



THE BABBLER

Newsletter of

BirdLife Zimbabwe
The BirdLife International
Partner in Zimbabwe

ISSUE # 132
October / November 2016



Committee	MASHONALAND (Code 04)	MATABELELAND (Code 09)
Chairperson	Tony Alegria 0772-438697 tonyalegria47@gmail.com 490375 (h)	Cecilia Hubbard 0772-433733 ceilhubbard@yoafrica.com 285666
Vice Chairperson	Dave Rockingham-Gill 882412 (h) rgill@zol.co.zw 0774-605314	John Brebner 0782-781108 brebnerj@acolchem.co.zw 242634
Secretary	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
Rarities Committee: Ian Riddell gemsaf@mango.zw 0772-117054
BLZ Library: dorothywakeling@gmail.com 304298; 481496
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 0773-524844 pgwidibira@gmail.com
Mashonaland East Natural History Society: Chairman Peter Hadingham 04-497035
Secretary: Colin de Beer 0279-23931 jcdb1936@gmail.com
Honeyguide production: Julia Duprée daliadupree@gmail.com 09-246269

SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE PAST DUE!

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: OCTOBER 2016

Saturday 1st October	Marlborough Vlei Walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 2nd October	Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Saturday 8th October	Harare Botanic Garden	Meet at 07.00 a.m. Meet at Main Car Park, Sandringham Drive; bring a folding chair and few dollars for entry
Sunday 9th October	Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Sunday 16th October	Monavale Vlei Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Thursday 20th October	Birding and BirdLife Zimbabwe	Meet at 5.30 for 6.00 p.m. Presentation by Tony Alegria, Avondale Sports Club
Sunday 23rd October	Prince Edward Dam	Meet at 06.30 a.m. Meet at Mukuvisi Woodlands car park for car-sharing. Bring \$2 entrance fee for dam

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

Saturday 5th November	Marlborough Vlei Walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 6th November	Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Saturday 12th November	To be advised	Meet at 07.30 a.m.
Sunday 13th November	No outing	
Sunday 20th November	Monavale Vlei Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Thursday 17th November	IUCN Conference, Honolulu	Meet at 5.30 for 6.00 p.m. Presentation by Julia Pierini, Avondale Sports Club
Sat-Sun 26th-27th November	Birding Big Day	

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 – Turn north off Harare Drive onto Princess Margaret Road and follow the road round to the left. Park on the short road midway along the bottom of Princess Margaret that faces the vlei.

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 15th October:** Aisleby survey. Meet at the Aisleby boom at 07:15. Note for this month only survey will take place on **Saturday and not third Sunday** as usual. Also note earlier starting time; this is necessary as we go into the long, hot days of summer. Bring chairs and refreshments. For more information contact Adele Edwards, phone 0712366917, email admin@dambari.com
- Sunday 16th October:** Bird walk at Khami Ruins.
- Saturday 29th October:** Visit to the Ornithology Department at the Natural History Museum.
- Sunday 20th November:** Aisleby survey. Meet at the Aisleby boom at 07:15. Please bring chairs and refreshments.
- 26th-27th November** Zimbabwe's annual Birding Big Day

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

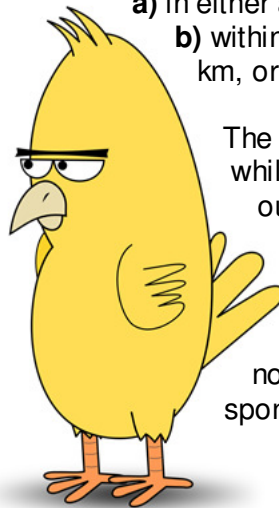
NATIONAL NEWS AND EVENTS

Birding Big Day

Are you all geared up for BBD 2016, to be held over the weekend of 26th & 27th November?

The usual rules apply: To identify as many bird species as possible

- a) in either a continuous 24 or 36 hour period, and
- b) within either an area with a maximum radius of 50 km, or your garden.



The aims are to have fun and enjoy ourselves, while at the same time increasing awareness of our wonderful bird life and introducing more people to the joys of birding.

It would also help to seek sponsorship to raise much needed funds for BLZ, so while not compulsory, teams are encouraged to find sponsors.

Teams can consist of **two to four members, two or a majority must agree**

on identification, and only free-flying birds may be recorded, but if you are recording in your garden **a single individual can participate**. **Please** limit the use of call playback to attract birds to a minimum, or not at all.

Cross-border bird identification and habitat monitoring training for local stakeholders in Chimanimani Mountains of Zimbabwe and Mozambique

Report by: Togarasei Fakarayi

The Chimanimani Mountains Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) cuts across Zimbabwe and Mozambique. In an effort to ensure joint monitoring of this KBA, BirdLife Zimbabwe is collaborating with Micaia Foundation,

together with local stakeholders in promoting birds and biodiversity conservation. In September 2013, a three-day joint training in bird identification and habitat monitoring was conducted in Chimanimani, Zimbabwe. A total of 34 participants were trained. Local stakeholders were exposed to knowledge and skills in bird identification and habitat monitoring. Participants were trained how to use monitoring tools such as the Important Bird Area framework and the Management Effective Tracking Tool (METT) for habitat monitoring. At the end of the training, participants had improved knowledge on birds and were able to identify different species. A total of 27 bird species were identified. Participants had better understanding of the habitat monitoring tools. However, more training is still required to improve skills.

Acknowledgement

BirdLife Zimbabwe is grateful to the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) for funding this project.

