



# THE BABBLER

Newsletter of BirdLife Zimbabwe

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## Hi everyone,

Sadly and with great regret we notify you of the passing of Michael Irwin, known personally to many of us. If you are in the UK please try and attend the funeral.

Vultures, Driefontein and cranes make the news under office reports, and keeping to an environmental theme the article on deforestation in Malawi is very interesting and disturbing and also relevant to wetland

counters because of the plight of their waterbirds. This will get to thinking of the coming counts - but don't forget that any influxes are needed, any time!

The stunning 2018 calendar is on sale now - get a copy for yourself and friends and relatives!

Happy Birding,

Ian Riddell [gemsaf@mango.zw](mailto:gemsaf@mango.zw)

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Committee	MASHONALAND (Code 04)	MATABELELAND (Code 029)
<b>Chairperson</b>	Tony Alegria 0772-438697 <a href="mailto:tonyalegria47@gmail.com">tonyalegria47@gmail.com</a> 490375 (h)	Karen Learmonth 0772-231819 <a href="mailto:afspeg@yoafrica.com">afspeg@yoafrica.com</a> 2240055 (h) 2244990 (w)
<b>Vice Chairperson</b>	James Ball 0772-310351 <a href="mailto:jameszwe@gmail.com">jameszwe@gmail.com</a> 481351 (h)	John Brebner 0782-781108 <a href="mailto:brebnerj@acolchem.co.zw">brebnerj@acolchem.co.zw</a> 2242634
<b>Secretary</b>	Kelvin Hein 0772 345355 <a href="mailto:bushpig48@gmail.com">bushpig48@gmail.com</a> 338714 (h)	Marina Jackson 0778-021818 <a href="mailto:mjackson@gatorzw.com">mjackson@gatorzw.com</a> 2230264
<b>Treasurer</b>	Debbie Wiggins 0772-252651 <a href="mailto:wigpd2015@gmail.com">wigpd2015@gmail.com</a> 882851 (h)	Jean Cranston 0733-005574 <a href="mailto:cranston@gatorzw.com">cranston@gatorzw.com</a> 2242921
<b>Members</b>	Alison MacDonald 0772-264758 <a href="mailto:alimacd1@gmail.com">alimacd1@gmail.com</a>	Cecilia Hubbard 0772-433733 <a href="mailto:ceilhubbard@yoafrica.com">ceilhubbard@yoafrica.com</a> 2280685
	John Vekris 0772 381582 <a href="mailto:gakamira@africaonline.co.zw">gakamira@africaonline.co.zw</a>	Clare Hubbard 0712-231416 <a href="mailto:skunkiezw@yahoo.com">skunkiezw@yahoo.com</a> 2231329
	Laurence Shadwell 0712 800905 <a href="mailto:adderley@iwayafrica.co.zw">adderley@iwayafrica.co.zw</a> 487670	
<b>Membership</b>	Sylvia Muzavazi 481496 (w) <a href="mailto:sylvia@blz.co.zw">sylvia@blz.co.zw</a>	
<b>Babbler Editor</b>	Ian Riddell 0772-117054 <a href="mailto:gemsaf@mango.zw">gemsaf@mango.zw</a>	

#### 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](mailto:birds@zol.co.zw)

Website: [www.birdlifezimbabwe.org](http://www.birdlifezimbabwe.org) also [www.facebook.com/BirdLifeZimbabwe](https://www.facebook.com/BirdLifeZimbabwe)

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

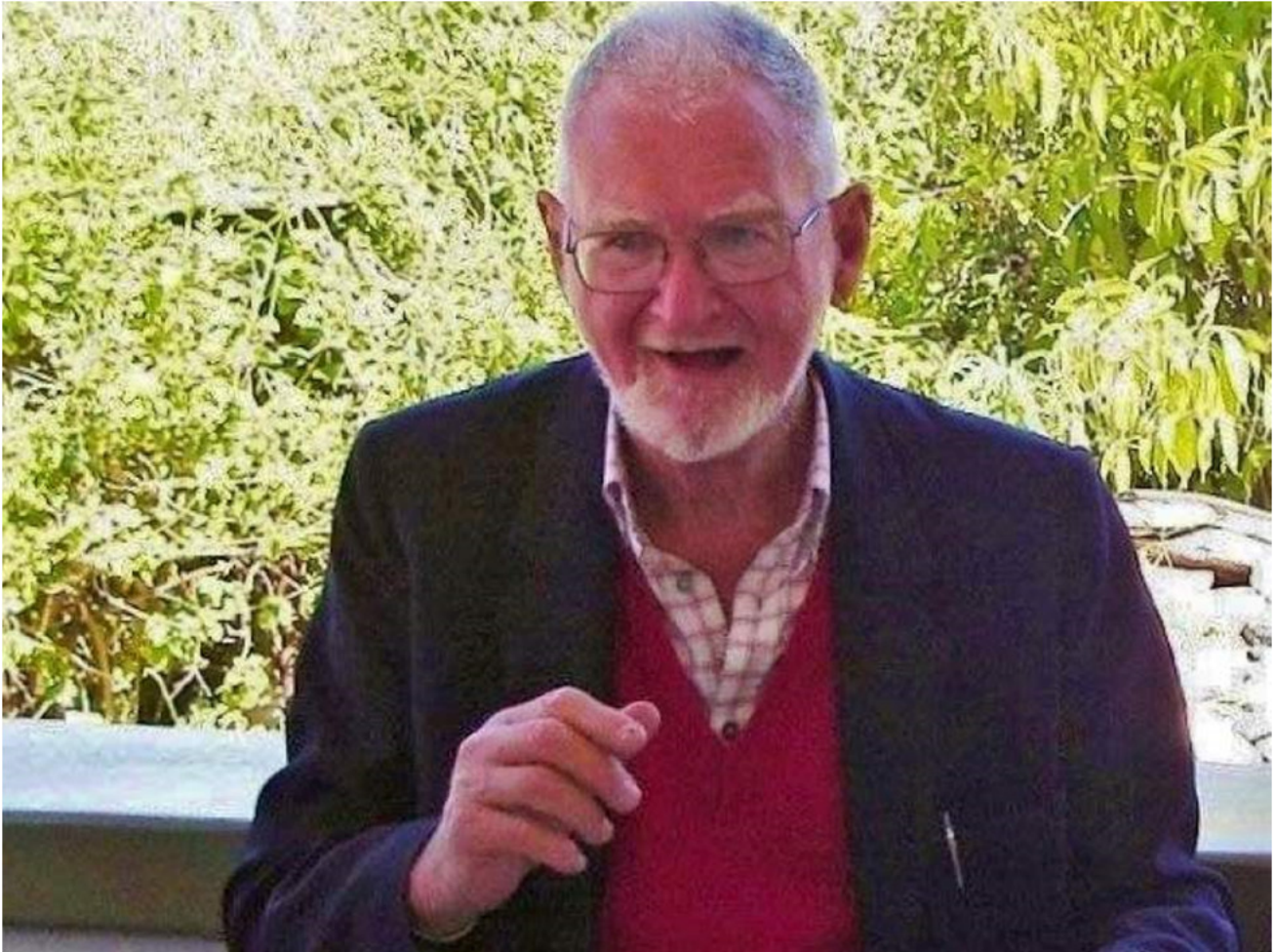
Julia Pierini  
Sylvia Muzavazi  
Fadzai Matsvimbo  
Togarasei Fakarayi  
Vengai Dengu

