



THE BABBLER

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The BirdLife International
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SUBSCRIPTIONS INFORMATION

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

Even if you don't attend meetings and outings, your membership is really important and supports our goal to protect biodiversity and conserve birds and their habitats through education, lobbying decision-makers and interaction with international organisations.

In addition, your involvement with data collection through atlassing and submission of records is invaluable. As a member you get the newsletter, *The 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.

Paynow online! 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** account – Merchant Code 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.

Please contact me, the national membership secretary, for all membership-related issues – new, renewals, payments, change of details, queries CarolynDennison@birdlifezimbabwe.org

And look on our Facebook page for great pictures and recent bits of birding news -

www.facebook.com/BirdLifeZimbabwe and our informative website www.birdlifezimbabwe.org

Branch Activities

Mashonaland Branch

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

Saturday 3 rd December	Marlborough Vlei Walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 4 th December	Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Thursday 8 th December N.B. 2nd Thursday	Hwange Game Count (20mins) followed by 'Bring and Share' Social Evening, Avondale Sports Club	Meet at 5.30 for 6.00 p.m.
Saturday 10 th December	Greystone Nature Preserve Meet at venue in Halford Road off Gaydon Road	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 11 th December	No outing	
Sunday 18 th December	Monavale Vlei Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.

BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ) Mashonaland Calendar of Events: JANUARY 2017

January is waterbird count month!

Sunday 1 st January	New Year's Day, no outing	
Saturday 7 th January	Marlborough Vlei Walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 8 th January	Mukuvisi Woodlands Walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Saturday 14 th January	Greengrove Nature Reserve (Willy's Dam) Meet at venue in Kirrie Road. Take Latimer Road from Harare Drive or Wilson Drive off Mutare Road and right into Athlone Avenue	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 15 th January	Lake Chivero	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Thursday 19 th January	AGM followed by Presentation by A. MacDonald: Photo Safari , Avondale Sports Club	Meet at 5.30 for 6.00 p.m.
Sunday 22 nd January	Monavale Vlei Walk Meet at CABS to share transport	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Sunday 29 th January	Douglynn Farm, Shamva Meet at CABS car park for car-sharing	Meet at 06.30 a.m.

For further information please contact Tony Alegria, tonyalegria47@gmail.com 0772 438697(h) 490375

Evening Meetings are on the **3rd Thursday** of each month 5.30 p.m. for 6.00 p.m. The venue is the Avondale Sports Club on Brighton Road between Sam Nujoma Street Extension and Upper East Road. There is a cash bar and a security guard. A minimum donation of \$1 per person at the door please.

Directions to regular venues:

CABS Northridge Park – From town drive along Borrowdale Road, turn right into Whitwell, next right into Ridgeway North, next right into Northend Road and first right into Northridge Close. Drive to the end of the road and go through a security boom into Northridge Park.

Marlborough Vlei – Meet at the bottom of Princess Margaret Road, off Harare Drive and follow the road round to the left. Park on the short road midway along the bottom of Princess Margaret.

Mukuvisi Woodlands – Turn off the Chiremba Road into Ford Road (opposite Queensdale shops) cross over Longford Avenue and bear left down to the T-junction on Blatherwick Road. Turn right and the gate is about 150 metres on the left. Bring a reasonable tip for the guard, taking into account the value of your vehicle! Don't forget refreshments for after the walk when we record the number of species.

Chivero and Rainham Dam – Meet at Prince Edward School car park on Josiah Tongogara Ave.

Monavale Vlei – 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 12th December: Aisleby survey. Meet at the Aisleby boom at 06:00. The early start is necessary if we are to complete the survey before it gets too hot. If you are running late please phone Adele (0712 366 917) and get directions as to where to meet us – we don't move far, fast. Please note for this month only survey has been moved from third Sunday to second Saturday. Bring chairs and refreshments.

Sunday 7th January: Annual bistro dinner – hosted by Cecilia Hubbard at 20 Eglesfield Road, Fortunes Gate, Bulawayo. \$10 per person. Places are limited, so please make your booking to Cecilia on 0772433733.

Sunday 22nd January: Aisleby survey. As for December. Results from this survey will be included in AfWC.

Saturday 28th January: African Waterbird Census (AfWC) at SAST (Southern Areas Sewerage Treatment works near Khami dam). Meet at the Railway Station car park at 07.30 a.m. Should you require transport, please contact Cecilia Hubbard on 0772433733 to make arrangements.

Saturday 25th February: Matabeleland branch AGM – The Gazebo, Qalisa, Suburbs, Bulawayo. Teas will be served from 10.00 a.m., before the start of the Meeting at 10.30 a.m. Please bring your chair, and if you would like to stay for a social after the meeting, bring your picnic lunch.

Other Areas

Mashonaland West – Margaret Parrock 068-22005 or 0773-263673

Eastern Districts – Second Saturday of every month The Vumba Walk. These vary from the Upper to Lower Vumba areas and occasionally may extend into Penhalonga, Burma Valley, and even Chimanimani. Many birding enthusiasts join us although it is not officially a birding walk. Contact Sue Fenwick 0779-408557 ingram.sue@gmail.com for more details.

Lowveld – contact Clive Stockil 0772-219204 or clive@chilogorge.com

NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL NEWS AND EVENTS

17.11.16 IUCN CONGRESS IN HONOLULU JULIA PIERINI

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature, whose aim is to save nature, holds its congress once every 4 years. Julia Pierini, CEO of BLZ, was fortunate to be sponsored to attend the 10 day meeting in Honolulu in September this year. She was one of 10,000 participants from both government and civil society organisations from all over the world. The experience was overwhelming; thousands of talks, videos, presentations to choose from on all aspects of biodiversity and efforts to research, conserve, restore the natural world.