RECENT REPORTS AND SIGHTINGS

Mashonaland

Harare garden bird summary Sheet 4 – 25 July to 21 August

There was no species with 100% sightings, not even Pied Crow or Dark-capped Bulbul! In the 90-100% range are the usual species, White-browed Robin-chat, Laughing Dove (25 against 20 Red-eyed Doves), Kurrichane Thrush, Arrow-marked Babbler, Purple-crested Turaco (24 vs 21 for Grey Go-away-bird).

Waterbirds & storks: Cattle Egrets (11) were top again but generally numbers of waterbird sightings were slightly less, probably due to Harare water bodies being drier?

Raptors: Still most numerous was the Gabar Goshawk (14); Lizard Buzzard (5) & Little Sparrowhawk (4) both recorded less often, but there was 1 record each of Black-chested Snake-eagle, Steppe Buzzard [!] & Lanner Falcon. No African Harrier-hawks were recorded this month.

Cuckoos, doves, etc.: Nearly 25% of observers recorded Meyer's Parrots and 5 records of Senegal Coucal, one in Greendale, much to the observer's surprise! There was 1 record of a Klaas's Cuckoo (often ahead of the cuckoo pack!), the first cuckoo of the season in the survey.

Owls, nightjars, mousebirds & kingfishers: Apart from the Barn Owl (10), records for all 4 owls were down slightly. Red-faced Mousebirds (8) up from last month and records of Brown-hooded Kingfishers (6) up slightly too. One record of a Swallow-tailed Bee-eater.

Wood-hoopoes, barbets, woodpeckers & honeyguides: by % records of African Hoopoe and Green Wood-hoopoes are both up. All four barbets were recorded more often with Crested Barbet (23) highest. Greater Honeyguide (2) and Lesser Honeyguide (7) both recorded. Golden-tailed Woodpecker has increased to 23%.

Swallows & martins: Records of swallows are scanty but a new one is an Eastern Saw-wing.

Drongos, thrushes, orioles and various: Black-headed Oriole (9) records same as last

month but no African Golden Orioles this month. Otherwise drongos & thrushes same but this month no African Paradise-flycatchers were recorded.

Shrikes: More Brubrus were recorded (4), in Highlands, Borrowdale & Greendale, while Tropical Boubous (15) and Black-backed Puffback (17) were slightly down. A Black-crowned Tchagra, not one to venture into more built up areas, was recorded in Helensvale. More Grey-headed Bush-shrikes (9) were recorded this month.

Starlings & sunbirds: Again, 6 species of sunbird were recorded with fewer Miombo Double-collared Sunbirds (14) and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds (3) but more Copper Sunbirds (4). African Yellow White-eyes (17), if not seen, are often heard chattering in small parties in the canopy of trees.

Weavers & sparrows: Weavers recorded included one Red-headed Weaver. Southern Masked-weavers (14), more familiar in their breeding plumage, were not as outnumbered by Spectacled Weavers (15) as in the previous month.

Finches, waxbills, mannikins etc.: All the common seedeaters were down slightly from last month. There was a notable drop in Steel-blue Widowfinch, down from 30% to 4%, maybe due to males losing their breeding plumage and therefore not so recognisable?

Interesting records: One person sighted an Ovambo Sparrowhawk which caught a Laughing Dove. Thick-billed Weavers, normally found by water, were seen in a variety of suburbs this month. There were a couple of casualties this month with a dead Spotted Eagle-owl and in Belvedere a snared Grey Heron which subsequently died.

Extras not on list: The Common Myna is still a regular visitor to one garden in Belvedere, whilst the African Crowned Eagle was still around in Mandara. Others are Natal Spurfowl, Marsh Owl and Red-throated Twin-spot. A new species was an African Cuckoo Hawk in Amby.

Garden birds in Borrowdale

29 Blair Road, Ballantyne Park

Up to 7 Red-backed Mannikins have been frequenting the garden and drinking at the bird bath. 2 Variable Sunbirds, one quite young, flit in and out of the house and one takes nectar from cut Gladiolus and Strelitzia blossoms.

Visit to Aberdeen Farm, Zvimba District 24/7/2016 17° 48'S, 30° 39'E

About 15+ people went out to Hideaway fishing retreat where the Mashonaland Bird Club did an African Waterbird Count. When we got there we managed to split into two land-based walking groups, and 1 boat of Shadwells, and maybe we explored 5 km of shoreline.

We got 200+ Little Grebes, 8 of each White-breasted and Reed Cormorants. Very poor counts of herons with only 7 species. 26 African Openbills, 1 Saddle-billed Stork and 1 Yellow-billed Stork. Glossy Ibis were abundant, our count being 125, but Tony Wood thought more like 400; either way we found more than 1% of our national population, qualifying Lake Manyame as an important Ramsar site for Glossy Ibis in Zimbabwe. A count of 140 made White-faced Duck our commonest followed by 108 Red-billed Teal. We counted 15 Hottentot Teal and one family had 6 ducklings (See BLZ/Facebook). We saw 9 species of duck including 2 Cape Teal and 1 White-backed Duck.

We had 5 raptors, the most exciting being an immature African Marsh-harrier and two very early Yellow-billed Kites.

A Red-chested Flufftail was heard and 22 African Purple Swamphens and 305 Red-knobbed Coots were seen. 3 Wood Sandpipers had arrived from their breeding grounds and we had a pair of Blacksmith Lapwings with an early clutch of 4 eggs, 12 Kittlitz's Plovers, 4 Crowned Lapwings and 2 Temminck's Coursers (see BLZ/Facebook), 119 Collared Pratincoles and 7 Grey-headed Gulls.

Wilmcote Place, off Harare Drive

Barbara Maasdorp has a pair of Tambourine Doves in her heavily wooded ephemeral stream. They quickly drink water and then fly back to the forest.

