

THE BABBLER

Newsletter of



BirdLife Zimbabwe

The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

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SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

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 4th 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 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
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

Paynow online!

BirdLife Zimbabwe is now a verified merchant of Paynow (www.paynow.co.zw, a secure online payment platform) so that we are now able to receive donations and payments online. There is now a donate tab on the BLZ website home page: www.birdlifezimbabwe.org where donations can be made and we are currently setting up a tab called: 'Shop with us' where products (e.g. 2016 calendars) can be purchased. On the website membership page, over and above using the traditional bank details to pay subs, old and new members will be able to pay their subs clicking on the Paynow tab at the bottom of the page.

For more information email: juliapierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org

Branch Activities

Mashonaland Branch

BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ) Mashonaland Calendar of Events OCTOBER 2015

Saturday 3rd October 2015	Marlborough Vlei Walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 4th October 2015	Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Saturday 10th October 2015	Haka Park Opposite Pick & Pay Msasa/Mutare Road	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 11th October 2015	Lake Chivero Sanctuary Meet at Prince Edward School car park, Josiah Tongagara Avenue at 6.30 a.m. prompt.	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Thursday 15th October 2015	Presentation – Photographic Bird Safari By Roger MacDonald Meet at Avondale Sports Club, Brighton Road, Avondale.	17.30 – 18.00
Sunday 18th October 2015	Monavale Vlei Walk Meet on the BS Leon side of Fenella Drive, at the platform.	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Sunday 25th October 2015	Outing – Irvine’s Farm, Masvingo Road Meet at Prince Edward School car park at 6.30 a.m. Bring a chair and picnic brunch. Share transport.	Meet at 06.30 a.m.

Birdlife Zimbabwe (BLZ) Mashonaland Calendar of Events NOVEMBER 2015

Sunday 1st November 2015	Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Saturday 7th November 2015	Marlborough Vlei Walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Saturday 14th November 2015	Harare Botanic Gardens Meet at the car park of the Botanic Garden off Fifth Street	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 15th November 2015	Monavale Vlei Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Thursday 19th November 2015	Presentation – A Birding Trip to Weya/Chiendambuya By Innocent Magunje and Jimmy Muropa Meet at Avondale Sports Club, Brighton Road, Avondale.	17.30 – 18.00
Sat/Sunday 21/22nd November 2015	Birdlife Outing – Gold Dust Village, Mazwikadei Either overnight on Saturday 21 st November, or a day outing on Sunday 22 nd November. Further details on booking accommodation closer to the date.	
Sat/Sunday 28/29th November 2015	BirdLife – Birding Big Day Arrange teams for this challenge.	

For further information please contact Tony Alegria, tonyalegria47@gmail.com 0772 438697(h) 490375

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. A minimum donation of \$1 per person at the door please.

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 at the bottom of Princess Margaret Road, off Harare Drive and follow the road round to the left. Park on the short road midway along the bottom of Princess Margaret.

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 FUTURE ACTIVITIES

Saturday 17 October: 3:00 p.m.

Slide show and talk by Vernon Tarr. The pressure is off! This will not be a quiz as previously advertised, although Vernon says he will be inviting those present to have a go at answering some questions and making some identifications. The meeting will take place at Adele Edwards' home – 6 Corney Road, Morningside. Tea and coffee will be served before the meeting starts, and a light supper will be available at \$5 a plate for anyone wanting to stay on in the evening. Bring your own drinks.

Friday 27 November: 6:15 p.m.

Dr. Simon Tonge will give a talk on “**Bird conservation projects around the world – think global, act local**”. The meeting will take place at The Gazebo, Qalisa. After the meeting hamburgers will be on sale at \$2 each. Bring your own drinks. Simon is the Executive Director of South West Environmental Parks Ltd. (including Paignton Zoo) and the Whitley Wildlife Conservation Trust, and chairman of the board of trustees of Dambari Wildlife Trust. He is a well-respected and enthusiastic ornithologist who has gone birding in many parts of the world and has an enviable life list.

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 clive@chilogorge.com

RECENT REPORTS AND SIGHTINGS

National



Adam Mabvuto, Volunteer Anesu and University of Bindura attachment student, Sylvia discussing the merits of vermiculture.jpg

Composting, vermiculture and Bee-keeping at the BLZ Office

Part of the work we do at the BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ) office in the process of protecting birds, biodiversity and their habitats is safeguarding sustainable livelihoods. This is a major issue to consider in the process of Important Bird Area protection. At the BLZ office we are running a little project of our own to learn about organic composting, vermiculture and bee keeping (a BLZ Youth project). By knowing the processes ourselves we are in a better position to suggest new projects and give advice!

Many thanks to BLZ member, Shaun Torr and Adam Mabvuto (of Adam's organic garden Cell: 0772 252660) for assisting us learn about composting and vermiculture, and Renee Fischer of the Mashonaland Beekeepers Association for guiding us through the steps of beekeeping.

Improving human livelihoods in the Chimanimani Mountains Biodiversity Hotspot.

