



THE BABBLER

Newsletter of

BirdLife Zimbabwe
The BirdLife International
Partner in Zimbabwe

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Committee	MASHONALAND (Code 04)	MATABELELAND (Code 09)
Chairperson	Tony Alegria 0772-438697 tonyalegria47@gmail.com 490375 (h)	Cecilia Hubbard 0772-433733 ceilhubbard@yoafrica.com 285666
Vice Chairperson	Dave Rockingham-Gill 882412 (h) rgill@zol.co.zw 0774-605314	John Brebner 0782-781108 brebnerj@acolchem.co.zw 242634
Secretary	Ken Dixon 0772-324301 lynnken@mango.zw	Marina Jackson 0778-021818 mjackson@gatorzw.com 230264
Treasurer	Debbie Wiggins 0772-252651 wigpd2015@gmail.com 882851 (h)	Jean Cranston 0733-005574 cranston@gatorzw.com 242921
Members	James Ball 0772-310351 jameszwe@gmail.com 481351 (h) Alison MacDonald 0772-264758 alimacd1@gmail.com	Karen Learmonth 0772-231819 afspect@yoafrica.com 240055 (h) 244990 (w)
National Membership Secretary	Carolyn Dennison 0772-210240 747567 (h) CarolynDennison@birdlifezimbabwe.org	
Babbler Editor	Ian Riddell 0772-117054 gemsaf@mango.zw	

National Office

Office hours: Monday to Friday 8.30 – 4.30
35 Clyde Road, Eastlea, P O Box RVL100, Runiville, Harare, Zimbabwe
Telephone: 04 – 481496
E-mail: birds@zol.co.zw

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

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

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

Useful Contacts:

CEO/Ringing Programme: Julia Pierini JuliaPierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org 0772-894562
BLZ Library: piumosso@zol.co.zw 304298; 481496
Rarities Committee: Ian Riddell gemsaf@mango.zw 0772-117054
Special Species: Peta Ditchburn specialspecies@blz.co.zw 0775-940714, 09-244596
Mashonaland South: Margaret Parrock 068-22005 or her daughter Coralee 0772-739370
Eastern Districts: Peter Gwidibira pgwidibira@gmail.com 0773-524844
Mashonaland East Natural History Society: Chairman Peter Hadingham 04-497035
Secretary: Colin de Beer jcdb1936@gmail.com 0279-23931
Honeyguide production: Julia Duprée daliadupree@gmail.com 09-246269

SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE PAST DUE!

If you are in arrears 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

Please deposit either into BirdLife Zimbabwe account at **NMB Bank, (Borrowdale Branch) Account No: 260092014** or **BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Branch, CABS (Chisipite Branch) Account No: 1002399955**. Or look on the website membership page www.birdlifezimbabwe.org/joinus where old and new members may pay their subs by clicking on the Paynow tab at the bottom of the page. **This is especially important for our members outside Zimbabwe**. We also have an **Ecocash merchant No. 22084**.

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 a merchant of Paynow (www.paynow.co.zw, a secure online payment platform) so we are able to receive donations and payments online. There is a **donate** tab on the BLZ website home page: www.birdlifezimbabwe.org where donations can be made.

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: AUGUST 2016

Saturday 6th August	Marlborough Vlei Walk	Meet at 07.30 a.m.
Sunday 7th August	Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Saturday 13th August	Haka Park	Meet at 07.30 a.m.
Turn left 500m after the Mutare road/Harare Drive traffic circle, passing the Pick 'n Pay complex, and meet at the Haka entrance gate; bring a folding chair and a few dollars for entry		
Sunday 21st August	Monavale Vlei Walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Thursday 18th September	Biodiversity at Catapú, Mozambique	Meet at 5.30 for 6.00 p.m.
Presentation by Ian Riddell, Avondale Sports Club		
Sunday 28th August	Mbizi Game Park	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Meet at Mukuvisi to share transport. Bring folding chair, drink and snacks		

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

Change to summer times

Saturday 3rd September	Marlborough Vlei Walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 4th September	Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Saturday 10th September	Greystone Park Nature Preserve	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Meet at the Preserve, Halford Road off Gaydon Lane. Bring drink, snack and folding chair		
Thursday 15th September	National Trust Talk and Bird Quiz	Meet at 5.30 for 6.00 p.m.
Avondale Sports Club		
Sunday 18th September	Monavale Vlei Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Sunday 25th September	Arden Park Farm/Hale Dam	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Meet at Julia's house, 78 Broadlands Road, Emerald Hill 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

- Sunday 14 August:** Paul Hubbard will be giving a talk; topic to be confirmed. Venue will be Adele Edwards' home – 6 Corney Road, Morningside. Talk will start at 11:30; tea available from 10:30. Talk will be followed by catered lunch, \$5 a plate.
- Sunday 21 August:** Aisleby survey. Meet at the Aisleby boom at 08:00. Please bring chairs and refreshments.
- Saturday 27 August:** Verreaux's Eagle Survey update and get-together in the Matopos. Teams will meet to compare notes and progress. Anyone interested in joining the survey in 2017 is also welcome to come along to find out more about what is involved. Further details nearer the time.
- Sunday 18 September:** Aisleby survey. Meet at the Aisleby boom at 08:00. Please bring chairs and refreshments.
- Sunday 25 September:** Walk at Troy Maidwell's Umvutcha Farm.

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

National News and Events

Saving Nature's Clean-up Crew

For the second year in a row, the 2016 Umfurudzi Trail Run that is to take place on 17 September 2016 will be in support of BirdLife Zimbabwe's Vulture Conservation Project.