Leslee Maasdorp

Smaller birds of interest were Pearl-breasted Swallow and Eastern Saw-wing, Capped Wheatear and Desert Cisticola. Purple-banded Sunbird, White-bellied Sunbird, Scarlet-chested Sunbird and Amethyst Sunbird were seen. At lunch we commented how few sunbirds were being seen in Harare these days. In a book *Where to Watch birds in Southern Africa* Tony Tree had commented that hundreds of Scarlet-chested Sunbirds could be seen on a visit to Ewanrigg; now you would be lucky to count 10 males in a day. Weavers were scarce, but 2 Thick-billed Weavers were in the reeds with 6 Common Waxbills. Yellow-fronted Canary, Brimstone Canary and Streaky-headed Seedeater were seen. One group also saw a couple of Bushbabies.

It is always a good day when we get over 100 species on a bird list in our cold-dry season, and 43 waterbird species on an African Waterbird Count form must be close to a record for Zimbabwe. Netting is bad on Lake Manyame with few cormorants and no African Darters seen. On our walk we must have seen 100m of abandoned net on the shoreline.

The real deal is what are Basil and Di Rushforth going to come up with when they tour the Lake on 30th July 2016? They must have done this now for over 20 years.

David Rockingham-Gill rgill@zol.co.zw

BLZ Mashonaland Branch Visit to Mbizi Game Lodge, Sunday 28th August 2016

This report will be short as I spent most of the cool, windy morning on my own. Having newly arrived back from the UK and having failed to check details I arrived at Mukuvisi about 6.20 a.m. Nobody was there 15 minutes later so I drove direct to the venue via the airport. African Sacred Ibis, Great Egret and African Jacana were in the almost-dry Ruwa River feeding the dam. Reaching the main entrance, I spent the waiting period scouring that area and the garden during which time I saw 30 different species; Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, White-bellied Sunbird and Variable Sunbird, Common Waxbill, Southern Black

Flycatcher, Red-billed Firefinch and African Palm-swift among them. From the rock pool I watched Dassies enjoying the early sun.

When no one had arrived at reception by 8.30 I was making my way to the picnic area when I was picked up by Mervyn Senior, the owner for the last 27 years, who had kindly admitted us for free in return for the bird list. Plenty of vehicles near the dam but no sign of the birders and no birds either! Eventually, Dave Dalziel's passenger appeared and then the man himself. I decided to set off for the game park in search of the main party but didn't locate them for a long time. The only birds I found

was a mixed party of Southern Masked-weaver/Village Weaver/Red-headed Weavers with a few Fork-tailed Drongos and Yellow-throated Petronia. On the waterhole near the end of the walk we saw a Wood Sandpiper and a Little Egret, a species becoming more and more common in the

UK along with Great Egret.

Despite the drought, the worst for 27 years with only 52mm [= 520?] of rain in the season, 91 species were seen by the group of 25. Highlights were a Brown Snake-eagle on what may have been an African Fish-eagle nest, African Harrier-hawk, an African Spoonbill overflying, 2 Spotted Thick-knees, Tambourine Dove (which seems unlikely and needs confirmation considering the dry conditions and lack of habitat) and African Green-pigeon, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Golden-breasted Bunting and Buffy Pipit. Mammals observed were Eland, Impala, Zebra and that Dassie.

Mervyn Senior then came to officially welcome us to his park and lodges, a delightful venue for an overnight stay or a day out for the family. We are grateful for the opportunity to visit.

Ken Dixon

Nest used by a Brown Snake-eagle 1km from the dam



BirdLife Zimbabwe walk at Greystone Park Nature Preserve, 10 September 2016

A couple of times a year BLZ members visit Greystone Park Nature Preserve on a Saturday for one of our morning bird walks. We try to do this once in the wet season and also during winter when it is still dry. There were only 4 of us for Saturday's walk, but we had a most enjoyable early morning stroll around the park whilst spotting birds.

We are extremely lucky that there is such a dedicated group of local residents who have for many years maintained the park, putting in an enormous effort to keep the paths cleared and control the litter by placing enough bins at strategic points. They also work towards trying to keep the alien and invasive plant species at bay. All this makes a huge difference in preserving the habitat which means that it is home to many birds. Since our previous visit work had been done on the bridges, and some steps on the sloping part of the preserve which runs back from the dam along the stream had been improved with the installation of a handrail.

Sadly there is no water in the dam at the moment so no waterbirds were seen, but there was an enormous colony of Village Weavers frantically building nests in the reeds along the dam wall and making a huge cacophony! We had a wonderful

view of a juvenile Long-crested Eagle sitting in a small tree on the other side of Gaydon Road at the upper end of the dam and making quite a racket. There was a White-browed Scrub-robin singing beautifully at the top of a tree soon after we arrived and a couple of us saw a Black-crowned Tchagra, seldom seen but often heard, at the top corner of the park. It must have been feeling sociable that day because it appeared again in the carpark at the end of our walk for all to see! As well as the area around the dam, there is a lovely woodland walk, below the dam wall, which is always rewarding bird-wise. Here we had wonderful sightings of family groups of both Red-throated Twinspots and Terrestrial Brownbuls, usually found scratching around in leaf litter and well hidden, moving around in a large bare tree next to us. A few others of the 49 birds which were seen or heard were the bright yellow Brimstone Canary, the Black-headed Oriole, Thick-billed Weavers and Golden Weavers and the little Chin-spot Batis. All in all, a most rewarding outing!

Our thanks to the wonderful people who help to make our walks such a pleasure.

Debbie Wiggins



The 2017 BirdLife Zimbabwe Calendar is hot off the press!