Article by: Togarasei Fakarayi

The Chimanimani Mountains Biodiversity Hotspot is one of the five Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) found in the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe. It forms part of the Eastern Afrotropical Biodiversity Hotspot region, one of the biological wonders of the world with global significant levels of diversity and endemism. BirdLife Zimbabwe engaged with stakeholders including Chikukwa

Communities in Chimanimani under a project 'Stakeholder Capacity Building for Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) Management Planning' from May 2013 to April 2015. The project raised awareness on the importance of KBAs, established a network of stakeholder group and Site Support Groups, identified conservation gaps to KBAs, as well as discussed possible strategies for improved biodiversity conservation in this KBA.

During the capacity building project (2013-2015) BLZ initiated a small project on improving livelihoods in Chikukwa Community as a follow-up to the capacity building project and to counter the challenges to the community that contribute to loss of biodiversity in the Chimanimani KBA. This project, which started in April 2015, aims at improving human livelihoods and promotes birds and biodiversity conservation. The project interlinks environmental components i.e. biophysical, social, cultural and economic in addressing issues of rural poverty, biodiversity conservation, and habitat destruction related to degradation. Unsustainable exploitation of natural resources by local communities is often associated with poverty. If the local communities have no alternative livelihood options and no direct benefits from natural resources in their areas, they put more pressure on biodiversity resulting in deterioration of human livelihoods in the short-medium and long terms.

The key alternative livelihoods supported by BLZ in Chikukwa community include bee-keeping, handicrafts in form of cloth cutting and designing, establishing demonstration orchards, and setting-up of nature trails. Communities were trained in bee keeping and bee apiaries were established in two villages. More than 40 women were trained in cloth cutting, designing and also equipped with skills to produce items such as embroidered aprons, curtains and tablecloths. The designs include birds, cultural and natural features. Local communities also received training in tour and bird guiding.

The project was well received by the local communities in Chikukwa. It has demonstrated a good link between improving livelihoods and biodiversity conservation in this KBA. Most villagers in Chikukwa have a greater interest in birds and biodiversity conservation. Communities were prepared for active participation in improved livelihoods, birds and biodiversity conservation, and eco-tourism.

Vulture Awareness at the Harare Agricultural Show

BirdLife Zimbabwe participated at the Harare Agricultural Show from the 27th to the 29th of August 2015 to raise awareness on vultures. Vultures are a priority issue for BirdLife this year especially as they are facing a myriad of threats including poisoning, food scarcity and habitat loss, just to mention a few.

BLZ was hosted at the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority Stand. There were two live vultures on display, a White-backed Vulture and a Lappet-faced Vulture. The two birds were borrowed from Kuimbashiri. As expected at the ZimParks stand, there was a continuous stream of visitors who wanted to see the various live animals on display. The vultures attracted a lot of attention as most people had not seen live vultures before or up-close.

It was an interesting three days as quite a number of conversations with most people mentioned that they have heard vulture heads are being used by both traditional healers and some prophets to enhance their clairvoyant powers. There is still a lot of education and awareness work that needs to

be done to dispel the myths around vultures otherwise these birds will continue to be persecuted or the muti trade.

Many thanks go to ZimParks for hosting us at their stand, Tafadzwa and Bright Chando, Merlyn Nkomo and Talent Jonasi for enduring the hot sun and talking to the visitors. Also special mention goes to Gary Stafford who let us use his vultures and Godfrey who came to check on the birds every day.



BLZ at National Parks stand at the Harare Agricultural Show

The Umfurudzi Trail Run...

The first edition of the Umfurudzi Trail Run took place on Saturday 19 September 2015. The theme of the event was: Zimbabwe's Vultures and creating awareness of the threats they face.

Grateful thanks to the sponsors: Unifreight and to the person who put it all together, Ben Burr. Two BirdLife teams ran the race comprising 4 BLZ Youth members, Talent Jonasi, Admire Charewa, Ronnie Chirimuta and Nyasha Dewu as well as Julia Pierini and Lynn Neves. BLZ Youth coordinator and education officer, Innocent Magunje ran the full 25km and came 3rd overall. Well done, Innocent!

Many thanks to BLZ members David Dalziel, Innes Louw, Anthony Pissas, Tony Wood, James Ball, BLZ Finance officer Sylvia Muzavazi and BLZ Special Species Conservation officer Fadzai Matsvimbo for all their hard work in manning the time-keeping points all day and to Carla Pierini for attending to the BLZ stand. The BLZ group camped at Hippo Pools and good birds seen and heard included: Livingstone's Flycatcher, Narina Trogon, African Broadbill, Broad-billed Roller, African Finfoot and a nesting Lizard Buzzard!



Unifreight and
runners at
Umfurudzi

BirdLife Zimbabwe Education Programme

During the school holidays, on 25 & 26 August 2015, BLZ organized and held a 2-day Miombo Woodland bird ID course for junior school children at Mukuvisi Woodlands. BLZ Education officer, Innocent Magunje was at the helm guiding 11 children with the assistance of Renee Fischer (Mashonaland Beekeepers Association), Meg Coates-Palgrave (Tree specialist) and Ian Riddell (Bird Guide). Many thanks to Mukuvisi Woodlands for facilitating the event.



