



THE BABBLER

Newsletter of



BirdLife Zimbabwe

The BirdLife International Partner in Zimbabwe

ISSUE # 130 – June / July 2016

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SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE NOW!

Please pay promptly and avoid constant reminders!

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.

Especially in these difficult economic times, donations towards any of our projects are always much appreciated and you may consider mentioning BLZ in your will!

Please note: Council agreed not to increase the fees for the 5th 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 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.

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: JUNE 2016

Saturday 4th June	Marlborough Vlei Walk	Meet at 07.30 a.m.
Sunday 5th June	Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Saturday 11th June	Harare Botanic Garden	Meet at 07.30 a.m. Meet at Main Car Park, Sandringham Drive; bring a few dollars for entry and folding chair
Sunday 19th June	Monavale Vlei Walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Thursday 16th June	Rifa visit, March 2016	Meet at 5.30 for 6.00 p.m. Presentation by Ken Dixon, Avondale Sports Club
Sunday 26th June	Ewanrigg Botanic Gardens	Meet at 07.00 a.m. Meet at CABS to share transport. Bring folding chair, drink and snacks

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

July is waterbird count month!

Saturday 2nd July	Marlborough Vlei Walk	Meet at 07.30 a.m.
Sunday 3rd July	Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Saturday 9th July	Greengrove Nature Reserve (Willy's Dam)	Meet at 07.30 a.m. From Harare Drive turn into Latimer Road, then left into Kirrie Road, entrance is on left. From Mutare Road turn into Wilson Drive, then right into St Malo Avenue and left into Kirrie Road at end.
Sunday 10th July	Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 17th July	Monavale Vlei Walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Thursday 21st July	Birding in Ghana	Meet at 5.30 for 6.00 p.m. Presentation by Alex Masterson, Avondale Sports Club
Sunday 24th July	Hideaway Lodge/Fishing Camp, Manyame	Meet at 07.00 a.m. Meet at CABS to share transport.

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 – From Quendon Road turn into Lyndhurst Road, at bottom follow right hand bend, take first left and second right to BS Leon roundabout. Second exit is Fenella Drive. Meet at viewing platform on the left.

Matabeleland Branch

Saturday 4th June: Bird walk on Bulawayo Golf Course. Meet at the Qalisa gazebo by the main gate from where the walk will depart at 08:00. The last time we did this walk it was extremely fruitful so we hope you will all be able to join in. Tea afterwards at the Jackson's home in Qalisa.

Sunday 19th June: It has been decided to have a members' visit to Aisleby once a month on the 3rd Sunday of every month. This will be the first one. Meet at the Aisleby boom at 08:00. Please bring chairs and refreshments.

Sunday 17th July: Winter water bird count at Aisleby. Meet at the Aisleby boom at 08:00. Please bring chairs and refreshments

Other Areas

Mashonaland West – 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

Grateful thanks to Fiona Greiffenberg, the past editor of the *Babbler*, for her dedication and commitment to producing the newsletter for the last four years. Your work has been much appreciated, Fiona! All the best to Ian Riddell (gemsaf@mango.zw) as the new editor as of Issue no. 129.

Julia Pierini, CEO BirdLife Zimbabwe

RECENT REPORTS AND SIGHTINGS

National

Reports from the BIRDLIFE ZIMBABWE AGM – 21 May 2016

Mashonaland

This year's Mashonaland AGM was held on the 21st January 2016 and was well attended. The committee changed as a result of Linda and Andy Fussell emigrating. The committee is now:

Tony Alegria as Chairman,
Dave Rockingham-Gill – Vice-Chairman,
Ken Dixon back on committee as Secretary,
Debbie Wiggins – Treasurer,
James Ball and **Ali MacDonald** – committee members.

Richard Dennison continues to lead the Chivero outings on a quarterly basis whilst Dave Dalziel is leading the Mukuvisi outings and Monavale vlei continues to be led by Dorothy Wakeling. Dorothy is also involved with the Marlborough vlei outings. All the second Saturday and fourth Sunday outings

are run by whichever committee member happens to be present.

We have just started another Harare Garden Bird Survey as from the beginning of this month and we are going to look after our data so we don't have the same problem we had the last time.

Normal monthly outings continue with fluctuating numbers of birders in attendance – some good turnouts as well as some not so good! With 5 or 6 birding outings per month as well as an evening meeting, we are pretty busy.

Twelve birders went to Zambia in early July 2015 on a one weeks' birding holiday to see the Shoebill. We were met up there by a fellow Zimbabwean, Geoff Lowe and the Zambian birding guru Carl Beel. Later on another four Zambians joined our group before we left for Shoebill Island. We saw something like 20 bird species, including

the Shoebill, which do not exist in Zimbabwe. New antelope seen were thousands of Black Lechwe besides Puku and Sitatunga. This was an excellent trip – good birds, wonderful scenery, good company and good food! The only downer was the many, many hours spent in a vehicle – we went a long way!

We tried to organize a trip to RIFA for March this year but failed to get the required minimum number – sign of the times! But fortunately birders in Marondera had organized a trip to the same location and were short of birders. Thus our members joined up with them and had a good trip.

This year we were hoping to organize a one-weeks-birding-holiday to southern Mozambique to see a few coastal birds, but unfortunately the security situation in that country is presently not conducive to such a trip. Due to the present economic situation we have decided not to have a one week's birding holiday this year but are looking at having a week-end trip.

Our monthly evening meetings are attracting some 30+ bodies every month and I thank all those birders who have taken time and effort to deliver presentations. We continue to have mostly birding presentations and we throw in the odd topic of interest. Finding speakers and suitable topics is my committee's biggest headache, so if anybody would like to give us a presentation, please contact anyone on the committee.

I extend an invitation to all BLZ members and non-members to participate in any of our monthly functions.

I also invite anyone from out of town who wants to go birding in the Harare area to contact myself.

Tony Alegria

Chairman – Mashonaland Branch

Matabeleland

Matabeleland branch has continued to conduct the surveys it has traditionally undertaken.

Firstly, the Verreaux's Eagle Breeding Survey

The breeding statistics and the replacement rate of 0.28 per pair for the 2015 season is slightly lower than what can be considered the norm of 0.32. The 2015 season had 29 territories occupied, with 11 pairs making a breeding attempt. This 53rd year of this survey has 98 Verreaux's Eagle nest sites and 20 Dassie colony sites allocated. We thank RSPB for their funding, received through the National Office, towards the 2015 Verreaux's Eagle Breeding Survey and the Dassie Population Census. We thank Council and the National Office for sending the monies from calendar sales in Bulawayo back to the Branch towards funding the 2016 surveys.

The data base for the 53 years of the Verreaux's Eagle Survey is nearing completion. The original report forms have been scanned and attached to each entry. A database for national Verreaux's Eagle sightings has been created, with historical and current observations being entered.

The 2015 Dassie Population Census

took place over the 'Africa Day' weekend. An increase from 448 in 2014 to 629 in 2015, animals counted could indicate stable populations at the sites monitored. The 2016 census is scheduled for next weekend – 28th and 29th May.

The Raptor Survey continues,

and John Brebner plots sightings received on a programme which then displays distribution of all raptor species, and the number of times they have been seen.

The Garden Bird Survey continues,

with Julia Duprée at the helm – collecting forms and dispersing information of species recorded.