There were a fair number of African representatives but the congress was dominated by the Europeans and the Asians (minus China). Julia was made acutely aware of the awful situation in Zimbabwe, how relatively ignorant our communities are of the state of our environment and how pollution is out of control with no official attempts to improve the situation. Yes, small groups and individuals are valiantly struggling to save elephants, rhinos and vultures but these are but drops in the ocean. In our landlocked country it is hard to comprehend all that is happening in marine conservation. One of Obama's final acts was to extend the biggest marine park in the world.

The choice of Honolulu as the venue was not a chance decision; the island of Oahu has been bullied by the US to serve the purposes of mainland America. On the one free day for delegates, Julia explored the area searching for the few endemic birds which have survived the despoliation of the country by rapacious US exploitation. Little has survived, all is exotic: the indigenous population is fighting to preserve what is left. So must we.

Increased Protection for a Bird Being Loved to Death

The Grey Parrot, also known as African Grey Parrot, is one of the world's most popular pet birds—but that popularity has fuelled the capture of millions of parrots from the wild in Africa. Earlier this month, an international wildlife trade conference granted this declining species increased protections under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). The Cornell Lab's Multimedia Productions program produced this [video summary](#) about the plight of the Grey Parrot for the government of Gabon and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Pan African Ornithological Congress 2016 and the VULTURE CONSERVATION STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

By Fadzai Matsvimbo

The Pan African Ornithological Congress (PAOC) was held in Dakar, Senegal from the 16th to the 21st of October. The theme was *Global changes / Threats and opportunities for birds in Africa*. PAOC happens once every four years and the last one was in Tanzania in 2012. Other meetings also occurred during the PAOC. One such meeting was the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) Multi Species Action Plan (MsAP) on vultures. Vultures remain one of the most

endangered bird families on the continent. The CMS Africa Regional MsAP workshop took place from the 18th – 21st October 2016. There were a total of 45 workshop participants from 28 different countries around the world of which 19 African countries from 4 regions, North, East, South and West were represented. Central Africa was a gap. Southern Africa had the highest representation at the workshop with South Africa constituting the highest representation from any country.

East Africa: Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Djibouti and Ethiopia

West Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Chad and Nigeria

North Africa: Morocco and Tunisia

Southern Africa: Zimbabwe, Botswana, South Africa, Swaziland, and Angola

Participants were from a range of research institutions, Universities, NGO's and Government.

The workshop was facilitated by Chris Bowden, Globally Threatened Species Officer & SAVE Programme Manager, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. I went to this workshop full of anticipation and hope of what the coming together of so many people fighting for the same cause would bring a solution. But the hope soon turned into dismay as many people shared the situations in their countries. The situation with vultures is rather critical, one that requires us all to be proactive or else we will lose these iconic species so synonymous with African skies. In southern Africa one of the biggest threats is that of poisoning, both unintentional and intentional. As the poaching problem escalates, vultures are taking a huge toll.

There is still a window of opportunity to save the vultures. Chris Bowden shared his experiences regarding the Asian Vulture crisis. The Asian Vulture Crisis is different from the African one, in Asia the problem was that of vultures dying after consuming cows treated with diclofenac. In Africa, the problems are many (poisoning, harvesting for muti trade, consumption by people, inadequate law enforcement) and each region has its own challenges. However, the Vulture MsAP was meant to bring stakeholders together to deal with some of the problems as vultures are wide ranging species and will need the cooperation of the various countries.

OBITUARY

DARREL CHARLES HERBERT PLOWES b.4-4-1925, d.19-10-2016

To quote from Bart Wursten's Introduction to *Flora of Zimbabwe*; "One of the greatest all-round naturalists of Zimbabwe, Darrel Plowes can perhaps be considered second only to Charles Swynnerton." Sadly this icon of the stapeliophiles, orchidophiles, ornithologists and many other groups of nature lovers passed away on Wednesday 19th October 2016 in Mutare at the age of 91. A very long innings, admittedly, but one that was not complete; up until the end Darrel was working on

various projects including an updated version of information on research on stapeliads and he had plans for further research.

In the course of his long career the species name *plowesii* was applied to grasses, plants, a bird, a butterfly, a legless lizard and a mole-rat, illustrating the broad range of his interests. He was an avid collector and photographer whose specimens can be seen at the National Herbarium and whose photos have appeared in so many

books and magazines like *National Geographic*. Also to be mentioned is his collection of birds' eggs, one of the largest in Zimbabwe, which was donated to the National Museum.

South African by birth, after completing school and serving in the forces in Italy in World War II Darrel graduated in agriculture, soil conservation and ecology from Witwatersrand University where he was a founder member of the Ornithological Society. He moved to Southern Rhodesia in 1949 to take up a post at Matopos Research Station. In 1956 he was appointed Provincial Agricultural Officer, Manicaland. From 1982-1995, following his wife who worked for USAID, he lived in Botswana, Sudan, Washington D.C. and Chad. Since that date he has been 'retired' in Mutare.

Darrel's idea of 'retirement' was to spend all of every day and much of the night pursuing his photography, writing, research and field work. When I got to know him in '95 he was already well known for his *Wild Flowers of Rhodesia*, written in cooperation with Bob Drummond and had begun to write the definitive work on stapeliads. Darrel always welcomed visitors and after showing them his latest orchid acquisitions sent from all over the

world and lovingly planted and nourished he would immediately involve them in his latest thoughts on everything from birds in the garden to recent political developments. His office was a hive of activity with the latest IT equipment, newly arrived books and journals on any natural history topic and cabinets of slides which he would send all over the world when requested. Despite all this activity, Darrel would leave his desk and come to chat with us over a cup of tea or a beer keeping up with local and family news. Occasionally he would accompany the local group on birding outings, giving us the benefit of his compendial knowledge. He also acceded to requests from Mutare or Harare to give an illustrated talk on whatever was needed. And not only the birders benefited: I have seen him holding forth to the Orchid Society at Mukuvisi on many occasions. Locally, Darrel supported those planning to upgrade Mutare Museum and more recently La Rochelle's new orchid exhibition, and this in his late 80s.