Zimbabwe is a country that is endowed with rich animal, bird and plant diversity
Children! Join BirdLife Zimbabwe at Mukuvisi Woodlands and check out our

MIOMBO

WOODLAND

Spend two glorious, fun-filled days enjoying Nature in the heart of Harare learning about Miombo Woodlands and the special birds that make that habitat their home
Venue: Mukuvisi Woodlands, Hillside Rd (off Glenara)

Thursday 20 – Friday 21 August 2015

Tuesday 25 August
Learning about Miombo, birds and their behaviour
Game Quiz at the Viewing Platform
Want to make your own honey? Learning about bees and honey-making from Moses
Exploring the wonderful world of Miombo trees out in the field with Meg

Wednesday 26 August
Exploring Mukuvisi Woodlands with Ian and Inno looking for African Spotted Creepers, Miombo Tits, Whyte's Barbets and more!
Picnic in the Park
Nature Trail on pony

(Ages 8 – 12 yrs)

Total cost: USD35 per student
(includes entrance fee, teas, lunches, all activities)

But what is Miombo Woodland anyway?
It is the common term for Brachystegia, a genus of tree comprising Masas and Mhondos.
Despite the nutrient-poor soil and long dry season, the woodland is home to many species, including several miombo specialist endemic bird species.

Contact Inno today and book your place!
inno@blz.co.zw
0773-053126

Living in Harmony with Nature

BirdLife ZIMBABWE
Keeping Common Birds Common

BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ) promotes the survival of bird life and biodiversity in Zimbabwe and elsewhere for both its intrinsic value and the enjoyment of future generations. For more information about BLZ - www.birdlifezimbabwe.org or come and visit us at 30 Clyde Rd, Eastlea, Harare Tel: 481496

Waterbird count July 2015

The numbers given are subject to correction but may not be far wrong.

- Cranes and Harriers are cause for concern.
- Sandpiper migrants are very under reported in year 2015. Did they fly through Zimbabwe, were their numbers are way down in Europe, or is this an artefact of our coverage?
- Storks, ibises and spoonbill numbers are up and pleasing. Most must be migrants too. For example we have lots of Marabou Storks but few breeders.
- Pans and Dams are well reported. Rivers and vleis: not so many records

A full report for 2014/2015 will go into *Honeyguide* sometime in the future.

Please write to me if you have seen something exciting (waterbirds), any time of the year, during the last two years. For example a Spur-winged Lapwing!

The Long-toed Lapwing photo at Mongwe by Chris Bishop made it into the *African Bird Club* magazine and Facebook. If you look at it you will see why it was called the White-winged Plover. All participants are thanked for their input.

Table 1. Most common waterbirds in July 2015

No. birds		No. sites	No. birds		No. sites
1819	White-faced Duck	25	462	African Openbill	23
1525	Little Grebe	27	399	Black Crake	36
1497	Cattle Egret	38	396	Spur-winged Goose	16
1337	Red-billed Teal	28	275	Comb Duck	9
1236	African Jacana	51	265	Grey Heron	45
965	Egyptian Goose	60	239	African Wattled Lapwing	27
951	African Sacred Ibis	33	183	Black-winged Stilt	27
949	Red-knobbed Coot	9	144	African Fish-eagle	56
760	Common Moorhen	29	139	Grey-headed Gull	8
570	Blacksmith Lapwing	83			
551	Reed Cormorant	39			

Table 2. Distribution by sites*

No. sites		No. birds	No. sites		No. birds
83	Blacksmith Lapwing	570	29	Common Moorhen	760
60	Egyptian Goose	965	29	Great Egret	107
56	African Fish-eagle	144	28	Red-billed Teal	1337
51	African Jacana	1236	28	Three-banded Plover	110
45	Grey Heron	265	27	Black-winged Stilt	183
40	Hamerkop	93	27	African Wattled Lapwing	239
39	Reed Cormorant	551	27	Little Grebe	1525
38	Cattle Egret	1497	25	White-faced Duck	1819
36	Black Crake	399	23	Squacco Heron	108
33	African Sacred Ibis	951			

*Sites by card submissions; there may be count/area overlap with different observers on other dates

Least number of birds seen July 2015

Little Bittern Nil (but they are here)
 Rufous-bellied Heron 1 at 1 site
 Black-crowned Night-heron 1 at 1 site
 Grey Crowned Crane 1 at 1 site. CAUSE FOR CONCERN
 African Snipe 1 at 1 site
 Cape Wagtail 1 at 1 site
 Pied Avocet 8 at 1 site
 Maccoa Duck 18 at 1 site
 Fulvous Duck 34 at 1 site
 Great White Pelican 7 at 1 site
 African Finfoot 1 at 1 site
 Long-toed Lapwing 11 at 1 site
David Rockingham-Gill rgill@zol.co.zw

Whiskered Tern 21 at 1 site
 White-backed Night-heron 4 at 2 sites
 Black Stork 2 at 2 sites
 African Crake 10 at 2 sites
 Pel's Fishing-owl 1 at 1 site
 Osprey 2 at 2 sites
 Cape Longclaw 1 at 1 site
 Cape Shoveler 13 at 2 sites
 Cape Teal 23 at 2 sites
 Greater Painted-snipe 10 at 2 sites
 White-winged Tern 23 at 2 sites
 Woolly-necked Stork 9 at 3 sites

Mashonaland

BirdLife outing to Ballantyne Park Wetland Area on Saturday 8 August 2015

Braving the chilly weather that we have been experiencing lately, fourteen of us met at the car park of Ballantyne Park Dam on Saturday morning to see what birds we could find around Ballantyne, Blair & Staley Dams. I must say that these walks would not have been possible were it not for a

dedicated team of residents who have worked very hard with Council to tidy up the area, clearing paths, controlling the litter and cutting grass. The parks have had a real face-lift thanks to them!