Throughout the year, there have been walks, talks, and outings organized. These have been varied in nature and topic, and attendance has been just as varied.

The completion of bird lists of species seen at the various dams, pans and waterholes throughout Hwange National Park during the annual 24 hour WEZ Game Count by participating teams – is encouraging. In 2015 there were 91 participating teams, of which 80 completed a bird list. A total of 214 species were recorded in 2015.

Our Branch's support, together with WEZ Matabeleland, in the form of fumigation of collections and the Museum itself – has been maintained during the past year. Kudzanai Dhlwayo is the enthusiastic Assistant Curator of the Ornithology Department at the Museum. She is taking care of the skin collection and has been checking the conditions of the skins, and ensuring they are in their rightful place within the collection. I take this opportunity to remind members she would welcome 'Nest Record Cards' submitted to her. An exercise that began many years ago, fell into the doldrums, but one she has 'restarted'.

Our Matabeleland Members are thanked for their continued support in every aspect of our Branch – surveys and activities.

Cecilia Hubbard
Chairman

Membership

The best thing about birds is that they can be seen anywhere. Bird watching is a very enjoyable and exciting activity, especially when you start to identify them, so please encourage others to become interested. We need to raise awareness of the importance of conservation of birds and their habitats, as changes in population are often the first indication of environmental problems. Without you, BirdLife Zimbabwe members, we would not be able to carry on, so many thanks to you all.

BirdLife Zimbabwe's membership numbers have increased over the past year to over 500, including those given membership in appreciation for various donations/sponsorship. Council agreed that in the present difficult economic situation the subscription rate would stay the same for the 5th year running, so I hope members will support BLZ and renew in good time, as our membership year runs from April to March. We do still however request that those who receive a printed copy of the newsletter *Babbler* to please pay an extra \$5 per year towards the cost of printing the pictures in colour. We have a membership category to suit everyone, from corporate to youth and those in between.

Your continued support is much appreciated, as we work hard to promote conservation and biodiversity and are involved in the ongoing battle for the nation's water supplies and saving the wetlands.

BLZ members can become involved with some of our projects and the data obtained contributes to monitoring trends, so vulnerable species and habitats can be identified. They are:

- The countrywide Waterbird Count, which is held every January and July, and whose valuable data is submitted to Wetlands International to include in the global figures. Contact Ian gemsaf@mango.zw
- Southern African Bird Atlassing Project (SABAP 2) which is birding with a purpose and adds to our knowledge and distribution maps. Contact juliapierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org
- Special Species focuses on a number of selected bird species that deserve attention mainly because their numbers or areas of distribution have undergone adverse change in the recent past or they are of other research interest. Contact Peta specialspecies@blz.co.zw
- The Garden Bird Survey. Some birds we now think of as 'common' in our gardens were not always there, so submitting what you see in yours helps fill a gap in our knowledge of the changes taking place. This will be particularly enjoyable for members who may not be able to get to BLZ events. There is both a Harare and a national garden bird survey. Contact 2016hgbs@gmail.com

- Nest Record Cards. About 540 of all bird species recorded in Zimbabwe are known or expected to breed here. Please help to update these valuable records. For details contact Kudzanai Dhliwayo kudzanaid@gmail.com
- Field Cards were started in 1962 to establish the geographic and seasonal distribution of Zimbabwe's 650-odd bird species. The BLZ field check list records all bird species in Zimbabwe, using the numbering system and names in *Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa*. The information collected is of world-wide interest. juliapierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org
- And we always want articles for our newsletter, *Babbler* and international journal *Honeyguide*. Send to Ian gemsaf@mango.zw

We need more members to get involved with the things we do please! It can be fun!

Don't forget you can also look on our website www.birdlifezimbabwe.org and Facebook page www.facebook.com/birdlifezimbabwe for information, news and some great pics. Please send contributions of interesting sightings and photos for Facebook to juliapierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org

And remember, donations and bequests are always very welcome!

Carolyn Dennison

carolyndennison@birdlifezimbabwe.org

National Membership Secretary

Honeyguide Editor's Report

Since the last Annual General Meeting the Editorial Team has completed Volume 61 (2015) and we have begun work on Volume 62 (2016). We have a fair amount of material to hand and we hope that Part 1 will be published well before the end of 2016 – and with luck we might be well on the way to producing Part 2 by then.

While looking through some old *Honeyguides*, I came across the first one I edited during my previous stint as Editor (No 82, May 1975). In the Editorial I wrote "*It is perhaps appropriate again to remind members that the magazine always needs contributions, both longer articles and short notes. Many members must have observations that could be used but which have not been sent in because of the fear that they may be of no interest or importance. In addition, many must have visited remote or little known places about which an article of interest can be written ...*" Forty years later, nothing has changed (but hopefully my English has improved)! We still need articles and notes and even old material that may have been forgotten or put aside can be used. For example, the lengthy notes from Des Jackson, dating back 50 years or so that appeared Volume 61 – with the rest to follow in 62(1) – still contain material of interest. It

is much better to have them on the record rather than lost in some dusty drawer.

Finally, I should like to thank Julia Duprée for her unstinting help since editing the journal at long distance has its difficulties although the electronic

age has made it easier. I should also acknowledge the contributions of Ken Dixon and Michael Irwin in the production process.

Brian Marshall

At the BLZ AGM – The Lodges at Kyle Dam, Masvingo, 20-22 May 2016

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I asked about the Common Ostrich and was told there were 4 (2 adults and 2 chicks). The female got killed (possibly by a croc, as no body could be found) but the male brought up the two chicks. The ostriches were introduced in the early 1960s.

A Saddle-billed Stork was seen, 6 African Fish-eagles, maybe more, and a juvenile Augur Buzzard. A Secretarybird was found with a nest in an acacia tree.

A flock of 34 Helmeted Guineafowl fed on the school football field. Three-banded Plovers and Kittlitz's Plovers were at the water's edge and a couple of Crowned Lapwings were in a degraded grassless area near the lakeshore. At night a Freckled Nightjar was heard near the camp. 6 Trumpeter Hornbills flew overhead one evening but Red-billed Hornbills and African Grey Hornbills seemed scarce. Three woodpeckers, Bearded Woodpecker, Cardinal Woodpecker and Golden-tailed Woodpecker. A White-breasted Cuckoo-shrike and a flock of 25 White-necked Ravens were also noted. Southern Black Tits were common, as was the Lazy Cisticola; a Marico Flycatcher was seen. Marico Sunbird, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird and Amethyst Sunbird were the only species. The only bunting was Cinnamon-breasted Bunting and I looked for the Cape but didn't find it – Vernon said they were a scarce resident with an abundance of habitat (Vernon, C.J. 1977. *Birds of the Zimbabwe Ruins Area, Rhodesia. Southern Birds* 4, Witwatersrand Bird Club). [I found the

Cape Bunting at the Acropolis during a short midday visit on 23rd April – Ed.]

We saw 14 animal species including a dead Bushbuck killed by a leopard. All the game from Impala to Rhino was introduced in the early 1960s. Some like Eland, Tsessebe and Sable have not thrived. The lodges were beautifully kept.

As we left the park, near a lion park, we saw 6 vultures, one being chased by a White-necked Raven. For all our effort not a great score of 69 birds, but our birds hate chilly, windy weather.