Check out this video clip:

<https://www.youtube.com/results?q=BirdLife+International+Nature%27s+Clean+up+Crew>

From BLZ CEO, Julia Pierini:

Last year we set the ball rolling and worked on creating awareness of the plight of these iconic birds. In 2016, our conservation efforts have started in earnest. The greatest quantifiable threat to Africa's vultures is poisoning, which currently accounts for 61% of all reported deaths. African vultures are often the unintended victims of poisoning incidents in which carcasses are baited with highly toxic agricultural pesticides to kill livestock predators. However the recent rapid increase in elephant and rhino poaching throughout Africa has led to a surge in the number of vulture deaths recorded, as carcasses have been poisoned specifically to eliminate vultures, whose overhead circling might otherwise reveal the poachers' illicit activities. The situation requires the resolution of a number of environmental and cultural issues. We, as BirdLife Zimbabwe, are proposing a range of measures, including more effective regulation of the import and sale of agricultural and other chemicals commonly used as poisons. This will benefit not just vultures, but all species widely targeted by pastoralists and poachers in Zimbabwe.

We are very grateful to Unifreight for the support in helping us save Zimbabwe's vultures! See www.umfurudzitrailrun.com for more information.



Vintage Air Rally

An extraordinary Vintage Air Rally is taking place later this year. It will be leaving Greece in November, flying over and stopping in Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana and South Africa. And what has this got to do with us?! Well, together with the other Africa BirdLife International partners involved, we are taking advantage of this opportunity to raise awareness for the plight of vultures across Africa and raise badly needed funds for vulture conservation. The air rally will be in Victoria Falls on the 7th and in Bulawayo on the 8th December 2016. As BirdLife Zimbabwe, we are working on a programme of events with the organizers and will keep you posted on our progress. If you're keen to get involved (especially if you're based in Vic Falls or Bulawayo) email me (juliapierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org) or Cecilia Hubbard (ceilhubbard@yoafrica.com)

Julia Pierini

For more details on the rally: www.crete2cape.com

#VulturesCareForYou
12 NOVEMBER - 17 DECEMBER | 2016
Vintage Air Rally
SAVE OUR VULTURES

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• Zimbabwe • Botswana • South Africa

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WWW.BIRDLIFE.ORG/SAVEVULTURES

A word from eBird, Cornell University

Thanks to You, Global Big Day was Birding's Biggest Day Ever

With 6,313 species recorded, 45,944 checklists submitted, and 16,758 participants from 148 countries, 14th April 2016 was the biggest recorded birding day of all time. Checklists came in from almost two-thirds of the world's countries, with Peru having the highest country total of 1,185 species. Thanks to everyone for participating, and to our sponsor Swarovski Optik.

Southern Ground-hornbills in Zvomuya Village, Murewa (Report by Innocent Magunje)

Six BirdLife Zimbabwe Youths, namely Admire Charewa, Nyasha Dewu, Ronald Bafana, Ronald Chirimuta, Talent Jonasi and Innocent Magunje (BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ) Youth coordinator) went to Zvomuya Village in Murewa, between 17 and 19 June 2016, at the invitation of a local resident Never Chigwara. The reason for the visit was to survey the area for Southern Ground-hornbills (*Dendera*) that are threatened primarily because of logging that destroys their breeding habitat. Zvomuya Village is mountainous and unusually well wooded for a communal area, with tree species such as Mountain Acacias *Brachystegia glaucescens* dominating. The mountains provide a safe refuge for Southern Ground-hornbills in addition to the cultural belief that they are spirit mediums whose persecution in any form leads to droughts and other natural disasters. A total of one and a half days were spent in the field searching for the birds. Two different groups of four individuals each were found within one pentad. One group had two females with one evidently younger than the other while the other group had at least one juvenile – the second group could not be studied properly because the birds were a considerable distance from the observers and kept moving away. BLZ Youth group took the opportunity to map the birds found in the area and the first card for the pentad was sent to SABAP2 database. Meyer's Parrots and Black-crowned Tchagra were amongst other bird species seen, the latter with its distinctive call. Local communities were very helpful and according to most the ground-hornbills are doing very well in the area and usually forage in homesteads without any problem. Mr Chigwara grew up in the area and has always seen the birds. Mayema and Morris Schools were visited and presented with Vulture and Migration posters. Several village heads and political leadership, including the Councillor, also received awareness materials.

July 2016 waterbird counts – Ian Riddell

Looking for new ways of recording your counts? I thought I would experiment with BirdLasser (BL) and headed out to Country Club golf course on a somewhat chilly afternoon to do a count. It was easier than scribbling notes on a bit of paper as at least the records were legible afterwards! So, I thought it worked quite well and it was quick and easy to log all sightings (you log the same species multiple times as necessary, and the complete list went off to SABAP2 as an atlas card) and on each entry I added the number seen. There is also provision on BL to mark whether your number is exact or an estimate and you can even go into sex and age classes if desired.

The result...? You have a comprehensive record of your count with co-ordinates (and thus spatial separation) and time of every sighting, which resides on your phone. Later I emailed to list to myself and extracted the waterbirds, first sorting by species and thereby easily getting the total for each. It was certainly easier than tallying scattered entries on paper notes and making addition errors! On Google Earth part of the site counted looked like this.



The latest BL version has a lot of new fields you can fill in including activity, habitat, breeding status, roosting, feeding, feeding on, fed by, colouration, alive or dead, ring number, and more. So I was also able to mark my Gabar Goshawk as melanistic but found that it would certainly be advantageous to add more behavioural fields for raptors; this one was chasing a small bird, though it failed to catch it, so *Pursuing prey* would be a useful field.

Minutes of the 35th Annual General Meeting of BirdLife Zimbabwe held at Kyle Recreational Park, Masvingo on Saturday 21 May, 2016

EXCERPTS – the full minutes have been sent out by email

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The President, Clive Stockil, welcomed those attending the meeting and hoped everyone had read the reports that were sent out ahead. He stated that although these are challenging times, achievements have been made and one should not be overwhelmed by the difficulties. Members should not be divided but work together to build on what is there, as everyone has the same objective. It will be how we all approach the challenges that will be how BLZ progresses to 2017. He advised the challenges be recognised, the achievements celebrated and BLZ moves in the direction of becoming a serious environmental conservation organisation.