Contrary to what we expected at this time of year, there were a surprising number of birds seen or heard and we had hardly moved away from the car park before we saw a variety of birds in a Coffee Shade Tree. These included Violet-backed Starlings & Greater Blue-eared Starlings, Yellow-fronted Canary, Lesser Honeyguide and Southern Black Flycatcher. We then meandered around Ballantyne Dam and along the wall and although the dam is virtually dry there were still a couple of Black-headed Herons and Hamerkop, which appeared to be resident. Other good birds



along the way were Cardinal Woodpecker, Black-headed Oriole, Common Fiscal, Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Amethyst Sunbird and Brubru, as well as a Grey Heron and Reed Cormorant both flying overhead.

Our walk took us below the dam wall and across Addington Lane to Blair Dam. Here we were able to walk right around the side of the dam and along the wall since the vegetation had been cleared and, with there still being a small amount of water, were lucky to see a couple of Black Crakes, a Common Moorhen plus two juveniles, a Little Grebe and a Squacco Heron. Southern Red Bishops and a Copper Sunbird too were around but not yet in breeding plumage and weavers seen included Thick-billed, Village and Southern Masked-weaver while a Lesser Swamp-warbler was heard. We continued up to Staley Dam, which is bone dry, but we did see some African Sacred Ibises and a Cattle Egret flying over and saw Tawny-flanked Prinia and Speckled Mousebird amongst others. On our way back past Blair Dam, a Purple Heron, always a good bird to see, took off from amongst the reeds and a group of magnificent Scarlet-chested Sunbirds was moving around in a fever tree.

Back at the gazebo by Ballantyne Dam, we checked species seen and the final tally was 58, which was not a bad catch for the day!

Debbie Wiggins

Monavale Vlei Report July and August 2015

Blossoming flowers are adding a unique charm to Monavale Vlei. A walk around will reveal Tropical Pink Gladiolus, Dwarf Red Combretum, Bells of St Mary's and many more. Capped Wheatears and African Pipits are currently breeding, so too are African Wattled Lapwings and Crowned Lapwings. Marsh Owls can easily be flushed and Cuckoo Finches are being seen in small groups. Other bird species of note include African Black Duck, Purple Heron, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler, Levillant's Cisticola, White-winged Widowbirds (males), Black Crake, Little Bee-eaters, African Stonechat and Orange-breasted Waxbill amongst others.

Recently a large Bush pig was spotted trotting across the vlei. We look forward to seeing the migrants very soon. The total number of birds seen in August was 104 species. Check the Conservation Society of Monavale Facebook Page for more information on Monavale Vlei and COSMO's activities.

Jimmy Muropa Monavale Vlei Scout. 0772 772 771

Matabeleland

Outing & Waterfowl Count at Aisleby, 19 July 2015

On this sunny, warm, slightly breezy winter's morning six members met at the entrance gate and then proceeded to the top end of the dam. The water was dotted with birds, and the huge

number of 'dots' that needed identifying and counting was daunting at first glance. All members present got busy with binoculars and telescope and the census began.

Black-winged Stilts and Pied Avocets danced along the water's edge, whilst Red-knobbed Coots and Red-billed Teal bobbed around in the waves. Moving along the edge of the dam, stopping to count the groups, we had reached the back bay of the dam when a seventh Branch member joined us – whose assistance was most welcome. Amongst the various flotillas, two adult Cape Teal were seen shepherding their playful flock of seven chicks out into more open water.

Once we had counted as best we could all the birds in this back area, we returned to our vehicles and began checking the narrower river section. Common Moorhen and Black Crake popped in and out of the reeds. In the trees opposite two Martial Eagles sat in all their glory. Three African Fish-eagles flew around adding to our growing list.

After checking the river section, we made our way back to the entrance gate and proceeded to the Club House. From the Clubhouse the many birds swimming around, as well as those standing along the opposite bank, were counted

Talk on Bird Migration, 22 August 2015

On Saturday 22 August, a good turnout of interested birders gathered at Adele Edwards' home in Morningside, starting off sitting outside over a cup of tea and some delicious eats before moving inside to watch slides and listen to Adele's talk on Bird Migration.

