

THE BABBLER

Newsletter of



BirdLife Zimbabwe

The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

ISSUE # 128 – February / March 2016

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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: FEBRUARY 2016

Saturday 6 th February 2016	Marlborough Vlei Walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 7 th February 2016	Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Saturday 13 th February 2016	Haka Park	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Meet at Haka Park gate at 7 a.m. Turnoff off opposite Pick & Pay, Msasa/Mutare Road		
Thursday 18 th February 2016	Birding in Akosombo, Ghana	17.30 – 18.00
Presentation by Julia Pierini Avondale Sports Club		
Sunday 21 st February 2016	Monavale Vlei Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Sunday 28 th February 2016	Outing to Ewanrigg Botanical Gardens	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Shamva Road – Meet at CABS car park Northridge Park, Borrowdale, promptly at 6.30 a.m. Bring table and chairs and a picnic brunch. There will be an entry fee at the Ewanrigg gate		

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

Saturday 5 th March 2016	Marlborough Vlei Walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 6 th March 2016	Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Saturday 12 th March 2016	Ballantyne Park Dams	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Meet at Ballantyne Park car park, opposite Spar Ballantyne, Wellburn Drive at 7 a.m.		
Thursday 17 th March 2016	Hwange Game Counts	17.30 – 18.00
Presentation by Dave Rockingham-Gill Avondale Sports Club		
Sunday 20 th March 2016	Monavale Vlei Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Sunday 27 th March 2016	Easter Sunday Outing to Gosha Park	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Meet at Mukuvisi Woodlands Car Park promptly at 6.30 a.m. Bring table and chairs and a picnic brunch		

RIFA – Away outing mid-March 2016

The pans around RIFA filled up last December when they had some good rains. Crakes, flufftails, gallinules, etc. breed on these pans and once they have chicks they are going to be around for some time. Well, we want to see them! Therefore we have planned a trip to RIFA in mid-March 2016. We will arrive at RIFA on Friday 11th and depart on Tuesday 15th. Note there is an extra day for this trip – we will use it to go birding at Nyakasanga camp, which is also run by the Hunters' Association. The same format will apply as for the last few RIFA trips – limited catering in terms of a full English breakfast every day after the early morning walk and sadza & gravy for the evening braais. So all you have to bring along are snacks, drinks and braai meat. This outing is open to all BLZ Members and a deposit of \$100.00 will book you a place. As this is a popular venue, we will be limiting the numbers – first come, first served.

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

Saturday 20 February: Matabeleland Branch Annual General Meeting. The AGM will take place at 10:30 a.m. at The Gazebo, Qalisa Retirement Village, Winnie's Way.

Saturday 5 March: Riverside Walk. We will be visiting the smallholding of Pete and Louise Abbot in Riverside. Participants should meet at the garage (JK Motors) just beyond the NUST entrance on the Gwanda Road at 2:30 p.m. Anyone wanting to stay on after the walk should bring chairs and their own refreshments; braai fires will be available.

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

National

BirdLife Zimbabwe 2016 Annual General Meeting

Please note that the BirdLife Zimbabwe 2016 Annual General Meeting will take place in Masvingo at Kyle Recreational Park in May.

Dates and details to follow but in the meantime, start planning to attend!

Thanks, Julia

RECENT REPORTS AND SIGHTINGS

National

Zimbabwe National Conference on Climate Change and Launch of the Climate Change Response Strategy *By Toga*

Climate Change is a crosscutting-worrying problem that affects many sectors including the environment. Birds and other biodiversity are among the victims of this changing climate. In response to climate change, a National Conference on Climate Change hosted by the Ministry of Environment, Water and Climate held from 19-20 November 2015 deliberated on issues of climate change and current initiatives underway by the government. This

conference coincides with and Launch of the National Climate Change Response Strategy. BirdLife Zimbabwe was represented by Toga and Sylvia (intern) at this Conference.

The Zimbabwe National Climate Change Response Strategy was launched. A draft National Climate Policy was also presented at this conference. Various discussions held on climate change implications on different sectors provided opportunity to participants to express their views. BirdLife Zimbabwe's key policy and advocacy message was centred on influencing recognition of biodiversity and ecosystems in climate change policies and strategies. This message was put across during sector discussions and interactions. The development of a National Climate Policy is still ongoing, and more contributions on biodiversity related issues are essential in ensuring that the Climate Policy addresses the issues.

The IUCN Red List and recent changes – what does it all mean? By Fadzai Matsvimbo

The **IUCN** (International Union for The Conservation of Nature) **Red List of Threatened Species** also known as the IUCN Red List has been published since 1964. The IUCN Red List uses scientific criteria to evaluate the extinction risk of thousands of species. These scientific criteria are relevant to all species and all regions of the world. The purpose of the Red List is to convey the urgency of conservation issues to the policy makers, public and other players to try to improve the conservation status of species. BirdLife International reviews the birds on behalf of IUCN. Various other specialist groups also assist in the review of the Red List. Every year the Red List grows longer, meaning more and more species are a step closer to extinction. Whilst these lists are used to reflect global and regional trends, some countries do produce their own National List, which reflect the national situation. In 2015 the Red Data List on birds was reviewed and here are some of the significant changes that took place on the list.

Scientific name	Common name	2014 Red List category	2015 Red List category
<i>Trigonoceps occipitalis</i>	White-headed Vulture	VU	CR
<i>Necrosyrtes monachus</i>	Hooded Vulture	EN	CR
<i>Gyps africanus</i>	White-backed Vulture	EN	CR
<i>Gyps coprotheres</i>	Cape Vulture	VU	EN
<i>Gyps rueppelli</i>	Rüppell's Vulture	EN	CR
<i>Torgos tracheliotos</i>	Lappet-faced Vulture	VU	EN
<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>	Steppe Eagle	LC	EN

The most significant changes have been on the vultures with the family now falling into the Critically Endangered (Extremely high risk of extinction in the wild) and Endangered (High risk of extinction in the wild) categories. For the vultures, the threats include loss of habitat, food scarcity due to reduced ungulate populations and poisoning. The poisoning problem stems from poachers who poison vultures to reduce detection by authorities and farmers putting out poisoned bait for predators. The situation with the vultures does not look good but there is still much that can be done to reverse the current scenario. This is the small window of opportunity that is available in order to secure a future for Africa's vultures.

