

THE BABBLER

Newsletter of



BirdLife Zimbabwe

The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

ISSUE # 127– December 2015/January 2016

Committee	MASHONALAND (Code 04)	MATABELELAND (Code 09)
Chairperson	Tony Alegria 0772-438697 tonyalegria47@gmail.com 490375 (h)	Cecilia Hubbard 0772-433733 ceilhubbard@yoafrica.com 285666
Vice Chairperson	Dave Rockingham-Gill 882412 (h) rgill@zol.co.zw 0774-605314	John Brebner 0782-781108 brebnerj@acolchem.co.zw 242634
Secretary	Linda Fussell 0772-364423 fussell@zol.co.zw 333896 (h)	Marina Jackson 0778-021818 mjackson@gatorzw.com 230264
Treasurer	Debbie Wiggins 0772-252651 wigpd2015@gmail.com 882851 (h)	Christina Gillott 0712-862477 christina.gillott@gmail.com
Members	James Ball 0772-310351 jameszwe@gmail.com 481351 (h) Andy Fussell 333896 (h) fussell@zol.co.zw	Jean Cranston 0733-005574 cranston@gatorzw.com 242921
National Membership Secretary	Carolyn Dennison 0772-210240 747567 (h) CarolynDennison@birdlifezimbabwe.org	
Babbler Editor	Fiona Greiffenberg 0772-224248 fiona6@zol.co.zw 336663 (h)	

National Office

Office hours: Monday to Friday 8.30 – 4.30 **until further notice**
35 Clyde Road, Eastlea, P O Box RVL100, Runiville, Harare, Zimbabwe

Telephone: 04 – 481496

E-mail: birds@zol.co.zw

Website: www.birdlifezimbabwe.org also www.facebook.com/BirdLifeZimbabwe

Chief Executive Officer
Finance/Administration Manager
Conservation Officer: Special Species
Environmental Education
In charge of IBA/KBA's
Messenger:

Julia Pierini
Sylvia Muzavazi
Fadzai Matsvimbo
Innocent Magunje
Togarasei Fakarayi
Vengai Dengu

Useful Contacts:

Rarities Committee: Ian Riddell gemsaf@mango.zw 0772-117054
Ringing Programme: Julia Pierini JuliaPierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org 0772-894562
BLZ Library: piumosso@zol.co.zw 304298; 481496
Mashonaland South: Margaret Parrock 068-22005 or her daughter Coralee 0772-739370
Eastern Districts: Peter Gwidibira 0773-524844 pgwidibira@gmail.com
Mashonaland East Natural History Society: Chairman Peter Hadingham 04-497035
Secretary: Colin de Beer 0279-23931 icdb1936@gmail.com
Honeyguide production: Julia Duprée daliadupree@gmail.com 09-246269

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

BirdLife Zimbabwe's membership year is from April to March, but you can join any time.

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

* If you would like recognition on our public forums, choose the \$200 Corporate Plan. To learn more about corporate sponsorship and BLZ projects, write to JuliaPierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org

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.

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 by clicking on the Paynow tab at the bottom of the page. **This is especially important for our members outside Zimbabwe.** For more information email: juliapierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org

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

BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ) Mashonaland Calendar of Events: DECEMBER 2015

Saturday 5 th December 2015	Marlborough Vlei Walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 6 th December 2015	Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Saturday 12 th December 2015	Greystone Park Nature Reserve	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Thursday 17 th December 2015	Bring and Share Christmas Social and Raffle Photo Presentation of Outings during the Year. Bring a plate of snacks	17.30 – 18.00
Sunday 20 th December 2015	Monavale Vlei Walk Meet on the BS Leon side of Fenella Drive, at the platform	Meet at 06.30 a.m.

BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ) Mashonaland Calendar of Events: JANUARY 2016

Saturday 2 nd January 2016	Marlborough Vlei Walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 3 rd January 2016	Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Saturday 9 th January 2016	Rainham Dam Waterbird Count Meet at Prince Edward School car park off J. Tongogara Avenue, at 7 a.m. sharp	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 10 th January 2016	Lake Chivero Waterbird Count Meet at Prince Edward School car park off J. Tongogara Avenue, at 6.30 am sharp.	Meet at 6.30 a.m.
Sunday 17 th January 2016	Monavale Vlei Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Thursday 21 st January 2016	Mashonaland Branch Annual General Meeting BLZ Mashonaland 2015/2016 AGM followed by Presentation on Special Waterbird Species	17.30 – 18.00
Sunday 24 th January 2016	Outing to Duglyn Farm Shamva Meet at CABS car park Northridge Park, Borrowdale, promptly at 6.30 a.m. to travel to Shamva. Bring table and chairs and a picnic brunch.	Meet at 06.30 a.m.