Birds make up a large group of biodiversity and are the first indicators of climate change, so BLZ can contribute important data through monitoring projects.

BLZ projects mentioned were:

- The ongoing struggle to save wetlands, in association with Dorothy Wakeling and COSMO;
- Trans-boundary co-operation with Mozambique and community livelihood improvement in the Chimanimani mountain area, administered by Toga Fakarayi;
- Youth Awareness and environmental education led by Innocent Magunje.

Globally, environmental conservation in Africa is being linked more and more to communities and BLZ must be receptive and aware of this trend.

Clive warned that all 4 species of Zimbabwe's vultures are Critically Endangered and rapidly going towards extinction – and may even overtake the rhino, as many birds are killed at a time, whereas rhinos are usually slaughtered in smaller numbers. Julia Pierini and Fadzai Matsvimbo are co-ordinating BLZ vulture conservation action in Zimbabwe and a MoU with Parks has recently been renewed to facilitate collaboration for this action and other species work. BLZ needs to be involved with ongoing monitoring and regional collaboration in this area.

It is very important that the **Waterbird surveys** continue to be supported, as it is one way to monitor the status of migrants and changing patterns. David Rockingham-Gill and Ian Riddell have been co-ordinating this.

The **Special Species Survey** is a great opportunity for members to contribute to a Citizen Science research programme and are encouraged to send their sightings to the WhatsApp group and written reports to Peta Ditchburn.

Zimbabwe continues to be a major contributor to **Global Big Day**, an important monitoring effort.

Thanks to the continued effort of Julia Duprée and the editor Brian Marshall, the world-class and renowned *Honeyguide* maintains its high standard of collecting and presenting valuable records and interesting articles and field data, collected by both scientists and laymen.

The newsletter, *Babbler* and the Matabeleland communication keeps members updated of events.

Carolyn Dennison is continuing with membership issues; and to potentially double the BLZ membership numbers, a challenge has been issued for each member to recruit one new member in 2016.

The accounts are ably managed by Sylvia Muzavazi – the financial report is dealt with separately.

The BLZ Council meets quarterly.

All the above were thanked for their valuable contributions.

Key issues have been; restructuring of the organisation, fund-raising, debt collection and legal issues related to historic termination of employment obligations.

CEO's REPORT

(Project Staff cited in the report: T. Fakarayi (TF) Important Bird Areas Programme, F. Matsvimbo (FM) Special Species Programme, I. Magunje (IM) Environmental Education Programme)

Comments from the CEO – Julia Pierini

Our focus in 2015/2016 has been vultures, the Eastern Highlands and Harare's wetlands. Of all the proposals submitted (listed within the following report) only two proposals were successful:

1. CEPF proposal on **Trans-boundary cooperation in the Chimanimani Mountains** with MICAIA Foundation submitted on 1 December 2015 by Toga Fakarayi for USD65, 000. The contract has been signed, the 1st tranche of USD16, 872 received on 1 March 2016 and work initiated.

2. Segré Foundation Proposal submitted in May/June 2015: **Supporting measures to regulate and control use of poison at Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe**. €37, 850. This proposal was successful. Two contracts have been signed with Segré and BLI (for the 10% management fee). The 1st tranche of €16, 275.50 (43%) was received on 21 March 2016. In addition, €1, 214 of the management fee (Total €3, 785) was received.

Although to date we have not managed to source donor funding to continue our work on wetlands, our policy, advocacy, education and community awareness efforts to save the wetlands of Harare continue unabated. The wetlands of Harare (and Zimbabwe) – the only water source for the city and home to many migrant bird species including Streaky-breasted Flufftail, Striped Crake Black Coucal, continue to be highly threatened by development and informal agriculture. These threatened sites include the internationally recognized Ramsar Sites of Monavale Vlei and Lake Chivero, which is also an Important Bird Area (IBA).

With regard to vultures, following the Vulture Action Planning Workshop held in March 2015, BLZ undertook several vulture awareness activities (see within report) but apart from the Segré Foundation proposal, no further funds have been sourced to date to fund vulture conservation activities.

BirdLife Zimbabwe's Environmental Education programme was also largely run on unrestricted funds sourced by core (apart from £5, 000 from the Murowa Project).

With regard the BLZ IBA programme, after much effort for which he must be applauded, TF was able to secure further funding from CEPF to continue work in the Chimanimani Mountains. However, this funding only arrived in March 2016. The previous CEPF project ended in April 2015 but TF was able to continue work in the Chimanimanis through a small project funded by the Netherlands Embassy which ended in November 2015.

In the light of the difficulties arising from sourcing funds to run project programmes (IBA, Special Species and Environmental Education), the CEO with the support of the Council of BLZ, has initiated the

restructuring of the organization, whereby project staff are no longer permanent staff members but contracted as per the successful project proposals they succeed in obtaining to run their programmes. Core cannot sustainably support staff that is not achieving their fundraising goals.

As you are all acutely aware, Zimbabwe is currently experiencing a credit crunch (it started in September 2015 and is now accentuated). Cash cannot be sourced from ATMs and banks have placed limits on withdrawals. Government has not paid civil servants for months. The economy is at a standstill with 90% of the population unemployed and crowding the streets of Harare and the main towns and surviving on informal employment. This year's drought has aggravated the situation with people starving in the rural areas. Poaching, illegal wildlife trade, habitat destruction and corruption amongst government authorities are rife. Good governance remains a pipe dream. Promoting nature conservation in this environment continues to be very challenging and the need to restructure the organization at this point in time is critical to ensure sustainability into the future.

Election of Officers

The current officers comprising of the President, Vice President, Honorary Treasurer and Honorary Secretary and member David Rockingham-Gill were all available for re-election as per the BirdLife Zimbabwe Constitution. There being no other nominations, they were re-elected.