Although Adele started off by apologizing for not being a "boff" on the subject and largely gave the Internet all the credit, her talk was absolutely fascinating and obviously a lot of work had gone into her presentation. Maps were shown of all the main migration flyways – in the Americas, north and south, as well as the ones that those present were probably most interested in, the Europe/Asia/Africa flyways. Several of the terms used in bird books such as Palaearctic and Intra-Africa migrants were explained and examples of those migrants given as well as a list of categories in which certain birds are classed – such as critically endangered, vulnerable, near threatened, least concern, not forgetting extinct and extinct in the wild. It is often thought that only large birds are capable of long migration but it was fascinating to note that one of the tiniest and beautiful little birds, the Willow Warbler, measuring 11-12 cm and weighing in at between 7 and 15g, does one of the longest migrations for a bird of its

and identified. Southern Pochard, Maccoa Ducks, Cape Shoveler and Hottentot Teal were amongst a crowd of Little Grebes.

Time seemed to be passing at such a rapid pace, and after being joined by one of our very young members, Zoe Gana (who at the age of two, soon settled into our company and politely insisted on having her own pair of binoculars so she could 'help' us), we moved along to our next destination of Aisleby. Arriving at the pond, we were once again confronted by what seemed to be a large number of birds. A lone Grey Crowned Crane strutted along the water's edge, and then lay down in the company of the Comb Ducks and Egyptian Geese who were possibly curled up in an attempt to shelter from the cool breeze that had arisen. Cattle Egrets and African Sacred Ibis flew into the area and settled on the grasslands close to the pond.

Our last stop was at the bridge over the river. To complete our day, and add a great sighting to our already impressive list, two African Black Duck popped up out of the reeds, showed themselves to us, and then disappeared back into hiding. A perfect end to a spectacular day on which a total of 2,575 birds of 33 species were counted.

Cecilia Hubbard

size, not forgetting that it would do it twice a year – there AND back!

Adele also presented interesting data regarding the reasons for migration in the first place, the two most obvious reasons being availability of nesting sites and food resources. Interesting facts continued on other aspects of bird migration – birding stopovers, where birds put down during migration to rest, recuperate and eat madly to restore their body resources before flying on; the trials, predation and hazards that might affect the migration, including hunting especially over the Mediterranean; how the birds actually manage the migration and how they navigate, pointing out the fact that some birds might follow one route going south and then another returning north depending on various factors such as weather, wind conditions, day length (noting that some birds will fly at night), food resources along the way, etc.

It was an extremely interesting presentation and discussion afterwards was lively and stimulating. This subject is well worth looking up on the Internet and learning more about. Global warming might be effecting migrations too and an appeal has been made to those who participate in the SABAP2 Atlassing Programme to do monthly pentad reports so that migrant

arrivals and departures can be more closely monitored.

After the meeting several people stayed on to enjoy a balmy evening with further discussion

over a few drinks and dinner. Thanks go to Adele for not only hosting the event, but also giving us all something to think about.

Jenny Brebner

Walk at Garden Park, Bulawayo, 13 September 2015

For the second consecutive week, after five hot, sunny working days we awoke on Saturday to cold, grey skies, strong winds and a hint of "guti" – not promising birding weather! Luckily, for a change, we were scheduled for an afternoon walk, rather than an early morning start; by late morning the skies had cleared, and by the time we met it was bright, sunny and warm.

Several of the residents of Garden Park retirement village are keen birders and have bird baths and feeders in their gardens and the area is known to be 'birdie' so we were interested to see what kind of list we could come up with. Due to the good turnout we decided to split into two groups to cover the maximum area, so we set off in opposite directions, meeting back at the Guest House two hours later. Along the way we stopped to chat with several of the residents (including long-time member Eileen Milton) who were keen to hear how we were getting on and to tell us about the birds that visit their own gardens.

Our final tally was 45 species. The list included many of the common garden birds we expected / hoped to see and hear such as Dark-capped Bulbul, Laughing Dove, Crested Barbet and Black-collared Barbet, Tropical Boubou, Grey Go-away-bird, African Hoopoe and Green Wood-hoopoe, Bronze Mannikin, Red-faced Mousebird, Black-headed Oriole, White-browed Robin-chat, Southern Grey-headed Sparrow and House Sparrow, Cape Glossy Starling, African Palm-swift, Kurrichane Thrush, Blue Waxbill, Southern Masked-weaver, and Marico, Miombo Double-collared, Scarlet-chested and White-bellied Sunbird.

As we strolled along there was some discussion about what we each regarded as

common for our gardens. For example at Garden Park Cut-throat Finch were seen throughout the complex, with a flock of +30 being seen in one bush. Scaly-feathered Finches were also plentiful, and yet I very seldom see either of these in my garden at Morningside. In contrast we never saw a Red-eyed Dove at Garden Park, but they are in my garden all the time.

Also seen or heard were Black-throated Canary and Brimstone Canary, Rock Dove, Tawny-flanked Prinia, White-throated Robin-chat, Lilac-breasted Roller, Magpie Shrike, Wire-tailed Swallow, Black-crowned and Brown-crowned Tchagra, Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler, African Yellow White-eye, and Cardinal and Golden-tailed Woodpecker. Non-breeding Long-tailed Paradise-whydah caused some confusion. The only raptor sighting was a Black-shouldered Kite seen far off in the distance. Shortly after admiring two metal-sculpture cranes set out in the gardens we realised the Black-headed Heron standing motionless about 5m away was not another sculpture but the real thing. A Black-chested Prinia delayed proceedings for several minutes while we struggled to confirm identification.