The theme focuses on the idea that we can resolve to save our environment and wildlife with fresh thinking, renewed energy and 'New Beginnings'. Funds generated from the sale of this and

our previous four calendars are ploughed back into projects aimed at safeguarding the future of our birds and the environment they call home.

Calendars are available for sale in outlets around Harare, Bulawayo and Victoria Falls and also directly from the BLZ Office, 35 Clyde Rd, Eastlea, Harare. For more information please contact: Julia Pierini: juliapierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org or cell: 0772-894562 or Cecilia Hubbard ceilhubbard@yoafrica.com or cell: 0772-433733. Thank you for your support!



Pictures from the July waterbird counts

Thanks to the **Charama Chicks** and **Chris Payne** for some pictures taken during their counts in July 2016

Opposite: Orange-breasted Waxbill at Eiffel Flats sewage works
Charama Chicks



2016 Waterbird Counts

A summary of the 2016 data is presented here; the main report will appear in *Honeyguide*.

94 sites were counted by at least 63 observers (some counts included 'BLZ' groups). Some regular sites weren't counted and this makes comparisons of distribution and numbers against other years meaningless.

The weather played its part and 6 sites were uncounted in January/February – 5 in Hwange were dry, though contrarily Big Toms was unreachable due to a local storm on 12th Feb; in July 3 in Matopos & 11 in Hwange were dry.

Some 162 species were recorded, though this includes birds associated with vleis and wetlands such as some swallows, prinias, waxbills, etc.



African Darter: eradicated by uncontrolled gill netting from Harare nowadays, this is a now a bird of concern. Found on Biri and Mazvikadei dams, with others further afield on Kariba, Claw dam, Matopos, Wamba dam, the lowveld and Esigodini (none at Aisleby!) – the highest count was 14 at Kazungula.

African Finfoot: Claw dam produced 2 in Jan and 3 in July. Hippo Pools is also a good spot and 1 was seen in Jan, 3 in June & 2 in July. Wamba dam had 1 in Jan.

African Grass-owl: only seen in Jan with 1 at Carswell farm and 1 at Wamba dam.

African Jacana: roughly (ignoring the possibility of recounts) there were 1232 in Jan & 1316 in July. 487 at Mazvikadei Dam in Jan was the highest number.

African Marsh-harrier: singles at Aisleby, Carswell, Crowborough, Guvalala, Imbwa, Rainham, Salt Pans Dam Hwange & Wamba Dam – all in Jan & Feb.

African Pygmy-goose: at 6 sites, the largest count being 60 at Clifton Dam, Chegutu, in July.

Allen's Gallinule: 1 at Clifton Dam and 1 at Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary, both in Jan.

Black-necked Grebe: in Jan 2 at Salt Pans Dam, Hwange and in July 1 at Makwa Pan.

Black-winged Pratincole: 8 at Guvalala in Jan and 150 at Salt Pans Dam, Hwange, in Feb.

Cape Shoveler: only found at Aisleby with 2 in Feb.

Caspian Tern: 1 at Mandavu in Jan.

Dwarf Bittern: 2 at Greengrove and 1 at Wamba dam, in Jan.

Fulvous Duck: in Jan 3 each at Kwechimsoro & Mvurachena dams. In July 45 at Lake Manyame.

Greater Flamingo: 1 each at Aisleby and Salt Pans dam in Feb.

Grey Crowned Crane: restricted to Hwange with 28 in Jan and 2 in July.

Half-collared Kingfisher: a single at Hippo Pools and 6 at Wamba dam, both in Jan.

Little Grebe: c.994 in Jan (Aisleby having 586), and c.802 in July. There was a likelihood of recounts at Lake Manyame.

Long-toed Lapwing: 17 at Kariba Bream Farm in Jan was a good number. Mandavu Dam (1) and Manzimbomvo Pan, Hwange (2) in Jan & Feb respectively are unusual.

Maccoa Duck: restricted to Aisleby where 41 were counted in Feb.

Osprey: 9 in Jan & Feb distributed at Biri Dam, Hale Dam, Mandavu Dam, Mazvikadei Dam, Mongwe Zambezi & Mteri Dam Section 1.

Pel's Fishing-owl: only a single at Wamba Dam in Jan.

Pink-backed Pelican: 2 at Kariba Bream Farm in Jan.



Western Marsh-harrier: 1 at Mvurachena Dam in Jan.

Whiskered Tern: in Jan 2 at Imbwa and 25 at Hwange.

White-backed Night-heron: only at Hippo Pools where 1 was seen in Jan and 2 in July.

Ian Riddell

White-breasted Cormorant and African Darter

Photos: Chris Payne



BLZ Mashonaland Branch Monavale Vlei Sunday 19th September 2016

Only 5 punters, Jimmy, 2 of his Kids' Club regulars, John Vekris and me on a cool breezy morning. 38 species were seen or heard, the majority by Jimmy who also showed us the burrows used by Side-striped Jackal who presumably feed mainly on the abundant mice which we also saw.

The vlei and streams were very quiet but the Gabar Goshawk, Lizard Buzzard and Black-shouldered Kite were out hunting. In fact, on a gum on Sherwood Golf course we watched a Kite

dismember a newly-caught mouse. The widow-birds and bishops are not yet in breeding plumage but yellow and black are appearing. Capped Wheatears are still present with African Wattled Lapwings but no owls on this occasion.

We await the court case on Mon 20th Sept to decide whether the greed of developers will overcome the undying efforts of the vlei's protectors.