BirdLife Zimbabwe
is organising a
TAXONOMY SEMINAR
that will be conducted by

Dr Moira Fitzpatrick (DPhil)
Regional Director of the Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe (Bulawayo)
on 12-13 March 2016
at (proposed venue – to be confirmed) St George's College (Harare)
Lecture Theatre (next to Chapel)

US\$50 per participant (including catering)

This subject is in the A Level Biology Syllabus and comes into the Learner Hunter/Guide Syllabus

Dr Moira Fitzpatrick has a DPhil in spider taxonomy, she is at present Regional Director of the Natural History Museum of Zimbabwe and was Principal Curator of Arachnids for 20 years before that. She has

described over 65 new species of spiders and one new species of scorpion and written a number of taxonomic revisions, etc.

Outline of the seminar is as follows:

Natural History at the Centre – What is natural history and its importance in understanding life?

What's in a Name – all about the naming game, name changes and the importance of understanding the organism – using the widow spiders as an example

Describing the living World – what is taxonomy, systematic, phylogenetics, Binomial Classification and the “Code”?

Species and their Discovery – what is a species, how do you know if it is a new one, and how many are there? The importance of museum and herbaria collections

Writing (and understanding) species descriptions – how to name it, describe it, importance of voucher specimens, and all the pitfalls and dos and don'ts and some seriously silly names.

All about relationships – cladistics and phylogeny – just what do we really know?

Meg Coates Palgrave – well known botanist and author of *Trees of Southern Africa* – will be a guest speaker doing a practical on plant taxonomy and describing the pitfalls of using keys

The seminar intends to create an understanding of taxonomy in a format that is easy to comprehend and will also help high school students learn about the science behind Latin names and give them a number of scientific principles that it would make it worth their while attending, especially if they wish to continue with biology at university. This seminar will also be of interest to people with a basic love of the bush.

To more information and to book: Penny Raynor: raynor@zol.co.zw or Julia Pierini: juliapierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org

Climate Change Meeting on Monavale Vlei on 30th November



This event attracted around 400 school children, the public, authorities and residents. The talk given by Professor Chris Magadza made a huge impact on the crowd. He described how carbon is sequestered into wetlands. Portia Chifamba, a lecturer in Ichthyology at University of Zimbabwe Biological Sciences Department, spoke of the importance of wetlands for fish spawning. The ZRP High School sang a moving song about the need to care for Harare's wetlands.

An outcome is that the Ministry of Environment Water and Climate is taking wetlands seriously. Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs) are now being formulated with one of the first being the *enhancement of Carbon Sinks through wetland protection and rehabilitation* ... our wetland advocacy work is paying dividends.



Prof Chris Magadza describing how carbon is sequestered into wetlands



COSMO Kid's Club
receiving posters
*Where Does Harare's
Water Come From?*
and
*The Plants and
Animals of Harare's
Wetlands*



ZRP High School and Jimmy Muropa

Mashonaland

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE MASHONALAND BRANCH OF BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE HELD AT AVONDALE BOWLING CLUB, HARARE, ON THURSDAY 21st JANUARY 2016 AT 6.00 PM

PRESENT: T. ALEGRIA (CHAIRPERSON), D. WIGGINS (TREASURER), L. FUSSELL (SECRETARY), D. ROCKINGHAM-GILL (VICE CHAIR), J. BALL (MEMBER)

BRANCH MEMBERS PRESENT: 34 members

APOLOGIES: D. Dalziel, L. Maasdorp, J. Muropa, I. Riddell, R. Castelin, R. MacDonald, Jan Wood, M. Skinner, P. Wiggins, A. Fussell

Tony Alegria welcomed the members and thanked them for their attendance.

1. *CONFIRMATION OF PREVIOUS MINUTES: Proposed by R. Chenaux-Repond and Seconded by T. Wood*

2. *MATTERS ARISING: None*

3. *CHAIRMAN'S REPORT (T. Alegria)*

I am grateful to Avondale Sports Club for letting us use this venue for all our evening events.

The outings have continued and we are getting some good turnouts, especially at the Mukuvisi Woodlands and the last Sunday of the month. Mukuvisi can have a sticky problem at this time of year – we need rubble to put into the swampy parking area. Please bring any rubble you have whenever you go on a Mukuvisi bird walk. Any amount can be used – anything and even rocks up to the size of your head will be OK. Just dump it out of the way near a gum tree!

We are very grateful to everybody that allowed us onto their properties. I thank all the leaders – Dorothy Wakeling, Dave Dalziel and Richard Dennison.

Lake Chivero is no longer a popular venue but those who didn't go there on the last two outings missed out on some spectacular water bird species. Amongst many others, the following were seen: Pied Avocets, Ruff, African Spoonbills, Kittlitz's Plovers and Marsh Sandpipers.

Meanwhile Rainham Dams have become a no-go venue. The place has been hacked up and divided, the roads fenced off, etc. I think it will be an Office Staff venue for waterfowl counts in the future.

Thanks to our speakers, without them we would not have a monthly function. We had: (Jan) right after the AGM, Roger MacDonald gave us a photo show; (Feb) Outing to Kopje Tops by James Ball; (Mar) Baobabs and Birds by Claire Douie and DRG; (Apr) Presentation on Bird Ringing by Jean Blake; (May) Cuckoos by Alex Masterson; (Jun); Namibia and Etosha Pan by Eve Roehl; (Jul) The second Great Extinction by Carol Thompson; (Aug) The Zambia Shoebill Trip by Tony Alegria; (Sept) Bird Migration Hazards by James Ball; (Oct) Photographic Bird Safari by Roger MacDonald; (Nov) Trip to Weya/Chiendambuya by Innocent Magunje and Jimmy Muropa introduced by John Vekris; (Dec) Highlights of the year by Tony Alegria followed by the Xmas social. Of course monthly evening functions would be pointless without an audience, so many thanks to all the members and non-members who attended the functions.

The most difficult job we have as a committee is finding topics and speakers to deliver the monthly

presentations. If you can help with a presentation or suggestions for these things, let's hear from you!

Last year we planned two away outings with the first trip being a weekend to Outward Bound in Chimanimani. This trip saw eleven of us going into the scenic mountains with a view to some of us looking for the Bokmakierie which unfortunately was not heard or seen. Accommodation was good and the meals excellent!

The second trip was a "One Week's Birding Holiday" to Zambia to see the Shoebill – this we did! In August the evening presentation was about that birding trip. Twelve of us went up there and met up with Geoff Lowe who was already there on business. We were joined by Carl Beel – the Zambian Birding Guru and four other Zambians. We had various reports placed in the *Babbler*. These two trips were great and anyone who has never been on an away outing is really missing out!

Your incoming committee will be organizing more away trips this year with school teachers in mind – if possible, we'll try and organize some trips during school holidays.

This is not guaranteed but we are looking at organizing a Coastal Birding trip later on in the year – this could be the one weeks' birding holiday of a lifetime.