Zimbabwe has many reasons to mourn the passing of this larger than life naturalist. Thank you for all you have done for us, Darrel. Rest in Peace.

Ken Dixon

RECENT REPORTS AND SIGHTINGS

Mashonaland

BLZ MASHONALAND BRANCH VISIT TO HALE (GWEBI) DAM ON BEL-IN STUD (ARDEN PARK) FARM, SUNDAY 24TH SEPTEMBER 2016

11 members assembled on a cool breezy morning for the trip out along the Kariba road to Belinsky's farm and dam about 4 km inland along a red dust road. The dam is naturally very low and weed covered, affording perfect conditions for about 500 White-faced Duck and 1,000 Red-billed Teal. There were also a few Comb Duck, 2 White-backed Duck, Little Grebe, Common Moorhen, Red-knobbed Coot and all the white egrets. African Jacana, Black Crake, Grey Heron, Purple Heron and Squacco Heron stood and waited or bustled busily about on the shoreline with Black-winged Stilt and African Sacred Ibis. There were no Osprey this time but 3 African Marsh-harriers quartered the reedbeds. The African Fish-eagle caused great consternation when it appeared and all the ducks took to the skies. One of the harriers attempted to drive it off but was treated with disdain, being so much smaller.

We split into upstream and downstream groups to cover the 5 km of shoreline following the newly-graded tracks which have the reedbeds and dam on one side and bushy scrub in fallow fields on the other. This is ideal as there is always something to hear and see. My group walked upstream towards the farmhouse. We were lucky to have close ups of

the harrier low above the reeds and, at one point, discovered a group of some 20 African Sacred Ibis feeding together. African Stonechats were everywhere as were Red-faced Mousebird and Red-faced Cisticola. Also visible were Tropical Boubou, Long-billed Crombec, Rufous-naped Lark, Arrow-marked Babbler, Grey Go-away-birds and others. The Euplectes species were still not in breeding plumage so rather tricky to identify. A beautiful Cape Longclaw gave perfect views. A Long-crested Eagle sat watching us but there were few raptors at our end.

Now for the 'dam wall' group... Heading west and downstream along the road, for the most part the Dam-Wallers were slightly away from the water along the edge of the thorn scrub and acacia woodland. Even so, there were great numbers of waterbirds visible on the dam across the recently burnt grassland. In addition to those seen by the others were Black-headed Heron, Reed Cormorant and White-breasted Cormorants and a Whiskered Tern. Along the shoreline were African Wattled Lapwing and Blacksmith Lapwing, with the occasional cheery twiddle of the Levillant's Cisticola, and above us at times were 2 juvenile African Fish-eagles. Also seen soaring were Black-

ched Snake-eagle (an adult and later, a juvenile) and a Wahlberg's Eagle. A few Wire-tailed Swallows and Barn Swallows were accompanied by large numbers of Grey-rumped Swallows and African Palm-swifts. Some others that presented themselves on the wing were the Yellow-throated Longclaw, African Grey Hornbill and Thick-billed Weaver.

The trees and shrubs alongside the road gave much reward with Grey Penduline-tit, Chin-spot Batis, Spectacled Weaver, Long-billed Crombec, Rattling Cisticola, Senegal Coucal, Emerald-spotted Wood-dove, Red-eyed Dove, Cape Turtle-dove and Laughing Dove, Green-capped Eremomelas and a rarity for most Harare residents, Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler. Making their presence known through song were the first Willow Warblers of the season, and lower down in the dry lantana thickets White-throated Robin-chats and White-browed Robin-chats sang lustily. Foraging on the road were Blue Waxbills and Jameson's Firefinch, whilst the Red-billed Firefinch and the Common Waxbill were also seen.

In the larger thickets further along, close to the dam wall, Terrestrial Brownbuls and Grey-backed Camaroptera churred and chirruped with African Reed-warblers singing continuously, but were nearly impossible to see. Climbing the steep bank to the top of the wall we found less activity on the dam. A few egrets, Common Moorhen and African Jacana potted around on the hyacinth and a White-browed Scrub-robin occupied the thickets on the downstream side. A Variable Sunbird was seen, adding to the Scarlet-chested Sunbird (whose nest was found on the way back) and White-bellied Sunbirds seen earlier, the sunbird representatives of the day. Black-headed Oriole and African Golden Oriole appeared briefly, adding further colour to the day.

Rounding out the total number of 110 was the Collared Pratincole, though some were seen before we started. All in all a very good day's outing with great birding and lovely weather if you could ignore the sometimes chilly wind.

Upstream: Ken Dixon, Downstream: Patrick Shadwell

BLZ MASHONALAND BRANCH OUTINGS TO HARARE BOTANIC GARDENS, 8.10.16 AND LAKE CHIVERO 9.10.16

The Saturday short outing was poorly attended – only 5 of us – as most recent outings have been. This is worrying for the committee and BirdLife. Please let us know if you prefer other venues. We are always looking for new and exciting places to visit.

The gardens were of course tinder dry but the 'Lake' does seem to be slowly filling. Some trees were in leaf but most are awaiting moisture. However, migrants like African Paradise-flycatcher and Willow Warbler were present. We heard Klaas's Cuckoo, too. Signature Botanic Gardens species like Kurrichane Thrush and Green-winged Pytilia were everywhere and the Lesser Honeyguides' call could be heard in their usual locations and were eventually seen. Red-faced Mousebird and Speckled Mousebird, Southern Black Flycatcher, Violet-backed Starling and Greater Blue-eared Starling, Arrow-marked Babbler and Terrestrial Brownbuls were also spotted. The only bird of prey was an overflying Gabar Goshawk. In all we collected 55 species.