Ken Dixon

Matabeleland

AISLEBY SURVEY, JULY & AUGUST

As reported in the previous edition of *Babbler*, Matabeleland Branch is now carrying out regular,

monthly surveys at Aisleby farm and sewerage works and the Upper Umguza Dam on the third

Sunday of the month. In July we counted 4,358 birds of 68 species; in August we counted 5,271 birds of 89 species. Over the three month period June – August we have recorded 110 species in the area.

Of ongoing concern is the proliferation of water hyacinth, not only on the dam but also on the Umguza River above and below the dam. The branch is endeavouring to get all concerned parties together to discuss possible solutions to the problem.

The results of the July count have been submitted to the African Waterbird Census. 3,085 waterbirds of 29 species were recorded. The most numerous were Little Grebe (1,129), Red-knobbed Coot (642), Cattle Egret (387), Red-billed Teal (259) and Southern Pochard (164). Unusual sightings were one White Stork (also seen in June) and five Marabou Storks (seen near the abattoir).

'Birds & People: Life Intertwined', Sunday 14 August

This was the title of a talk given to 13 branch members by Paul Hubbard. Members were taken on a journey from pre-historic times to today, and reminded of the part birds have played in man's life.

An unusual aspect of the talk was that birds and their eggs have been an important food source for man. The Common Ostrich was for the Bushman a life-saving bird in that every part of the bird was used in various ways, and their eggs provided the means to carry life-saving water. The humble chicken that saved Western civilisation was discovered – according to legend – by the side of the road in Greece in the first decade of the fifth century B.C. The Athenian general Themistocles, on his way to confront the invading Persian forces, stopped to watch two cocks fighting. This 'bird' fight where neither cock would 'give up' the fight reportedly inspired the Greeks. History records that the Greeks repelled the invaders, preserving the civilisation that today honours those same creatures.

Man has always been fascinated by, and envious of birds' ability to fly. In his attempts to mimic their flight from the Wright brothers to today,

The July survey started with a fantastic sighting of a melanistic Gabar Goshawk which perched on a fence post less than 10m from where the counters' cars were gathering, giving everyone ample opportunity to consult their bird guides and to check all the diagnostic features. Other unusual sightings were seven Common Mynas and eight Chestnut-backed Sparrowlarks, while Meyer's Parrot and House Sparrows were heard.

In August we were able to add several of the returning migrants – Common Greenshank (4), Ruff (6), Wood Sandpiper (13) and two Barn Swallows. Also recorded were Glossy Ibis, African Spoonbill, Cape Shoveler and Kittlitz's Plover. Raptors were well represented with the following being seen: Lizard Buzzard, Martial Eagle, African Fish-eagle and Black-chested and Brown Snake-eagle.

Adele Edwards

birds continue to inspire man in this quest. With the real threat of human-induced climate change, much is being made of the ability of birds to help create more energy-efficient, less wasteful aircraft. Most exciting are investigations into making small aircraft that can move their wings a little like birds do. Designers are taking cues from bird skeletons, body styles and even group behaviour to invent these aircraft.

Paul then went on to demonstrate how the visit by Charles Darwin to the Galapagos Islands in 1835 and the collection, and later study of various birds from different islands, was the root of the formation of his theory of evolution.

The closing sentence of Paul's talk is striking and should be remembered: "Arguably, in today's world, there is a fear that humans are losing touch with nature. Environmentally, with the threat of climate change, declining numbers of species and shrinking biodiversity, are the 'canaries in the coalmine' warning us all of impending changes we may not like?"

Cecilia Hubbard

To Robins Camp 1826C1, Hwange National Park, for the 2016 Game/bird count

We left Harare for the much looked forward to Hwange Game Count, at 06h00 on the 13th September and after 27 road blocks up to the Robins Camp turnoff, 50 km south of the Victoria Falls, we got there in 13½ hours, exhausted and bad tempered. So much for Ease of Doing Business.

At Robins* camp in the early morning of the 14th I went to the one-room museum in his tower dated 1934, and was horrified at the state of the displays,

with photos of Robins and his contemporaries all over the place in dirty broken frames. Proceeding to the top floor there was a Coke crate in the corner under the roof with a Speckled Pigeon sitting (it must have been on eggs, but I didn't disturb it). They were tolerably common around camp and I must have seen at least 6. Interesting that nearly the first bird I saw was not on the Kit Hustler list of birds of Hwange National Park (*Honeyguide* 32(2) of Aug. 1986). There were 2 Barn Owls in camp

and we heard Fiery-necked Nightjar. Lesser Striped Swallows were common in camp, but I didn't find a nest site. Animals in the camp were baboons and Banded Mongoose.

We visited Little Toms twice, once in the morning of the 14th and later for a sundowner. Some birds seen which we don't usually see in Mashonaland were Chestnut-backed Sparrowlarks, Southern White-crowned Shrike, Violet-eared Waxbill, Red-billed Buffalo-weaver and Black-throated Canary. Later in the day with cooler box at the hide, we spotted an African Wild Cat. We watched it for 45 minutes and eventually a family of 9 or 10 Swainson's Spurfowl walked past it, one got too close, and the cat sprung and tried to swipe the spurfowl out of the air, but too late, it was faster than the cat, with a vertical take-off.

A big male lion visited, drinking for 30 minutes; it had obviously fed very well. It was distinctive in that its lips were a bit distorted, maybe kicked by a zebra or something.

Both Big Toms and Little Toms are supplemented by solar panel water pumps.