Proposed: Ken Dixon. Seconded: Karen Learmonth.

The BirdLife Zimbabwe Council for the 2016/17 year consists of:

Clive Stockil	President
Tony Wood	Vice President
James Ball	Honorary Treasurer
Carolyn Dennison	Honorary Secretary
Tony Alegria	Chairman, Mashonaland Branch
Cecilia Hubbard	Chairperson, Matabeleland
Leslee Maasdorp	Education
David Rockingham-Gill	Council Member
Russell Clark	Council Member
Rob Rees	Council Member

In Conclusion

Clive expressed his sincere thanks to the council for their dedicated and ongoing voluntary contribution, not only ensuring this important component to the conservation of our fragile environment continues but to carry on striving to increase efficiency which is critical in achieving sustainability.

In particular he wanted to thank Julia Pierini for her dedication and inspiration, for accepting the position of CEO and her effort in the restructuring process. He recognised Tony's contribution as vice chairman, and in holding the fort in the chairman's absence, who is not based in Harare and therefore not always available when needed.

His sincere appreciation to all who made the effort in attending this AGM and his wish they all have an enjoyable time in this magnificent part of our great country, whilst we socialise and strengthen our commitment to our common interest – birds and their environment.

Carolyn Dennison proposed that the President's report be accepted. Agreed by Lyn Dixon and seconded by Peta Ditchburn.

Julius – the White-backed Vulture – 21 March 2016

A Critically Endangered White-backed Vulture was found behind the main post office in the middle of Harare on Julius Nyerere Way near the intersection with Nelson Mandela Avenue on 21 March 2016. We were alerted to his presence by Hardlife Mudzingwa of Community Water Alliance, who partners with BirdLife Zimbabwe on water/wetland related issues. Hardlife was on his way to work at 6.20 a.m. when he saw the bird lying in the road and called us. There was already a crowd of onlookers gathering and some were suggesting that its head be cut off for religious purposes! When we first arrived the bird looked dead but moved his head when we picked him up. Julius (he was found on Julius Nyerere Way, after all) was rushed to Chisipite Vet Surgery. On arrival Julius was severely dehydrated and starving and his legs were paralyzed. We consulted with Kerri Wolter of Vulpro who advised us on rehab. Progress was very slow but the bird was recovering. Nobuhle Mabhikwa, ex Peter Mundy NUST student from Bulawayo who was on attachment with Kerri Wolter of Vulpro for a year, worked with Julius (funded by BLZ) for a month before returning to Bulawayo. Shelley Fennell also worked tirelessly with Julius using infrared therapy (unpaid). We then submitted an application to Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority for permission to move Julius to Roger Parry and the Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust Rehab. Centre in the Falls to complete his

rehabilitation. The permit came through on 13 May and Mel Hood of VAWZ travelled to the Falls with Julius on the 14th. When all seemed set for a happy ending, Julius convulsed and died on the 15th March at the Falls. Dr Chris Foggin is conducting a post mortem to find the cause of death. The outcome of this experience is very unfortunate but notwithstanding, we are very grateful to Clare Savage and Chisipite Veterinary Surgery for their enormous contribution.

➤ Ian Riddell and Tatenda Muchopa (GIS Specialist) are working together to collect and map vulture hotspots in Zimbabwe in conjunction with Peter Mundy and a NUST student, Melissa. Please assist by emailing all your vulture sightings (including nest sightings and mortality data) to gemsaf@mango.zw. \$2200 has been spent of unrestricted funds to date on the project on the BLZ side and PM has spent approx. \$2000 out of his own pocket. Funds to finalize the project are urgently required. This work will be published in *Honeyguide*.



For the last 4 years BLZ Youth have gone to Lake Chivero (a Ramsar site and IBA) on the outskirts of Harare to pull out abandoned gill nets when water levels are low and have exposed the kilometres of nets that line the lake. These nets are causing havoc – drowning both fish and diving birds e.g. Reed Cormorants and White-breasted Cormorants. The African Darter, which used to be a common bird at Chivero, hasn't been recorded there for years now. The gill nets are certainly the principle culprit for their disappearance.

T. Chimuzinga and T. Zisengewe bundling up abandoned gill nets at Lake Chivero November 2015

RECENT REPORTS AND SIGHTINGS

Mashonaland

HARARE BOTANIC GARDENS, Saturday 11th June

Lovely walk and superb light but not too many birds to meet us. 38 species in all for the few members present but very enjoyable even so. It really is always worth the effort.

MONA VALE VLEI, Sunday 19th June

5 adult members plus two delightful youngsters from the Saturday Club, who knew their birds and served to bring down the average age, took part in our monthly survey and litter pick-up. We'd love to see more youngsters join us and there is no better mentor than Jimmy.

We heard Arrow-marked Babblers and Crested and Black-collared Barbets from the local gardens but the vlei seemed quiet. However, as we progressed we saw many of the resident species like Southern Red Bishop, Red-collared Widowbird, Yellow Bishop and Yellow-mantled Widowbird, lots of Orange-breasted and Common Waxbills and Little Rush-warbler called in the reeds. Swainson's Spurfowl and Lizard Buzzard called incessantly and African Wattled Lapwing, Black-shouldered Kite, three Gabar Goshawks and two Long-crested Eagles flew over the tall, rank grass. Rather short on species we wandered off to the pond and found the resident pair of Pearl-breasted Swallows, two Hamerkops and a Streaky-headed Seedeater. We tried to flush Marsh Owl but failed, noting only two Common Fiscals and Red-faced Cisticola on the fringe of the golf course. 46 was a reasonable tally for June and suitable reward for getting up and out on a cold morning.

Ken Dixon

Visit to Ewanrigg Botanical Garden, 26th June 2016

Only 2 of us turned up at CABS car park, the meeting place for this outing, and another 5 adults and 2 small children joined us at the Garden about an hour after we arrived. Unfortunately no committee members attended and in the past we used to delegate a committee member to take charge of each outing.