On Sunday 5 of us set off from PE at 6.30 and were pleased to find 4 more members awaiting us at the Chivero sanctuary but even 9 was disappointing for what proved to be an excellent survey of the shoreline. Old hands said the lake is the lowest it has been since 1983. I personally have never before been able to walk out to rocky Bird Island where the cormorants collect. The situation is perfect for waterbirds as there is plenty

of hyacinth-free foreshore. This had attracted between 100 and 120 gorgeous Pied Avocets that mingled with many Black-winged Stilts at the edge of and on the water. Near the shore were some 60 Red-billed Teals among which we found 2 Hottentot Teals, 2 Cape Shovelers and a dozen Little Grebes. At the water's edge foraged 4 Ruff, a few Wood Sandpipers, 1 Marsh Sandpiper, 3 Common Sandpipers and lots of Kittlitz's Plovers. But best of all were 2 Common Ringed Plovers, annual passage migrants here. On the rocks out in the lake were about 300 White-breasted Cormorants and a few Reed Cormorants. As we approached Harare Safari Lodge we discovered a large flock of White-faced Duck. On their beach 4 or 5 Black Crake looked out of place climbing the rocks instead of paddling through the weed and 2 Yellow-billed Storks briefly appeared. It was also good to see a fair number of Barn Swallows, a Lesser Striped Swallow and a Grey-rumped Swallow over the water.

We finally dragged ourselves away from the action on the shoreline to beef up our list with woodland birds. However, apart from a big flock of Helmeted Guineafowl and 2 African Grey Hornbills we saw very little. The best sighting was an African Cuckoo Hawk sitting in a *Terminalia*. Our final count was 49 but with most of those waterbirds we were more than satisfied.

Ken Dixon

BLZ MASHONALAND BRANCH VISIT TO PRINCE EDWARD AND HENRY HALLAM (SEKE AND HARAVA) DAMS, SUNDAY 23RD OCTOBER 2016

We were relieved to see an improved turnout of 11 for this interesting visit to this venue on the Seke Road just short of Chitungwiza, formerly a popular fishing and picnic spot with Salisbury families, now dilapidated and rather forlorn, its shelters and ablution blocks vandalised and evidence everywhere of large scale wood poaching. However, for dedicated birders it proved to be a great destination despite the almost empty dams. Our count for the morning was 105 species.

On arrival at the erstwhile picnic area we split into 3 groups to partially cover this vast municipal property, excited by the prospect of dams and mature miombo woodland. My group set off immediately for the steep sided wall of Mandavu (formerly Henry Hallam Dam) (1974). Driving in along the sandy track, we had been aware of the call of the Red-chested Cuckoo but now we could see it clearly from the dam wall atop a tall bare tree. As expected there was little water but enough to attract Reed Cormorant, Pied Kingfisher, African Pied Wagtail, Great Egret and Barn Swallows. Later, when we walked across the parched and cracked exposed shore right down to the water's edge we were to discover Red-billed Teal, Common Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Kittlitz's Plover and African Fish-eagle. In fact, the miombo woodland was more interesting and also offered welcome shade. We saw Long-billed Crombec, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, a pair of Yellow-fronted Tinkerbirds mating, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Willow Warbler, Red-faced Mousebird and Speckled Mousebird, Miombo Blue-eared Starling and Violet-backed Starling and Cardinal Woodpecker. A Lizard Buzzard sat in a Msasa and an African Goshawk circled calling overhead.

The other group headed off for the area below the spillway, through a dense thicket of lantana which contained both White-browed Scrub-robin and White-throated Robin-chat, before getting down to the water's edge. The waterberries were in full flower and attracted a variety of birds including Southern Masked-weaver, Village Weaver, Golden Weaver and Spectacled Weavers as well as Variable Sunbird and Purple-banded Sunbird. Great Reed-warbler, African Reed-warbler, Lesser Swamp-warbler and Little Rush-warbler and White-browed Robin-chat made their presence known

through song. Venturing out onto some rocks among the reed, we were able to look downstream along the river. A lone African Sacred Ibis and a flock of Thick-billed Weavers flew overhead. Further downstream we could see three Hamerkops, before a Purple Heron came swooping down into the weed. We headed back into the woodland, where the calls of the Emerald-spotted Wood-dove and Terrestrial Brownbul betrayed their presence.

Heading back to the starting point and up the dam wall we could see White-bellied Sunbird, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird and Amethyst Sunbirds in the treetops. Flying around us was a Wire-tailed Swallow and settling into the bushes and treetops were various Euplectes, the only one of which we were able to positively identify being Southern Red Bishop. From below us in the thickets we could hear Yellow-bellied Greenbul and flying overhead were a Cattle Egret or two. Heading along the wall we saw or heard Southern Black Flycatcher, Tropical Boubou, Grey-headed Bush-shrike and Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, before we were beset by ants, which forced us to head back towards the cars. The woods were quiet apart from the occasional calls of the Black-collared Barbets but getting back to cars we found Brown-crowned Tchagra and Neddicky beneath the powerlines.