I wish to thank all those who wrote articles for the *Babbler* thereby providing feedback to all our members on our outings and monthly functions.

Unfortunately we are losing two committee members this year – the Fussells are going to live on Mud Island - and Linda, you will be missed. However I'm pleased to report that the rest of the committee members will stay on if you want them to. I'm also pleased to announce that Ken Dixon has had his arm twisted and can do the secretary job again, thanks Ken.

I thank Carolyn for sending out the email reminders for the outings & evening functions and I thank Linda Fussell for providing the necessary information for the *Ndeipi* monthly magazine.

In closing I thank my committee for all their input & work during the last year and my wife for providing snacks and for putting up with our committee meetings every other month.

Tony Alegria Chairman-Mashonaland Branch

4. *TREASURER'S REPORT (D. Wiggins)*

We have had another quiet year in 2015 with a small loss, reducing our balance to \$1,116.41 of which \$536 is made up of cash assets. We do not have any immediate plans on how to utilise this but are in a position where we have the available funds for when a suitable project does come up.

Regarding our revenue of \$566.91, most of this came from monthly meetings, with our Christmas raffle adding a further \$100. Thanks to members for your support in both of these. CABS credits came from interest and a minimal demonetisation amount of \$5. Our thanks too to Di Rushforth for her donation.

Moving on to expenses, Avondale Sports Club fees and tips for the car guard remained the same as last

year & comprised the main expense. Meanwhile local venue expenses consisted of our regular donations, \$100 to Mukuvisi to help with keeping the electric fence clear, \$45 towards Greystone Park Preserve and a \$5 tip to the Haka Park game ranger for his help on one occasion. The last expense, under Miscellaneous, was a painting presented to Leslee Maasdrorp for her 90th Birthday. We felt that the painting of Monavale Vlei was a fitting gift to someone who has devoted so much of her life to bird conservation.

Lastly, no change on the cash & assets except the CABS account balance which now stands at \$506.41.

Just to sum up, we are currently more or less breaking even, allowing us to maintain our reserves for

future projects. In conclusion and on behalf of the society, thank you to everyone for their continued support which is not only greatly appreciated but vital!

5. *REGULAR VENUES:*

5.1 **Mukuvisi Woodlands: (D. Dalziel)**

I am going to keep this report of our 2015 trips to Mukuvisi nice and short. As usual, we did the monthly walk on the 1st Sunday of every month.

We have had a good turn out to most of the walks and are therefore getting a good coverage of the area. With the new paths we are getting better coverage of the area below the cement bridge and birds like Red-backed Mannikin and Black-throated Wattle-eye were often seen this year.

There are some birds that are seldom seen or are seen less frequently. The Southern Black Tit was not seen again this year. The Stierling's Wren-warbler and the Neddicky appear to be getting less common and are seldom seen. The Miombo Rock-thrush had not been seen on a BLZ walk for many years but it was seen near the bee hives and was subsequently seen on a few occasions by other birders. Interestingly, the birds we are seeing less often at Mukuvisi are also getting less common at Haka.

5.2 **Lake Chivero: (R Dennison)**

JANUARY to DECEMBER 2015

We visited the sanctuary in January, April, August, October and November last year and wader space was significant from October.

Species Count

The annual species count was 119, which was the lowest ever recorded and 20 less than the previous year when we first reduced our visits from monthly to quarterly. The main reason for this was the paucity of birds in the woodlands as the water bird counts were good. There were no additions to the total number of 331 species recorded since records began in 1992.

In my opinion the highlights were:

Shore and Water Birds

Little Grebe	200 in November
Reed Cormorant	288 in August

5.3 **Monavale Vlei (D Wakeling)**

2015 recorded the lowest rainfall in 10 years (668mm) with very low rainfall received October to December.

Bird sightings of particular interest selected from the 177 species recorded during 2015 are given below. In 2014 a total of 181 bird species were recorded.

Buff-spotted Flufftail remained on the Soper property throughout the 2014/15 rainy season. Many Streaky-breasted Flufftails were heard or recorded throughout the season – 11 reported calling at one time. Striped Crake was seen in January. Corn Crake, Little and Dwarf Bittern, Common Moorhen, Temminck's Courser were recorded. African Marsh-harrier, Black-chested Snake-eagle, Long-crested Eagle, African Fish-eagle over flying, Steppe Buzzard, Black Sparrowhawk, Amur Falcon, Eurasian Hobby and Lesser Kestrel were some of the raptors listed.

Revenue and Expenditure worksheet is available on request.

Spotted Creeper, Southern Hyliota, Whyte's Barbet, Miombo Tit and Miombo Double-collared Sunbird are all still seen frequently.

Other birds of interest have been the African Black Duck which is often seen. The Long-crested Eagle was often seen around the nest area and the Black Sparrowhawk was seen with a couple of nearly fledged chicks. The Wahlberg's Eagle did not nest in either of the usual sites but we suspect that they may have had a nest in one of the plantations as they were seen frequently. The African Cuckoo was very vocal and good sightings were made in November. However, January was the month for cuckoos with African, Red-chested, Levillant's, Jacobin, Klaas's and Diderick all recorded.

If anyone would like the complete list of sightings for the year I can send them by email.

We hope to see most of you during the year at least once as this is a wonderful place so close to Harare.

Grey Heron	21 in August
Little Egret	59 in August
Yellow-billed Egret	6 in August
Black Heron	14 in October
Squacco Heron	86 in August
Glossy Ibis	30 in October
White-faced Duck	500 in October
Egyptian Goose	42 in August
Red-billed Teal	200 in October
Osprey	1 in November
Allen's Gallinule	1 in April
Lesser Moorhen	5 in January
African Jacana	398 in August
Common Ringed Plover	2 in November
Pied Avocet	37 in November
<i>Other Birds of Interest</i>	
Yellow-bellied Greenbul	1 in October

Cuckoos included: Red-chested, Levillant's, Jacobin Cuckoo, Diderick and Klaas's. Black Coucal and Senegal Coucal, European and Lilac-breasted Rollers and Red-backed Shrike; Greater Striped Swallow and Lesser Striped Swallow, Pearl-breasted and a few Barn Swallows joined the resident Grey-rumped Swallows. Barn Swallows are considerably reduced in numbers these days and we are excited to see them. Warblers included Sedge, Dark-capped Yellow, Willow, Lesser Swamp, African Reed and Little Rush. Pale-crowned & Levillant's joined the common cisticolas. Spotted Flycatcher and African Paradise-flycatchers returned, as did the Copper Sunbird. Thick-billed and Village Weavers and Cuckoo Finch, White-winged Widowbird, Green-winged Pytilia, Orange-breasted, Blue and Common Waxbills, canaries, plus Golden and Cinnamon-breasted Buntings also adorned the wetland.