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 Tongogara Ave.

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

Matabeleland Branch FUTURE ACTIVITIES

- Sunday 6 December:** Christmas lunch at “Bean There” (at BAC Bowling Club).
- Saturday 16 January:** Cecilia Hubbard will be hosting an evening bistro at her home on 16th January 2016. Keep this date free!
- 6/7 February:** Advance notice: there will be a waterfowl count at Longueville Farm in Gwanda on the weekend of 6th and 7th February 2016. Accommodation is free, but members must take their own food.

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

August Holiday Fun days
25-26 August 2015

Mukuvisi Woodlands

Maintaining and building relationships with schools remains a crucial objective of BirdLife Zimbabwe to reach more people. BLZ organised two days of fun and learning about Miombo ecosystems during the August schools holiday. The initial plan was to invite two sets of students from both Primary and Secondary Schools. Eleven pupils enrolled, only for the Primary

level category, coming from private schools such as Ruzawe, Sharon, St Michaels and Blakiston.

BirdLife Zimbabwe provided for the participation of two Conservation Society of Monavale (COSMO) Kids. The first day was packed with talks from BirdLife Zimbabwe on Birds and the Environment, Renee Fischer (Mashonaland Bee-keepers Association Chairman) spoke on Bees while Meg Coates-Palgrave spoke on tree identification. The second day was spent in the beautiful Miombo woodlands where Msasas were in new leaf. We failed to find a Spotted Creeper but Ian Riddell found White-breasted Cuckooshrikes and Whyte's Barbet amongst other more common Miombo bird species. A large Python in full view captivated the kids.

A small picnic, swimming on the Mukuvisi River and horse riding sealed the two days of fun. Participants paid for entry fees into Mukuvisi and for teas and lunch. BirdLife Zimbabwe took care of the external speakers. There were requests for more days and food next holiday.

Innocent Magunje (BirdLife Zimbabwe Education)



Innocent and some of the kids at Mukuvisi Woodland



Thank you

for recently sharing your views about vultures with BirdLife International. An astounding 1,100 people completed our short survey, which was designed to shape a new international campaign to conserve vultures across Africa.

News from *BirdLife International*



- * The most attractive campaign message is 'Vultures are nature's clean-up crew'.
- * Key positive words that stand out are: ecosystem, their role, size, flight, majesty, beauty.
- * Key negative words that stand out are: ugly, bad reputation, associated with death and carcasses.
- * 96% of respondents like vultures.
- * The top countries were UK and South Africa, with good numbers of participants from USA, Zimbabwe, Australia and Spain.

Our '[Saving Nature's Clean-Up Crew](#)' campaign is now live. **Your feedback has been used to design all elements of the campaign**, including a new video.

Vultures in Africa really need all our help ... No fewer than seven African vulture species are now facing extinction. In West Africa vulture numbers have decreased by 98% in just 30 years. In the Masai Mara they halved in the same period.

If you care about vultures and would like to help, [please visit the campaign page](#) and show your support. You have four options:

- [Fund](#) – Donate out of goodwill, or select one of six amazing rewards.
- [Volunteer](#) – Become a blogger for vultures, and set your creative juices to work and save some of the most charismatic and important of all birds.
- [Promote](#) – Help to spread the word through your social networks, email contacts and more. Make vultures go viral and change the world.
- [Like](#) - Help the campaign find a bigger audience by liking the campaign page.

The national waterbird count happens again in January 2016...

...and once again I would like to thank all who have taken part in the past and encourage fresh support from new participants. So head out to your favourite sites as close to the 15th January as possible and count those waterbirds. If you haven't done this before and have a wetland or dam near you, we would love to hear from you.

All our data goes to Wetlands International in The Netherlands. They prefer a mid-January counting date but will accept information a month either side of this, even if some of this is excluded from certain analyses, so if you are at a good spot over the Christmas holidays do count those birds!

About 128 sites were counted in July 2015 with some 1500 records – this amounted to 18 893 birds! David Rockingham-Gill is doing a write-up for *Honeyguide* so we can expect fuller details to appear soon.

Carolyn is corresponding with our regular counters about the January count and will also send out reminders in December. It is with great regret that I announce she will be 'retiring' at the year-end so I take this opportunity to thank her profusely for all she has done – how will we manage without her!

Visit our Website www.birdlifezimbabwe.org where you can download a census form on the **News** page or contact me at the address below.

I.C. Riddell. Email: gemsaf@mango.zw

Mashonaland

BLZ Mashonaland Branch Monavale Vlei Walk, Sun 18th Oct 2015.