Walking further along the lines, upon which were hung the nests of Red-headed Weavers, some with their proud owners, we managed to get good sightings of the Tchagra and Neddicky as well as Broad-billed Roller. A Black Cuckooshrike was heard and an intriguing call, similar to that of the Brown-hooded Kingfisher (which was also heard a little later) led to a pair of Grey-headed Kingfishers. Now further downstream, we cut across to the river to find Great Egret, Yellow-billed Egret, Little Egret and Cattle Egrets in the company of African Sacred Ibises and Squacco Herons. The cheery twiddle of the Levillant's Cisticola accompanied us as we followed a Lesser Honeyguide to find a pair of disgruntled African Wood-owls hiding from the sun in the waterberries we'd passed earlier. Now hot, hungry and thirsty, we headed back to the picnic site to tally up the total of that which we had seen before heading back to Harare after a great outing!

HIPPO POOLS, SHAMVA, between the weir and the Umfurudzi junction. 7-10 October 2016, Pentad 1700_3150

We went into the bush to chill out and didn't work hard at birding. We stayed in Figtree tent, opposite the two islands 'Heathrow and Gatwick', which nightly have about 100 Reed Cormorants

roosting in them. They must fly from way up and down the Mazowe River, as the Umfurudzi is quite dry to the Mazowe junction.

On 7th we managed to record a pair of Collared Sunbirds near the swimming pool begging for food; Swallow-tailed Bee-eater were there too (I have not recorded the bee-eater in the Mukuvi Woodlands this year and I wonder why?). The last birds recorded that night were the White-backed Night-herons, and we saw them every night.

On the 8th we had a Hamerkop building a nest somewhere inland from the river, but not far away. The African Wood-owl called at 04h40 and was still calling very quietly at 07h00. Klaas's Cuckoo, African Emerald Cuckoo and Thick-billed Cuckoo were all there plus two pairs of Broad-billed Roller. The star of the weekend was 4 Mottled Swifts drinking at high speed at the Mazowe/Umfurudzi junction. Nearby, next to an island, we found a female African Finfoot.

Red-faced Mousebirds were seen almost every day; they seem to have had resurgence in Harare this year. We only recorded two Trumpeter Hornbills, not the 5 or 6 we normally see, always in a fruiting fig tree. Red-headed Weavers were easily the commonest bird on the riverine fringe – there must have been hundreds of feeding females and yet few males. The only nests I saw were on a baobab some 4 km from camp. The Red-eyed Dove, Cape Turtle-dove & Emerald-spotted Wood-dove seemed to be few and far apart, but maybe the temperatures were far too high, and that was probably why we saw so few birds. White-crested Helmet-shrike and Retz's Helmet-shrike were common, as were the White-breasted Cuckoo-

shrike and Black Cuckooshrike – in fact I have never seen so many White-breasted. Of interest was a Purple Heron that used to fly in to roost on the riverside at night. The Black Crake are very quiet along the river and I would have not recorded it if we had not been having a quiet sundowner on the pontoon which Cheryl & Anthony use for fishing clients.

The two raptor species we were lucky to see were Western Banded Snake-eagle and African Goshawk. The pair of resident African Fish-eagles may be the only pair for miles as the weir has lots of fish. Shelley's Francolin was also heard from camp. Livingstone's Flycatcher were seen every day, a Narina Trogon female once and a Black-throated Wattle-eye only once. Funny that we never heard a Grey Go-away-bird.

Normal are kudu – we saw 9, Impala 13, Bushbuck 4 and Hippo 3. But more unusual was Spotted Hyaena heard, and evidence of Antbear, since the last one was we think killed by a leopard.

Some of the new birds in Umfurudzi area in the last few years are Western Banded Snake-eagle, European Honey-buzzard, Long-crested Eagle, Green Sandpiper, Eastern Saw-wing, Collared Palm-thrush, Brown-backed Honeybird, Neddicky, Plain-backed Sunbird and African Yellow White-eye.

Some notes from Hippo Pools appear in *Babblers* 69, 79, 80, 85, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 95, 101, 108, 115 and 129. Tony Wood wrote in *Honeyguide* 2005, 51(1).

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

Matabeleland

AISLEBY SURVEY, 18 SEPTEMBER & 15 OCTOBER

As previously reported, BLZ members have been recording sightings at the Upper Umguza Dam, Aisleby sewerage works and associated farm for many years, with over 400 species being seen. In June Matabeleland branch began a formal survey of the area and in the first three months recorded 110 species. Obviously we still have a long way to go but each month we manage to add a few more of the regular resident species and now with the return of the migrants we are hoping for an extra boost to our species total. In September we saw 69 species and added the following species to the list: Southern Carmine Bee-eater, Cut-throat Finch, Spur-winged Goose, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Squacco Heron, Yellow-billed Kite, Green-winged Pytilia, Red-breasted Swallow and Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler. In October we saw 84 species, adding: European Bee-eater, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Black-throated Canary, Yellow-billed Egret, Helmeted Guineafowl, Purple Heron, African Paradise-flycatcher, Common Sandpiper, Little Stint, Lesser Striped Swallow, Wire-tailed Swallow,

Little Swift, Black-crowned Tchagra, African Pied Wagtail, Orange-breasted Waxbill and Pin-tailed Whydah. The species total for the area is now up to 135.

In September we recorded our highest-to-date figure for Pied Avocet (221) and in October the highest-to-date for Red-knobbed Coots (726). In October we recorded two White-breasted Cormorants (only previous record was one in July) but for the first time did not see a Reed Cormorant. Also for the first time we did not record White-faced Duck. Marabou Storks (2) were again seen near the abattoir. Numbers of both Black-headed and Grey Herons were down on previous months. Grey Heron – we recorded 11 in October and 6 in September compared to over 80 in both June and July; Black-headed Heron – we recorded 9 in October compared to an average of 28 over the previous four months. There were more African Sacred Ibis – 90 in October and 121 in September compared to a previous high of 44 in July. We saw few Red-billed Quelea but we could still hear them.