#### **BirdLife Zimbabwe**

The BirdLife International  
Partner in Zimbabwe



## MICHAEL PATRICK STUART IRWIN



Editor Emeritus for the *Honeyguide*, BirdLife Zimbabwe's world-renowned journal, died on 13 September, 2017 in hospital in England, aged 92. He had had a fall in May and fractured his hip and unfortunately, although he managed to pull through various complications, in the end he was just too frail to continue and it is with sadness that we convey this news.

Michael was a legend in the ornithological world and liked nothing more than a good discussion about birds and their various characteristics. He always said he was blessed with an enquiring mind and had been a prolific writer. He published *The Birds of Zimbabwe* which is still referred to, as well as numerous articles over many years. The Council and members of BirdLife Zimbabwe send their sincere condolences to his son Tony and the family.

His funeral and burial will be held in the Village of Litcham, Norfolk, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October at 12:00. You are more than welcome if you wish to attend. Tony can be contacted on: Anthony Irwin [anthony.irwin2@ntlworld.com](mailto:anthony.irwin2@ntlworld.com)

# Branch News

## Mashonaland

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### ***MONAVALE VLEI WALK, SUNDAY 17<sup>th</sup> September 2017***

It was good to get back to Zim. birding after 6 weeks in the UK where it was depressing to record fewer birds than ever. Eurasian Curlews seem to have virtually disappeared from Ilkey Moor in Yorkshire where their calls always welcomed us 'home' as we walked through the heather. As it happened the one rarity I did see which got the locals very excited at Leighton Moss Reserve on the northwest coast was a Purple Heron, only the second ever to turn up there.



**Purple heron at Leighton Moss from Grisedale hide by Mike Malpass**

We were a very mixed party at Monavale ranging in age from 8 to 78 and hailing from many different countries. The vlei, having suffered 3 fires, is now covered by soot and green shoots making it rather difficult to pick out birds on the ground. However, we all watched a family of Capped Wheatears at their nest hole, the parent birds rushing about collecting insects for their 2 young who looked big enough to be foraging for themselves. African Pipit also ran along the furrows in various places. Another special treat was a high-flying, displaying Red-capped Lark. A Common Duiker showed itself among some of the remaining tall reeds; not a frequent visitor to the vlei. Thanks to Jimmy's expertise and experience we were able to identify most of the Euplectes that erupted in groups at regular intervals. Lots of White-winged and Yellow-mantled Widowbirds, both Southern Red Bishops and Yellow Bishops and Red-collared Widowbirds. Grey-rumped Swallows were numerous and we also recorded Wire-tailed and Pearl-breasted Swallows.

Our count was just under 50 with many common species missing.

**Ken Dixon**

### ***Mashonaland Branch visit to Tsindi Ruins, Marondera District, Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> September 2017***

What a good idea it was to leave all the worries about fuel, bond notes, US\$ and rising prices behind and retreat to the idyllic tranquillity of Tsindi, although we may subsequently regret using up our precious fuel on the 200km round journey. On the way I saw my first Yellow-billed Kite of the season and the second flew over as we were doing the count.

19 of us, vlei scouts, Kids' Club and Youth Club members, French agronomists and a few old hands arrived at the deserted site at 8.15 and began the ascent of the knobbly gomo

topped by the Ruins. Birds were scarce but the Black-crowned Tchagra and Yellow-throated Petronia were ever present. A Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill overflowed us which was surprising as the late MPS Irwin states it avoids Brachystegia. Amethyst and Miombo Double-collared Sunbird soon appeared and then my first Wahlberg's Eagle of the summer. Nearer the top we came across Familiar Chat and then Cliff Mocking-chat delighted us with their calls and antics.

The walls built in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries are built into the natural rocks on site very

much like those of Great Zimbabwe and cover an area of 2ha, 1600 m above sea level and 150 m above the valley floor. As we explored the area we found the nest of a Rock Martin with a parent bird in residence and a youngster sitting



unfazed just above. From the valley floor rose calls of Black-backed Puffback, Emerald-spotted Wood-dove, Cape Turtle-dove, Tropical Boubou and Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird. A Lazy Cisticola, seen in this area by others was carrying a long thin worm and a Grey Penduline-tit was also carrying insects – nesting was in full swing. We all had a glorious time wandering around the fascinating site.

Other species were added as we made the tricky descent; Red-winged Starling and Violet-backed Starling, Black-throated Canary, African Cuckoo Hawk and Lizard Buzzard among others. Our party was able to use the

attractive picnic site at the office to have snacks and drinks and do the count. A small bird party down here also had a Miombo Rock-thrush. This initially came to about 40 but as we looked around we noticed Red-headed Weaver which was nesting under the eaves of the building and a White-breasted Cuckooshrike whose nest we then located in a msasa with a youngster ensconced. A Rufous-naped Lark called from the grassland nearby. Members of the group who had taken different routes to the main party added extra species and a happy conclusion to a very successful visit to a little-known gem of a monument.