Big Toms was visited for an hour or so in the middle of the day. One female Common Ostrich (not common), a Secretarybird under a distant bush, 3 Yellow-billed Kites, and a Lanner Falcon flew by. Lots of Namaqua Doves, maybe 8 African Quail-finch, a Cut-throat Finch and Golden-breasted Bunting. Between Big Toms and Little Toms we saw our only Lilac-breasted Roller of the 2000 km trip. A female Reedbuck came to drink and 24 Roan Antelope were there when we arrived. The biggest herd I have seen. A small herd of Kudu had Red-billed Oxpeckers on them, but Yellow-billed Oxpeckers were not seen.

We had a quick visit to Crocodile Pool on the Deka River, and found 12 Hippo, lots of crocs and some waterbirds. Black Crake, Egyptian Goose, Water Thick-knee, Giant Kingfisher and Pied Kingfisher. There were some flowering shrubs with White-bellied and Amethyst Sunbirds in attendance. The only LBJ was a Tawny-flanked Prinia and we never saw a Dark-capped Bulbul.

On the 15th we started 24 hours of Animal/bird counts at Manzichisa 1 (Hot Spring). It was a seep with plenty of water in elephant hammered scrub mopane. Immediately we found 2 Blacksmith Lapwings sitting on eggs. There was a Wood Sandpiper and a Three-banded Plover too, in mud much churned up by our 152 elephants. An adult female and an immature Bateleur flew overhead, and an African Fish-eagle was 500 metres downstream at Manzichisa 2. We worked very hard and got less than 40 species. African Scops-owl and Pearl-spotted Owlets called at night. A pair of Double-banded Sandgrouse came to visit at last light and through the night we did shifts 2 hours on and 2 hours off.

On the 16th at 6 in the morning, I heard my first European Bee-eaters for the year; a Grey Heron was looking for frogs. Then between 08h00 and 09h00 10 White-backed Vultures, 2 Lappet-faced Vultures and a female White-headed Vulture took wing and a Tawny Eagle joined the mix. We left at 12 and within a km saw 3 Southern Ground-hornbills keeping as cool as possible under a broken Mopane Tree.

That night maybe 50 of us gathered for a debrief (we met old friends, the Mundys and Tawny Stidolph). The debrief took the form of an auction, run by Geoff Shinns and was conducted with great humour, which raised about \$2000 for a new Deteema Dam pipeline.

We went to bed shattered, and left Robins at 05h50 on the 17th. The weather was perfect, and we came across 5 Wild Dog harassing a herd of about 8 sable. The bull ventured about 50 m from the herd and took them on with confident side-to-side sweeps of his horns. The dogs made about 3 attempts to get at the sable and then decided to look for easier prey elsewhere. We got to Harare at 18h00. Our animal count was small, but all teams must have had highlights as we did.

Thanks to Allistair and Pam Fawcett for organising the whole expedition. We had forgotten how hot the days can be and how cold it can get from 3 to 6 in the morning, we had forgotten what a full moon looks like through the night, and we had forgotten what a privilege it is to do a Game Count. Oh, it is so much easier to turn on the TV and watch Animal Planet in comfort!

Herbert George Robins was born in England in 1867 and died in Wankie in 1939. He fetched up in Matabeleland in 1892 and was in the Bulawayo Field Force in the Matabele Rebellion of 1896 – his BSA Company medal is in a known collection. He was given a farm there and bought and sold land around Bulawayo. In 1902 he went to the Congo and found and mapped tin deposits. He prospected and explored in north east Angola. He was part of the exploration team in the Wankie Coalfields, and in 1912 he bought Little Toms Spruit (farm) and started cattle ranching. In 1915 he bought Big Toms Spruit and later still he got Toms extension.

In 1925 he gave up cattle and let the game have its way. He had a well-known neighbour P.D. Crewe, once of the Greys Scouts, who had Nantwich Farm, now also part of Hwange National Park.

Not far from Robins Camp is a plaque saying "Robins Game Sanctuary, 25000 acres in extent". This Sanctuary was created and maintained for 25 years by the late H.G. Robins FRGS, FZS, for the protection of game and on his death in 1939 was bequeathed by him to the people of Southern

Rhodesia. He was also a member of the Royal Astronomical Society.

His grave is a little in the bush away from the Robins Camp entrance and within one metre of it is a well-marked game trail, coming out of the Mopane Woodland to the grass on the old airstrip.

Nearby is his old, wagon in a state of irreparable collapse.

A proposed book about Hwange Game Reserve, *The Forest with a Desert Heart* by Gary Haynes can be viewed on www as can a story on HG Robins.

David and Penny Rockingham-Gill

Mashonaland West

Ngezi and Kadoma

Wednesday 24th August at 6.30 a.m. was the day the Charama Chicks set forth for Ngezi National Park. The drive was from Kadoma to the Selous roundabout then proceeding south for 60 km on full tar past the Zimplats mine, then another 10 km dirt road to the Nat Park office.

A warm and friendly welcome was given by the staff. After payment of \$3 each and \$3 for the vehicle we proceeded to the various bush camp sites along the Ngezi dam waterside where we were able to walk freely, climb over rocks or just sit. The water level is very low but fishing permits have been issued to 4 co-operatives who are permitted to fish between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m. only. We did report to the office a fish poacher who was netting in a secluded bay area.

The day was cold and windy and the sun did eventually warm us up.

Waterbirds of interest were; 2 African Fish-eagles, 1 Goliath Heron, 2 Purple Herons, 4 Great Egrets, 8+ Reed Cormorants, 1 Grey Heron, 1 Squacco Heron, 1 Little Egret, 1 African Sacred Ibis, 8+ African Spoonbills, a pair of Egyptian Geese, 20+ White-faced Duck, 10+ African Jacanas, the odd single sighting of Blacksmith Lapwing and African Wattled Lapwing; a Water Thick-knee was calling.