It was in the first hour that the two of us recorded most of our birds as after we joined the other 7 people, birds became sparse. This was reflected in our species count of only 35, of which the highlights were 6 African Green-pigeons, Whyte's Barbet, Terrestrial Brownbul, Thick-billed Weaver and Red-headed Weaver. The aloes were blooming well and we saw Miombo Double-collared, Variable, White-bellied and Scarlet-chested Sunbird.

Richard Dennison

Harare Garden Bird Survey Summary

Sheet 1 – 30 May to 26 June

Total observers – 25 (out of 53 registered)

*Numbers in brackets by bird names are numbers of observers who recorded (seen or heard) that bird at least once during the 4-week period and frequency figures are a simple frequency based on no. of observers who have recorded a bird at least once. And always remember the golden rule **'if in doubt, leave it out!'***

More than 80% frequency recorded: Pied Crow (100%) Arrow-marked Babbler & Dark-capped Bulbul & Laughing Dove (both 96% (Red-eyed Dove only 77%)); Purple-crested Turaco (more common than Grey Go-away-bird) (96%); Kurrichane Thrush & White-browed Robin-chat and lastly Blue Waxbill & Bronze Mannikins (85%).

Waterbirds & Storks: Cattle Egrets more common than Sheet 1 (54%), Hamerkops (8 records), Black-headed Herons (6) and others (4 or less) included Grey Herons, Marabou Storks, White-faced Ducks and this time Egyptian Goose (3) and White Stork (1).

Raptors: Most common large raptor still Long-crested Eagle (7). African Fish-eagles were seen flying over by 2 people and heard by 3. Records of Gabar Goshawks (16) are over double those of Lizard Buzzard & African Goshawk (each 7); Black-shouldered Kite (1), Little Sparrowhawk (6), Shikra (4) also recorded & African Harrier-hawk was recorded once.

Owls, Nightjars, Mousebirds & Kingfishers: Barn Owl still most common (50%), with African Wood-owl records (2) & Southern White-faced Scops-owl (5) up from last month & Spotted Eagle-owl down (4). Frequency of Fiery-necked Nightjars remained the same. Frequency of Speckled Mousebirds (38%) & Red-faced Mousebirds (12%) while there were 5 records of African Palm-swifts, 4 of Brown-hooded Kingfishers & 1 of Pied Kingfisher, plus 1 Little Bee-eater was recorded.

Wood-hoopoes & Barbets, Woodpeckers & Honeyguides: Four barbets recorded with Crested Barbet & Black-collared Barbet still more common than Whyte's Barbet & Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird. Frequency of Green Wood-hoopoes stayed the same and frequency of African Hoopoes recorded for this period was up from 14% to 50%. Cardinal Woodpecker slightly more common than Golden-tailed Woodpecker. Greater Honeyguide & Lesser Honeyguide recorded.

Drongos, Thrushes, Orioles and various: Fork-tailed Drongo fairly common at 77%, 6 records of Groundscraper Thrush and Black-headed Orioles clocked up 6 records this period. Bar-throated Apalis (73%) fairly common with Tawny-flanked Prinia records at 4. Southern Black Flycatchers were recorded by 35% and there was 1 record of an African Paradise-flycatcher in Meyrick Park. A pleasing garden record is the Chin-spot Batis recorded 3 times.

Shrikes: 50% of observers recorded Tropical Boubous and Black-backed Puffback, while Grey-headed Bush-shrikes (31%) were 4 times more common than Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, and Brubru was recorded by 3 observers.

Starlings & Sunbirds: Variable Sunbird (21), Miombo Double-collared Sunbird (17); Amethyst Sunbird (12), Scarlet-chested Sunbird (8), White-bellied Sunbird (6) & Copper Sunbird (4) recorded. Amongst starlings recorded were Violet-backed Starling (4), Miombo Blue-eared Starling (3) & Red-winged Starling (7) with Greater Blue-eared Starling (20) by far most common.

Weavers & Sparrows: Spectacled Weavers (14) still more common than Southern Masked-weaver (12) & Golden Weaver (7). Southern Grey-headed Sparrow (18) outnumbered House Sparrow (6) by nearly 3 to 1. Thick-billed Weaver (1) & Red-headed Weaver (1) were recorded in Mandara and a Red-billed Quelea in Meyrick Park.

Firefinches, Waxbills, Mannikins, etc.: Red-billed Firefinch much more common than Jameson's Firefinch, Blue Waxbills very common while only 3 records of Common Waxbill. Yellow-fronted Canary (4) and Brimstone Canary (3) recorded and 25% observers recorded Steel-blue Widowfinch, down from last period.

Interesting records: African Green-pigeon (Mandara), Meyer's Parrot (Greendale & Mandara), Little Bee-eater (1), African Hoopoe (13), Wire-tailed Swallow (1), African Golden Oriole (1), Pin-tailed Whydah (1). Garden Warbler & Cinnamon-breasted Bunting were both heard. **Interesting extras not on list:** Red-collared Widowbird (Helensvale), Marsh Owl, Red-throated Twinspot (breeding), Orange-breasted Waxbill & White Stork all seen on edge of Harare beyond Mabelreign. A Common Myna was recorded in Belvedere. Perhaps the most exciting of all records though was of a juvenile African Crowned Eagle on 2 consecutive days in Mandara.

Debbie Wiggins



Southern White-faced Scops-owl in Mandara, 21 June (James Ball) and Miombo Double-collared Sunbird nesting in a cycad in a Newlands Garden in July 2016 (Ian Riddell) What have you found in your garden?