Ken Dixon; photos Wavy Owl & Tsindi: I. Riddell



## Matabeleland

### **VISIT TO THE ORNITHOLOGY DEPARTMENT OF THE MUSEUM – 26/08/17**

A group of nine members met with Kudzanai Dhliwayo at 8.00 a.m. this morning for a very interesting tour of the Ornithology Department. Kudzi started off by showing us the new wooden cabinets which the Museum purchased for the storage of eggs. There are 95000 specimens housed here and Kudzi has been digitizing the collection and putting it in electronic form – so far in two years 23000 have been done. Handling the specimens can cause deterioration so dowels are used to hold them to avoid contamination by handling.

The other problem which has to be carefully managed is the fumigation for mites which is done annually. Without this mite control the

collection would disintegrate completely. Kudzi advised that the use of vapona strips would also greatly help, but this is expensive as the strips have to be imported from South Africa.

Points of interest are that the colours of the specimens actually fade over time, especially the reds. For example the Red-billed Hornbill will lose the colour of the bill over time. Kudzi advised that this is an international problem and reference to other institutions in the States confirm that there is no known solution to this problem as yet. Where it is not possible to preserve a specimen with feathers intact, the museum will then retain the skeleton for record

purposes - carbon dating can be done on skeletons. There is also a collection of complete birds preserved in alcohol, but Kudzi advised that this collection is, unfortunately, not as good as it could be. The sample she showed us had alcohol evaporation from a bottle that did not seal correctly. Also some of the labels had faded and have become difficult to read. It was interesting to note that when preserving the birds it is also necessary to preserve stomach contents as these can be used in research regarding diet, eating habits etc.

Apart from the specimens the museum houses the Nest Record Cards and the Bird Checklists. Items of importance for us birders as "citizen scientists" to note are that we need to be diligent about:

1. Always fill in Nest Record Cards and Bird Checklists
2. Any specimens of birds found need to

be handed in to the museum with information as to where it was found (GPS reading if possible) and any other information which may be useful. Even damaged birds are useful.

As always finances are a serious constraint and the department is looking for financing to purchase the vapona strips and to repaint the ceiling which is in a bad state of disrepair. They are also looking for someone who is proficient at varnishing wood to refurbish the cabinets. Of special note is the fact that there is a serious lack of fire extinguishers. The thought of a fire in this department with no means to control it doesn't bear thinking about. Perhaps BirdLife can look at engaging some donors for this funding?

Many thanks to Kudzi for an interesting and informative tour.

**Helen Lewis**

## Mashonaland West

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### *A visit to the Chegutu Safari Area*

On the 18 August we left Kadoma around 7.30 a.m. for the Chegutu Safari Area (previously Hartley A Safari Area). Unfortunately, due to a lack of reliable directions we only arrived at the safari area around 11 a.m. It is 90 km northwest of Kadoma on a reasonable road (Golden Valley Mine and then Nyarire Primary School Rd). Much of the road passes through old commercial farming areas.

Before you get to the area one passes through a communal land and there is resettlement on its boundary with much clearing of trees. The National Parks office is situated next to a series of pools on the Nyabongwe River (-17.883578, 29.617981). The altitude is 985 metres above sea level. Mixed woodland predominates, interspersed with areas of *Brachystegia* - we also saw many *Croton gratissimus* trees and two or three baobabs. There were *Acacia tortilis* trees, *Trichilia emetica* trees and flowering flame combretum growing at the top end of the pools and thick expanses of *Acacia ataxacantha* along the periphery. This is all new territory for us and it proved to be a relaxing and interesting day. Commercial hunting was suspended here

in 2007 due to poor trophy sizes and I should imagine over-hunting!! We did not see any game at all but there were old elephant tracks, kudu droppings and evidence that warthog had been foraging in the area. We also found what could be leopard droppings on one of the park roads.

It was very peaceful sitting next to the pools. There was no disturbance whatsoever . . . no korakorsas with their make-shift 'James tables' everywhere; no people netting; no people cutting trees and no domestic stock wandering everywhere! What a refreshing change from the majority of places we visit around Kadoma!! We spent three hours or so watching the birds and having our lunch. We saw or heard the following birds:

Black Cuckooshrike (male & female)  
Brown-crowned Tchagra  
Black-backed Puffback  
Emerald-spotted Wood-dove  
Lesser Striped Swallow  
Tropical Boubou  
Terrestrial Brownbul  
Lesser Honeyguide  
Fork-tailed Drongo

Bearded Scrub-robin  
 Dark-capped Bulbul  
 Yellow-breasted Apalis  
 White-crested Helmet-shrike  
 Cardinal Woodpecker  
 Black-collared Barbet  
 Ashy Flycatcher  
 White-browed Robin-chat  
 Senegal Coucal  
 Blue Waxbills  
 Chin-spot Batis  
 Orange-breasted Bush-shrike  
 Black-headed Oriole  
 Weaver species (too far to identify positively)

When driving through the safari area we heard Rattling Cisticolas and saw a flock of widowbirds (ID was difficult).

I am sure we would have seen many more birds if we had arrived earlier and spent more time walking around the pools. Apparently they hold water throughout the dry season until the next rains.

After a game drive we left the safari area at 16.00 hours. A pleasant day was had by all and we hope to go back and camp at the old Hunters' Camp sometime soon!

**Ruth Paice**



### **The 2017 Mana Game Count – 9-10 September, pentad 1545\_2925**

I was up early on Friday, ready to be collected for another Mana Pools game count. But then the delays started piling up. Leaking fuel pipes necessitated a change of vehicle, so following the repacking we only left Harare at lunch time; then there was 'trouble with aggressive cops' at Chinhoyi, which our advance vehicle warned us about, followed by a *too-fast* dash to Marongora to beat the clock. As it happened we breathlessly pulled in to the office with not a moment to spare – the officer had drawn the curtains and was just locking the door! With permission to enter late we



wound down the escarpment and hit the dirt. The 'rumour' that the Mana road had been fixed up was disproved and we corrugated our way through the bush as darkness threw her dusty cloak over the mopane and jesse.