Dry Wigeon Pan, Gutu District, 19° 21'S., 30°54'E

In an hour we saw 2 Secretarybirds, 2 Grey Crowned Cranes, 1 Kori Bustard, 1 Black-bellied Bustard, Black-headed Heron, Hamerkop, Blacksmith Lapwing, Common Fiscal, and African Quailfinch, 5 of which we also saw at Kyle.

At the AGM we found out that BLZ is in serious financial difficulty. We passed a resolution to ask every member to find a new member this year. BLZ can also be mentioned in your will – a bequest would be a wonderful gesture of your support.

D. Rockingham-Gill

The eBird Global Big Day – 14th May 2016

MY GLOBAL BIG DAY

By Adele Edwards

Having taken part in Global Big Day last year, and with National Office encouraging more members to participate this year, Cecilia and I were keen to take part. As so often happens on these occasions many of our regulars were conspicuous in their absence, but in compensation we had a number of sightings that were personal highlights and which, with luck, will help to push the species count up.

A quick whizz around our gardens, and visits to a few of our favourite spots around the suburbs resulted in us having

The global tally is currently at 6300 — and more than 58% of the world's bird species! 45,082 checklists have been entered by 16,429 eBirders in 145 countries—all in a single day. Zimbabwe was one of them

about 30 species on our list by 9:30. The highlight was without question an Ashy Tit. We had an excellent, clear, close up view of the bird but neither of us was really familiar with the species and we had to resort to our books before confirming the identification. Other highlights were a Crimson-breasted Shrike, a Brown-crowned Tchagra and a Groundscraper Thrush – these used to be common in Bulawayo but I hadn't seen one for a long time.

Next we headed out to Aisleby which as usual provided a wide assortment of birds allowing us to add almost 50 more species to our list. Starting in June, the branch will be having regular outings to Aisleby on the third Sunday of

each month and I really recommend to members that they join us for these as it is such a worthwhile place to bird. Our list of water birds included: Little Grebe, Reed Cormorant, Grey and Black-headed Heron, Cattle Egret, Saddle-billed Stork, African Sacred Ibis, Egyptian Goose, Cape, Hottentot and Red-billed Teal, Cape Shoveler, Southern Pochard, Comb Duck, Black Crake, Common Moorhen, Red-knobbed Coot, African Jacana, Three-banded Plover, Crowned, Blacksmith and African Wattled Plover, Common Greenshank and Black-winged Stilt. We were disappointed not to find the African Fish-eagle or the White-breasted Cormorant but were delighted with a sighting of Chestnut-backed Sparrowlark, a Striped Kingfisher and Meves's Starling. Global BBD was a bit more challenging this year than last year as we were asked to record not only species but the number of birds of each species. While one can appreciate the scientific advantage of this information it isn't always easy especially at a site like Aisleby. We didn't have time to visit all areas but in the few areas we did go



The total of 395 species in South Africa was good enough for #14 worldwide! Tanzania came in second with 326, and Zimbabwe a close 3rd at 318, thanks to the engagement from BirdLife Zimbabwe



totally choked by this floating weed; there wasn't a glimpse of open water – or a bird. I'm not sure how one tackles a problem of this magnitude but something needs to be done as a matter of urgency before the whole of Umguza dam is taken over.

Our drive through the CBD proved to be a dud – not a single swift or swallow at the usual spots, let alone a falcon!

From there we headed out towards Matopos. Again we were disappointed not to see a Verreaux's Eagle but did pick up our only raptors – a Black-shouldered Kite and a few White-backed Vultures.

Other sightings that stood out in my mind were:

- Violet-backed Starlings – seen at two different locations in town at the start and end of our day
- an Acacia Pied Barbet
- Marico Flycatchers – neither of us had seen a Marico for some time and we were pleased when we found five in one spot where the road verge had been graded and there was an area

- of disturbed soil. However after that we found them in several other places
- Common Mynas were seen / heard in four different locations

The Big Day at Christon Bank

By Ian Riddell

Julia, Carla and I wended our way to Christon Bank for this year's count.

Like most people, we suffered a bit from the effects of the season though others had a windy day that seemed to diminish the amount of birds available. In fact it was so slow that we only had 21 of our 50 species dribbling in over the first 1 hour 34 minutes! We visited one of the Boulder Chat spots but they weren't there, though we were rewarded with a magnificent view over the Mazowe Valley and a flyby from an Augur Buzzard.

Then it was up the hill to a spot where I had a great bird party on a previous visit that included an uncommon-for-this-area sighting of a Spotted Creeper (the area is full of Mountain Acacias which the Creeper avoids because of the smooth bark). Yes, it was one of those birding stories about how you should have been here on such and such a day, but not today... No sooner had we ventured to the edge of the ridge and looked down into the woods below when, at last, we were assailed by calls and shapes of flitting birds. With some anticipation we descended the steep slope, first being distracted by someone on the ground in front that turned out to be just a Black-crowned Tchagra, and by someone behind who turned out to be Carla cautiously navigating the hazard in various ground-hugging postures. Then, joy of joys, the bird party materialised with the first prize being that Spotted Creeper! And very noisy it was too, calling continuously and moving slowly from tree to tree in typical fashion but being such an in-your-face bird today that even Carla managed to get great sightings, even though only ¾ of the way down the slippery slope. Grey Penduline-tits, White-breasted Cuckooshrike and Red-faced Crombec showed themselves, and being of a contrary nature, they make their way up to the top of the hill where we had just been – naturally. We mountain goats were back to the top in no time, leaving poor Carla to re-ascend on hands and knees. Black-backed Puffbacks hopped to and fro and we soon spotted the diminutive lookalike, the Southern Hylita; Green-capped Eremomelas and a Brown-backed Honeybird were soon added. Then even I got rather excited as I noticed a male Western Violet-backed Sunbird at eye level and right in front of us and Black-eared Seedeaters called high up. Following the party we added many more 'typical' birds (plus Mrs. Western Violet-backed), culminating in a Miombo Rock-thrush and Striped Pipit. At this point the party was over as they headed down the hill but a quick

appearance by an African Goshawk caused a departing flurry of alarm calls.

Back at the car Carla took a rest whilst Julia and I did a last sweep around, first checking out another Boulder Chat spot – and there they were, very vocal even at 11h40 as they called in competition with another pair a little further off. Heading that way we found another bird party, adding Green-backed Honeybird, White-crested Helmet-shrikes with a Retz’s Helmet-shrike or two joined to them, Common Scimitarbill, a Greater Honeyguide chasing other birds about, and again a short list of more typical species.

From Christon Bank we dropped in at Komani Microlight Club and trekked the vlei in search of longclaws and Marsh Owls. No luck with the owl (much of the vlei had been mown) but we did find all three longclaws – Rosy-throated Longclaw, Yellow-throated Longclaw and Cape Longclaw. We added some vlei birds including African Quailfinch and a large flock of Red-capped Larks. They really teased us... whilst trying to explain to Julia where a few had landed in the short grass 60m away, we took a few steps and bunches of the blighters erupted from almost at our feet!