Lesser Kestrel is a new bird for the list. Daily recording continues.

Mammals: Common Duiker, Bush Pig, Large Grey Mongoose, Slender Mongoose, Scrub Hare, Clawless Otter and field mice and cane rats.

Reptiles: Egyptian Cobra, Olive Grass Snake, Three-striped Grass Snake, Schlegel's Blind Snake.

Flora: magnificent displays of flowering wetland plants and grasses were observed year round. This visible biodiversity is an essential conduit for rainwater into the soils where invisible biodiversity enables tasks such as water retention, purification, regulation and other qualities performed by the wetland.

The Harare Wetland Programme ended on 1 May but activities continued. In May an Application for a Permit to Build on Monavale Vlei privately owned area was requested of the City Planning Department. Despite receiving 2500 applications against development the application was approved by the Director of Work and on 12th December it appeared on Full Council Meeting Agenda for approval. Quick

manoeuvring through our MP and some councillors saw this item removed from the Agenda at the meeting and back to Environmental Committee for its re-consideration. It will be on the Full Council Agenda in February. Two Ramsar visits took place. One visit took place in February with the WWF Gland Switzerland representative and a second in November to finalize the Ramsar Information Sheets for all Ramsar Sites for uploading onto the Ramsar Website. This was achieved. Schools, colleges, community and church organizations and other local and international visitors enjoyed visiting the wetland during the year.

Monavale Vlei remains an iconic wetland for Zimbabwean wetland awareness and a model for wetland restoration.

cosmo@yoafrica.com; www.monavalevlei.com

The Conservation Society of Monavale Face Book Page

Monavale Daily Bird Records and Rainfall Statistics kept since 2005 Monavale Vlei Bird Species Counted 2005 (210) to December 2014 (243)

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total Birds & *Rainfall
149	137	126	127	104	101	104	104	104	114	124	123	2015
66	70	62	54	43	22	39	47	45	57	35	44	3 rd Sun
234.8	147	73	12.2						10.7	43.1	147.6	668.4mm
141	139	125	117	97	94	96	97	98	114	123	136	2014
80	62	53	36	41	34	56	34	48	57	71	82	3 rd Sun
172	239.8	28.2	48						44	107	274	912.48mm
138	135	134	113	102	97	100	103	103	119	119	125	2013
74	72	77	58	48	38	67	64	63	54	66	67	3 rd Sun
421	59.5	231	51.5						1.6	103.5	157.8	1025.9mm
142	136	137	124	103	100	102	102	110	117	120	129	2012
72	62	59	66	56	32	65	32	47	57	62	70	3 rd Sun
267.5	171.5	173.5	24.5						37.5	94.5	215	984mm
144	132	136	124	106	96	103	99	108	106	125	134	2011
66	71	75	61	56	56	48	58	45	66	68	80	3 rd Sun
221	75	62	9	1	2.5	9			35	115	419.5	949mm
142	140	136	111	93	87	97	106	107	121	130	143	2010
62	66	61	54	46	54	32	64	63	62	83	78	3 rd Sun
207.5	171	49	178	3.5					25.5	126	152	912.5mm
131	123	120	114	95	89	100	91	103	109	120	127	2009
70	51	59	49	45	47	37	47	44	51	61	57	3 rd Sun
197.5	130	165.5	20	40					4	142	183	882mm
117	113	115	110	90	91	87	98	103	108	112	126	2008
52	53	52	45	25	45	45	50	40	47	64	71	3 rd Sun
383.5	38.5	43	33						9	167.5	253	927.5mm
121	118	112	109	91	91	91	93	97	101	109	116	2007
58	69	53	53	40	39	53	53	55	57	73	52	3 rd Sun
174	58.5	92.5	45.5	2.5				4	2	168	540	1087mm
116	114	115	107	85	90	86	92	92	101	104	106	2006
	58	52			49	35	48	41	36	48	52	3 rd Sun
279	171.5	155.5	3						9.5	65	148.5	832mm
									43	63	95	100
									0.5	12	106.5	285
183	94	137	24	8								850mm

* Yearly rainfall totals were checked and the few errors found were adjusted for the 2105 report

6. *ELECTION OF OFFICE BEARERS, MASHONALAND BLZ COMMITTEE*

Committee members prepared to stand again with the exception of Andy and Linda Fussell.
2016 Committee re-elected as follows:

Chairperson: Tony Alegria
Vice Chairperson: Dave Rockingham-Gill
Secretary: Ken Dixon
Treasurer: Debbie Wiggins

Committee Member: James Ball
Committee Member: Alison MacDonald
Proposed by Tony Wood and Seconded by Julia Pierini

7. *ANY OTHER BUSINESS:*

7.1 T. Alegria asked members if there were any volunteers for giving presentations at the Thursday evening meetings. Please approach a committee member. Suggested speakers Tony Wood, Innes Lowe, Neil Deacon and J. Pierini.

7.2 The old and new committee was thanked for its hard work and commitment by Rolf Chenaux-Repond. He also thanked Fiona Griffenburg for the *Babbler* editions published every 2 months.

7.3 Julia Pierini thanked Andy and Linda Fussell for their contribution to BLZ Zimbabwe.

7.4 Tony Wood also thanked the Mashonaland Committee.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 6.40 p.m.

BLZ MASHONALAND BRANCH, 19TH NOV 2015

Over 30 members and friends were offered a varied and entertaining evening at Avondale Sports Club on Thursday 19th Nov. First, Julia, our CEO, introduced the staff from the office and outlined their present duties before giving more detail about the valuable but little-known work of Innocent Magunje, BLZ's Education Officer, who on a shoestring budget manages to spread the message of biodiversity to schools and universities in Zimbabwe. She then introduced John Vekris, one of our members who for 20 years, has been working with the Artists of Weya in their home area.

BIRDING IN THE CHIENDAMBUYA COMMUNAL LANDS

Innocent, Jimmy Muropa, the Monavale Scout, and John spent 3 days (27-29.3.15) birding, mostly in that part of Weya which generally lies at 1 100m, between the Mupfure and Nyagadzi rivers. The group was kindly hosted by Mrs. R. Mungure, who has welcomed many visitors over the years and would be very happy to host more guests in future. In addition, Innocent and Jimmy also gave talks to the local schools and forged promising links with BLZ.

The team observed widespread stream-bank cultivation and extensive harvesting of many

indigenous trees for tobacco curing. Thirsty gums are replacing these. Unfortunately, the rivers were almost dry so few waterbirds were encountered. However, in the little time available, +80 species were identified from near the rivers to the woodland and other parts of this area (See separate report below.)

