu overview of the centre, which is open to 18 – 21 year olds, and is aimed at providing basic life skills such as welding, plumbing, mechanics, public speaking, first aid training, bush

survival, business management and career selection to the participants. Currently, they have 32 young men, in two intakes, undertaking the programme, which lasts nearly eight months. They also offer tailor-made courses for companies on request.

A light shower of rain heralded the end of an incredibly interesting and informative day. Our most grateful thanks to Gordon and Heather Macdonald, Reg Querl and Will Randle for taking valuable time out of their busy schedules to provide us with an excellent days outing to the College.

**Marina Jackson**

## **Mashonaland South**

### **Kadoma 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2015.**

12 White Storks and 10 Abdim's Storks were seen by Mr Bruce Newman on his Hove dairy farm, 12 km north of Kadoma. The green grass had been cut for silage and both these storks were feasting well.

### **6<sup>th</sup> March, 2015.**

8 White Storks feeding in soya bean field crop near Rio Tinto, so probably some of the Hove Farm group storks.

Diderick Cuckoo and Levillant's Cuckoo are still around and calling.

Southern Masked-weavers are nest building again. Three large colonies all nest building in tall, dense, bamboo plantations. Two different areas at the Kadoma Golf Course near the Masheumavale River and one colony in Kadoma Suburbia. All the inner top leaves of the bamboo are stripped and these are used to build the nests, hanging on the ends of the bare twigs. Lots of noise and wing movements by male and female birds, but there are more nests on the ground than in the plantation.

### **Kadoma Golf Course 28<sup>th</sup> February 2015.**

The Thick-billed Weaver nests are still holding tight on the reeds. Two males seen perching on top of nests which the males sometimes do for roosting. At present, eight nests in reeds, of an area of Masheumavale River, but no evidence of any females, or any food being carried.

### **Saturday, 14<sup>th</sup> March 2015.**

Two female Thick-billed Weavers seen washing in the river, both looking thin and dishevelled so may be sitting on eggs. One male in attendance nearby and proudly calling.

The Black-headed Heron's nests in the tall gum trees near town are still active and busy.

Recent arrivals are the Black-chested Snake-eagle seen hovering over Cherrybank feed lots, White-bellied Sunbird and the Brown-hooded Kingfisher

**Margaret Parrock.**

***White-backed Night-heron***  
*sighted and photographed by*  
*Dhalika Goven at Claw Dam,*  
*Kadoma on 03/08/2014.*



## Other Areas

### **Birding south of Mutare...** travelling from Mutare to Chisambanje – 18 February 2015

I was travelling this route on business and these are a few observations made on this journey – 1 Yellow-billed Kite seen about 15km out of Mutare close to the main road travelling towards Birchenough Bridge and then a further 15km later, I saw a Steppe Eagle flying parallel to the highway.

After turning towards Chipinge, just before the 'Bridge' travelling towards Tanganda Halt, I stopped my vehicle to observe approximately 20 Lesser Spotted Eagles flying in a northerly direction directly over the highway.

I then turned right at Tanganda Halt and drove southwards on a disintegrating tarred road towards Chisambanje. Just past Checheche (95+km from the turn off), I noticed huge flocks of White Storks and Abdim's Storks that were 'resting/watering' along the sand banks of the Save River. From my photographs there were c.125-130 White Storks and c.475 Abdim's – 75% on the main sand banks together with the White Storks. There were also

60-75 circling above, and another 40-50 Abdim's on a smaller sand bank about half a kilometre downstream. There were also at least 9 Egyptian Geese in the whole 'party'. A sight to savour. My previous largest congregation of Abdim's (c.300) were near Bromley just outside Harare on 5/12/2011.

On returning an hour later from the business I visited nearby, I stopped again to take sight of the huge congregation of Abdim's Storks and there was only one White Stork evident!

Travelling back towards Tanganda Halt I came across a Wahlberg's Eagle and a single Yellow-billed Kite – I have never seen one along this stretch over the past 4 years.

There were two small flocks of Amur Falcons, totalling 90-110, close to the highway between Chipangayi and Checheche.

This stretch of the country is in somewhat of a rain shadow – total maize crop failure, bare earth, goats, donkeys and some thin mombis.