Correction to BIG BIRDING DAY November 2015

Ian Riddell

Luke Wilson has notified me of an error in his team list for Big Birding Day 2015 which was held over the weekend of 28-29th November. ***So apologies to Luke and team*** Three Wondering W’s – it was my error as I only entered the first page of their list (57 species) when in fact their total list for the day was 128 species! This moves them from 15th place to a tie at 7th place with Imvelo Safaris, a considerable jump up the ladder. They also added two more species to the overall list, Little Bittern and Malachite Kingfisher, bringing the total to 358.

The tables in *The Babbler* #129 are replaced as below and the downloadable excel file on the website has been replaced too [on the site map click on *Surveys & Reports*, under the *Conservation* heading]. I hope I’ve got it right this time...

RESULTS — 2015 BIG BIRDING DAY

Table 1. Overall list ranking on number of species

Position	Species	Name	Leader	Category	Location
1	161	Bunny Huggers	M. Jackson	36 hour	Bulawayo
2	152	Whet	C. Hubbard	24 hour	Bulawayo
3	148	Dodo's	A. Masterson	24 hour	Harare
4	140	Shadwigs	D. Wiggins	24 hour	Harare
5	134	Bhejane Trust	S. Long	24 hour	Hwange
5	134	Hot Spotters	R. Dennison	24 hour	Harare
7	128	Imvelo Safaris	S. Sibanda	24 hour	Hwange
7	128	Three Wondering W's	L. Wilson	24 hour	Harare
9	123	Jusan	J. Duprée	36 hour	Bulawayo
9	123	Vic Falls Turacos	G. Blair	24 hour	Victoria Falls
11	109	Migratory Three	P-A. Ditchburn	36 hour	Hwange
12	99	Peterhouse	P. Raynor	24 hour	Mana
13	93	Charama Chicks	R. Paice	24 hour	Kadoma
14	86	Louw Toppies	I. Louw	36 hour	Harare
15	62	Macdonald	G. Macdonald	36 hour	Esigodini
16	¹ 52	Calvert	G. Calvert	36 hour ²	Esigodini

¹ 1 species disallowed

² includes garden category

Table 2. 36 hour category

Position	Species	Name	Leader	Category	Location
1	161	Bunny Huggers	M. Jackson	36 hour	Bulawayo
9	123	Jusan	J. Duprée	36 hour	Bulawayo
11	109	Migratory Three	P-A. Ditchburn	36 hour	Hwange
14	86	Louw Toppies	I. Louw	36 hour	Harare
15	62	Macdonald	G. Macdonald	36 hour	Esigodini
16	52	Calvert	G. Calvert	36 hour	Esigodini

Table 3. 24 hour category

Position	Species	Name	Leader	Category	Location
2	152	Whet	C. Hubbard	24 hour	Bulawayo
3	148	Dodo's	A. Masterson	24 hour	Harare
4	140	Shadwigs	D. Wiggins	24 hour	Harare
5	134	Bhejane Trust	S. Long	24 hour	Hwange
5	134	Hot Spotters	R. Dennison	24 hour	Harare
7	128	Imvelo Safaris	S. Sibanda	24 hour	Hwange
7	128	Three Wondering W's	L. Wilson	24 hour	Harare
9	123	Vic Falls Turacos	G. Blair	24 hour	Victoria Falls
12	99	Peterhouse	P. Raynor	24 hour	Mana
13	93	Charama Chicks	R. Paice	24 hour	Kadoma

International

Our first Nature Walk/Bird Outing in Lancashire

Andy and Linda Fussell

BROCKHOLES/LANCASHIRE TRUST

Brockholes is an old quarry site, and there are lots of amazing habitats to explore and wildlife to see. It has one of the largest strips of ancient woodland in the UK, species-rich hay meadow, large wetland areas and the beautiful River Ribble running along the edge of the site. Brockholes is also one of the best sites in the country for birds, in particular breeding waders.

They have created an environment that provides habitat (homes) for lots of different wildlife. Some of the homes, particularly for birds, are temporary because they migrate and only spend some of the year at Brockholes. Hides, paths and viewing points have been built to allow you to see the wildlife at close quarters without disturbing it.

Brockholes is the Trust's flagship nature reserve, a transformed quarry site located straight off junction 31 of the M6 at Preston

There is an amazing variety of plants, birds and insects you can find. Listen as well as look, for there's a wonderful variety of song and calls to be heard. Some birds you might hear but never see!

Andrew and I ventured out on Wednesday 16th March 2016 and joined a party of 6 other outdoor enthusiasts for a 2 hour nature walk. This is 30 minute drive from Oswaldtwistle, where we have taken up residence. We were received very warmly and after an

introductory talk we bundled up warmly and set out around the ponds to observe ducks and other waterbirds. We had excellent sightings of Common Black-headed Gulls, Common Coot, Common Moorhen, Canada Geese, Mallard, Common Goldeneye, Muted Swan, Eurasian Wigeon, Common Teals, Tufted Ducks, Gadwalls, Eurasian Oystercatchers, cormorants, Northern Lapwing and Grey Heron. A fantastic hide has recently been constructed overlooking the vast wetlands.

We then wandered into the ancient woodland dating back to 1660. Old wood and broken branches are homes to Grey Squirrels, bats, Barn Owls and other woodland creatures. Brockholes is famous for its established Badger Sets. "Brock" meaning Badger dating back to Edward II around 1400.

The sun came out and the woodland was suddenly alive with the appearance and calls of birds. We sighted Long-tailed Tit, Common Blue Tit and Great Tit, Eurasian Nuthatch, Chaffinch,



Carrion Crows, Eurasian Jackdaws, the little Northern Wrens which despite their size have a very powerful voice, a pheasant, a hovering Common Kestrel and a Eurasian Buzzard.

One of the party is also a butterfly observer and we were shown a beautiful Peacock Butterfly. We also discussed the local vegetation, trees and appearance of the spring flowers.

It was a very informative outing.

Mashonaland

BLZ Mash Branch outing to Goshu Park, Marondera, Sunday 27th March 2016

Well, 390 of you missed the distribution of Easter Bunnies by Cathy and you also missed out on an exciting, productive walk in this super reserve in pristine miombo woodland with its towering rocky kopjes and balancing rocks. After a drive through mist so thick even the cops at roadblocks couldn't see us the 15 members and visitors reached Goshu at around 8 a.m. just as the sun was finally breaking through.

Led by Richard D we took the circular drive from the Hikers' Hut through the dappled Masasa woodland. It was silent at first but then, following distant calls, we found ourselves surrounded by various members of a large and diverse bird-party. As often happens it was the chattering of the White-crested Helmet-shrike which gave away the whereabouts of this group which held our attention for the next hour as we trailed it through the reserve.

At first there were lots of Southern Black Flycatchers and Chin-spot Batis, while Cape Turtle-dove, Black-headed Oriole and Black-collared Barbet could be heard. But then Geoff spotted a Miombo Rock-thrush, so rare in Harare, which gave us all a thrill and good views. Golden-breasted Bunting, White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Kurrichane Thrush, an unspecified woodpecker, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Willow Warbler, White-browed Scrub-robin, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, Stierling's Wren-warbler, Black-backed Puffback, Fork-tailed

Dronko, Mocking Cliff-chat, Whyte's Barbet, African Yellow White-eye, Meyer's Parrot and Dark-capped Bulbul made up the main party but we were soon on the trail of a separate group on an open area on the woodland fringe. This contained 4 Black-eared Seedeaters, an uncommon species for us, Yellow-throated Petronia, Brubru, Bar-throated Apalis, Miombo Tit, Black-crowned Tchagra and Brown-crowned Tchagra and Blue Waxbill.