A less welcome sight was three Common Mynas, which flew over just as the last members were packing their cars. Several nests were seen; although we did not succeed in identifying all the owners, the information we could gather was carefully noted by Kudzanai Dhliwayo from the museum's ornithology department who is busy updating their nest record card collection and who was with us on the walk.

Adele Edwards

Mashonaland South

Kadoma 9th September 2015 8 a.m. Black-headed Heron

These birds have been seen flying and croaking about Kadoma and surrounds in large numbers since the beginning of the year.

A large heronry has been established in a tall spreading gum tree, with nests as high up as 15 to 20 metres. Fortunately this tree stands on vacant municipal land, in a secluded corner area, near open ground and grassland. The heronry can be seen on approach to Kadoma before the traffic lights and near the police station.

On this hot and dry morning I walked to the heronry where there was much noise and activity. I counted as best as possible the following:

15 nests

4 birds sitting

1 new nest being constructed by a pair
6 to 8 young birds quietly crouched down.

A gentle clucking and contented call could be heard from the tree all the time. There are other gum trees in that area and some new nests are being constructed on other trees. The usual messy nests of dry sticks, grass and vegetation and the tree awash with white markings from the bird excrement. Hopefully the forthcoming rains will wash the vegetation clean.

In another slender tall gum tree, a pair of Pied Crows has built a nest, which is even higher than that of the herons. A bit of competition as all the birds fly in/out of their destination all day long. Perhaps there is safety from predators should the need arise.

Spotted Eagle-owl

An adult and juvenile were seen by a friend in her garden so breeding does take place somewhere in the urban areas.

Margaret Parrock

Tail Feathers

Abandoned Black Stork nest



The adit* (of the disused AMMS mine pit at Madziwa) that Black Storks have been utilizing for years unfortunately tells a story of an abandoned nest with some 4 eggs. In August 2015 I did see a couple of Black Storks flying over the campsite at Hippo Pools Wilderness.

Innes Louw

Abandoned stork nest

*Adit is a small mine hole

Snowy Egret (right) with Little Egret at the same site/river for comparison

The Snowy Egret made its 2nd vagrant appearance in Cape Town in June 2015 (the previous was in February 2002 at Lakeside, close to Muizenberg). I was in C.T. at the time and fortunately my hostess (being a birder) took me to the site. Black River is horribly polluted, just off the N5 approaching the N1. Other birds on the river were Yellow-billed Ducks, Greater Flamingos, Red-knobbed Coots and Common Moorhens.

While there, I met a couple from Gauteng who had driven non-stop overnight to Avis dam near Windhoek earlier in the year to successfully tick the Red-throated Pipit. They have also visited Seldomseen in the Vumba a few times as 'our' Swynnerton's Robin was initially elusive.

Snowy Egrets are somewhat widespread in South America and moved up into southern North America – currently the population there has expanded after being placed under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act for protection as its feather were consumed to adorn ladies hats (Wikipedia info).

This bird was way off its migratory route!!

Innes Louw



Western Banded Snake-eagle



During the August long weekend Riana and I were at Hippo Pools Wilderness when we came across the Western Banded Snake-eagle (a pair), first time seen in *this locality* by myself over past +17 years of regular visits.

Other birds of interest were Black Storks, Orange-winged Pytilia, White-backed Night-heron, Freckled Nightjar, and Red-backed Mannikins and plenty of Livingstone's Flycatchers.

Innes Louw

Western Banded Snake-eagle; the distinguishing tail bands are not showing in this picture

Shoebill Protection by Carl Huchzermeyer

Bangweulu Wetlands is managed by African Parks in partnership with the Zambian government and local communities. Bangweulu Wetlands is the entity responsible for conservation management in the area, including the Shoebill Nest Protection Programme.

Following a spate of theft of chicks for the illegal bird trade prior to and during 2011, we encouraged fishermen using areas near nests to report nests to us. The nests are visited by one of our staff, who checks on the chicks. A fisherman from near the nest is then employed to keep an eye on the nest. His role is to take ownership of the nest, report any suspicious activities, prevent burning of vegetation near the nest, protect the camera traps deployed on the nest from theft, show the nest to tourists and researchers (if accessible) and generally be an ambassador for Shoebills in his community. He receives a monthly payment until the chick has successfully fledged.

At the moment we try to protect ten nests per year. Last year we protected 8 nests from which 11 chicks fledged (two pairs managed to raise both chicks successfully). Shortly before fledging most of the chicks are ringed by myself or Elijah Mofya, the Community Development Facilitator for our swamp habitat. The fishermen will have been fishing in the nesting areas anyway, and so the payment is an incentive for them to value the shoebill and prevent access to poachers.