At the 4-ways crossing we headed east on a minor detour, looking for the turnoff to our pan. The track looked wild enough to have our navigator doubting her memory of where this turnoff actually was – the only evidence of passage was that of elephants who had liberally scattered the debris of branches all over the place, so after a while we paused in a clearish mopane stand, pulled out a cell phone and consulted some co-ordinates supplied by

the 4x4 club. With these in the GPS we were instructed to execute a U-turn and head another 6 or so km up the main road. However, it looked like it would be quicker to bypass the turnoff and head in via the middle jesse road, so trusting to technology we trundled on, soon to be accompanied by flashing hazard lights as the Landover's computer decided to throw in a light show to keep us entertained.



Some time after 20h00 we located Ingwe pans and found a suitably open spot in which to set up a temporary camp and heat up a late supper, with a dull orange balloon moon rising through the trees over the water. A hyaena silently moved through the woods of the far side. What to do at 22h10, settled in the tent with the night noises? Why, start atlassing of course; there has only been one full protocol card for this square! With the moon up quite a few birds kept her company, including Meves's Starlings. An hour's birding produced 11 species and from 04h56 the next morning (Double-banded Sandgrouse) to just after 06h00 the total had risen to 28. You know you are in Mana when the Southern Ground-hornbills add the percussion to the dawn chorus! Once out of the tent I could actually start seeing birds, starting with the Böhm's Spinetails that were frequently over the pans that weekend. Grey-headed Parrots (there seemed to be 4 over the period), Meyer's Parrots and Lilian's Lovebirds formed the parrot contingent, the latter falling out of a tree to the water's edge like a cloud of green and red leaves, only to float back up again, and down again, in their cycle of noisy drinking. A stroll across to the neighbouring pan was rewarded by seeing four Greater Painted-snipes probing the shallows on the far side - such delightful birds! The first

Bateleur, an adult male, floated over on my return for breakfast.

Now it was decision time - should we stay put or move to the other pan? The other vehicle had arrived from their overnight at Nyamepi (with stories of rampaging hyaenas and other shenanigans!) so we strolled across for a group recce and decided on a nice spot at Ingwe 2. Mosque Swallows swooped over the surface for a drink, reinforcing the decision.

We struck camp and bundled almost everything onto the roof rack, creating a semblance of an old local bus except for some goats, chickens and a sofa or two, carrying a few things like tents - it wasn't far. The one and only Yellow-billed Kite of the weekend coasted over on a lazy and disapproving inspection of the proceedings. Our Landover wasn't starting of course. Somewhere along the roads a button had fallen off the immobiliser, which wasn't in a particularly good condition to start with, and now the computer was sulking! Any attempts to start were accompanied by the light show and very noisy protestations from the hooter. As almost everyone knows, all this computerised nonsense and driving in the wilds invariably end in tears and expense at some stage!! So with LR towing LR (this is allowed in the 4x4 world without embarrassment and disgrace) we finally arrive at our game count pan some 22 hours after leaving Harare - phew...



Our camp was behind a termite mound crowned with African Ebonies and a Tamarind, with a convenient line of bushes blocking the east side and the pan to the north. We could count by sitting on the north side of the mound in the shade of the trees. In addition to the painted-snipes, whose number rose to 5, were





the typical waterbirds such as Three-banded Plovers, Black-winged Stilts, Wood Sandpipers, Blacksmith Lapwings, Hamerkop and a pair of Egyptian Goose that came and went. We pondered on the navigation skill of this pair who would fly off to ponds unknown on the floodplain or the Zambezi, but in the dead of night would unerringly return, announced with the usual honking. They have a GPS too, obviously. They also let me know when the lion, heard earlier roaring to the north, arrived at 03h42. There was just an almost unnoticeable change in stance and gentle muttering by the male goose and I knew! Creeping onto the east side of the mound and through a gap in the bushes I finally spot a beautiful black-maned lion lying quietly in the open some 60m from the water. Even though I am looking through a tiny window of foliage and am quite hidden he isn't fooled and we engage, eye to binoculeye.



Our group of about 8 Black-winged Stilts was often very noisy. They included quite a few immatures and at odd times of day or night would decide to chase one or two

individuals around the pan, or perhaps it was a male chasing another male with everyone joining in. It was magical by moonlight, the white of the undersides shining brightly and reflecting off the water, making them look like a flotilla of white-sailed yachts tacking back and forth over a dark sea. I only heard the Water Thick-knee at night (where did it/they go in daylight?) and of course there was the call of the Three-banded Coursers. African Barred Owlets called a lot, with fewer African Scops-owls and some rather distant Verreaux's Eagle-owls and Square-tailed Nightjars.

During the day a few Red-billed Oxpeckers came to the pan but never with any mammals, Bennett's Woodpeckers were nice to record since they are infrequent in Harare, and Horus Swifts swooped over the water at drinking time. Only one White-backed Vulture was



seen, after the count on the 10<sup>th</sup> when 3 African Hawk-eagles were in the same air space. I stayed in camp whilst the others went to Nyamepi to start the complicated process of borrowing a phone for the one available network so they could stand under the one tree with the hanging bottle and phone Harare to get that guy to phone the UK to get the code for the vehicle that is entered through a complicated procedure of key turns to placate the infernal computer and achieve ignition... needless to say success wasn't achieved! But that is Plan B-C and another saga. By the peaceful pan 38 shy Crested Guinea fowls came out to drink to the burbling growls of hidden African Green-pigeons whilst the Slender Mongooses scampered back and forth or lay, cat-like and paws crossed, in the sand. Off to the west the lion's roars reverberated through the mopane woodland.