John and the community would welcome further visits from birding groups and individuals and there is certainly much to be discovered there.

Visit to Weya/Chendambuya, March 2015

Weya Communal Land (better known locally by its more meaningful growth point name "Chendambuya" or "Chiendambuya") is situated in Makoni North district, about 160km southwest of the capital. Chiendambuya itself is about 30km NNE of Headlands. The Umfusire gravel road turns off left from the Mutare road at virtually the same altitude as Msasa, in Harare, from which point one climbs down more than 300 metres to what used to be the Weya Community Training Centre, 38 kilometres away. The now defunct Centre spawned the tradition of Weya art, which still survives and which is probably better known outside Zimbabwe than within.

In March 2015 BLZ facilitated an exploratory visit to Weya by BLZ's Innocent Magunje, COSMO's* Jimmy Muropa and BLZ member John

Vekris, who works with the community of Weya artists, the idea being to (i) begin to survey local birdlife, with a view to evaluating the possibility of future organised birding outings by interested local and foreign birders, and (ii) engaging local schools on birding and environmental awareness.

Two expert birders were thus accompanied by a novice from Harare and two very keen local men, both of them Weya artists, who know the area well, and are also quite familiar with much of the local flora and avifauna.

The small team had limited time for both birding and visits to local schools. In the less than 48 hours available we looked for birds at the confluence of Mupfure and Nyagadzi rivers† (altitude 1108m – late, Day 1), downstream from the main Nyagadzi River bridge (afternoon, Day 2)

and Rukore Hill (early morning, Day 3). For the greater part of our only full day there we visited three primary and two secondary local schools where we introduced children to BLZ's stuffed Spotted Eagle-owl, spoke about biodiversity, gave away posters & leaflets and finally encouraged the schools to become involved in environmental education through activities such as birding.

Each and every school received us very warmly and expressed great interest in our proposal. In fact, most of these same schools had expressed the same interest when approached by the writer on behalf of BLZ eleven years ago but, unfortunately, lack of meaningful follow up at the time as well as lack of resources, meant that nothing was built and the opportunity went begging. If only BLZ can facilitate the odd presentation, provide materials and actually conduct some birding outings in the area, with interested students and Teachers-in-Charge, the potential is there for establishing model bird clubs in rural schools in this country.

On the actual birding done on this trip, the final list of 88 species seen was of course disappointing – and was so because water birds in particular did not show up at the party. Perhaps the more interesting or exciting sightings were Wahlberg's Eagle, Lizard Buzzard, Little Sparrowhawk, Natal Spurfowl, many Emerald-spotted Wood-doves, Barn Owl, both Speckled Mousebird and Red-faced Mousebird, European Roller and Lilac-breasted Roller, Wire-tailed Swallow (which breed regularly at the Weya Art Gallery), Groundscraper Thrush, Mocking Cliff-chat (near the Nyagadzi bridge), Long-billed Crombec, good numbers of Chin-spot Batises and Cinnamon-breasted Buntings (at Rukore Hill) and Cuckoo Finch.

There was also a difference of opinion as to whether the Fiery-necked Nightjars that we heard around our host's homestead after dark were also the birds that we saw fly away from the road, as we drove back from Nyagadzi bridge on the second evening. Or maybe the latter, with their pronounced white spots on their wings, were Square-tailed Nightjars. It would be great if the argument can be settled on subsequent visits.

In addition, the writer can confidently claim to have seen Dickinson's Kestrel, Pennant-winged Nightjar, Giant Kingfisher, Spotted Eagle-owl (to add to the dead one found by the roadside on this trip,) Senegal Coucal and African Black Duck, on different previous visits to Weya. Crowned Lapwings, African Grey Hornbills and Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills are also plentiful in the area, the last two occasionally in mixed parties.

Clearly, on this first visit we barely scratched the surface and only just began to get familiar with the topography, so more visits by greater numbers of knowledgeable twitchers should yield a lot more species.

Speaking of the physical environment, our party could not help noticing considerable evidence of stream bank cultivation and the cutting down of trees: tobacco has long replaced maize, cotton etc., as a cash crop in this part of the country and the villagers are cutting trees down for their small curing barns at an alarming rate. Perhaps the people of Weya might prove amenable to a well-presented case for a more green approach to their own environment?

The local community has hosted many visitors before, including Germans who lived and worked at the Training Centre in the early years after independence, and American students who lived with different host families for weeks at a time, in the late 80s. The community is therefore accustomed to visitors. The writer has good relations with Chief Chendambuya, who has already met Jimmy and Innocent and has given us his blessing for future visits.

If our birding is more than just pure fun, if it is also about learning and teaching and data gathering (not forgetting SABAP!) then, surely, it is not enough to just visit the Lanark farms, Mazvikadei dams and Gosho parks of this world. We should, in addition to such attractive places, visit the less frequently or hardly ever visited corners of Zimbabwe, to explore and survey each and every square inch of land in the country and truly complete the jigsaw puzzle. And if we get a whole lot more young Zimbabweans to join us in such an endeavour, so much the better in the long term. How great it would be to have an army of youngsters across rural Zimbabwe who know their birds well and understand what they tell us about our environment.

In Weya/Chendambuya we have an ideal opportunity bringing together a potentially bountiful birding area that is fairly accessible, that is welcoming and that has schools that are interested in becoming part of the project.

Many thanks to Cosmo and BLZ for helping to make this trip possible.

John Vekris

*: Conservation Society of Monavale.

†: Incorrectly identified as "Mafuri" and "Nyangadzi" respectively, in Surveyor General maps.

RED DATA BOOK OF BIRDS OF SOUTH AFRICA, LESOTHO AND SWAZILAND

Also in Harare for the week was Martin Taylor, BLZ's link person with BirdLife South Africa. He gave us a brief but clear and disturbing introduction to the latest Red Data Book of South African birds on which he has been working for the last 3 years. Loss of habitat through human activity, poisoning, predation by cats and mice on remote islands on pelagic species and long-line fishing are among the threats to an ever-increasing number of species, especially among raptors and seabirds. He emphasized the importance of our data collection in keeping track of population changes. Often we are aware of loss of iconic birds like vultures and parrots but reductions in numbers of say larks and warblers go unnoticed. To finish on a lighter note, we noticed that the 'little' Red Data Book is now about 5cm thick and weighs 4kg.

We thank all who contributed to this interesting evening.