Matabeleland

AISLEBY SURVEY, 19 June 2016

The Upper Umguza Dam, Aisleby sewage works and associated farm are situated about 15km from Bulawayo off the Victoria Falls road. This is a wonderful birding area offering not only a wide diversity of species but also large numbers of some species – both quality and quantity! The area covers a number of different habitat types, over 400 species have been recorded here and it is not unusual to record several thousand waterbirds. With so much in its favour it always surprises me that more people do not take advantage of planned outings to Aisleby. Members of BLZ Matabeleland have been monitoring the bird life at Aisleby for many years, notably Harry Erwee and Sandy McAdam, but also several others. It has now been decided to make Aisleby the focus of a branch survey with regular visits on the third Sunday of each month.

The first of these trips took place on 19 June with four participants (Adele Edwards, Karen Learmonth, Gaynor Lightfoot and Tafadzwa Tichagwa). As always we had a very productive morning recording 56 species of which 26 species

are waterbirds included in the African Waterbird census. One thing about Aisleby is that it is never predictable. While you will always see something of interest it is seldom the same thing, while you will usually see lots of species they won't be the same species, or they won't be in the same place.

We began by by-passing the entrance to the farm and continuing down Bulawayo Drive to access the dam from the far side. Crossing the bridge at the top end of the dam we were taken aback to see the proliferation of water hyacinth. Over the last few months this water weed has spread to choke the river where it flows into the dam and is now well on its way to covering the first bay below the bridge. The water flowing into the dam is highly polluted and on this occasion must have contained a lot of detergent as a couple of large balls of foam floated on the water [*I think this just indicates sewage and these foam blocks can get quite large where the water churns over rapids – Ed.*]. Despite this we saw Black Crake, African Jacana, Black-headed Heron and a Brown-hooded Kingfisher. We were startled when a flock of 13

Hadedda Ibis flew overhead with their loud, distinctive cry. The odd Hadedda Ibis has been recorded at Aisleby over the years but I had never seen as many as this before.



View from the bridge at the top end of Umguza Dam where the water is flowing in. The water is very polluted and in recent months water hyacinth has proliferated, blocking some of the bays and channels

Continuing on our way the road runs along the edge of the dam passed well grazed fields of resettled farms, an abattoir and a feed lot. Species seen on this section of the dam included African Sacred Ibis, Black-winged Stilt, Blacksmith Lapwing, Red-knobbed Coot, Reed Cormorant, Hottentot Teal, Cape Teal and Red-billed Teal, White-faced Duck and two Egyptian Geese. In one short section of reed bank on the far shore we counted 47 Grey Herons – and no doubt missed a few as often all that was visible was the long, thin, snake-like neck and head protruding above the level of the reeds. Inland we saw/ heard Crested Barbet and Black-collared Barbet, Laughing Dove and Namaqua Dove, Lilac-breasted Roller, Grey Go-away-bird, Magpie Shrikes and more than 20 Pied Crows. Several flocks of Red-billed Quelea, ranging in sizes from 50 to a couple of hundred birds, swept passed. We also saw a number of *Euplectes* species – LBJs with the exception of one male Long-tailed Paradise-whydah in full breeding

Kadoma and district landscape is showing its winter colours and veld fires are already happening. The birds will still nest when spring arrives. The House Sparrows are collecting grass and feathers for nesting on a ledge in the verandah.

Our visits to Charama Lodge take place often and how tranquil to be at peace with nature and outdoors. Some notables of our area:

Sat 11th June at Charama. Pans in the bush still have water, as has the big dam near the lodge.

Waterbirds: 90+ White-faced Duck, 1 pr. Hamerkops, 1 Grey Heron, 1 pr., 1 Black-crowned Night-heron, Great Egret, 1 pr. African Wattled Lapwings, 1 pr. Black-winged Stilts, 2 prs. African

plumage. Stopping at the top end of the most easterly bay we were somewhat daunted by the number of white birds lining the shore in front of us. For this survey we intend to record the number of each species seen. 163 Cattle Egrets to start and later we started using the telescope to count the numerous other birds bobbing around on the water, including Little Grebe and Southern Pochard. Closer to hand, or rather to our feet, we recorded 31 Crowned Lapwings, two African Wattled Lapwings and two Capped Wheatears.

After this we backtracked, along the way seeing two Black-chested Snake-eagles, our only raptors of the day besides the resident African Fish-eagle. Once on the farm we headed for the dam known locally as Muddy Puddle. Along the way we saw Swainson's Spurfowls, African Pipit and a lone White Stork in one of the pastures. Muddy Puddle added the following to our species list: six Pied Avocets, two Comb Ducks, two Common Moorhens, four Three-banded Plovers, a solitary Yellow Bishop and three Rock Doves.

A short distance beyond Muddy Puddle the road crosses another bridge, this time over the river below the dam wall. Again this area has become totally blocked by water hyacinth, with no open water visible above the bridge and, unusually, not a single bird visible.

Our final stop for the day was the picnic ground at the Umguza Recreation Club where we were able to add Arrow-marked Babbler, Long-billed Crombec, Red-faced Mousebird, Tropical Boubou, Common Scimitarbill, African Hoopoe, Blue Waxbill, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Dark-capped Bulbul, Fork-tailed Drongo, Southern Black Flycatcher, Rattling Cisticola and Marico Sunbird.

Overall we recorded 1,709 birds from 56 species. Of these 700 were Red-billed Quelea and doves. Amongst the waterbirds the most common were Cattle Egret (191), Red-knobbed Coot (179), Little Grebe (105), Grey Heron (86) and Red-billed Teal (82).

Adele Edwards

Mashonaland West

Jacana, 1 African Fish-eagle, 1 pr. Pied Kingfishers, Striped Kingfisher and Brown-hooded Kingfisher calls.

Other birds of interest: 1 pr. Yellow-throated Longclaws. Calling Lizard Buzzard and Grey-headed Bush-shrike, African Hoopoe, White-crested Helmet-shrike (group), Grey Go-away-bird, African Grey Hornbill, Miombo Blue-eared Starlings. Groups of Crowned Lapwing are noisy about the dry school playing fields.