**Ian Riddell**

## News from the office...

### ***Vulture identification and monitoring training in western Zimbabwe***

A total of four Vulture Identification and monitoring workshops were conducted at Main Camp and Sinamatella, Hwange National Park, Kazuma Pan National Park and Zambezi National Park. A total of 62 people participated in the training workshops. At Main Camp a total of 18 trainees attended the course of which 15 were from Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZPWMA) and the remaining three were members of the Painted Dog Conservation Anti-Poaching Unit and at Sinamatella a total of 25 people (all ZPWMA) participated in the course. At Kazuma a total of seven people participated and at Zambezi National Park a total of twelve people attended the course. Again all the participants were ZPWMA staff.

The first training workshop was conducted at Main Camp on the 24<sup>th</sup> July, at Sinamatella the training was conducted on the 25<sup>th</sup>, Kazuma on 26<sup>th</sup>, and Zambezi National Park on the 27<sup>th</sup> July 2017. The training was a joint effort by BirdLife Zimbabwe and ZPWMA with



Ms Fadzai Matsvimbo whilst Ms Lovelater Sebele facilitating the trainings at the various stations. The training targeted rangers as they are always the ones in the field and as well as the first at a poisoning scene.

At the end of the training most trainees appreciated the role of vultures in the ecosystems and the importance of keeping accurate monitoring and mortality records.

### ***Recommendations from the training***

There is need to have feedback platforms so that the rangers are aware that the information they collect in the field is useful and how else it can be improved. Some rangers even expressed that it would be useful that at the end of each quarter a summary of the statistics is compiled and also made available to them. This is very useful as any verification of discrepancies of statistics can be done at the earliest possible time.

**Fadzai Matsvimbo**

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## ***Driefontein Visit Report - August 2017***

***By Togarasei Fakarayi***

### ***Background***

Driefontein Grasslands is the key breeding and foraging area for the two crane species found in Zimbabwe. The site is communally managed where people and cranes co-exist. In the past BirdLife Zimbabwe has done some work on Crane conservation and community engagement in the conservation of bird species. Awareness on the conservation status of Cranes was raised. Most people are aware of

the importance of cranes although continuous engagement and more awareness is required. In 2013, the Driefontein Grasslands was designated a Ramsar site. Over the years BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ) has maintained its good relationship with the local communities living in the Driefontein Grasslands. There has been always communications between BirdLife Zimbabwe (through Toga) and villagers in this IBA. This report shares one of the community initiatives in their active involvement in crane conservation in the Driefontein Grasslands.

## Outline of the Visit

Following calls by the Village Chairperson of Widgeon five in Driefontein, Toga visited this area. The Village Chairman Mr Muchakazi informed BirdLife Zimbabwe about a pair of Wattled Crane which had a nest on a shallow wetland in his village located in the grazing area. Mr Muchakazi was afraid of potential disturbances to this breeding pair of Wattled Crane by villagers especially young children as schools were about to close for vacation. Also considering that the wetland where these cranes nested was shallow and could be easily accessed, the breeding pair was at high risk. In response, BirdLife Zimbabwe organised a visit to the site on 7 August 2017.



**Wattled Crane nest on a wetland in Widgeon Village, Driefontein Grasslands**

On arrival in Widgeon 5 village, Toga had a short meeting with Mr Muchakazi and thanked him for informing BLZ about this breeding pair. Toga together with Mr Muchakazi then visited the breeding site of this pair of Wattled Cranes. Two Wattled Cranes were seen few meters from the nest. There was one egg in the nest and it appeared the pair was in the early stages of breeding. Downstream, about 800m away from the nesting site there were two women who were collecting grass broom. Mr Muchakazi and I talked with these women and inform them not to go in the wetland area where a nesting site was located. It was also established that these women were coming from another village for broom collection. Having seen that, the Village Chairman said he will keep an eye on these outsiders to ensure such activities will not disturb this breeding pair of cranes. When, we assessed the site, there were no disturbances seen despite

presence of the two women (at a distance) and few cattle grazing in the grassland.



**Villagers received awareness materials prior to the meeting at Widgeon Village in Driefontein Grasslands**

After a visit to the site, the Village Chairperson assisted by the environmental resource monitor mobilised the villagers for a meeting. A meeting was conducted in this village, and was attended by a total of 37 people. Awareness on the Crane Conservation as well as importance of Driefontein Grasslands as a Ramsar site was raised. Villagers were then informed of a breeding pair of Wattled Cranes in their village and urged not to disturb it. The parents were also urged to tell their children to avoid breeding sites should they come across them during cattle herding. This encouragement and information shared about cranes was well received by the villagers. This village expressed gratitude to BLZ visit in their area. Villagers indicated that they are happy to be continuously engaged in crane conservation programmes.

During the meeting, villagers also shared some challenges faced in their community. One of the challenges relating to birds was destruction of maize crops by cranes during planting especially in winter season. They appealed for BLZ to assist with technical solution to this problem, and if possible assist with maize seeds. Meanwhile, the only way villagers prevent crop damage by cranes is through guarding their crop fields in the mornings and evening soon after planting of maize for a period of at least two and a half weeks. There was also an appeal for awareness materials in form of calendars, T-shirts, other print materials. In an effort to motivate young people for active conservation of biodiversity, local villagers appealed for soccer balls and

competitions to help raise profile of crane conservation in their area.

### Outcome of the visit

It was agreed that everyone should take responsibility in monitoring cranes (whether breeding or not) in their village. There was improved knowledge among villagers on the conservation status of cranes in this IBA. Inputs and recommendations from local villagers were received during the meeting. More interest in crane conservation was generated among the villagers who expressed active involvement in the conservation activities in this area.

### Conclusion

The visit to this village in Driefontein came at a time when more active involvement of local communities in monitoring cranes is required, especially during the breeding season. It was interesting to note that communities are taking initiatives in the

conservation of cranes. BirdLife Zimbabwe was grateful to receive calls from communities and this indicates the impact of its conservation programmes in this area. It is BirdLife Zimbabwe's wish to continue engage with communities and other stakeholders in Driefontein Grasslands in addressing conservation, social and livelihood issues in this Important Bird Area.