In August and September we saw several thousand quelea, many clouds of +200 rolling overhead. In October we recorded only one flock but as we drove through a stand of acacia, near the bridge where the river flows into the dam, we could hear hundreds of birds chattering away. Although it was not yet 9 a.m. it was already extremely hot, the acacia was showing a new flush of leaf and while we could not see them, the queleas were presumably sheltering in these thickets.



Blacksmith Lapwing nest: Kudzanai Dhlwayo

In September many members were away taking part in the annual game census at Hwange National Park so Kudzanai and I tackled the survey alone. We were seeing spots in front of our eyes by the time we were finished recording 6,245 birds – 3,067 excluding quelea. In October, in addition to four regulars we were joined by youth members Melissa and Peace and their friends Arthur and Angel, as well as Cheryl, a visitor from Dubai.

OUTING TO KHAMI RUINS, SUNDAY 16 OCTOBER

It was already getting warm as five birders, braving the October heat, arrived at the Khami Ruins entrance boom. Khami Ruins was recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1986 and is about 22 km west of Bulawayo. An enormous amount of work has recently been put into the site by the National Museums along with the Friends of the Museum and it is extremely satisfying to see that the museum there has been totally rebuilt and is beautifully laid out. The drive in was pretty dry and dusty but over the dry, leafless bush we could see the beautiful green trees that obviously line the dam and the river course.

After watching a group of Retz's Helmet-shrikes while waiting to go through the boom, we parked in the ample picnic site, set up a telescope and birding began. A small Yellow-fronted Canary flock

Anticipating hotter weather we met at 7 a.m. in October but it turned into a blistering hot day and by 11 a.m. there was barely any movement – avian or otherwise. The dam level is dropping and while the spread of water hyacinth appears to have slowed down the surface area of the open water has been greatly reduced. In September, just as Kudzi and I thought we had finished counting the top section of the dam, a vehicle drove along the far shoreline flushing hundreds of birds. We then realised there was still water spreading back into the grass and reeds. While it was frustrating to have to begin counting all over again we were delighted to see two Spur-winged Geese which we would otherwise have missed. By September Muddy Puddle was more mud than puddle and the reed-covered island was no longer an island and had been abandoned by the many Grey and Black-headed Herons we had found congregated there on previous trips. While scoping the area (we're always optimistically hoping to see a swamphen or painted-snipe) we became aware of a Blacksmith Lapwing sitting out in the blazing sun on the dried mud. When a second bird came along and changed places with the first, we realised there must be a nest there. When someone approached closer the bird moved off and the speckled eggs were so well camouflaged it took several minutes to find them.

Aisleby is a wonderful birding destination, not only for waterbirds but also for many species of bush birds. It's a short, easy drive from town. When you have had enough you can leave, you don't have to stay for a full morning. Don't be put off by the counting – there are people prepared to do that, but we would welcome more eyes to help pick up the one-off birds in the many different habitat types.

Adele Edwards

was scratching in the grass while a couple of Kurrichane Thrush were seen dashing around in the dustier parts of the picnic site. Meanwhile a Fork-tailed Drongo, as well as a Southern Black Flycatcher were hawking insects from the bushes nearby as a couple of vocal Black-backed Puffbacks foraged in the canopy above us. A diligent pair of Southern Black Tits was keeping up a noisy conversation while they busily gathered food which they took to a hole in the trunk of one of the huge trees near where we were sitting, obviously feeding chicks. Further up in the same tree, a lady and gent Golden-tailed Woodpecker were knock-knock-knocking away. Four of us set off for a walk to the dam wall accompanied by the raucous calling of a couple of Hamerkops which we did get to see a bit later. On our way we added

African Grey Hornbill, Green Wood-hoopoe, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird, Crested Barbet, Black-collared Barbet, Emerald-spotted Wood-dove and Dark-capped Bulbul to the list, all the way being entreated by a Cape Turtle-dove somewhere to “work harder”.

Since our previous visit when the water in the dam was very murky and there was an all-pervading ghastly smell, the dam was looking really good and there was hardly any nasty aroma. We had been told that a German concern have been doing a lot of work to resuscitate the sewerage ponds and to clean up the water in the dam. Great work!

At the ancient dam wall an African Pied Wagtail was busily bustling around one of the columns as a Barn Swallow darted in and out the trusses and we were delighted to see seven White-breasted Cormorant perched on various rocks in the dam as well as a Reed Cormorant and two Green-backed Herons. As we approached the Precipice Platform, two very large mottled eagles flew off across the other side of the inlet and we watched with some amusement as these two fledgling African Fish-eagles precariously landed in the tall trees opposite. We assumed they had been nest mates as they continued to try out their flying skills – once in flight, they were fine but landing still needed some tweaking, especially as they both seemed to want to pick the same twig to land on! As we took the path to the Passage Platform, a Yellow-bellied Greenbul was grumbling away in the underbrush and we could hear a White-browed Robin-chat

which we eventually found flitting along the path ahead of us. As we turned at the Monolith Platform to return to the picnic site, we came across a Red-headed Weaver in full breeding plumage, hanging upside down from the nest funnel, doing his “thing”, quivering and chirping, trying to attract a lady perched close by, also having her say about this latest bit of real estate. Fossicking in the grass along the path was a mixed bunch of littlies – Blue Waxbill, Red-billed Firefinch, Pin-tailed Whydah and gorgeous Green-winged Pytilia.

Two small raptors were seen but neither could be identified unfortunately. One was one of the small sparrowhawks or goshawks and the other was definitely a falcon but ...?? A total of 53 species was seen but the final sighting of the outing as we were leaving was certainly the best – a magnificent Broad-billed Roller, bright yellow beak with plumage blazing cinnamon, purple and turquoise in the sun.