10 members of BLZ and George, an American employee of The World Bank visiting various towns in Zimbabwe to assess sustainable water projects, congregated at the rather sorry-looking viewing platform on this breezy morning. The usual long swaying grass has now almost all been consumed in various fires but the wildlife is still present. Who would have expected to see 53 species of bird, including 4 Marsh Owls and a Common Duiker on such a morning? Somebody must be doing something right in Zimbabwe. COSMO.

On the short grass we found African Pipit, Capped Wheatear, Crowned and African Wattled

Lapwing and Swainson's Spurfowl. Overhead flew Grey-rumped, Barn and Pearl-breasted Swallows and African Palm-swift and Little Swift. The reeds along the streams brought us Southern Red Bishop, Red-collared, Yellow-mantled and White-winged Widowbirds as well as Lesser Swamp-warbler, Little Rush-warbler and Thick-billed Weaver. We must pay tribute to Jimmy Muropa for identifying the *Euplectes* species that are yet to don breeding dress. As often happens here, a pair of African Black Ducks rose from the stream.

A normal and a melanistic Gabar Goshawk dashed past and the Long-crested Eagle patrolled

the treetops while flocks of Orange-breasted Waxbill rose from the streamside scrub. The slender, short-beaked female sunbird, which we

had problems identifying, turned out to be a Copper Sunbird.

Ken Dixon

BLZ Mashonaland Branch Visits to Haka Park and Lake Chivero 10th and 11th September 2015

Where were you Saturday?

Only 7 members gathered at Haka for the walk through the woodland and along the shore of Cleveland Dam. The wind definitely discouraged the birds but it was a thoroughly enjoyable experience just to be there. In all we recorded about 55 species, most of them in the woodland. Waterbirds are now scarce on the dam: we saw only Reed Cormorant, Common Moorhen, African Jacana and African Black Crake on the water, with African Stonechat, Little Rush-warbler and Lesser Swamp-warblers in the reeds. Rufous-naped Lark called from the grassland, which also yielded African Pipit. Overhead were an African Cuckoo

Hawk, a Gabar Goshawk, African Palm-swift and Little Swift and my first Barn Swallow of the summer. The cries of the African Fish-eagle and African Wattled Lapwing managed to pierce the rustling of the grass and reeds.

It was difficult to find birds in the trees as the wind in the leaves obscured their calls. Of the summer visitors we found Willow Warbler and African Paradise-flycatcher. Dave Dalziel and Patrick glimpsed a Spotted Creeper but the rest of us failed to locate it again. Otherwise there was nothing unexpected and it wasn't until I was driving out that I heard Klaas's Cuckoo.

And Sunday at the Bird Sanctuary?

Carla can be excused as she got the time wrong but the rest of our members missed out on a memorable visit. Only three of us met at P.E. for the Chivero trip but what a lucky group we were as the water level had dropped exposing large areas of muddy shoreline for waders, and the shallowness of the water near the shore attracted ducks *a go-go*. Counting was the main problem. There must have been 500 White-faced Duck and 2-300 Red-billed Teal with a few Fulvous Duck and Southern Pochard among them. At the approach of the African Fish-eagle ducks and waders took off in panicking clouds but not all escaped its clutches.

The most interesting of the waders were the dozen or so Black Herons mantling among the Black-winged Stilts, African Jacanas, Black

Crakes, Ruff, Marsh and Wood Sandpipers, Little and Great Egrets and Grey-headed Gulls. A lone Pied Kingfisher and also a Giant Kingfisher flew by and a couple of Blacksmith Lapwing fed on the grassy patches. The distant rocky islands held large numbers of White-breasted Cormorants while Reed Cormorants flew back and forth near the shore. *We also saw a 4m crocodile swimming in the polluted water at the Marimba Angling Club end of the sanctuary.*

After that feast came the famine of the woodland. Fewer and fewer birds are seen here, possibly because of the disturbance due to fish poachers. However, it was a wonderful morning and 74 species were recorded of which about 50 were waterbirds.

Ken Dixon

Back Pan, Wilderness Area, Hwange Game Count 2015, 27-28/9/2015 – 19° 02' 57"S; 27° 21' 38"E.

Alistair and Pam Fawcett invited us to the Hwange Game Count. We were allocated Back Pan in the Linkwasha Concession, in the southeast of the park, and not far from the Bulawayo to Victoria Falls railway line, which we heard in use at night. Back Pan has a borehole and water is pumped by diesel engine 24/7.