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## The effect of deforestation on rainfall

by Dr John Wilson

### **Bioprecipitation**

The concept of rain-making bacteria, referred to as "**bioprecipitation**", was proposed by David Sands in 1983. A group of bacteria have been identified as ice-nucleation active (INA) bacteria, which have the remarkable property of catalysing ice nucleation in super-cooled water in the atmosphere, which results in precipitation. These bacteria are plentiful on trees and are caught in upward airflows and carried up into the clouds. There they cause ice crystals to form which act as nuclei for raindrops. The bacteria are carried back to earth in the rain to start the cycle over again. **There are many times more of these bacteria on trees than on other types of vegetation, and hence the decline in rainfall when the trees are removed.**

### **Change in rainfall on Satemwa Tea Estate**

The rainfall recorded on Chawani block of Satemwa tea estate in Thyolo, which was

nearest to the evergreen rain forest on the summit of Thyolo Mountain, was always much higher than all the other blocks further away until this 8.353km<sup>2</sup> Forest Reserve was totally destroyed in 2000-2001 by local communities encroaching this protected area to grow maize. **The average annual rainfall on Chawani block fell by 279.57mm = 10.97inches** compared to Sambankhanga block, which is furthest from the forest, following the destruction of this forest. This was 17.33% of the average annual rainfall per year on Chawani block from 1990/1991 to 2000/2001, and in spite of the 10ha evergreen forest remnant preserved on this block, which may have had some ameliorating effect.

The streams that originated on Thyolo Mountain also dried up, leading to a cry for boreholes from the same communities who had illegally encroached on and totally destroyed the forest reserve, with the loss of its unique biodiversity, especially of birds.

### **Forestry development and stream flows on Zomba Plateau**

The development of Zomba Plateau as a timber plantation began in 1907. By 1955 the plantation area was only 145 ha; this increased by 500 ha by 1960, 1,118 ha by 1970, and 2,093 ha by 1992. Over 80% of the plantation was *Pinus patula*, the Mexican Pine.

Trees draw up water to meet the evaporative demand of the atmosphere and to drive growth processes. Expansion in plantation area resulted in an increased leaf area, thus potentially increasing the loss of water through evapotranspiration and interception.

However, it was found that river flows were positively correlated with plantation area ( $r=0.728$ ). In other words, **as the plantation area increased, so did average river flows.** The increase in river flow was approximately 30%.

The relationship between rainfall and mean annual river flow ( $r=0.16$ ) was not significant. This is probably because of the importance of groundwater flows from previous rainy seasons. Typically, river flow (and lake level) can be related to rainfall up to 4 years back.

Now that most of this plantation has gone, the annual rainfall level will have dropped and the flow of the Mulunguzi River reduced accordingly.

### **Change in rainfall on the outer slopes of Zomba Plateau**

The clear felling of large areas of pines on the outer slopes of Zomba Plateau has had a **measurable effect on the rainfall** of neighbouring villages. The rainfall recorded just below the forest reserve at 4 600 ft. a.s.l. has declined considerably over the last five years, which appears to be related to the complete clear felling of the pine plantation above this site from 2012 to 2016, compounded by the cultivation of the entire surrounding area. The average annual rainfall from 2011/12 to 2016/17 (1 240.83mm) was 27.7% less than the average annual rainfall from 1995/96 to 2000/2001 (1 716mm.), **which equates to a fall in average annual rainfall of 475.17mm (18.71 in.)**

This is in comparison to the rainfall recorded in Zomba City at the foot of the Mulunguzi Gorge at 3 400 ft. a.s.l. 8km to the

northeast, where, although the outer slopes pine plantation was cleared some 10 or more years ago, a substantial number of trees still survive, particularly in urban gardens, and the average annual rainfall has only declined by 20.85% (310.42mm, 12.22in.).

In 2016/2017 Zomba Forest Lodge, which is also on the outer slope of Zomba Plateau and on almost the same elevation, and only 4km to the west of Stephen Carr, and is still afforested, recorded 1 901mm rain, which was 759mm (66.5%) more than the 1 142mm recorded by Stephen Carr below the now denuded area.

### **The effect of falling rainfall on lake levels**

The amount of rainfall in any one year, or over a period, especially in the catchments, is reflected in the level of the lakes in Malawi.

- \* The level of Lake Malawi has fallen for the last 6 years.
- \* Lake Chilwa has dried up every year, for the last 6 years, since 2012.
- \* Lake Chiuta dried up in 2016 for the first time since 1850.

This is clear evidence that the annual rainfall in all these lake catchments has been falling over the last 6 years or more. Malawi's Deforestation Rate is 2.8% which is the fourth highest in the world, second highest in Africa, and the highest in SADC. Malawi has lost 7.8 million hectares of trees since the 1980's, which is almost 83% of the total area of the country. The wholesale deforestation of water catchments, throughout Malawi, especially forest reserves, and particularly over the last 10 or 15 years, is thus believed to be a major contributing factor in the fall in the level of these lakes.

### **The consequences of the fall in lake levels for Malawi**

#### **A. Malawi's Hydro-electric power**

Malawi obtains all its electricity from hydroelectric power stations on the Middle Shire River. When the level of Lake Malawi is 474.0m a.s.l. and above, the flow of the Shire river is 240 cusecs and above, and these power stations produce 351MW. The level of Lake Malawi has fallen every year for the last 7 years since 2010, and this year it is lower still. This trend is unlikely to be reversed. Even if it were, the lake is now so low that it would take

above average rainfall, over a number of years, to restore the Lake to its former high level.

By October last year the level of Lake Malawi was down to 473.15m a.s.l., the flow of the Shire River was down to 115 cusecs, power generation was down to 150MW and the month's power shedding was **321 hrs (an average of over 10hrs/day)**. This year the level of Lake Malawi is predicted to fall further to 472.5m a.s.l., cutting electric power generation to even less than 50%, which will result in even more extensive blackouts than were experienced in 2016.

The future outlook for Malawi's power supply is dire, especially as the project to supply Lilongwe by pumping water from Lake Malawi is implemented, thus further reducing the flow of the Shire River, and consuming vast quantities of electric power.