**Innes Louw**



**Abdim's and White Storks on the Save River**

### **Red-necked Buzzard**

On our Christmas trip to Mana Pools we came across what we believe is a first record of Red-necked Buzzard for Zimbabwe on a walk in Mana Pools on the 27<sup>th</sup> of December 2014 (for usual distribution check [www.birdlife.org](http://www.birdlife.org)).

Details below. Date 27/12/14, Time approx. 08h30; Weather partly cloudy, Visibility clear; Distance 500 feet.

Binoculars used: Swarovski 8.5 x 42 EL; Swarovski 7 x 42; Swarovski 8 x 30

Number of people; Tracey Couto, Ferdy Couto, Antonio Couto, Adam Francis, Kyle Lang, Francis Searle, Nick Fawcett, Evan Stuart, CJ Stuart, John Francis, Jonathan Francis

The raptors were just starting to catch the thermals. There were good numbers of Steppe Buzzards as well as Lappet-faced, Hooded, White-headed and White-backed Vultures. We noticed a peculiar raptor slightly smaller than the Steppe Buzzards with a broader shorter wing. It had prominent bold barring restricted to the armpits. This barring against the pale belly, tail and under wing was a significant feature of our sighting. There were several European Honey-buzzards, mostly the dark morphs with their prominent bands in the tail as well as the dark terminal bands. They had a much longer, thinner wing than the above mentioned raptor.

Despite the wealth of birding knowledge within our group and the extensive speculation at the time none of us were able to identify the said raptor. On our return to Harare my colleague Gary Douglas mentioned sightings of a Red-necked Buzzard seen in Kasane on the 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2015. I googled the bird and to my excitement the images unmistakably matched our sighting in Mana Pools!

Sadly we have no photographic evidence, however, the rest of our party have also seen the images and have verified the sighting.

I think this is a very exciting record for Zimbabwe and I hope that the bird stays around long enough for other enthusiasts to appreciate it!

**Jonothan Francis**

## **Tail Feathers**

### **For Sale/Donation to BLZ Mashonaland**

A pair of Regatta X-Lt Size 6 Walking Shoes.

Hardly Used. Purchased in UK for \$60.00

An Appropriate Donation to BLZ Mashonaland Branch will be accepted.

Contact **Linda Fussell** 04 333896

### **Green-winged Pytilia, Chisipite, Harare**

New visitor this morning. Very colourful bright orange/red beak, olive back & wings, red tail feathers. Best I can determine is he was a male Green-winged Pytilia. First for us.

Regrettably the setting in "sports" mode only seems to allow a 5.6 aperture so all pics over exposed.

**George Fleet**

## **Cape Wagtail recycling**

Travelling from Cape Town last month, we stopped to fill the tank at a garage at Three Sisters near the N1/N12 intersection. I almost stood on a Cape Wagtail and wondered what it was after. Then it occurred to me that cars were bringing in food in the form of squashed insects attached to their radiator grilles! When we parked in the car park, wagtail was there again – he even hopped up onto the front boat tow-hitch to pick off a few grasshoppers and other insects stuck to the front of the car – and strolled on to inspect 'fresh' pickings from the other cars. This is not new information, of course, but fun nonetheless.

**Ian Riddell**



**Public holiday weekend at Charama Safari Lodge, Kadoma. 23-25 May**

This is a lovely venue with a variety of habitats and good bird life. There are chalets, camping facilities, dining room and pool. Chalets are \$60 (double), camping \$10/person – own tents supplied. We will have access to the kitchen or alternatively their chef can prepare meals for us. There are 5 double chalets and a family room which has 2 rooms. Treat yourselves to a couple of days away from the rat race, relax and experience somewhere different. Some of our members from around that area will join us. Please contact Carolyn on 0772-210240 or [CarolynDennison@birdlifezimbabwe.org](mailto:CarolynDennison@birdlifezimbabwe.org) as soon as possible.

Errata:

The pic of the little Red-chested Cuckoo in the last *Babbler*, BLZ MATABELELAND OUTING TO STONE HILLS, was by Marina Jackson and not Rob Bate.

...and yes, some readers picked up the mistake in Tail Feathers, *Babbler* 121 where the picture of the Thick-billed Weaver and *Dianella* plant were left off and the Bronze Mannikin was mis-captioned.

Garden plants for birds



Photos: Ian Riddell

Contributions for *The Babbler* 124 June 2015/ July 2015 may be sent to the editor anytime between now and 14<sup>th</sup> May 2015.