We saw 144 Elephant, 74 baboon, 14 Warthog, 1 Sable Antelope, 2 Kudu bulls, 1 Waterbuck, 2 Zebra, 4 Spotted Hyena, a Black-backed Jackal, an African Civet, 8 Giraffe and 500± 20 Buffalo, one slightly lame, and 1 with a yellow tag in its ear.

It was terribly hot on the 27th and few birds came in sight. There was a White-headed Vulture drinking as we started to count at 12.00 and 7 Blacksmith Lapwings on the pan. A Common Sandpiper visited that afternoon and then pushed

off. Three White-backed Vultures flew overhead at various times, three Yellow-billed Kites were there, and I noticed others wherever we went. There were 6 over Main Camp when we got there on the 28th. Three African Fish-eagles, 1 male, 1 female and 1 immature were at our pan and an African Harrier-hawk passed through the area. 2 Kori Bustards appeared and wandered around a bit away from the pan, maybe looking for dung beetles; they were in sight for 2 hours but did not drink. A Rufous-cheeked Nightjar was heard at night, and we picked up one dead on the road, on our way to our site at Kennedy 2. Penny did most of the driving and she said she also saw a squashed Lilac-breasted Roller. Some people drive too fast, and at night?

On the 28th between 03h11 to well after 05h00 we saw nothing, as a beautiful copper/golden eclipse took place and darkened our full moon, indeed, the first thing we heard just after 5, were Crowned Lapwings flying at night. They didn't land, and flew elsewhere. Was this the first game count in over 40 years with an eclipse? The animals stayed away or we couldn't see them, and it got very cold.

As we packed up on the 28th we heard overhead our first European Bee-eaters of the season. We were pleased to see a pair of Bradfield's Hornbills, and not so pleased to see a pair of Pied Crows. A Capped Wheatear was always moving about 100m from the pan. There were only 10 or so Yellow-billed Oxpeckers on the 500 or so buffalo that came to drink and another 3 on an old bull Giraffe. Red-billed Buffalo-weavers, maybe 6, were interested in the same palm tree as 7 African Palm-swifts. There must have been 20-30 palm trees around our pan. I tried to make the Yellow-fronted Canary into a Yellow Canary, but failed. Black-throated Canaries were common and a Golden-breasted Bunting visited for a drink with 7 Helmeted Guineafowls.

Elsewhere in the park we saw a Common Ostrich pair with 7 chicks at Nyamandhlovu Pan, another pair with 13 chicks at Ngweshla Pan,

Irvine's Lanark Farm 24th October 2015

On Sunday 24 October we visited Lanark Farm, belonging to Irvine's, which is about 45 km out along the Beatrice Road. Many thanks to Dave Hasluck of Irvine's who kindly made the outing possible and who also took part in the walk along with about 15 other BirdLife members.

We met at Prince Edward School and proceeded to Lanark Farm, which has a small game park in which we walked. It was a beautiful day, perfect for birding, and no sooner had we driven through the game gate than we saw a Capped Wheatear perched on a small bush. We decided to split into 2 groups to maximise on coverage and explore different parts of the park. In spite of it being very dry, the dams had a reasonable amount of water in them, and we saw a number of good water birds around them. We walked through beautiful Miombo woodland areas as well as clambering up boulders to get a better view of the dam. Our visit was timed perfectly for the magnificent Blood Lilies or Fireballs, which abounded in the woodlands.

Five different species of herons and egrets were seen including Great Egret, Purple Heron and Squacco Heron and we were happy to see 2 Saddle-billed Storks by the water's edge. Good water birds for our list were African Rail, Black Crake and Wood Sandpiper. Near the water a couple of strikingly coloured Yellow-throated

where we also saw Roan Antelope, and another female was seen near Intundhla Siding. A Martial Eagle chick was in a nest near Nyamandhlovu Pan, a Bateleur was drinking at Ostrich Pan at about 13h00 on the 28th as we left the next day, but I was surprised not to see them flying over Back Pan.

There was no time to wander around Main Camp, where there were lots of birds common to the Matabele's and uncommon to us Mashona. However, we did see Crimson-breasted Shrike, Southern Pied Babbler, Southern White-crowned Shrike, Magpie Shrike nesting, Red-billed Spurfowl, Marico Sunbird, Violet-eared and Black-cheeked Waxbills at the birdbath, with Meyer's Parrots drinking from a dripping tap outside the office.

Pat Cox said 42% of the pans in Hwange are dry. The Cheetah lady told us only 250 cheetahs are left in this country – mostly in Hwange. We were lucky to see one at Makwa Pan on the 28th. The lady who told us of lions said there were about 450 in the Hwange area and that was about in balance with the prey available. For further reading try www.friendsofhwange.com

David and Penny Rockingham-Gill
rgill@zol.co.zw

Longclaws flew around and one perched on a power line, revealing its characteristically long claws.