### **B. Lake Chilwa**

Lake Chilwa dried 12 times in the last century, and it has now dried every year for the last 6 years, since 2012, except in 2015 following the cyclone. This year it is drying again. When Lake Chilwa dries, the fishery, which yields an average of 10-16,000 tons of fish a year worth about US\$17million, ceases to exist. This imposes great hardship especially on all those who depend on the fishing industry for their livelihood.

### ***The effect on Lake Chilwa's waterbirds***

In the years when the lake has dried, the fishermen have to turn to other resources, mainly the waterbirds. In 1996, the year after the lake had dried, it was conservatively estimated that 1.2 million waterbirds were trapped or shot; mainly Allen's Gallinules and Lesser Moorhens, but also African Spoonbills, Glossy Ibis, etc. In 2013, it was noted that even bird species which were formerly protected by taboo were now being targeted; these included the white egrets (Cattle Egrets, Great Egrets, Yellow-billed Egrets and Little Egrets), Reed Cormorants, Grey Herons, and even Grey-headed Gulls, amongst others.

### ***A further consequence of the deforestation of Zomba Plateau: Blackfly in the Domasi River and elsewhere in Zomba City***

The destruction of the pines on Zomba Plateau above Domasi resulted in a slight change in the level of the acidity in the water of the streams running from the area. This was enough to encourage the breeding of blackfly (*Simulium*), otherwise known as "Bingu", the carriers of the parasite which causes River Blindness (*Onchocerciasis*) which occurs in many parts of Africa. A number of local residents have been infected, especially the girls at the Domasi Secondary School. Fortunately, early treatment has meant they have not been blinded, but rather suffered large and unsightly swelling. The blackfly larva used to be killed by pouring DDT into rivers, but apparently it is now being brought under control by putting a strain of *Bacillus thuringiensis* into the water. This attacks and kills the larvae of the blackfly, but does no damage to the environment.

### **References**

- Carr, Stephen (2017). Why do trees attract more rain? Wildlife and Environmental Society Zomba Branch Newsletter
- Owen, R.B., and R. Crossley. Recent sedimentation in Lake Chilwa and Chiuta, Malawi. Pemba, Dyllo (2016) Wildlife and Environmental Society Newsletter, Zomba Branch.
- Sitaube, Langes A., Mtambo, P. & Makungwa, Stephen D. (1996). Forestry development and stream flows on Zomba Plateau. FRIM Newsletter No. 78.

Note: There is an excellent video on bioprecipitation that can be found on Biological Ice Nucleates by Cindy Morris on the web.

<https://bioice.wordpress.com/about/>

The home page of the same website has the videos (link below)

<https://bioice.wordpress.com/>



## From the ADU, Cape Town

*Anyone contributing to the ADU's Virtual Museum will have received this message. Why not get involved and put your photographs to good use!*

Dragonflies and damselflies are a key group of insects for monitoring water quality and this has become ever more important in Africa. Odonata are sensitive to environmental changes and play important roles in both terrestrial and aquatic habitats. They are predators as both nymphs and adults, feeding on a variety of prey including nuisance species such as mosquitoes and biting flies. Spending most of their lives underwater in rivers, streams, ponds, and lakes, their presence in aquatic environments is an excellent measure for water quality, as they require clean water to thrive.

Our two main aims with OdonataMAP are to increase the use of this data resource by conservation authorities, environmental management groups, researchers etc. and to collect data to fill in the essential gaps in coverage. Each and every record helps! So we thank you for your records and we encourage you to please keep submitting records to OdonataMAP (and the rest of the Virtual Museum projects). We would also be extremely grateful if you could spread the word and encourage others to take up biodiversity mapping.

I have produced this handy slideshow that gives some guidelines on how to best



Male Yellow-veined Widow,  
*Palpopleura jucunda* on Monavale Vlei

photograph dragonflies/damselflies for  
OdonataMAP:

[https://www.slideshare.net/Animal\\_Demography\\_Unit/how-to-shoot-your-dragon](https://www.slideshare.net/Animal_Demography_Unit/how-to-shoot-your-dragon)

Thank you for being an ambassador for  
biodiversity!

Kind regards,  
Megan

--  
Megan Loftie-Eaton

## For Sale

Mark Shaw is selling *Honeyguide*, *Ostrich*  
and *Bokmakierie* sets

*"It's preferable to sell them as  
sets but I may consider selling odd  
volumes if necessary"*

Contact Mark on [sas4security@live.com](mailto:sas4security@live.com)  
SAS Security P/L  
Cell: 0772-343485

## Useful Contacts:

CEO/Ringing Programme: Julia Pierini [JuliaPierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org](mailto:JuliaPierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org) 0772-894562  
Rarities Committee: Ian Riddell [gemsaf@mango.zw](mailto:gemsaf@mango.zw) 0772-117054  
BLZ Library: [piumosso@zol.co.zw](mailto:piumosso@zol.co.zw) 304298; 481496  
Special Species: Peta Ditchburn [specialspecies@blz.co.zw](mailto:specialspecies@blz.co.zw) 0775-940714, 09-244596  
Mashonaland South: Margaret Parrock 068-22005 or her daughter Coralee 0772-739370  
Eastern Districts: Sue Fenwick 0779-408557 [ingram.sue@gmail.com](mailto:ingram.sue@gmail.com)  
Mashonaland East Natural History Society: Chairman Peter Hadingham 04-497035  
Secretary: Colin de Beer 0279-23931 [jcdb1936@gmail.com](mailto:jcdb1936@gmail.com)  
*Honeyguide* production: Julia Duprée [daliadupree@gmail.com](mailto:daliadupree@gmail.com) 09-246269

## BLZ MEMBERSHIP

**SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE NOW** Please ensure you pay without delay!

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 Babblers*, 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!

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](mailto:JuliaPierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org)

**Payment details.** Please deposit into BirdLife Zimbabwe account at **NMB Bank, (Borrowdale Branch) Account No: 260092014** or BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Branch, CABS (Chisipite Branch) Account No: 1002399955 or **Ecocash** – Merchant Code No. **22084**. You can **also** pay your subscription online with **Paynow**. Look on the BLZ website on the membership page [www.birdlifezimbabwe.org/joinus](http://www.birdlifezimbabwe.org/joinus), and click on the Paynow tab at the bottom of the page. This is especially important for our members outside Zimbabwe. You could **also** come to our office at 35, Clyde Road, Eastlea in Harare.