As we made our way towards the smaller dams we could hear European Bee-eater overhead and our first White-browed Robin-chat of the day called from nearby. Our search for Boulder Chat was fruitless but we spied Rock Martin on a tall vertical boulder and Lazy Cisticola lower down. Our return walk was less exciting but it was now hot and still.

Back at the camp site we met up with the rest of the party who had visited the large dam and seen White-faced Duck, Red-billed Teal, a Wood Sandpiper, Grey Heron, Southern Red Bishop and Yellow Bishop, Black Crake, Cattle Egret and Reed Cormorant. The total count, accompanied by the sweet song of a Yellow-fronted Canary, was 82 species, a fitting result to a most satisfactory birding session in a beautiful, calm environment. Mammals seen were Blesbok, Wildebeest and Vervet monkey.

Ken Dixon

BLZ Mash Branch weekend activities, 14th and 15th May 2016

Busy weekend for BLZ; Greystone Park and Global Big Day on Saturday, Monavale and Alex's birthday bash on Sunday. But not a good weekend for large numbers of birds or birders. In fact, in my 25 year membership of OAZ/BLZ I have never been the sole member at a venue but that was the case on a lovely morning at Greystone Park. I dutifully did the circuit and filled in the list but with only 30 species, more heard than seen, though. Things did get better though as I received a call from James Ball while I was in the preserve and later visited Greengrove and Haka with him for the Global Big Day list.

Sunday was windy and cool at Monavale and there were 8 of us following the newly mowed paths through the tall rank grass. In contrast to last month's visit when all the usual suspects popped up to see us and some still in breeding plumage, it was hard to find any birds at all. For me the highlight was a pair of Pearl-breasted Swallow in their usual spot on a line on the Meyrick Park side of the vlei. 41 species were recorded. It is also good to know that the fight against the greedy, unprincipled wetland destroyers continues with financial backing having been obtained to pay legal fees of the lawyers fighting to protect Monavale, Marlborough and Borrowdale wetlands against development.

A few hours later, 50 or so of us were gathered in an idyllic spot under the shady trees of the Botanic Gardens to celebrate the 80th birthday of one of OAZ/BLZ's founding fathers and current icons, Alex Masterson, a lifelong naturalist and leading birder since 1949. David Rockingham-Gill introduced our star guest and gave us a brief resume of Alex's education and career, especially focussing on his contribution to the development of birding and ornithology in Rhodesia and Zimbabwe, from his Shona influenced childhood with catapult and fishing rod to his current legal work in defending the exploitation of our wetlands. Other long-time friends added their own memories and anecdotes about their association with this colourful but modest character. Finally, the man himself rose to his feet to great applause and entertained us with his own version of **THE CONTINUING LIFE AND TIMES OF ALEX MASTERSON**. There's enough there, Alex, for a book!

Then a delicious lunch was served, prepared by the Botanic Gardens restaurateur and accompanied by the usual cool-box refreshment and oodles of chat amongst the many friends who had not met for so long. A fitting occasion to mark an important moment in BLZ history. We are indebted to all who made this occasion such a success.

Ken Dixon

THANKS FROM ALEX MASTERSON

Dear All

On Sunday 15th May the Mashonaland Branch organized a most enjoyable lunch for me to mark my 80th birthday. The Botanic Gardens in Harare was an ideal venue, there was plenty of wine and a very well presented meal. Our table almost had a 50/50 split between those of 80+ and those not quite 80. Over 50 people came along, all having generously contributed to the costs of the occasion. I was most honoured by your support and thank you all for your attendance. Many of you brought cards and "good things". You should not have done so but they have all been appreciated and I thank you. I also received several calls and good will messages from those who had other engagements or lived too far away. It was great to hear from them too.

The occasion reflects that birding is not just about birds. I have had as much pleasure passing on to other members what I know about birds as in seeing the birds myself. Sharing the pleasure of finding a Pitta is as gratifying as seeing it yourself. Your company and support over the years has been a great pleasure to me.

**Thanks again.
Alex Masterson**

BLZ Mashonaland Branch visit to Arden Park Farm/Bel-In Stud, Gwebi, Sunday 24th April 2016

13 members joined in this maiden trip to Arden Park Farm, just past Nyabira on the Kariba Road. It was surprisingly windy for April but the temperature was perfect. We drove directly to the dam about 3kms from the turn off along a red clay track. Waiting for us were a Giant Kingfisher atop a floodlight, a Lizard Buzzard and a juvenile African Fish-eagle on a bare gum. The dam, which stretches out of sight both to the north and south, was alive with activity; hundreds of White-faced Duck and Red-billed Teal, 2 African Purple Swamphens, Squacco, Grey and Purple Herons, African Jacana, Black Crake, Reed Cormorant, Malachite Kingfisher and Pied Kingfisher, Little Rush-warblers and Lesser Swamp-warblers in the reeds. Not a bad start.

When the latecomers had turned up in order to cover the lengthy shoreline we divided into 2 groups, one going towards the dam wall and the

other southwards. I went north in a small group which first concentrated on the bush and acacias finding Yellow Bishop, Green-winged Pytilia, African Green-pigeon, Lilac-breasted Roller, African Stonechat, Yellow-fronted Canary and Little Bee-eater. We were lucky to be joined by Neil Deacon who knows the farm well, accompanied by his 9 year old daughter. This young man can identify the tiniest speck in the sky provided it is a bird of prey. Thanks to him we were soon watching 2 African Marsh-harriers quartering the reeds on the shoreline and frequently diving down to snatch a hapless African Jacana chick. Even more exciting was a pair of Osprey which flew right over us. In theory they should have left Zim. for Scotland or Scandinavia but there was no doubt about their identity.

Leaving the dam, we took a rough track parallel to the shore which we left from time to time to get

nearer the dam or fight our way through the rank grass in the hope of flushing quail or buttonquail. Red-faced Cisticola and Rattling Cisticola called and we found Variable and Amethyst Sunbird, a Wood Pipit, Gabar Goshawk and a Black-chested Snake-eagle. Lawrence, who was ahead of us, managed to get good photos of a Marsh Owl he flushed but there was not much to report from a long hard walk.

At the count, our group realised that, apart from the Osprey and Marsh-harrier, we had made a poor choice in opting to go north. I'll let someone from the other group relate their experience...

By going south to the top end of the dam, we tried to get a good view of the whole length of the dam but after 2km we found that this was not possible because of the heavy vegetation both in

and around the water. In terms of raptors we managed to add [another?] Black-chested Snake-eagle and Neil Deacon added a Lanner Falcon after the call over. Around the dam we added White-backed Duck, Southern Pochard, Senegal Coucal, Little Rush-warbler and 73 African Wattled Lapwings on floating water weeds.

In the grassland away from the dam many of the anthills had what appeared to be an exotic shrub with bunches of small yellow berries that were being eaten by African Green-pigeons of which we counted 8. Other highlights included Meyer's Parrot, White-throated Robin-chat, Yellow-throated Longclaw and White-winged Widowbird. On the drive out we added a pair of Magpie Shrikes to give a final species count of 92.