The Shoebill Nest Protection Programme has been running since 2011. From 2011-2013 Shoebill research was conducted by Dr. Ralf Mullers of the Percy-Fitzpatrick Institute of Ornithology at the University of Cape Town. A number of publications from this study yield first-ever insight into their foraging, movement and breeding behaviour. A

number of birds were fitted with satellite transmitters, which helped us understand the areas most used by the birds. It appears they do not leave the Bangweulu basin to other populations in DRC and Tanzania and beyond. The Shoebill research also found that during the first 35 days of a chick's life, the parents are continuously in attendance. Therefore tourists only visit nests with chicks over this age. Nest visits are also only permitted after 9 a.m. as there is a peak in foraging and feeding by the parents early in the morning. The guides are also fully briefed on the appropriate distance at which a nest may be approached (no closer than 5m and no longer than 15 minutes).

Protecting a nest costs approximately \$500 for the 4 months it takes the chicks to fledge. This excludes the logistical costs of nest inspections, both on the ground and from the air. This is funded by visitors' conservation levies and tourism fees for nest visits.

In addition to protecting wild chicks, occasionally we have to rehabilitate or raise confiscated birds. Small chicks are raised according to international best practice for raising endangered bird species, with minimized contact with humans; feeding only with a costume, frequent health-checks, etc. These techniques prevent the chicks becoming imprinted on humans, and so their integration back into the wild is very successful. However, sometimes chicks are stolen at a young age and raised in captivity, which means we receive them in a permanently imprinted state. The Shoebill that is currently at Chikuni is one of these heavily imprinted birds. So far we have taken care of four chicks, two non-imprinted birds that integrated 100% successfully back into the wild, and two imprinted birds.

Second Silent Spring? Bird Declines Linked to Popular Pesticides

By **Jason Bittel**, for National Geographic PUBLISHED 09 JULY, 2014

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/07/140709-birds-insects-pesticides-insecticides-neonicotinoids-silent-spring/#.VcwSAid8b6l.facebook>

Pesticides don't just kill pests. New research out of the Netherlands provides compelling evidence linking a widely used class of insecticides to population declines across 14 species of birds. Those insecticides, called neonicotinoids, have been in the news lately due to the way they hurt bees and other pollinators. (Related: "[The Plight of the Honeybee.](#)")

This new paper, [published online](#) in *Nature*, gets at another angle of the story—the way these chemicals can indirectly affect other creatures in the ecosystem.

Scientists from Radboud University in Nijmegen and the Dutch Centre for Field Ornithology and Birdlife Netherlands (SOVON) compared long-term data sets for both farmland bird populations and chemical concentrations in surface water. They found that in areas where water contained high concentrations of imidacloprid—a common neonicotinoid pesticide—bird populations tended to decline by an average of 3.5 percent annually.

"I think we are the first to show that this insecticide may have wide-scale, significant effects on our environment," said Hans de Kroon, an expert on population dynamics at Radboud University and one of the authors of the paper.

Pesticides and birds: If this story sounds familiar, it's probably because Rachel Carson wrote about it back in 1962. Carson's seminal *Silent Spring* was the first popular attempt to warn the world that pesticides were contributing to the "sudden silencing of the song of birds."

"I think there is a parallel, of course," said Ruud Foppen, an ornithologist at SOVON and co-author of the *Nature* paper. Foppen says that while Carson battled against a totally different kind of chemicals—organophosphates like

DDT—the effects he's seeing in the field are very much the same. Plainly stated, neonicotinoids are harming biodiversity.

"In this way, we can compare it to what happened decades ago," he said. "And if you look at it from that side, we didn't learn our lessons."

In the past 20 years, neonicotinoids (pronounced nee-oh-NIK-uh-tin-oyds) have become the fastest growing class of pesticides. They're extremely popular among farmers because they're effective at killing pests and easy to apply. Instead of loading gallons and gallons of insecticide into a crop duster and spraying it over hundreds of acres, farmers can buy seeds that come preloaded with neonicotinoid coatings. Scientists refer to neonicotinoids as "systemic" pesticides because they affect the whole plant rather than a single part. As the pretreated seed grows, it incorporates the insecticide into every bud and branch, effectively turning the plant itself into a pest-killing machine.

This lock, stock, and barrel approach to crop protection means that no matter where a locust or rootworm likes to nibble—the root, the stem, the flower—the invader winds up with a bellyful of neurotoxins.

"The plants become poison not only for the insects that farmers are targeting, but also for beneficial insects like bees," said Jennifer Sass, a senior scientist with the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) who's been building a case against the widespread use of neonicotinoids. The pesticide's top-to-bottom coverage means the plants' flowers, pollen, and nectar are all poisonous too. Worse still, Sass says, neonicotinoids can persist in the soil for years. This gives other growing things a chance to come into contact with and absorb the chemicals. "So they actually end up in plants that grow on the sides of fields and that were never meant to be targeted," she said.

The new *Nature* paper shows strong evidence that neonicotinoids are dangerous even if not ingested.

The study looked at population statistics for over a dozen species of birds common to farmlands in the Netherlands. Most of these species are dependent on insects for all or part of their diet, though some also munch on seeds and grains. This means that there are two ways neonicotinoids could be harming the Netherlands' birds.

The first is ingestion. Studies have shown that while neonicotinoids are commonly considered to be safer for mammals and birds than for insects, they in high enough doses. And the best way to get a concentrated dose of neonicotinoids is to eat seeds coated with them. A 1992 study by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency found that sparrows have difficulty flying after consuming a tiny

Second Silent Spring?