Large raptors included a Wahlberg's Eagle as well as some African Fish-eagles. A White-backed Vulture was seen soaring above while small raptors included a melanistic Gabar Goshawk and a Lizard Buzzard. Natal and Swainson's Spurfowl were seen or heard and Blacksmith and African Wattled Lapwings seen.

Pleasing finds were a few Meyer's Parrots, and an African Pygmy-kingfisher, which was spotted on our way out of the park. A Senegal Coucal and a Black Cuckooshrike were seen and the very familiar call of the recently returned Red-chested Cuckoo was heard, and the liquid call of the Black-headed Oriole too.

Lilac-breasted & Broad-billed Rollers were both there, the latter not so commonly seen. No woodpeckers this time, but we did see/hear Crested Barbets, Black-collared Barbets and Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird. Swallows included the Barn (back 'home' from Europe), Wire-tailed & Lesser Striped Swallow and a Common House-martin was also spotted. Four species of warblers were seen, including the Icterine Warbler, and four Cisticola species along with a party of Green-capped Eremomelas. We did well on the shrikes, notably Magpie Shrike and Orange-breasted

Bush-shrike as well as sunbirds, of which we saw five species including the glorious Scarlet-chested Sunbird. Among the weavers and seedeaters seen, the best were the Red-headed Weaver and the Yellow-throated Petronia.

BLZ Mashonaland Branch Weekend Visit to Mazwikadei 21-22 November 2015

A dozen BLZ members accepted the kind invitation of Tim and Bev Morgan to spend the weekend at Gold Dust Township on Lake Mazwikadei near Banket and were rewarded with excellent birding, generous hospitality and a taste of the luxury usually only experienced at 5-Star lodges. I think the appellation 'Township' is a tad misleading.

Having arrived around lunchtime on Saturday we deposited our bags and made our way to the Marina for our first sortie. It was not easy persuading us to leave the car park as an African Golden Oriole was serenading us in an acacia, Miombo Blue-eared Starlings and Greater Blue-eared Starlings were running around on the lawns and a Spotted Eagle-owl and its 2 owlets could be easily viewed nearby. Eventually we set off for the 'fish farm' where the 'fish' turned out to be mostly crocodiles. This however did not deter the birds, which were numerous. The reed lined shallow pools and bushes were perfect for Common Moorhen, Red-knobbed Coot, African Jacana, Cattle Egret and Great Egret, Squacco Heron, Hamerkop, Malachite, Pied and Giant Kingfisher, Thick-billed, Village, Southern Masked-weaver, Golden and Spectacled Weavers and a clump of surprisingly short trees was home to dozens of Black-headed Herons. Little Rush-warbler, Lesser Swamp-warbler, Great and African Reed-warbler, Red-faced Cisticola and Common Waxbill inhabited the bulrushes, while in the tall gums we found Trumpeter and African Grey Hornbill, Meyer's Parrot, African Green-pigeon, Lilac-breasted Roller and lots of Fork-tailed Drongos. Under darkening skies our hosts dragged us rather reluctantly away from all these rich pickings to explore the woodland of the Peninsula but as we arrived there so did the rain and we were forced to forgo this change of habitat.

After a brief visit to our luxury accommodation for a shower and change of clothing we returned to the Marina for a communal braai. Unfortunately, there were two different interpretations of six-o'clock, one of which was seven-fifteen so the majority of the party stood shivering at the braai

Monavale Vlei Report September – October 2015

Birding on Monavale Vlei has been rewarding over the last couple of months. Earlier, in the open burnt areas, Capped Wheatears and African Pipits could easily be seen and they bred successfully. Other bird species to be seen

After a good walk, we were happy to find a shady glade where we could enjoy our morning coffee and found that we had clocked up an impressive 98 species!

Debbie Wiggins

watching the rain, awaiting the arrival of the charcoal and food for rather a long time. Fortunately, the atmosphere was convivial and we did have our drinks with us so the time passed relatively quickly and the meal when it eventually came was excellent.

We were all back at the Marina Sunday morning at 6 a.m., too late for the Osprey, sadly, but we saw the Spotted Eagle-owl family again before setting off along the shoreline. In the small trees Red-faced Crombec, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Willow Warbler and African Paradise-flycatcher were flitting about and a Golden-breasted Bunting sang sweetly on the treetops. Waterbirds were not numerous, only Pied Wagtail, Squacco and Purple Heron, White-faced Duck, White-breasted and Reed Cormorant and Pied Kingfisher. A Black Coucal was heard in long wet grass but failed to materialise.