The 2 prs. of White-browed Robin-chats in my garden give daily dawn and dusk serenades of melodious phrases.

Margaret Parrock

A visit to Mongwe Fishing Camps, Zambezi River, Hurungwe District, 15° 55'S, 28° 55'E. 24-29 May 2016

(QDS 1528D4 Mubindi – a little-known place ornithologically with only 10% of the square in Zimbabwe)

Two pairs of Rufous-bellied Herons were at swampy ground just off the river with two pairs of Long-toed Lapwings. One Hamerkop nest was seen, with 4 birds recorded. Just one pair of Saddle-billed Storks was found along about 5km of river frontage. A flock of 25 Glossy Ibis flew by as well as 11 African Spoonbills. There was the biggest number of Egyptian Geese I have seen on the Zambezi, 885 on 3 sandbanks close to each other, with 70 Spur-winged Geese. Raptors included one Osprey taking a tiger fish, about 6 African Fish-eagles, Black-chested Snake-eagle, Tawny Eagle, Bateleur and Lizard Buzzard. The vulture nests once seen on top of baobabs on the way in have now vanished. Crowned Lapwings flew over in the middle of the night. A Common Greenshank was in swampy ground and like the Osprey had failed to migrate.

The Cape Turtle-dove was commonest with the Emerald-spotted Wood-dove second. A single Red-eyed Dove was seen with a single egg in its nest, in a grass tuft, 75 cm off the water next to the river. No Laughing Doves were seen. A pair of Grey-headed Parrots flew up and down the river every morning, Meyer's Parrots were there in small numbers but only a single Lilian's Lovebird was located in some Mopane woodland. Three colonies of White-fronted Bee-eaters were using their nests (60, 30 & 15) and a new colony of Southern Carmine Bee-eater nests was seen but the birds were not there. Ant Manning said the colony was about 500 strong. The Red-billed Hornbill was by far the commonest. 6 Trumpeter Hornbills were spotted flying from Zambia and Southern Ground-hornbills were heard nearby from our beds in the early morning. This is one place where we should look for the Pale-billed Hornbill on this side of the river. [*The escarpment forms an ecological barrier and this miombo endemic doesn't appear below it in Zambia, so its occurrence on or south of the river is unlikely. Ed.*]

Some of the smaller birds we saw were Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Lesser Honeyguide, 3 Eastern Saw-wings* in a place where we have seen them before, Eastern Nicator, Collared Palm-thrush, Yellow-breasted Apalis and 8 Red-billed Oxpeckers on a magnificent kudu bull. But only White-bellied Sunbird and Amethyst Sunbird. At a bird bath were Green-backed Pytilia with Red-billed Firefinches

and a male Steel-blue Widowfinch with 4 females at the top of a tree. The Golden-breasted Bunting also came to the bird bath.

African Darters were looked for but not found. 50m of fishing net was picked up and burnt. Amongst the animals were 100 hippos, 24 elephant 11 waterbuck with c.15 Cattle Egrets, 11 kudu, 10 impala, 5 bushbuck about 40 Chacma Baboon and maybe 20 Vervet Monkeys. Of course lots of crocs and water monitors. We also encountered 2 dead Spotted Hyaenas and two dead civets killed on the tar road below Marongora at the base of the escarpment.

Our thanks to the Manning and Taylor families for a super holiday at a super place.

* In *An annotated checklist of the birds of Rifa Camp, Chirundu, Zimbabwe, 1987-2014* by Maasdorp & Cotton (in press), they call this bird the Black Saw-wing. In the *Birds of Zambia* Dowsett *et al.* (2008) say the Black Saw-wing and the Eastern Saw-wing are by molecular analysis the same bird [but call the Chirundu record of the Eastern Saw-wing race]. In *Roberts 7*, Hockey *et al.*, they call our bird on the Zambezi the Eastern Saw-wing and have the Black Saw-wing nowhere near the Zambezi. They obviously follow the editors of SABAP 1. There must be at least 20 species of birds that have a distribution pattern along our eastern border and along the middle Zambezi in Zimbabwe.

[*Comment: Saw-wing taxonomy is complex and some races overlap in range with apparently little interbreeding; hence various races including orientalis and holomelas often treated as full species; further work required in order to assess relationships within the group.*

The Eastern Saw-wing is, or was, a regular migrant around Ruckomechi Camp between April and November but in over 20 years the Black Saw-wing (race *holomelas*) has never been recorded.

P. p. orientalis Reichenow, 1889 – S Tanzania and E Zambia S to E Zimbabwe and C Mozambique.

P. p. holomelas (Sundevall, 1850) – S Zimbabwe and S Mozambique S to E & S South Africa.

Ed.]

D.V. Rockingham-Gill rgill@zol.co.zw

Visit to BBC Camp, Mana Pools, 11th – 16th June, 2016

My wife and I were invited to join friends at BBC Camp, Mana Pools, from 11th to 16th June, 2016. As we drove out of Harare a billboard for the Herald newspaper stated that the police intended to

reduce the number of roadblocks, but we still had to pass through about 14 of these on both the outward and return journeys. In the Zambezi Valley we had a pleasant break from the winter cold as it was

about 5 degrees warmer than Harare and at Mana Pools the vegetation cover and soil moisture level were good after late rains.

We got off to a good start about 3km from the National Parks office as we found a good number of vultures on a zebra carcass close to the road. We first saw an immature White-backed Vulture eating a piece of meat at the edge of the road and then noticed vultures circling overhead and landing nearby. We counted about 50 White-backed, 8 Hooded and 2 Lappet-faced Vulture plus a Spotted Hyena. That night we heard African Scops-owl and Southern Ground-hornbill calling and lions roaring and the next morning we found the tracks of 2 male lions within 40m of our camp. Every morning we were greeted by a pair of African Golden Orioles and further afield we found several more of these birds. Crowned Hornbills also visited us daily and, along with Southern Ground-hornbill and Wattled Starling, were seen regularly on our walks and drives.