The Pied Crows appear worrisome especially when the fish-eagle is in flight or perched with some food. 3 large crocodiles were basking on the

hot rocks and I am sure many more were hidden. We surmised that human and domestic cattle activity is disturbing waterbirds at the dam. Only 3 young waterbuck were seen. Nat. Parks say the wild game has been decimated because of game fence theft and settlement of 'new farmers'.

We enjoyed our picnic lunch under the msasa trees at an attractive well maintained lodge. We had a full 12 hour day and over 200 km travelling but visiting another part of beautiful Zimbabwe was great.

Local news:

A friend living at Eiffel Flats says the Spotted Eagle-owl family of 2 adults and 4 chicks are easily seen from her back door, high up in a hollow jacaranda tree where they were nesting 2 years ago. Of course all is quiet during the day as the fledglings are sunken low on the nest while the parents are hidden in nearby trees.

The Black-headed Heronry is being re-started in the same tall gum trees near the police camp in town. There is lots of morning and evening activity with nest material being carried.

Our bauhinia trees of white and lilac have been full of flowers and nectar so the White-bellied Sunbirds are heard all day long.

Margaret Parrock

Midlands

Sebakwe trip – September 2016

After hearing glowing reports about the location and birding at Sebakwe Dam, we decided to go down there and take a look for ourselves. We went for 2 nights though another night would have been good, giving us a bit more time to explore. It's in a really beautiful setting and our lodge was on top of a rocky kopje covered in trees, with many Mountain Acacias and paper-bark trees and figs too. As to be expected, it was extremely dry and it was a little windy at times. We had a magnificent view over the lake which is pretty low at the moment, exposing grass covered flats. There is still a huge

expanse of dam though, half of which we couldn't see, and the actual water is an amazing colour. We remarked on this when we were there and looking at Google Earth later, Sebakwe Dam is bright turquoise compared to Ngezi (which we visited on our way back), which looks almost black!

Birding and animals

There weren't as many birds as we were expecting though September is not such a great time birding-wise. Apart from African Fish-eagles,

we didn't see any raptors save for one overhead that we failed to identify. We could hear Lizard Buzzards but nothing else. We heard no owls but did get Fiery-necked Nightjars & Freckled Nightjars. Quite a few waterbirds including a Kittlitz's Plover which we think may have been sitting on a nest. There were the normal woodland birds and we heard lots of Brubrus calling, but we were most pleased to see a pair of Grey Tit-flycatchers with a nest in the end of a dead branch. There is also a bit of game in the park – impala, waterbuck and we saw a male nyala. The rocks around our lodge were home to many dassies! There were lots of babies and at night the whole group huddled together on a rock, no spaces between them, like one great big dassie! In the morning when we went outside they slowly dispersed, often climbing up into trees and one even climbed up a large Euphorbia just in front of the lodge where it proceeded to nibble at the plant.

Accommodation

We stayed in a very rustic 2-bedroomed lodge which had a strange assortment of furniture but was quite adequate and very clean. There was a good selection of kitchen utensils and although there is no ZESA, they do have a gas stove and good braai facilities. We had forgotten to bring towels so I had to go all the way back to the gate (about 4 km) and fortunately they had some in very

reasonable condition! However, I got back to find that there was no water so Paul went back to the gate and they immediately produced 4 'chigubs', suggesting that they knew it was a problem though they hadn't said anything when we arrived! The water comes from a borehole and the pump was a problem but the staff were very obliging and came to fix it in the morning. It did work briefly during the morning but dried up by afternoon and so we had to trek down yet again to get some more 'chigubs'! Another minor issue was that the large outside bin was brim-full with rubbish so we had to get them to empty it plus pick up cans and bottles from the bush in front of the lodge, but they were very helpful and did sort out the problem.

There are 2 x 2-bedroomed lodges (@\$30) and 1 x 1-bedroomed lodge (\$20), but we didn't look at the others and were not quite sure what sort of condition they were in. Evidently there is one camp manager for Sebakwe & Ngezi. When we were at Ngezi we saw that they are busy renovating the lodges and they said the plan was to move onto Sebakwe next, whenever that may be! Camping (\$5 pppn) at Sebakwe looked good; there is a stone shelter for each campsite and the ablutions looked ok... but also no water so it does seem to be a major problem.

When all is said and done though, we think it was well worth the visit and recommend it if you can face the accommodation challenges!

Debbie Wiggins



Thick-billed Weavers in Emerald Hill, Harare

After 47 years living in Zimbabwe I presumed I knew every common garden bird in the big city, until recently! I had a sunflower grow in the middle of my vegetable garden; a bird must have dropped a seed there one day and I loved watching it grow. Eventually it matured into this magnificent flower in amongst my vegies. At the breakfast table in early September this bird arrived and started investigating the flower. I was curious – it looked like a seed eater but it was larger than what I was used to. I quickly pulled out my bird book and with my binoculars confirmed that it was the Thick-billed Weaver. I was confused by the map showing its location only near Victoria Falls and along the Mozambique & South African eastern coastline. Each day I have had the joy of watching this weaver come twice a day, early morning and mid-afternoon, to this one plant and pull out a few seeds, sitting on top of the plant and breaking each one open

and enjoying the kernel within. I now want to grow more sunflowers in my vegie garden to encourage more of these beautiful birds into my garden in Emerald Hill.

Sue Haley

Thick-billed Weavers wander about the city a fair amount at certain times of the year and I have seen them in various places including the streets of Newlands. They come into our Newlands garden quite often, and especially at this time of the year, when the *Dianella* is fruiting. With the new green fruit developing at the moment I expect them to arrive shortly, as soon as they turn purple. This morning the Streaky-headed Seedeater was munching on the unripe fruit! Ed.