Leaving the shore we threaded our way through miombo woodland to the road, adding Cardinal Woodpecker, Southern Black Flycatcher and Chin-spot Batis to our list. A chance sighting of a female Red-headed Weaver led us to more of the same species, more woodpeckers, Brown-crowned Tchagra, White-crested Helmet-shrike and Black Cuckooshrike among others. Near the entrance gate we heard Neddicky and Grey-backed Camaroptera, and saw White-bellied Sunbird and Amethyst Sunbird with White-browed Robin-chat.

The rest of the party was snoozing on the lawn when we arrived back, waiting for the boat party to return, so we joined them just as the Abdim's Stork that had brought the rain flew in. The sailors were able to add Osprey, Black-chested Snake-eagle, Black-winged Stilt, Glossy Ibis, Little Grebe, African Wattled Lapwing and Blacksmith Lapwing and Black Heron to our list making a grand total of about 120 species. What a fabulous weekend! Thanks from all of us to Bev and Tim for looking after us so royally and introducing us to a new and exciting venue.

Ken Dixon

included Reed Cormorant, African Black Duck, Egyptian Goose, Black-chested Snake-eagle, Lizard Buzzard, Black Crake, Common Moorhen, Senegal Coucal, Marsh Owls, Pearl-breasted Swallow, African Stonechat, Malachite Kingfisher,

Dark-capped Yellow-warbler, Yellow-throated Longclaw, Thick-billed Weaver, Kurrichane Buttonquail, Cuckoo Finch, White-winged Widowbird, Temminck's Courser and Yellow-fronted Canary.

As the season progressed in came the migrants with the following seen so far: Wahlberg's Eagle, Barn Swallow, Lesser Striped Swallow, European Bee-eater, Willow Warbler, Red-backed Shrike, Lesser Grey Shrike, Little Bittern, Black Coucal, Abdim's Stork and Spotted Flycatcher. Jacobin Cuckoo was recently seen on the Vlei. Total bird species seen / heard for September 2015 was 104, and that of October

was 114. Bush Pig and Common Duiker continue to be seen occasionally, so too are the grassland snakes.

We had Peterhouse Girls School and Selbourne Routledge Primary School visiting the vlei for wetland talks and education. Bindura University students also toured the vlei. UZ Biological Sciences Department brought students to study transects. Looking forward to the arrival of more migrants especially the Streaky-breasted Flufftails and Striped Crakes among others.

Jimmy Muropa

Monavale Vlei Scout. 0772 772 771

Monavale Vlei Management Update

- According to Chief Planner Nyabeze no decision has been made on the application for a permit to build 165 houses on a portion of the core area of the wetland.
- Through Mawenje Consulting, Limpopo Housing Cooperative presented to COSMO and the Monavale community an environmental impact assessment public consultation questionnaire indicating their proposed plans to build 100 houses along Lyndhurst Road area of the Monavale Wetlands. This area is part of the overall Ramsar Site. It is zoned in the existing plan as road reservation, and in the proposed plan as Open Space Wetland Conservation Area. COSMO has consulted both Physical Planning of Local Government and Municipal Planning in response to this and found that the decision lies with the State Land Office. SLO has not yet made a decision and await our response to the EIA.
- COSMO was invited to take a stand at the Annual Garden Show at Wild Geese Lodge. We sold a number of trees taken there from the COSMO Indigenous Tree Nursery. It was a perfect occasion for wetland awareness. Over 3000 people visited this show.
- The Ramsar Information Sheets on all 7 Zimbabwe Ramsar Sites have been completed. A Ramsar Delegation to Zimbabwe visited from 7 to 12 November 2015 and worked with the National Wetland Committee to complete this task, which was uploaded by EMA, thus sealing Zimbabwe's commitment to these wetlands. Information on the sites should be posted very soon on the Ramsar website.
- Schools and university students, a World Bank official, and Ramsar officials visited the vlei during this period.
- An MSc thesis in 2015 by Innocent Shoshore entitled *An Assessment of a Vlei Ecosystem Restoration Process: Monavale Vlei Harare* repeated the transects of a MSc Thesis on Monavale Vlei from 2006 and shows that the wetland has recovered as a result the restoration process.
- Monavale Vlei signage has been replaced on the verge opposite the lookout.
- BLZ and COSMO together with government authorities are holding an awareness event on Monavale Vlei on 30th November ***How Harare's Wetlands Help us Through Times of a Changing Climate*** to coincide with the World Climate Change Meeting in Paris commencing on that day. The aim is to teach resilience on the ground! If we want water and to mitigate the effects of supposed climate change we must take care of the ecosystems that care for us!
- COSMO continues to lobby for other wetlands which are under siege... Borrowdale, Highlands Gunhill, Marlborough... the battle is not over yet.