It is **ESSENTIAL** please that you include YOUR name on the deposit slip so it appears on the statements **AND** advise Sylvia Muzavazi by e-mail or phone of your transaction, or your payment may not be recorded.

Please contact Sylvia on 04-481496 or e-mail [sylvia@blz.co.zw](mailto:sylvia@blz.co.zw) for all membership-related issues – new, renewals, payments, change of details, queries.

And look on our Facebook page for great pictures and interesting birding news -

[www.facebook.com/BirdLifeZimbabwe](http://www.facebook.com/BirdLifeZimbabwe). You can find out about us and projects you as a member can get involved with, on our informative website [www.birdlifezimbabwe.org](http://www.birdlifezimbabwe.org)



# Branch Activities

**Friends of the Vumba** is a community initiative that employs 3 trained scouts to protect the wildlife – tracking for snares and arresting poachers of game, birds and wood. We also support an education outreach into the schools in the area, mostly focussed on birding but more recently extending into wider environmental issues such as WESSA's Water program, rubbish health awareness, alien tree harvesting and indigenous tree planting.

## Directions to regular venues (Google Earth co-ordinates):

**CABS Northridge Park** -17.777494, 31.090782. 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** -17.742715, 30.990416. 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** -17.851935, 31.092010. 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. The **public car park** is off Hillside Road, -17.835393, 31.089111.

**Prince Edward School car park** -17.818721, 31.036462. Josiah Tongogara Ave.

**Monavale Vlei** -17.806770, 31.010579. 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 on Fenella Drive.

**Haka Park** -17.843391, 31.143369. From the traffic circle at the Mutare Road/Harare Drive intersection continue 500m and turn left, follow the road (770m) to the Haka sign and boom on the left. If entering through the boom on Harare Drive (-17.828473, 31.140253; 1.9 km north of the circle) make your way to the meeting point. \$3 entrance fee for BLZ members, \$5 others.

**Avondale Sports Club** -17.785100, 31.041972. Brighton Road, Harare 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.

## Mashonaland Branch

### *BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Calendar of Events: OCTOBER 2017*

<b>Sunday 1<sup>st</sup></b>	<b>Mukuvisi Woodlands walk</b>	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
<b>Saturday 7<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Marlborough Vlei walk</b>	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
<b>Fri. 13<sup>th</sup>-Mon. 16<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Lasting Impressions – Kadoma</b>	
<b>Sunday 15<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Monavale Vlei Walk</b>	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
<b>Thursday 19<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>Seldomseen – Vumba</b> Presentation by Ken Worsley, Avondale Sports Club	Meet at 5.30 for 6.00 p.m.
<b>Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup></b>	<b>Umwinsidale – Stuart Beverley</b>	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
	On Enterprise road, go through the toll gate and immediately left on the Shamva rd. After 850m left into Spring Heights Rd. Go about 300-400m, turn left at farm gate with yellow sign, next to pasture. Follow road up the hill.	

**Sunday 29<sup>th</sup>**      **No outing**

*BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Calendar of Events: NOVEMBER  
2017*

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Saturday 4 <sup>th</sup>	Marlborough Vlei walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 5 <sup>th</sup>	Mukuvisi Woodlands walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Saturday 11 <sup>th</sup>	Arundel School (To be Confirmed)	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 12 <sup>th</sup>	No outing	
Thursday 16 <sup>th</sup>	Lasting Impressions – Kadoma Presentation by Tony Alegria, Avondale Sports Club	Meet 5.30 for 6.00 p.m.
Sunday 19 <sup>th</sup>	Monavale Vlei walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Sat 25 <sup>th</sup> – Sun 26 <sup>th</sup>	Birding Big Day – see below	
Sunday 26 <sup>th</sup>	Mbizi Game Park (Henry Hallam Dam) Meet at Mukuvisi to share transport. Bring folding chair, drinks and snacks	Meet at 06.30 a.m.

For further information please contact Tony Alegria, [tonyalegria47@gmail.com](mailto:tonyalegria47@gmail.com) 0772-438697 or 490375 (h)

### 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. They are usually hosted by either a Vumba resident or a commercial venue such as Tony's Coffee Shop, Forest Hills Lodge, White Horse Inn or the Botanical Gardens and the walks will often traverse private properties not always accessible by the public. Contact Sue Fenwick 0779-408557 [ingram.sue@gmail.com](mailto:ingram.sue@gmail.com) for more details.

**Lowveld** – contact Clive Stockil 0772-219204 or [clive@chilogorge.com](mailto:clive@chilogorge.com)

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## ►Late Notice◀

**Birding Big Day** will take place over the weekend of 25<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> November.  
Full details will be sent via email closer to the time but the usual rules apply.

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.

*Please send contributions for  
The Babbler 139 Dec 2017-Jan  
2018 any time before the 15<sup>th</sup>  
Nov.*

# The 2018 BirdLife Zimbabwe Calendar is hot off the press!

For only US\$10 each from the BLZ Office (35 Clyde Rd) - buy yours NOW!

Calendars can be purchased for cash or deposits made to: Ecocash Merchant no. 22084

BirdLife Zimbabwe NMB Bank, Borrowdale Branch, Harare Acc. no. 260092014

BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Branch, CABS, Chisipite, Harare, Acc. no. 1002399955

Other outlets:

## **In Harare:**

Titles Bookshop (Newlands Shopping Centre)

Folio Bookshop (Sam Levy Village)

Coconut Joe (Sam Levy Village)

QV Pharmacy (Sam Levy Village)

Village Pharmacy (Sam Levy Village)

Medix Pharmacy (Pomona)

Mukuvisi Woodlands (Hillside Road)

Billy's Meats (Mount Pleasant shopping Centre)

Kamfinsa Vet

Chisi Vet

Ballantyne Pharmacy

Medicine Chest (Chisipite)

Inside Out (opp. Arundel Village)

## **In Bulawayo:**

LNA Stationery