Ken Dixon

MASH BRANCH, MONA VALE VLEI WALK, SUNDAY 17TH JAN 2016

21 expectant people, mostly local members, but including a group of German birders with their guide, assembled at the now almost defunct viewing platform on Fenella Drive fervently hoping the recent rain would have attracted all those rarities "twitchers" dream of. In the event, 62 species were recorded but the only 'lifer' for the vleis was a Black Cuckoo, which called mournfully most of the morning (or is it mourning).

There are plenty of pools of lying water both on the vleis and the edge of the golf course for those who like wading but gumboots were not de rigueur. In the latter area, both Dwarf Bittern and Little Bittern were detected but it was the bishops and widowbirds that dominated over most of the grassland and along the streams. Southern Red Bishop and Red-collared Widowbird were everywhere, Yellow-mantled Widowbirds almost everywhere and Yellow Bishop in the small section devoid of the previous species.

From the reeds emanated many calls and songs but you needed to be close to Jimmy or Richard to have them correctly identified as African or Eurasian or Great Reed-warbler, Lesser Swamp-warbler, Dark-capped Yellow Warbler and Little Rush-warbler.



Despite severe harassment Marsh Owls failed to flush but we did see Croaking, Zitting, Red-faced and Levallant's Cisticola and Diderick Cuckoo. Barn and Grey-rumped Swallow and African Palm-swift and Little Swift over flew with the European Bee-eaters while Southern Masked-weavers and Village Weavers sat in the tall reeds with Cape Turtle-dove, Laughing and Red-eyed Doves.

Thanks to Dorothy and Julia for their passionate dedication to protecting this precious resource and to Jimmy for guarding it and recording the wildlife.

Ken Dixon

Marlborough Vlei Report 1 June 2014 to January 2016

I was employed as the Marlborough Vlei Scout in June 2014 under The Harare Wetland Project funded by The Aage v Jensen Charity Foundation through BirdLife International and managed by Conservation Society of Monavale and BirdLife Zimbabwe, which ended at the end of April 2015. Thanks to support from BirdLife Zimbabwe I have remained on the Vlei since that time. I am also a committee member of the Marlborough Environmental Action Group. During the past 19 months I have learnt an enormous amount about birds, wetlands and the environment in general. It has been and still is an interesting experience and

enjoyable watch the birds and the wetlands and their changes during the seasons.

A total of 170 different bird species have been recorded. These were all new birds for me. In addition to the usual wetland species Black-chested Snake-eagle, Long-crested Eagle, Lizard Buzzard, Black-shouldered Kite, Peregrine Falcon, Gabar Goshawk, Marsh Owl, Yellow-mantled Widowbird, Red-collared Widowbird, Pin-tailed Whydah, Southern Red Bishop, Yellow-throated and Rosy-throated Longclaw, Common Waxbills and Orange-breasted Waxbills, weavers, warblers, swallows and swifts, some exciting birds recorded were an immature Bateleur, African Fish-eagle,

White Stork, African Marsh-harrier, Secretarybird, Streaky-breasted Flufftail, African Crake, African Rail and Goliath Heron. On the Marlborough Sewage Ponds I enjoyed seeing Red-knobbed Coots, Hottentot Teal, Red-billed Teal, White-faced Ducks, Squacco Heron, Grey Heron, Black-winged Stilts, African Jacana and Lesser Moorhen. A 2m Nile crocodile has moved in to the Ponds and is to be relocated. A large Rock Python 2½ m has also been seen.

Through being a Vlei Scout I have managed to educate the Marlborough Community, particularly those living near the Vlei and those engaging in any activity on the Vlei, about the importance of wetlands. This has been successful work in that many more people are aware of wetlands. I have also been involved in the educational visits to the Vlei by schools and universities. The restoration of the wetland included the removal of invasive plant species such as purple-top verbena and blackjacks and this is ongoing. This has been most rewarding work.

In as much as great work is being done we are facing challenges. There are plans to build 2000 houses, 2 schools and a church in the Vlei. In

December 2014 Marlborough and concerned residents petitioned against these developments. The matter is now before the courts and moving at a snail's pace. Cultivation is extensive on the wetland, despite the many meetings held with the cultivators, City of Harare and EMA over the years. A politician overrode these useful meetings by handing out seed and fertilizer to cultivators. Raw sewage is being discharged onto the Vlei both upstream and downstream of the Sewage Ponds, and into the Ponds. Other threats remain such as dumping, soil poaching, burning, feral animals and hunting. It is a big area to manage but these impacts would be worse without the presence of a Vlei Scout.

With the drought currently being experienced, 2016 should be a year where people value wetlands more than ever and they now understand the link between wetlands and water source and supply.

I look forward to seeing you at the 1st Saturday of the month BLZ Vlei Walk and just call me on 0775 617213 if you would like to join me during the week for a walk on the Vlei.

Ronnie Chirimuta, Marlborough Vlei Scout

Monavale Vlei Report November-December 2015

As everywhere, the rains have not been ideal and favourable this season. African Crakes were a bit late in arriving with the first one being heard on 28 December 2015. As I write this very article on 8 January 2016 no Streaky-breasted Flufftails have been heard. This is the first time ever from my observations. Could this be associated with lack of rain? Despite this the grasses are giving a good and better outlook of the Vlei together with the flowers.

Birds that have been seen include the following: Purple and Grey Heron, Reed Cormorant, Abdim's Stork, African Black Duck, Long-crested Eagle, Steppe Buzzard, Lizard Buzzard, Black Sparrowhawk, Shikra, Amur Falcon, Kurrichane Buttonquail, Common Moorhen, Temminck's Courser, Red-chested

Cuckoo, Levillant's Cuckoo, Black Coucal, Marsh Owl, Malachite Kingfisher, European Bee-eater, Barn Swallow, White-throated Swallow, Pearl-breasted Swallow, Greater and Lesser Striped Swallow, Grey-rumped Swallow, African Stonechat, Great Reed-warbler, Willow Warbler, Levillant's Cisticola, Spotted Flycatcher, Red-backed Shrike, Thick-billed Weaver, Cuckoo Finch, White-winged Widowbird and Yellow-fronted Canary, to mention only these. The Common Duiker continues to be seen so too are Olive Grass Snake, the odd Giant Bullfrog and once a Large Grey Mongoose. Wishing you all a Happy New Year and hopefully more rains.

Jimmy Muropa, Monavale Vlei Scout.
0772772771

BLZ MASHONALAND BRANCH: Waterfowl Count January 2016

Rainham Dams, Saturday 9th January

Only 5 of us met at PE for this outing on yet another hot, dry January day. Getting to the Rainham area is still relatively easy but reaching the dams required 3 attempts as the first two tracks we took led only to fences. The third was not much better but when confronted by a donga we disembarked and walked a few hundred metres.