Dorothy Wakeling, Monavale Vlei Programme Manager, Conservation Society of Monavale, cosmo@yoafrica.com 0772 376506

Matabeleland

Slide Show By Vernon Tarr, 17 October 2015

Twenty members turned out to see Vernon's slide show and soon realised it had been well worth the effort of going out on a hot, lazy Saturday afternoon.

Vernon began by explaining how he has been interested in birding for many years but his passion for photography is more recent, and he has been delighted to realize how well the two

interests complement each other. After taking a photo Vernon is able to enlarge it and study it in detail for as long as he likes, and in this way has picked up details he would probably not have noticed even if he was using the best of spotting scopes.

After two opening photos of a Greater and Lesser Honeyguide (in acknowledgment of our BLZ journal) Vernon showed us a picture of Red-billed Quelea, drawing attention to their disproportionately large feet – difficult to explain in a bird which, as Vernon pointed out, does nothing more sinister than pounce on a seed! He continued to highlight the feet of other birds, and to introduce us to some real tongue-twisting words like:

- ansiodactyl = having three toes (2nd, 3rd and 4th) pointing forwards, and one toe (1st) pointing backwards. This is the most common arrangement of toes and occurs in most of the songbirds as well as hawks and eagles;
- syndactyl = similar to ansiodactyl but with two (2nd and 3rd) or three (2nd, 3rd and 4th) toes fused, e.g. the kingfishers and bee-eaters; and
- zygodactyl = having two toes (2nd and 3rd) pointing forwards, and two toes (1st and 4th) pointing backwards, e.g. parrots and woodpeckers and birds which commonly clamber around in trees.

After that we talked about eyes and how some birds have eye rings (particularly conspicuous where the ring is a contrasting colour), while others have 'eye lashes' – compare bulbuls and

waxbills with hornbills and coucals. And how to sex and age different species. For example did you know you can tell a female African Grey Hornbill because she wears lipstick (the tip of the bill is tinged with red); or that as a Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill matures the 'cutting' edge of the bill darkens, turning almost black; or that young Yellow-billed Hornbills have blue eyes, which turn yellow as they get older.

While some of Vernon's photos were taken for practical purposes, to show a particular feature of the bird, most were visual delights. There were many memorable shots: the two Blue Waxbills together with a male and female Violet-eared Waxbill at the bird bath; the bemused, masked face of an Orange-breasted Bush-shrike peering straight at the camera; the mottled colours of a mother Natal Spurfowl and chicks drinking from a pool; the Common Waxbill peering through the grass and sunlit seed heads. But Vernon had better be resigned to the fact that he will be remembered not for his wonderful photos but as the man with the foot fetish!

By the time the show ended there had been a complete change in the weather and it was decided everyone would be more comfortable inside. So it was all hands on deck to rearrange the furniture and turn the 'lecture room' into a 'dining room', and to bring forth the meal prepared by a number of willing volunteers. Everyone opted to stay on and the banter and chatter continued for some hours. Thanks to everyone who helped with the arrangements and in particular to Vernon (and Shirley) for putting together this fantastic presentation.

Adele Edwards

Mashonaland South

Kadoma (and district) has experienced very high temperatures during October, often 35°C and more. Despite this our avifauna friends do not disappoint, as their daily activity continues from dawn to dusk. Through birds we watch change, the sounds and movements all in cyclical constancy.

The Kadoma golf course opposite the Rainbow Ranch Motel, as one enters Kadoma, has wonderful indigenous trees, as has the Cam and Motor Golf course.

Both places are ideal for walking and watching our birds in different seasons.

Recent birds of interest are:

Hamerkop, Groundscraper Thrush, Crested, Black-collared Barbets and Yellow-fronted Tinkerbirds, African Hoopoe, Lilac-breasted Roller, African Grey Hornbill, European Bee-eater, Red-faced Mousebird, African Paradise-flycatcher, Barn and Lesser Striped Swallow, Grey Go-away-bird, Purple-crested Turaco, Klaas's Cuckoo, Black-crowned Tchagra, Black-headed Oriole, Grey-headed Bush-shrike.

One morning, a lone Pied Crow was remorselessly chasing a Black-headed Heron. There was plenty of noise. Suddenly a Fork-tailed Drongo intervened and chased the Pied Crow with determination and the heron was able to land safely.

A male Shikra has found my garden birdbath and visited twice for a leisurely drink and long wash. I know when the raptor is around as the "toppies" chatter incessantly.