Other species seen were: Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill and Red-billed Hornbill; White-bellied Sunbird; Red-eyed Dove; Tawny-flanked Prinia; Tropical Boubou; Grey-headed Bush-shrike; Cardinal Woodpecker; Golden-breasted Bunting; Swainson’s Spurfowl; Hadedda Ibis; Red-faced Mousebird; Black-headed Oriole; Brubru; Arrow-marked Babbler; Southern Masked-weaver; Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird; Cape Glossy Starling; Grey Go-away-bird; Long-billed Crombec; Grey-backed Camaroptera.

Jenny Brebner

ON MY MORNING WALK ..., TUESDAY 25 OCTOBER

While out on an early morning walk, I heard an unusual bird sound – raspy and querulous. Just off the road in a dry bit of thorn scrub was a Fork-tailed Drongo making this dreadful grating sound. There were several Dark-capped Bulbuls also adding to the din and I was sure from all the other birds gathering and the way they were behaving that there was probably a snake or a cat or something upsetting them all. Five Blue Waxbills were cautiously hopping closer, while a Scarlet-chested Sunbird and Mr and Mrs White-bellied Sunbird flitted close to the noisy, agitated drongo adding to the cacophony themselves. Above in a Tipuana were a Crested Barbet, a Black-collared Barbet, two male and one female Violet-backed Starlings and a Red-headed Weaver peering down through

the foliage while hopping down closer and closer to the scene. There were also one or two LBJs I couldn't make out as well as a Chin-spot Batis. As an African Hoopoe flew in to see what all the ruckus was about, the drongo exploded out of the bush pursuing a Dark-capped Bulbul, in turn, being pursued by another Dark-capped Bulbul. The three avians had a mid-air rumble, tumbling to the ground in a whirl of feathers and dust, parted company and flew off in different directions. The rest of the bird party shrugged their shoulders (if birds could do it) and started peeling off to carry on with their day as if nothing had happened! I can't be sure what that was all about but it was an interesting start to the day.

Jenny Brebner

Mashonaland West

Kadoma

The blistering hot days from early October have been a testing time for us all – how to keep our cool.

Our avifauna friends are sensible early birds and then rest up during hottest part of the day. The

Spotted Eagle-owl family at Eiffel Flats have raised their 4 chicks of different sizes and by 4th October had all departed the nest in the big hollow jacaranda tree. Their calling is heard during dusk

and dark as they fly and feed in that area. Cherrybank farm, 8 km south of Kadoma has also been successful with 3 Spotted Eagle-owl chicks reared.

Does this augur well for lots of rain this summer season? The Black-headed Heron heronry has had challenging times for their nesting young. The strong north blowing winds of early October dislodged a fledgling or two, which were seen wandering about at the base of the tall gum tree. Wendy Olivier successfully reared such a one given to her and he is now fully independent and roosts nearby in their garden which is close to the family heronry.

Martinfields Textile Dye ponds. Sat 15th October

A worthwhile 7 a.m. visit was a must as the temperatures were already hot and uncomfortable. Of course waterbirds and waders are not concerned with hot conditions and carry on moving wading or feeding as needed. 36+ Ruff, 20+ Black-winged Stilts, 8+ Wood Sandpipers, 54+ Cattle Egrets, 4 African Sacred Ibis, 7+ Blacksmith Lapwings were counted. Some cuckoos have arrived for the summer season and their distinct call notes heard. The Red-chested Cuckoo, Klaas's Cuckoo, Diderick Cuckoo and Levaillant's Cuckoo are all about in our area. The vegetation of shrubs and trees is showing new summer growth so there is lots of natural food for birds to find and enjoy.

Margaret Parrock



Birds, do they have a community spirit, a social consciousness or just simply follow instinct?

Peter B Munday

This question has always played on my mind.

We have lived at our address for over fifty years and participated in numerous Garden Bird Surveys. As the suburb has developed and changes in the ecosystem have taken place over time, so naturally, has the range of avian species.

Since retiring we have tended to take breaks from daily activities like having breakfast, morning and afternoon tea, lunch and sometimes dinner on our front veranda of our Mandara property. These breaks have afforded us the opportunity to observe more closely the activities of over one hundred species of birds which choose to inhabit, visit or fly overhead.

We have been blessed to have had the time to spend watching the interaction of our birds and get to recognise their characteristics, how they communicate and relate with one another. There are obviously distinct social planes, for example Ian McDonald and I witnessed a Gabar Goshawk raid the nest of a Dark-capped Bulbul in an ornamental cherry tree, pick up a chick and fly twenty metres into a Chancellor Tree (Fiddle wood) to devour it. The Gabar then flew back and devoured the other chick in the nest, so having a second helping. Well, the Gabar, like the other raptors and predators, also has to eat! It was the opinion of a well-known Ornithologist, Michael Irwin, who once told me that in his estimate 80% of the nests in Harare gardens were pillaged by the Pied Crow alone.

In the last few years, I have re-enforced my perception that many of our smaller garden birds have special affiliations with their avian cousins of a different genus. We all learned when we were very young of the role of the cuckoo who unabashedly laid its egg in a host's nest.

This "foster parenting" practice is more common than most of us perhaps realise. An example is the Steel-blue Widowfinch on the Red-billed Firefinch; the Greater Honeyguide and Lesser Honeyguide on the Crested Barbet (see photos, p.15); the Levillant's Cuckoo on Arrow-marked Babblers. There is nothing more comical than seeing a fledgling cuckoo sitting in the middle of the lawn with vibrating wings outspread, its bill gaping and the demanding youngster being fed by a flock of six or seven hard-foraging Arrow-marked Babblers. One other species who chooses to find a foster parent for its children is the Pin-tailed Whydah who appoints one of the species of waxbills to raise its offspring.