Ken Dixon and Richard Dennison

URGENT!! HELP REQUIRED! THE HARARE GARDEN SURVEY 2016 NEEDS MANY MORE PARTICIPANTS ALL OVER THE CITY!

The response to our invitation to participate in the new survey was disappointing. We must have at least 250 members in Harare but only 30+ responded to our appeal rendering any data gathered unrepresentative of the city as a whole. Please join us. You can start at any time and you can miss weeks if you are absent but we need your input. There may not be too many species about at present but the survey lasts until May 1st 2017 so

will cover all seasons and you will be amazed at the extremes you record.

We can guarantee that your results will be faithfully recorded, analysed and the findings published soon after the conclusion of the exercise. Please email Tony Alegria tonyalegria47@gmail.com to receive registration forms, 4-weekly lists and full instructions.

Matabeleland

MATOPOS BIRDING, 30 April – 2 May 2016

The long weekend at the beginning of May saw Cecilia and I heading out to Matopos for a weekend of mixed fortunes. For example Saturday was a glorious, hot, sunny day – but the mopane bees were out in full force; while Sunday dawned cool, overcast, grey and breezy – which kept the mopane bees at bay, but also deterred many of the smaller birds. The nights were magnificent, with clear skies spread with a dazzle of stars. Birding in the vegetation along the edge of Maleme Dam is always rewarding and we had close up views of many of the smaller birds such as Long-billed Crombec, Bar-throated Apalis, Yellow-fronted Canary, White-bellied Sunbird and Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, Chin-spot Batis, Tawny-flanked Prinia and Southern Black Tit. Many of the larger birds were there as well such as Green Wood-hoopoe, Grey Go-away-bird, Black-headed Oriole, Fork-tailed Drongo, Dark-capped Bulbul, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Tropical Boubou, Black-backed Puffback, Crested Barbet, Cape Glossy Starling and Red-winged Starling and Brown-hooded Kingfisher. During the day the peace was often disturbed by the raucous alarm call of the Natal

Spurfowl, in sharp contrast to the peaceful clucking of the Helmeted Guineafowl. The Purple-crested Turaco, common in Harare gardens, is a treat for us in Matabeleland and while we didn't have the pleasure of seeing any, we heard them call on several occasions. We also heard White-throated Robin-chat, White-browed Robin-chat, Black-collared Barbet, Golden-tailed Woodpecker and at night a Pearl-spotted Owlet.

The dam itself is distressingly low – possibly less than 10% full – and this at the end of the rainy season! Seeing it like this one realises how silted and overgrown with reeds it has become – greatly reducing its capacity even when full. Despite lots of exposed mud, there were not a lot of water birds but we did see: Blacksmith Lapwing and African Wattled Lapwing, Three-banded Plover, Cattle Egret, Saddle-billed Stork, Squacco Heron, African Pied Wagtail, Egyptian Goose and White-breasted Cormorant. We were puzzled by one small bird perched atop a reed near the water. While I had been scolding most of the birds for not staying still long enough for me to get a chance to ID them, this one sat still as a stone, facing directly towards us

so we could see its rusty coloured breast and nothing else. Eventually our patience was rewarded and it turned so we could see it was indeed an African Stonechat.

Raptors presented their usual challenge. A magnificent pair of African Fish-eagles, which nest at Maleme, were on view throughout the weekend. We also had several sightings of Verreaux's Eagle. We saw birds from three different territories from our camp site, and others on our drives. On a couple of occasions they were interacting with other species; once with a Lanner Falcon, and on another occasion with an African Hawk-eagle and a third unidentified species.

One of our most profitable half-hours was spent along the gravel scenic drive which connects the

Maleme road to Circular Drive. We'd stopped to look at a Verreaux's Eagle when we realised the stream line running alongside the road was alive with birds. These included Blue Waxbills, Jameson's Firefinch, Yellow Bishops, Red-billed Quelea and Red-collared Widowbirds.

Other birds seen to make up our total of 60 species were: Brown Snake-eagle, African Jacana and Wire-tailed Swallows (seen at Sandy Spruit), Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill and African Grey Hornbill, White-necked Raven, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, Retz's Helmet-shrike, Speckled Pigeon, and four doves – Cape Turtle-dove, Laughing Dove, Red-eyed Dove, and Emerald-spotted Wood-dove.

Adele Edwards

Mashonaland West

KADOMA and surrounds are in gentle hibernation with the avifauna in slower respond mode.

The 20+ Black-headed Heron nests in the tall gum trees near the central police area have vanished. No evidence of any messy stick nests and the colony of birds have disappeared.

8th May: six Black-chested Snake-eagles overhead in the area.

4 Hamerkop noisily feeding in Cherrybank reservoir.

Lilac-breasted Roller, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Golden-tailed Woodpecker, White-bellied Sunbird, and Red-faced Mousebird are all recent birds of note around the area.

Margaret Parrock

Manicaland

Visit to Connemara Lakes, Nyanga 28th January to 1st February, 2016

It was my good fortune to spend 4 nights with Eddie and Jeanette Cross at Glendermere self-catering cottage at Little Connemara from the 28th January to the 1st February, 2016. This gave us the opportunity to reconnect with some of the high altitude Eastern District specials. However, in spite of the drought, the weather was very wet, cool and windy for the first 2 days and it only started to clear on the 30th at 10 a.m. when I managed to start a pentad. Glendermere Cottage is on the eastern side of Lake Corrib, the largest of the 3 lakes, and has a panoramic view of its front garden, the lake and the mountains. The lake edge is about 100m away and the water was rising about 25mm a day.

On the afternoon of the 28th we managed to do a short walk for about an hour during a break in the weather and saw Cape Robin-chat, Wailing Cisticola and juvenile Cape Canary out of the Eastern District specials. There were about 15 of the juvenile Cape Canaries hawking termite alates. However they looked more like adult Forest Canary than adult Cape Canary because of streaking on the front and lack a grey nape. The Forest Canary has a yellow eye stripe and the Cape Canary does not.

The next day we saw both Livingstone's Turaco and Bronzy Sunbird about 10m away through the lounge window. The other Eastern District specials seen during our stay included Cape Grassbird and Malachite Sunbird. We also recorded 10 African Black Duck, Shelley's Francolin and Speckled Pigeon, a close-by Red-chested Cuckoo, Cape Crow, White-necked Raven and Cape Bunting. The total species count was 48.

This cottage may be an option for a BLZ outing as it can accommodate up to 10 guests in 5 two-bed bedrooms. The cost is currently \$100/day for the cottage and \$5/day per guest. The caretaker will cook for \$1 per plate, if required, and a menu is provided. The cottage is split in two with a 2-car garage between the 2 halves. The bigger half has 3 bedrooms, 2 ablutions, a lounge, a dining room and a kitchen while the smaller half has 2 bedrooms, 1 ablution and a lounge-cum-dining room. The address is No. 43, Little Connemara, Troutbeck, Nyanga, the GPS is 18°09'32.45"S 32°47'37.75"E and the booking agent is Gail on email: glendermerezim@gmail.com and cell 077 2287 429.

Richard Dennison

Other Areas

Gonarezhou National Park, 30 March-1 April 2016 (See more in Babbler 121)

Clare, my daughter, her husband Chris and the Khan family – Kiaan, Michael and Jessica – and I toured the south of the country for a week.