Margaret Parrock

Tail Feathers

Small Kingfisher?

Unconfirmed sightings of a small kingfisher from two locations in Mandara during October. One was from a friend in Belant Road and the other from my gardener at my house. I tried to catch a glimpse of the one in my garden, but failed when it flew next door. By all accounts it would appear to have been an African Pygmy-kingfisher, possibly en route to South Africa.



Something else, which may be of interest?

Several (up to 7) Thick-billed Weavers have often been observed in the upper branches of Pine trees. It looks like they might go after the nectar or sap soon after the new cones have formed or certainly something of that nature. I saw at least 12 Thick-billed Weavers in the tree on Friday 20 Nov. My last sighting had a Golden Weaver doing the same thing. This seems to be an annual occurrence.

James Ball



*Yellow-billed Storks
(left) and African
Spoonbills (below)
at Greengrove
photos James Ball*





*White-throated
Swallow at
Marlborough
Sewage ponds
James Ball*

Juvenile Fork-tailed Drongo and juvenile Bar-throated Apalis in Mandara James Ball





Picture of a Spotted Eagle-owl female nesting under the apex thatching in our lodge at Mazwikadei. Chick can just be seen on the right. Both were roosting in the nearby trees for a time. All quite nice but the thatch is destroyed in the area!

George Fleet

Egyptian Vulture seen in the Zambezi Valley

From *The Wattled Crane*, Volume 45 No. 8, the newsletter of BirdWatch Zambia

Egyptian Vulture – New to Zambia – Frank Willems & David Hancock

At 09:40h on 26 October 2015, while out on safari with Chiawa Camp colleague Bright Tembo and visitor Peter Warrick in the Lower Zambezi National Park, DH noticed a peculiar vulture soaring overhead with a single White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus*. The immediate impression was that of a juvenile Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, mainly due to the long wedge-shaped tail and long thin bill. The bird was soaring above *Faidherbia albida* woodland near the banks of the Zambezi River, some 3 km downstream from Chiawa Camp, at approximately S15.674° / E29.442° [this is about 9 km downstream of Nyamepi Camp].

DH managed to take some photographs, which on return were shared with FW and Rory McDougall, and subsequently with Pete Leonard, Nik Borrow and Dick Forsman. The unanimous opinion is that this is indeed a juvenile Egyptian Vulture, based on the following features:

- ✓ typical vulture-like build and size;
- ✓ long, wedge-shaped tail;
- ✓ long wings with 5 emarginated primaries ('fingers');
- ✓ grey-blue naked frontal half of face and long thin bill;
- ✓ long nape feathers.
- ✓ intact (new) feathers and dark plumage, suggesting it was a very young bird

A couple of similar species can be ruled out. Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus* is also dark, long-winged and thin-billed, but has a shorter and less wedge-shaped tail, short nape feathers and

broader wings with 6 clear 'fingers'. Juvenile Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier) *Gypaetus barbatus* has a thicker bill, a fully feathered face and only 4 'fingers'.

Although there are three probable and widely spaced sight records of this species from Zambia in the 1960s (Benson *et al.* 1971) this is the first confirmed record for the country. The formal addition of the species to the national list was long anticipated as it has been recorded in many neighbouring countries.

Egyptian Vultures are widespread, though generally scarce, throughout southern Europe and the northern half of Africa, wintering as far southeast as northern Tanzania, as well as the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent. In the southern African sub region the species has declined dramatically in recent times though it is possible that very small numbers may still breed in northern Namibia and southern Angola. Elsewhere it is apparently no more than a very rare vagrant. Declines throughout its range have resulted in the species being listed as Endangered by IUCN.

The Zambian bird may have originated from the remnant Namibian-Angolan breeding population, but it is perhaps as likely to have come from further north. As the species is known to have been more numerous in southern Africa up to maybe 100 years ago, it is likely to have occurred regularly in Zambia in historic times.

The timing of this record is fascinating, as this week's news was dominated by the 'uplisting' of most African vultures to Endangered or even Critically Endangered. Nice to have some positive vulture news!

On the off chance that it is still frequenting the Zambezi Valley, any birders down there in the near future should keep a look out for an unusual vulture with a clearly wedge-shaped tail – and take photographs, of course! If you have your old *Honeyguides* do read Peter Mundy's review of Zimbabwean records – Mundy, P.J. 1993. The Egyptian Vulture in Zimbabwe. **39(1)**: 16-21



Contributions for *The Babbler* 128 February 2016/March 2016 may be sent to the editor anytime between now and the very latest 14th January 2016. I hope that you all have a very Merry Xmas and Happy 2016!