As expected there was little water in either of the dams and lots of fishing but this did not deter the birds. 31 White-faced Ducks, 12 Red-billed Teals, Squacco, Purple and Grey Heron, African

Wattled and Blacksmith Lapwing plus African Jacana, Cattle, Little and Great Egret were observed, while numbers of Barn, Red-breasted and Grey-rumped Swallows and White-rumped Swifts and African Palm-swifts swooped over the water. The only waders were Wood Sandpipers.

In the grassland and bushes we found Red-backed Shrike, Yellow-throated Longclaw, Orange-breasted Waxbill, Rufous-naped Lark and African Pipit. A Purple-banded Sunbird was a nice surprise. Raptors appeared from time to time; Amur Falcon, Black-shouldered Kite, a Black-

chedsted Snake-eagle and 2 harriers, one definitely 'ringtail'.
an African Marsh-harrier, the other left as a

Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary, Sunday 10th January.

We were still only 9 the next day despite predictions of low water level and plenty of shoreline fit for waders. Our December visit had been exciting with high numbers of waterbirds. Numbers were still high on this day but with different species.

Even without a boat or a telescope we counted 184 White-breasted Cormorants on various rocks and 90 Reed Cormorant closer in. As we made our way through the water hyacinth towards Harare Safari Lodge we were fully occupied counting the myriad birds on the muddy shore: 62 Grey-headed Gulls, lots of Little Egrets and Great Egrets and 5 Black Herons. Stars of the show were 40+ Pied Avocets, 12 African Spoonbills and 30 Black-winged Stilts. Waders present were 100 Ruffs, a few Little Stint and Marsh and Wood Sandpipers. What we at first didn't see were some 50-60 Kittlitz's Plovers, each individual hiding in the deep footprints made by the fish

poachers. The ducks were Red-billed Teal, White-faced Duck and Egyptian Goose with their young.

Raising one's gaze from the shore, African Fish-eagles, lots of Barn Swallows, a Black-shouldered Kite and a few Amur Falcons could be seen.

After the excitement of the lakeshore, the woodland was extremely quiet as is so often the case these days and nothing of note came to our attention. However, the dam wall end of the shore also produced large numbers of waterfowl; 20-30 Grey Herons, 20+ White-winged Terns, a Goliath Heron, Glossy Ibis and African Sacred Ibis, 2 Allen's Gallinule and 2 White-faced Ducks, plus egrets and waders.

All in all a useful, enjoyable exercise. What a pity so few participated.

Ken Dixon

BLZ MASH BRANCH OUTING TO DOUGLYN FARM, SHAMVA, SUNDAY 23RD JANUARY 2016 – photos Cathy Shadwell

This was a new venue but one we shall, hopefully, visit again. Douglyn is a 540 hectare mixed farm with beef cattle, soya, maize, wheat and citrus a few kilometres from Shamva Gold Mine. Although the 70ha dam was the focus of our attention for the Waterbird count we collected a long varied list of over 100 species of birds.

After a welcome cup of tea or coffee we walked down to the dam, which is shallow and full of nutrients, received from the flow of effluent from the pigpens. This makes it attractive to fish poachers who abound in the area and necessitates tight security. The honest punter can buy a day permit for \$2 from the warden. As we approached the shoreline we could already see large numbers of ducks, egrets and waders at points all round the dam. We reckon there must have been about 200 White-faced Duck, numerous Cattle Egrets, Little, Great and Yellow-



billed Egret, Blacksmith Lapwing and African Wattled Lapwing, Wood and Common Sandpiper, Kittlitz's Plover, Reed and White-breasted Cormorant, Grey and Squacco Heron, Egyptian Goose and just one African Jacana. Yellow-billed Storks were feeding among the egrets in the distance.

In the grassland and reeds on the dry approaches we saw many Pin-tailed Whydahs and Southern Red Bishops, Yellow-throated Longclaw and a Red-backed Shrike. The bird of the day, however, was the Yellow Wagtail, an uncommon summer visitor. Three of these were feeding in the short grass a few metres from the water's edge. Over this area Barn Swallows chased the abundant insects. Among them were a few Wire-tailed Swallows and Grey-rumped Swallows and higher up one or two Common House-martins. Not many raptors but we identified African Fish-eagle and Wahlberg's Eagle, Black-shouldered Kite and Gabar Goshawk.



As we walked along the channel leading from the pigpens to the dam we could hear Little Rush-warbler and Lesser Swamp-warbler in the reeds and espied a Green-backed Heron sitting just above a Malachite Kingfisher. Up at the compound were Pied Wagtails, Southern Masked-weavers and Spectacled Weavers.

Our group split at this point and 8 people drove off to the dam wall where they found lots of new birds in the scrub: Red-throated Twinspot, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Southern White-crowned Shrike, Brubru and many others. The rest of us retraced our steps along the shoreline, through a small area of

woodland and back to the verandah for another cup of tea, some delicious flapjacks and the count. Reluctant to leave the generous hospitality of Scott and Sandy Bean our group of 19 finally left at about midday but there was one treat left, a Little Bittern wishing us a safe journey from the side of the road a few hundred metres from the farm.

Many thanks to the Bean family for this opportunity to visit their lovely home.

Ken Dixon

Gathering of waterbirds Douglyn farm



Matabeleland

BIRD CONSERVATION: A ZOO MAN'S PERSPECTIVE, 27 NOVEMBER

Our guest speaker on this occasion was Simon Tonge, Director of Whitley Wildlife Conservation Trust that operates three zoos in Devon and Cornwall in the UK – Paignton Zoo, Newquay Zoo and Living Coasts. Simon is also a trustee of Dambari Wildlife Trust. The subject of his talk was 'Bird conservation around the world: think global, act local – a zoo man's perspective'.

Many people still think of zoos as somewhat doubtful places where animals are unkindly kept in small cages purely so that people can come and gawp at them. However the modern zoo is a very different place. They use the latest scientific and artistic developments to create exhibits which enable visitors to experience what it is like in other parts of the world. For example at the huge, enclosed Masoala exhibit at Zurich Zoo visitors

can walk at canopy level and look out over the tops of 20m high trees growing as they do in the Masoala rainforest in Madagascar. Modern zoos are also actively involved in conservation. They support conservation programmes in other countries, for example as Whitley WCT supports Dambari's Conservation Across Boundaries programme in the Matobo Hills World Heritage Site. And they run captive breeding and

reintroduction programmes. As a result of these captive breeding programmes they are developing improved husbandry skills.