The next type of interaction between birds is the intense honourable interest of one type in the off-spring of another bird. I wonder if this is akin to a lady who can't resist cooing and making mothering noises at the beautiful baby in the pram? Maybe this is simply the 'Mothering instinct'? I rig up nesting tubes or cylinders of Agave for Crested Barbets and often as the fledglings reach the stage just prior to abandoning the nest and viewing the wide world from the portal, other birds visit and pay homage or admire the baby. The main contestants in this 'admiring' role are the Speckled Mousebird the Dark-capped Bulbul and the Kurrichane Thrush.

Another instance of what might be wishful thinking was when I observed a Blue Waxbill admiring a weaver's nest. It even tried to enter the nest but its 'stall coefficient' prevented it from entering the suspended vertical portal. Later on the same day an inquisitive Dark-capped Bulbul also inspected the same nest.

The Dark-capped Bulbul, though a very common bird in our garden, is perhaps the most underrated as it undoubtedly is one of the most alert. The bulbul and the Kurrichane Thrush are the flagbearers of the 'Avian Neighbourhood Watch' and raise the alarm should there be anything to report like the presence of the district Mafia, in the form of the Slender Mongoose or a Pied Crow. Having raised the alarm the little Variable Sunbirds, the babblers and the entire 'Avian mob', join in the chorus. The Flying Squad role is taken by the Fork-tailed Drongo who defends its territory, attacking and dive bombing the infringer of our joint domain until it has been seen off the property.

There is another thing about Bird watching and study which is so stimulating and that is that we never cease to learn something new about them. Keep up your studies and you will be rewarded.

Female Zebra Finches smell their eggs

15 Oct 2016 - 11:13 -- Eduardo de Juana

Recognizing and rejecting parasitic offspring is one of the main defensive strategies against brood parasitism in host species. In birds, much emphasis has been placed on understanding the visual mechanisms underlying egg recognition, based on egg colouration or spotting patterns. However, olfactory egg recognition has almost been completely ignored. In 2014, an experimental study on Common Magpies (*Pica pica*) gave the first evidence of olfactory egg recognition in birds. Model eggs resembling those of the parasitic Great Spotted Cuckoo (*Clamator glandarius*) that were either exposed to the smell of tobacco smoke or handled by humans were more frequently ejected in comparison to control ones. Now a study on Zebra Finches (*Taeniopygia guttata/T. castanotis*) has shown that females are able to discriminate between their own eggs and conspecific eggs based on olfactory cues alone. This could be important for Zebra Finches in order to defend themselves from conspecific brood parasitism, since they live in dense colonies and lay monomorphic white eggs in dark domed nests, which could make it more difficult to use visual cues for egg discrimination.

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[Australian Zebra Finch \(*Taeniopygia castanotis*\)](#)

Taxonomy:

Amadina castanotis

Gould, 1837, interior of New South Wales, Australia.

Genus sometimes subsumed in *Poephila*. Formerly considered conspecific with *T. guttata*, and each is the other's closest relative, but...

Descriptive notes: 10.5 cm; 9.4-15.7 g. Male has top of head and upperparts grey, rump white, very long uppertail-coverts black with white bars, almost covering blackish tail; from loreal area a teardrop-shaped vertical white patch narrowly margined with...



[Timor Zebra Finch \(*Taeniopygia guttata*\)](#)

Taxonomy:

Fringilla guttata

Vieillot, 1817, Timor.

Genus sometimes subsumed in *Poephila*. Formerly considered conspecific with *T. castanotis*, and each is the other's closest relative, but...

Descriptive notes: 10 cm; 10 g. Male has top of head and upperparts grey, rump white, uppertail-coverts black with white bars, tail blackish; ear-coverts orange to light chestnut, at loreal area a teardrop-shaped vertical white patch narrowly margined with...

[Common Magpie \(*Pica pica*\)](#)

Taxonomy:

Corvus pica

Linnaeus, 1758, Uppsala, Sweden.

Forms a superspecies with *P. asirensis*, *P. nuttalli* and *P. hudsonia*, and often treated as conspecific with first and/or last of...

Descriptive notes: 46–50 cm; 200–270 g (various races), male 185–247 g and female 161–240 g (nominate), male 214–268 g and female 208–232 g (*leucoptera*). Very distinctive magpie, mainly black and white, with long...



[Great Spotted Cuckoo \(*Clamator glandarius*\)](#)

Taxonomy:

Cuculus glandarius

Linnaeus, 1758, northern Africa and southern Europe = Gibraltar.

Birds from S Africa described as race *choragium*, supposedly smaller than others, but those breeding there overlap considerably in size with...

Descriptive notes: 35–39 cm; 124 g. Adult dusky brown above with white feather tips, flight-feathers grey-brown, tail tipped white, crown grey with slight crest, face blackish; throat buff, otherwise white below; eye-ring grey to reddish, iris brown...



Lesser Honeyguide (left) and Crested Barbet (right) visiting nest-boxes – see pages 12-13. P. Munday



Long-crested Eagle (left) and Spotted Eagle-owl (right) in Mandara, Harare. P. Munday



A Red-chested Cuckoo in a Greendale garden, Harare

Dave Gray

Contributions for *The Babbler* 134 February-March 2017 may be sent to the editor anytime between now and the very latest 14th January 2017.

Badger: Richard Peek

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Zimbabwe
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2017



CHRISTMAS is nearly upon us. We have busy lives and all wondered at one time what to give someone for a present. Ponder no longer – it is quick and easy to give a subscription to BirdLife Zimbabwe (see subs info in this issue) and if they are not really birders, a BLZ 2017 calendar is the next best thing. Our theme is 'New Beginnings' and they are bright and cheerful and always acceptable to relatives and friends outside Zimbabwe. \$10 from the BLZ office and selected outlets around the country (phone Sylvia or Julia 04-481496)