Our first bird at Chipinda Pools was the African Scops-owl followed by 10 African Skimmers, these after 6 p.m., and much later the Verreaux's Eagle-owl. We found African Spoonbill, 60 Egyptian Goose and 3 Spur-winged Goose. Double-banded Sandgrouse, African Green-pigeon, Brown-headed and Meyer's Parrots, Woodland Kingfisher, European and Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, Common Scimitarbill, Terrestrial Brownbul and Red-backed Shrike. An active colony of maybe 1000 nests of Red-billed Quelea was seen in 5 bushes and Southern Red Bishops were also nesting. a White-winged Widowbird and Long-tailed Paradise-whydah. Of the 18 animal species the highlights were 2 cheetah and 5 lion.

On a quick visit to Chilojo Cliffs (see more in *Babbler 125*) we had African Harrier-hawk, African Fish-eagle, Bateleur, Swainson's Spurfowl, Crowned Lapwing, White-crowned Lapwing and a single African Openbill, but only 2 doves – Cape Turtle-dove and Emerald-spotted Wood-dove.

At Massasanya Dam African Darters were carrying nesting material. Other waterbirds included Great Egret, Green-backed Heron, Hamerkop, African Fish-eagle, Common Sandpiper and African Wattled Lapwing. Pied and Giant Kingfishers were there as well as about 20 European Bee-eaters and only 1 Blue-cheeked Bee-eater. African Pied Wagtail was on the dam wall. Red-backed Shrike, Magpie Shrike and Black-crowned Tchagra calling. On the way to the dam we saw 6 Spotted Hyaena eating something substantial in grass about 30-45 cm high. One was huge, in good condition but had a snare around its neck.

On leaving Chipinda we went to the Mashilichokwe Dam Fishing Retreat at Nottingham Estate, Beitbridge from 1st to 4th April. Getting there late we saw White-breasted Cormorants, African Darter and Green-backed Heron all breeding. The next day we were woken by Hadeda Ibis flying over at daybreak. An Osprey was seen while out fishing (very good bass and bream) Three-banded Plover, Water Thick-knee, Fiery-necked Nightjar (heard), Sabota Lark, Familiar Chat, Long-billed Crombec, the Common Waxbill and Red-billed Buffalo-weavers nests in Baobab trees. I always find it so difficult to get to grips with swallows and swifts. The Wire-tailed Swallow, the Rock Martin and the African Palm-swift were there.

Nottingham Estate has a long boundary with South Africa along the Limpopo River, said to be too saline for the citrus they are developing, so they

are building a huge shallow dam for fresh water. It was here that Bronkhorsts 34 sable got stuck in the sand and are now impounded on the farm.

While others watched cricket on 3/4/2016 (World Cup Final), I went to the Fly Camp about 25 km away to look for Kori Bustards; I didn't see any but I did see a Verreaux's Eagle. When I reported this to the Special Species Survey they said it bred in a Baobab on the farm. Does it still? The rocky hills on the farm seem to be very climbable by baboons. There was also a falcon there but too far for an ID. At a tiny water point where the orange pulp is put out for the elephants there was a single Egyptian Goose. Namaqua Dove, Mocking Cliff-chat, Sabota Lark, Red-backed and Lesser Grey Shrikes, Red capped Lark, Chestnut-backed Sparrowlarks, Scaly-feathered Finch and Long-tailed Paradise-whydah. The oranges were not being picked yet but one or two elephant were in the area. When they are, elephant come from SA, Botswana and local, to eat the pulp. Little Michael found a porcupine quill near the coal mine.

Enquiring about Common Ostriches I was told about 30 are on the farm and getting rarer. About 20 are in Gonarezhou and 40 were counted by nearly 300 counters at the Hwange Game Count in September 2015.

Just as we got to the 315 km peg on the Bulawayo-Beitbridge Road there was a smelly dead donkey road traffic accident, with 26 vultures on it or nearby.

Lastly we went to Bon Accord Farm, Shangani, 19 53S, 29 27E from 4-6 April where they look after kids in a big way with obstacle courses, abseiling and kayaking, so my bird list wasn't long, but within an hour we had a pair of Kori Bustards and a Secretarybird in its nest. Other nice to see stuff were Wing-snapping Cisticola, Miombo Tit, Boulder Chat, Lesser Grey Shrike and Red-winged Starling. David Mead who has been in the district for 30+ years said they have Southern Ground-hornbills. The place is in pristine condition with Biri Ruins on the farm and nearby are Debshan Ranch and Nalatale Ruins. Tsessebe and Black-backed Jackal were nice to see. When a carcass is available there is a vulture restaurant.

Bon Accord is 1331 ha. It was as a BSA Co. farm in 1911. It was bought by Walter Glasse for his son Basil who was killed in the 1914-18 War. Then it went to his daughter Helen May Glasse from 1929-1989 and is now in the hands of the Mayor of Bulawayo and Jabulani Safaris.

Lastly a challenge – has anyone got photos of young Kori Bustards?

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



For Sale

1 pair of 10x42 Zeiss Binos for sale

Excellent Condition

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

The following is an extract of a very interesting post on the Conservation India website and is worth reading in full. It is also very relevant to Zimbabwe!

Note the section on the playback of bird calls.

<http://www.conservationindia.org/resources/ethics>

Stop! Don't Shoot Like that — A Guide to Ethical Wildlife Photography by Shekar Dattatri and Ramki Sreenivasan

"I will not harm my subject!"

Every nature photographer should willingly and happily follow this simple credo – even when no one else is watching.

This is not hard to do, and for those with a genuine love for nature, or even just a conscience, it should be second nature. Unfortunately, thanks to the vast numbers of people who now own high-end photography equipment, and are constantly on the lookout for excitement – and instant gratification on social media – instances of photographers harming wildlife or habitats in pursuit of the 'perfect shot' have become alarmingly common. Some of it is due to a lack of awareness, and some, a result of sheer callousness.

Whichever it might be, one thing is certain; if right-minded nature photographers band together, we can stamp out the menace of unethical photography to a large extent. Self-regulation is the best kind of regulation, so let's kick-start a movement now.

Past, present and future

One of the most disgraceful chapters in the history of wildlife photography in India is the nest photography craze that spread like wildfire in the early 1990s. In a quest to outdo each other, many photographers practiced a level of insensitivity and brutality that was horrifying. Their modus operandi was quite simple: they would scout around, or offer rewards to villagers, for locating active nests. Once the nest of a desired species was discovered, the photographer would land up and do some 'gardening' – a euphemism for removing leaves or

twigs to get a clear view of the nest. With the obstructions out of the way, nesting activity would be photographed from all angles, sometimes with multiple flashes positioned around the nest. Once the photographer was satiated with his efforts, he would depart, leaving the exposed nest vulnerable to predators. Some went even further, and destroyed the nest (and eggs or chicks) so that other photographers could not take advantage of their 'find'.



This went on for a few years, until there was severe condemnation from conservationists and photographers with a conscience. The pernicious practice finally died out when nest pictures were banned from competitions. However, even today,

thanks to the despicable actions of those uncaring photographers, all nest pictures, including those shot unobtrusively, are viewed with suspicion.

Unethical photography? What's that?