Simon gave examples of some birds that have benefitted from these programmes, including the California Condor in North America, the Gull Bunting in southern England, and the Waldrapp Ibis [Northern Bald Ibis] in North Africa. In 1987 there were only 17 California Condors remaining in the wild when a captive breeding programme was started by San Diego Zoo, Los Angeles Zoo and the Peregrine Fund. The programme was successful and within five years reintroductions into the wild had started. By the end of 2014 there were about 410 birds: 193 were in captivity in three facilities, with the rest returned to the wild – 120 in California, 70 in Arizona/Utah and 30 in Mexico. The programme continues to run successfully though the species continues to face problems due to high levels of lead in the environment.



On the Hawaiian Islands there were at one time at least 113 endemic species of birds. Of these 71 are now extinct, the most recent being the Po'ouli which became extinct in 2008. A further 31 species are considered endangered or critically endangered. The main reasons for declining numbers are predation, habitat destruction and introduced diseases. Most of the survivors are found in marginal habitats. Captive management and reintroduction are the only hope for the remaining species. Several programmes have already started and some progress has been made, e.g. with the Maui Parrotbill [left] and Palila Nene [Hawaiian Goose] have been bred at Slimbridge in the UK and released back onto the Hawaiian Islands. 350 Puaiohi eggs [a thrush] have been hatched in captivity and 200 have been released back into



the wild. (Simon's talk was accompanied by slides, which showed many of these birds, and in most cases their appearance is as exotic as their names!)



The Madagascar Pochard has presented challenges even for a reintroduction programme. This species was declared extinct in 1990 but subsequently a few birds were rediscovered on one small lake. This population was closely monitored but it was not doing well, and it was realised that the lake was too deep for chicks to feed successfully. A captive population has been successfully established on Madagascar but, despite a nationwide search, only one possible reintroduction site has been identified.



Zoos are also supporting numerous bird conservation programmes in Africa. In North Africa the 'Red-necked Ostrich' (whose range is restricted to the Sahara desert) [this is presumably the *S. c. camelus* race of the Common Ostrich?] is under threat as a result of overhunting by Arab falconers and hunters. Eggs have been taken for captive rearing with the long-term aim of reintroduction. In South Africa the UK's Hawk Conservancy is carrying out fieldwork on White-backed Vulture and other vultures in Kruger National Park. Several zoos are sponsoring fieldwork on Crowned and Wattled Cranes. Living Coasts (UK) is working with SANCCOB on the conservation of Bank Cormorants.

In conclusion Simon reminded us that zoos are primarily conservation organisations; they have a global perspective but work locally; and new techniques, which have been developed for successful captive breeding and management, may be applicable and useful in Africa.

Adele Edwards

MATABELELAND BRANCH CHRISTMAS LUNCH, 6 DECEMBER

On the dot of noon on Sunday, 6th December, 20 birders gathered at "Bean There" Restaurant for the Matabeleland BLZ Christmas lunch. It was a scorching hot day and a long table nearest the windows had been selected and decked out with brightly coloured tinsel, Christmas baubles and crackers. Drinks flowed throughout the day and a delicious lunch (we had four choices on offer) was served by the delightful young ladies of the restaurant. Crackers were pulled, paper hats donned, and the feeble jokes from the crackers were exchanged amid much laughter. The meal was topped off with chocolate brownie mince pies! It was a very merry and enjoyable day for all who came.

Marina Jackson

Mashonaland South

It's a new year and season for all creatures of planet earth. This summer season has had distinctly variable weather patterns, which is affecting all living creatures. We don't have to teach the birds where to find food, water or shelter.

Our new BirdLife Calendar "Zimbiosis" means we are all living together for the mutual benefit of one another, so, daily we must be aware of what's happening around us and act accordingly.

Recent arrivals have been few and erratic:

30+ Abdim's Stork – daily feeding on Kadoma golf course

Cuckoos – Red-chested, Levallant's, Black, Diderick and Klaas's.

White-winged Widowbirds and European Bee-eaters.

No Southern Red Bishops or Yellow-crowned Bishops or Thick-billed Weaver as yet.

21 December at 6.30 p.m. a large flock of Amur Falcons but very high in the sky.

Wed 6 January – A morning trip to Charama and surrounds with sweltering heat. The small pans in the bush are full of water as is the big dam by the lodge. They all filled after the 150 mm rain of 17/18 December 2015. 3 pans had nests of Little Grebe and both parents attending. About 18 total seen.

8 Red-billed Teal, 20+ White-faced Duck, 1 female Saddle-billed Stork. 2 pairs of Bronze-winged Coursers took flight as we traversed the bush.

The heronry of Black-headed Heron near the Kadoma police station has decreased in numbers, but is still active with lots of chattering noises day and night and many flights to and fro to the old gum trees.

Margaret Parrock

Tail Feathers

For Sale

1 pair of 10x42 Zeiss Binos for sale

Excellent Condition

US\$800 (negotiable) Telephone (Jacko) +263 (0) 4 481196



A new bird for our garden bird list

A Dwarf Bittern made itself at home on 15th January 2016 in our little dam at 11 Lyndhurst Road, Monavale, Harare.

Dorothy Wakeling and John Kelly.

A challenge for all our Atlassers – from Peter Lawson

I am project leader of this SABAP2 project which is registered with SANParks Scientific Services. It is a three year project and expires on 31 December 2016. Thus we have one full year for completion which I am determined to accomplish and the year 2016 will be filling in the gaps.



There are 446 pentads in the project and the original target set by the ADU was to turn them all green with a minimum of four atlas cards each. There are just 40 left but they are not all easy ones.

My reason for writing is to seek help from Zimbabwe Atlasers for just a single pentad that requires three cards. This is pentad **2215_3100** that just touches Kruger NP with one corner. The bulk of the pentad is in Zimbabwe and would be easiest atlased from Zim. We

have done it once on the SA side but a military base is on the Limpopo River in that corner and they are reluctant to let us in again.

The pentad lies due east of Chipise on the Zimbabwe side and a road traversing the entire width of the pentad, with the Bubyee River also cutting through.

This would be such a great help and whoever can assist will be of great service to this SABAP2 project which is certainly one of the best to date.

...And here just a short notice to say that because of the lack of space in this issue, the results of the November 2015 Big Birding Day competition will appear in the next *Babbler*

Donation

Grateful thanks to BLZ member Carl Wilson for manufacturing and donating two protective carrier cases for the BLZ office's two projectors.

These projectors are used extensively for presentations to schools and communities and these cases will ensure the projectors travel protected!



Contributions for *The Babbler* 129 April-May 2016 may be sent to the editor anytime between now and the very latest 14th March 2016.



*Black Heron at Mazvikadei Damon 6 December 2015
Photos George Fleet*