Notice

Brian Marshall has sent me this advance notice (see on the back cover) for a new publication on *Terrestrial Gamebirds & Snipes of Africa*.

This is quite topical since the Blairs from Victoria Falls recently came across a hybrid spurfowl in Botswana that was initially thought to be a Natal Spurfowl x Red-billed Spurfowl, since it was with a Natal. However, though first published as such in *African Birdlife*, we (Brian and I) were a little dubious since it showed some affinities with a Swainson's Spurfowl! Rob Little took another and more critical look at the photo and revised it to a Red-billed x Swainson's hybrid. *Yes, hybrids are tricky on morphologic characters alone ...*

But to read more about this group why not consider getting hold of this book, which will be about R280 in South Africa.

Jacana Media

For product information

& sales queries:

sales@jacana.co.za

Tel: +27 011 628 3200

Fax: +27 011 482 7280

Sales Fax: +27 011 482 7282

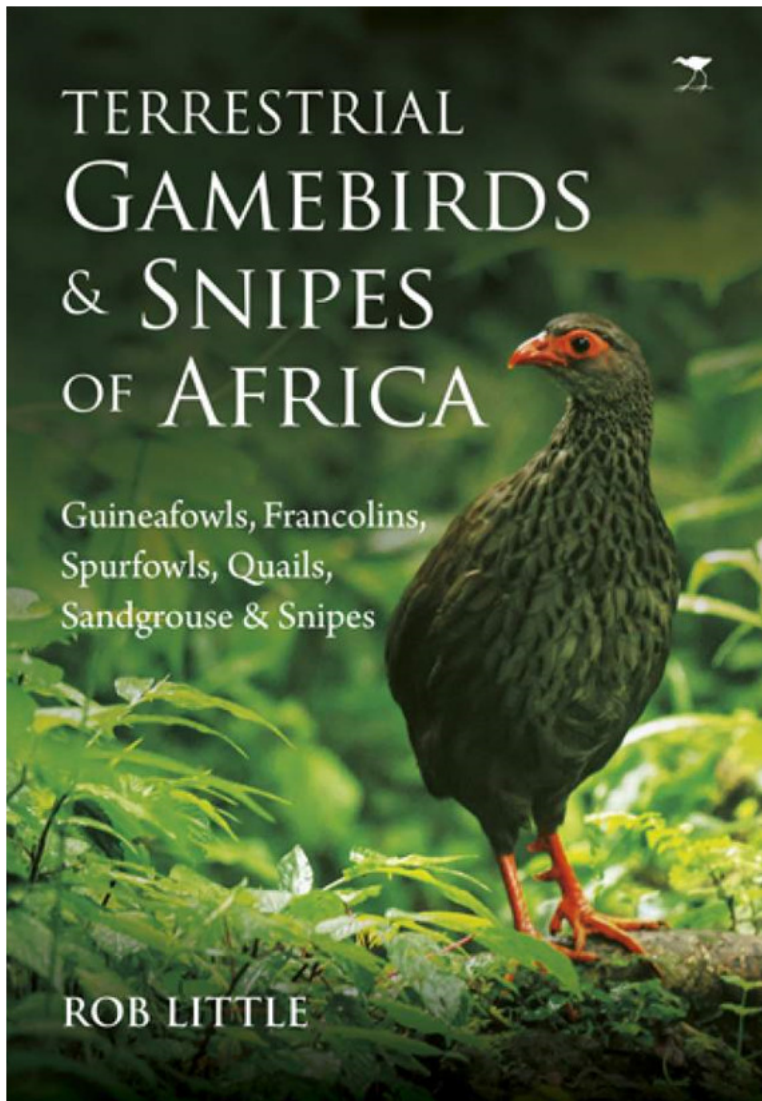
On the Dot

orders@onthedot.co.za

Tel: +27 021 918 8810

Fax: +27 021 918 8815

Ian Riddell



Description

Terrestrial Gamebirds & Snipes of Africa is a detailed full-colour hand book. It includes everything needed to identify and get to know the 74 species that fall into six groups: guineafowls and Congo Peafowl, francolins and partridges, spurfowls, quails, sandgrouse, and snipes and Eurasian Woodcock.

Terrestrial Gamebirds & Snipes of Africa offers a concise summary of the large but scattered body of accumulated scientific research and field-guide literature. Pertinent and interesting facts about the distribution, habits, breeding and conservation of each species are presented in a readable fashion. More than 250 photographs convey the appearance, characteristic features, behavioural activities and, in many cases, the habitats frequented by each bird.

Terrestrial Gamebirds & Snipes of Africa will be a worthy addition to the ornithological literature and to the bookshelves of bird enthusiasts, particularly birders, wing-shooters, land owners and anyone with an interest in nature and conservation, throughout Africa and across the rest of the world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rob Little is a prolific author and a passionate birder and conservationist. He has a BSc in Wildlife Resources and a PhD degree on the behavioural ecology, management and utilisation of the grey-winged francolin. During the early 1990s, Rob coordinated the Gamebird Research Programme at the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology, University of Cape Town. Together with Tim Crowe, he published the book *Gamebirds of Southern Africa*. Rob was Director: Conservation at WWF South Africa from 1997–2008. In 2009 he was appointed manager of the Centre of Excellence (CoE) at the Fitztitute. He is the Fitztitute's link with the South African National Research Foundation and the Department of Science & Technology and manages the research activities which are funded by the CoE using birds as keys to biodiversity conservation.

Contributions for *The Babblers* 133 December 2016-January 2017 may be sent to the editor anytime between now and the very latest 14th November 2016.