How Neonicotinoids Work

Bye Bye Birdie

amount of imidacloprid, and become immobile at higher doses.

The second way neonicotinoids can affect birds is by eliminating their food sources. Since these pesticides kill target and non-target species alike, there are fewer flies, grasshoppers, stinkbugs, and caterpillars for the birds to feast on.

Causation vs. Correlation

While the new paper shows a *correlation* between high concentrations of neonicotinoids and declining bird populations, it doesn't claim the pesticides are a direct *cause* of the decrease. To make sure the correlation wasn't some sort of coincidence, the team analyzed a number of alternative explanations.

Caspar A. Hallmann is an ornithologist and population ecologist at SOVON and Radboud University. As the lead author of the *Nature* paper, he explained that there are numerous causes for population declines in birds, from changes in the kinds of crops planted in any given year and the amount of fertilizer used to the urbanization of former farmland. But when the team looked at the data, none of these explanations held up. Hallmann said that, as with any correlative study, caution is a watchword. "But still," he says, "we think we have a line of evidence that is building up."

[Bayer CropScience](#), the primary manufacturer of imidacloprid, defends the use of neonicotinoids. In a statement responding to Hallmann and his colleagues, the company writes: "Neonicotinoids have gone through an extensive risk assessment which has shown that they are safe to the environment when used responsibly according to the label instructions."

Pesticide Maker Disagrees

The statement concludes by saying that the *Nature* paper fails to establish a causal link, and therefore "provides no substantiated evidence of the alleged indirect effects of imidacloprid on insectivorous birds."

"Indeed, we showed a negative correlation, which is already very alarming," the Dutch scientists said in response to Bayer CropScience's critique. "Showing causal links at the ecosystem scale would require landscape-scale experiments," which would be "difficult and probably very unethical."

A Third View

The Dutch scientists say neonicotinoids are negatively affecting bird populations. Bayer CropScience says neonicotinoids are safe when used correctly. Whom do we trust?

Maybe an independent group that just completed a review of over 800 scientific studies on the effects of neonicotinoids on wildlife. The Task Force on Systemic Pesticides, composed of 29 multidisciplinary scientists, recently released its landmark report titled [Worldwide Integrated Assessment of the Impact of Systemic Pesticides on Biodiversity and Ecosystems](#).

Overall, the scientists concluded that even when neonicotinoids were used according to the guidelines on their labels and applied as intended, the chemicals' levels in the environment still frequently exceeded the lowest levels known to be dangerous for a wide range of species—and were "thus likely to have a wide range of negative biological and ecological impacts."

David Gibbons, a member of the task force and head of the RSPB Centre for Conservation Science, the largest nature-conservation charity in Europe, explained that many European countries have already restricted three types of neonicotinoids—including imidacloprid—because of the mounting evidence that they harm bees.

Not Just Bees Anymore

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/07/140709-birds-insects-pesticides-insecticides-neonicotinoids-silent-spring/#.VcwSAid8b6I.facebook>

(As of yet, similar protections do not exist in the U.S. Though not for lack of trying—the NRDC filed a legal petition just this week asking the EPA to withdraw its approval of neonicotinoid pesticides.)

"Over the last decade, there have been a number of mass die-offs of bees in several European countries," said Gibbons. The process of planting corn can actually dislodge the neonicotinoid coating, which tractors then kick up into the air with the dust from fields. "These clouds of dust contain very high concentrations of neonicotinoids, and are instantly lethal to bees."

But part of the goal of the *Worldwide Integrated Assessment* report is to show that bees aren't the only animals affected. The task force presents evidence that earthworms, aquatic invertebrates, lizards, fish, and many other animals are suffering ill effects as a result (either direct or indirect) of systemic pesticides.

Gibbons says it's hard to say whether we've entered a second "silent spring." "However," he adds, "[neonicotinoid] use is now so widespread—nearly 40 percent of the global insecticide market—that there are valid reasons to be worried."

Rhino Safari Camp, Matusadona, late July/early August 2015

We just returned from Rhino safari camp where the animals were few but the birds compensated.

The photos show :

1. The female Double-banded Sandgrouse sitting on her clutch of three eggs. The sitting period is 24/25 days!!

2. But she is a lucky girl as he shares the responsibility as shown in the next picture. His double bands are visible.

They have the ability to immerse their lower breast in water and carry it back to the nest for chick hydration as well as egg cooling.

We passed in the morning about 8.30 and she was sitting. On the way back 2½ hours later there they were.

3. Hatchlings, the third one still wet from hatching. The chick top left appears to be the last hatchling. Not as animated just yet. Whilst sitting on the eggs the birds did not fly off. But after the hatching they left as we approached.

The nest was on the ground in rocks lining a part of the dirt track we were on. Steven, the guide, said they would have all left in a short while for deeper cover.

George Fleet



Double-banded Sandgrouse female (top left)



So this is he, Double-banded Sandgrouse male (top right)

Double-banded Sandgrouse hatchlings (right)



Contributions for *The Babbler* 127 December 2015/ January 2016 may be sent to the editor anytime between now and 14th November 2015.