Many photographers probably don't even think about their impact on wildlife, and may regard animals simply as 'models' that exist for their photographic pleasure. It probably does not even occur to them that their actions could cause stress to an animal, perhaps even affecting it profoundly. Simply becoming aware of the issue might make many photographers – at least those who are otherwise 'decent' folks – think carefully on their next outing, and modify their behaviour appropriately.

Take the example of one of the world's rarest birds – the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard. This large bird, which lives in open grasslands, is extremely wary of intruders. When it spots someone even hundreds of metres away, its reaction is to stop whatever it is doing and fix its attention on the trespasser. As long as the 'threat' persists, the bird will not feed, court or mate, impacting its very survival. As a result of the disturbance caused by some insensitive photographers, the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) was constrained to issue a circular curtailing photography of the bustard during its breeding season. Unless we proactively check the menace of unethical photography, we can expect more such directives in the future, which will affect the photography community as a whole.

Damage to habitats can be immense too, when many photographers and their vehicles converge on a particular location. For instance, the Hesaraghatta grasslands on Bangalore's outskirts suffered tremendous damage and destruction as a result of overenthusiastic weekend bird photographers. Fortunately, thanks to the issue being highlighted and talked about, there has been a change for the better in some areas.

While it's impossible to catalogue or list every type of 'unethical' behaviour, one's conscience and common sense are the best guides. If you believe that something you are doing, or are about to do, may cause distress to your subject, or damage its habitat, back away. It's as simple as that.

Examples of unethical practices and how to curtail them

While it's not always possible to define 'unethical' in black and white terms, or point out every example, here's an indicative list.

Please note that several of these practices, in addition to being unethical, are downright illegal and violate several wildlife and environmental laws. If reported, they could attract stiff penalties and prosecution.

Issue 1: Crowding

Too many people or jeeps crowding around an animal in a sanctuary or National Park, or deliberately going too close to provoke a snarl or a charge.

Impact:

Causes tremendous stress, and disrupts the animal's natural behaviour, such as hunting, feeding and courtship. In the case of large animals like elephants and tigers, regularly being subjected to crowding might make them more dangerous.

Remedy:

When you spot an animal, maintain a 'safe' distance between the animal and the vehicle. When you see other vehicles approaching, take a few pictures and leave. If you see any of the drivers, guides or photographers misbehaving, discreetly shoot a video of this and report it to someone in authority. You can also upload the video to YouTube and send us the link.

Examples:

- Blue-tailed Bee-eaters in Naguvanahalli near Mysore being mobbed by photographers.
- Harassment of hyenas in Velavadar, Gujarat.
- Crowding of tigers in Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Ranthambore and other tiger reserves.
- Chasing European Rollers in Hesaraghatta.
- Hassling leopards in Kabini, Nagarahole.

Issue 2: Nest or den photography

Photographing birds at their nests or near it, or mammals at their dens.

Impact:

Causes stress and disturbance and could lead to abandonment of the nest or den. In the case of mammals, it often forces the parents to move their litter to another den, which may not be as safe as the original one. This type of photography can also attract other photographers or even poachers.



Remedy:

Avoid nest or den photography. Stay away from new-born or young animals. Needless to say, this also includes manipulating nests. Publishers

(including moderators on online forums) should be very strict about allowing nesting and denning images.

Examples:

- Photographers crowding and disturbing nesting Oriental Dwarf Kingfishers in Maharashtra.
- Photographing Hornbills at nests.
- Waiting near dens of Desert cats, Desert foxes, Hyenas, Wolves, etc.

Issue 3: Playback of birdcalls to attract birds

Impact:

Studies have shown that this can cause stress to birds. The available literature suggests that responding to call-playback may result in serious energy costs for the bird, disrupt social systems and even lead to pair break-ups.



Call-playback during the breeding season could distract adults from more important tasks like courtship, nest guarding, and defending territories, all of which could have dire consequences for breeding success.

Remedy:

Desist from this practice, especially for rare and endangered birds.

Issue 4: Photographing nocturnal animals

Impact:

Nocturnal animals, especially creatures such as nightjar, lorises and owls, have extremely sensitive eyes, and can get temporarily blinded by powerful torches and flashes.

Biologists who study such creatures therefore use diffusers and red filters on torches to minimise the impact of lights on the extremely sensitive retinas of these animals.

Remedy:

Leave nocturnal animals alone. If there is a good reason (such as research) to photograph them, it might be better to use a night vision video camera (which relies on infrared) and take some frame grabs from the recorded video.



Issue 7: Cell phone usage inside wildlife parks

Impact:

While almost all parks, especially tiger reserves, have banned the use of wireless radios and cell phones, violation of this rule is quite common. These practices encourage crowding, and totally kill the pleasure of 'chance' encounters in the wild. Also, the sounds of phones ringing and people talking disturb wildlife, as well as those who have come to enjoy nature.

Remedy:

Using a cell phone in the wild in non-emergency situations demonstrates utter disregard for nature. Do not instigate the driver, naturalist or guide to seek information about the presence of animals. Enjoy the forest and whatever comes your way. Don't miss out on all the other wonderful creatures of the forest in the single-minded pursuit of 'big game'.

Responsibility from publishers & editors

We believe that there is a significant responsibility from publishers and editors of wildlife and photography magazines, as well as online communities and Facebook groups, to ensure that their contributors meet ethical standards. Images that are questionable should not be accepted. In the past, such leadership by magazines has resulted in curbing undesirable practices such as nest photography.

Conclusion

We believe that following these guidelines and sharing them with fellow photographers will promote the well-being of wildlife and natural habitats. In the field a photographer must exercise good judgment and, when in doubt, wildlife should always get the benefit of doubt.

Cape Vulture Sighting

In mid-May, Duncan Parkes was visiting Humani and spotted a Cape Vulture with a yellow tag on its wing. The number that he could see was 126. This vulture was handed into VulPro, Hartebeespoort Dam in South Africa as a fledgling in December 2015, rehabilitated and was released to the wild on the 4th of February 2016. The last time it was seen was at the Vulture Restaurant on the 26 March 2016. If anyone sees this bird please try and take photo and send it to Humani or juliapierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org to be forwarded to VulPro.

***Stop press*– news from the AGM**

At the BirdLife Zimbabwe AGM held on 21 May at a very chilly and overcast Kyle Recreational Park in Masvingo, the Officers were re-elected as:

Clive Stockil	President
Tony Wood	Vice President
James Ball	Honorary Treasurer
Carolyn Dennison	Honorary Secretary

The Council consists of:

David Rockingham-Gill (re-elected);	
Tony Alegria	Mashonaland Chairman
Cecilia Hubbard	Matabeleland Chairperson
Russell Clark	Council Member
Rob Rees	Council Member
Leslee Maasdorp	Education

The Minutes will be sent to all members in due course.

A reminder to all our regular supporters that July is Waterbird Count Month.

Counts done as close to the middle of the month are preferred and I look forward to the usual enthusiastic participation – new observers are always welcomed too. I hope that everyone will manage in these difficult economic times!

We will send out additional reminders, with procedures, via Mail Chimp in the coming month but do get hold of me if you have any queries.

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Top: Brockholes, Lancashire: photo A & L Fussell. Bottom: Alex Masterson's Birthday bash at the Harare Botanic Garden: photo C. Shadwell



Contributions for *The Babbler* 131 August-September 2016 may be sent to the editor anytime between now and the very latest 14th July 2016.