We carried out waterbird surveys along the river in front of our camp and along an approximately 8km stretch from Mana River mouth to our camp. These surveys yielded 31 waterbird species and the highlights included flocks of up to about 100 African Openbills, Yellow-billed Egret, one Osprey, Rufous-bellied Heron and Dwarf Bittern.

Walks were taken for up to 2km inland and yielded another 73 species. Here the highlights included Martial Eagle, Meyer's Parrot, Retz's Helmet-shrike, Ashy Flycatcher, Bennett's Woodpecker and Bearded Woodpecker, Red-billed Oxpecker, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Mosque Swallow and Greater Honeyguide. So our total bird count was 104 species.

On 13th June near our camp, Pretty Boy, a bull elephant, was darted by Aware Trust with a tranquilizing drug and treated for a suppurating bullet wound to his skull.

Richard Dennison



HBW Alive

A recent study using geolocators on three male Great Snipes

(*Gallinago media*) revealed that they completed 4300-6800 km long non-stop flights between Swedish breeding areas and sub-Saharan African wintering grounds, taking just 48-96 hours, by flying at remarkable speeds of 54-97 km/h. During 2009-2013, 70 further geolocators were fitted to lekking males, 19 of which yielded tracking data. Autumn trans-Saharan flights averaged 64 hours in duration, covering 5500 km and, once again, birds maintained fast ground speeds of 90 km/h. Arrival in the west African Sahel was timed to coincide with the local wet season, and after three weeks birds continued on to wintering grounds in a relatively small area of the lower R Congo (E Gabon, Congo, and W DR Congo), where they spent the next seven months. On the spring return leg, trans-Saharan flights were of similar length and speed, with the final stage through E Europe being slower. All birds arrived on the lekking grounds within one week of each other in mid-May. Great Snipe populations have decreased markedly in Europe and the species is considered globally Near Threatened; indeed, the main lek studied was abandoned in 2011. The identification of the main stopover and wintering areas will assist conservation work on this species.

A Lesser Flamingo tracked flying between mainland Africa and Madagascar

15 Jul 2016 – 09:34 – Eduardo de Juana

A female Lesser Flamingo (*Phoeniconaias minor*), satellite tagged at Delareyville, in the North West Province, South Africa, has been tracked crossing the Indian Ocean from Mozambique to Madagascar. It covered 1069 km in a single 16-hour flight. It left the Mozambique coast at Maxixe at 7 p.m. on 10 June 2016 and reached the western shores of Madagascar near Morombe at noon the following day. The Lesser Flamingo is a winter visitor to Madagascar but this seems to be the first instance that one has been tracked making the crossing from mainland Africa.

Harare gardens

On 19 May 2016, whilst my gardener was sweeping up leaves he came across a dead African Pygmy-kingfisher. I can only surmise that one of my cats might have swiped it off the birdbath, played with it and then abandoned it [*This kingfisher is a regular window-basher and could have killed itself in a collision*, Ed.]. This is my first real sighting of these brilliantly coloured little birds, as all previous times have just been a flash and a blur.

There have been African Green-pigeons feeding on figs in the garden since early May. The population peaked around 21 June when there were 18 birds. During this time they would compete with Crested, Black-collared and Whyte's Barbets, Dark-capped Bulbuls and Purple-crested Turacos for eating rights. The number of Green-pigeons has recently dropped to 10 – my belief is that some of the birds are on nests, since there were displays of courting early in July. They are great lovers of the sun and often used to retreat to the top of a Gum tree to catch the last rays of the setting sun.

The figs are a great attraction to other birds – Violet-backed Starlings, Greater and Miombo Blue-eared Starlings, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbirds, Meyer's Parrots and more recently African Grey Hornbills.

I have also had sightings of three owls in recent weeks. First there was a Southern White-faced Scops-owl (see page 11), precariously perched holding onto a vertical bamboo stem, then a Spotted Eagle-owl sitting on a rock in the next-door garden, and then a Barn Owl sleeping in a Fir tree. The Spotted Eagle-owl has been seen in the same vicinity for over two weeks, so perhaps there is a female on eggs nearby?

James Ball, Mandara

A few years ago I was convinced that I had seen an immature African Crowned Eagle land in my Mandara garden. When discussing the matter with my learned ornithological friends who were then of the opinion that African Crowned Eagles just did not visit urban gardens, I became a little unsure of my identification.

Well yesterday afternoon, 17th June 2016, I was attracted to an avian party up at the back of our property. Pied Crows were circling above the Msasa tree and making quite a racket. So thinking that there was probably something amiss I took my camera and binoculars and walked up to see what was attracting the crows. It did not take long for me to find the raptor devouring what looked like a chicken. After spending over 30 minutes taking photo after photo and phoning a few friends who all were too busy to come around to share in what I thought was a unique experience, the very large eagle flew off.

This morning I sat down and have sorted out a few photos which tend to support my identification that our visitor was a sub-adult African Crowned Eagle.

See for yourself (*photos back page*) and I would love to have any comments.

Happy Birding,

Peter B Munday

This (?) African Crowned Eagle has been around the Rhodesville-Highlands area for a few months (since March) and James Ball has had one at Mandara too. Let's hope it survives! Bev Morgan received a SABAP2 ORF for her record of one at Mazvikadei 1715_3015 on 5 Jan 2016 and Ferdi Couto had ORFs for his Christon Bank, Chivero and Norton records.
Ed.



Grey-headed Kingfisher at Mana (*left, C & R Dennison*) and African Pygmy-kingfisher at Mandara (*above, James Ball*)



African Crowned Eagles
Left: Mazvikadei area, Bev Morgan
Below: Mandara, Harare, Peter Munday



Barn Owl and African Green-pigeon at Mandara, *James Ball*

Contributions for *The Babbler* 132 October-November 2016 may be sent to the editor anytime between now and the very latest 14th September 2016.