



THE BABBLER

Newsletter of BirdLife Zimbabwe

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Hi everyone,

We have a number of outing reports for Harare - thanks to Ken Dixon for making the effort to send these in. Come on, all you other Branches, let us know what has been happening in your areas.

The results of Birding Big Day 2017 are included here and it would also be nice to have reports from other teams on how their day went, at least for 2018. The [excel file](#) showing detailed results can also be downloaded from our website. Most everyone had issues with the weather and it would have been nice to have had that weather over this past January, which was basically a drought, about 40mm here in Newlands! I hope the remainder of the season improves. On that note have a read on the Harare Wetlands Trust on page 11 - water *is* Life!

January is gone but for those that don't have one, get a 2018 calendar for yourself and friends and relatives!

Happy Birding,

Ian Riddell gemsaf@mango.zw

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Branch News

Mashonaland

THE HARARE BOTANIC GARDENS, SATURDAY 9TH DECEMBER 2017

The Saturday morning short outing was originally intended for those keen birders who were unable to join Sunday outings as they were committed to church visits. It is also supposed to be of only 2 hours duration to allow participants to go shopping. However, I could identify only one known churchgoer and possibly 2 shoppers in the Botanic Gardens group which met today. Most of the 'big guns' turned out and had a rewarding walk through the property which is receiving lots of maintenance at present. Although the upper section beyond the National Parks offices has now been fenced off as an animal enclosure and expensively landscaped for use as a wedding venue it is still possible to explore the various habitats and climb up onto Harman Hill and down back via the office road or reservoir.

After the initial get-together which took place below a circling African Goshawk giving its diagnostic 'quick' call, we divided into groups and wandered off in different directions. There were plenty of birds in certain spots. We looked for Magpie Mannikins in the flowering bamboo but without success. Surely they are due to revisit. [Probably not; the flowering bamboo was the attraction in the past and they

are likely to pitch up for the next one - in 50-odd years!]. On Acacia bend and the nearby miombo we found Willow Warbler, African Hoopoe, Brubru, Whyte's Barbet, Streaky-headed Seedeater, Miombo Double-collared Sunbird and Variable Sunbird, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Golden-tailed Woodpecker and Cardinal Woodpecker, Chin-spot Batis and lots of Southern Masked-weavers. There were plenty of Abdim's Storks on the lawns and adjoining playing fields. Another fruitful area was dense thicket at the foot of the reservoir hill. Tawny-flanked Prinia, Spectacled Weaver and Golden Weaver, White-bellied Sunbird and Kurrichane Thrush were all heard or seen. Violet-backed Starling appeared regularly. The Lesser Honeyguide was at its usual post in the Zambezi section along with commoner species.

We gathered for the list in the car park and in the course of doing that saw Lizard Buzzard, Red-headed Weaver, Red-backed Mannikin and Bronze Mannikin in a gum. The count of 67 was good for an overcast, cool morning and included Ovambo Sparrowhawk, Gabar Goshawk and Tambourine Dove.

Ken Dixon

MONA VALE VLEI SUNDAY 17TH DECEMBER 2017

Surely if one of those greedy developers or even a stand buyer had joined our walk they would have understood what a wetland is supposed to look like and why it should be preserved along with its Vlei Lilies and Vlei Ink, a duiker and 63 species of bird. These are what wetlands should be home to, not ostentatious, overpriced houses liable to flooding.

It was a beautiful, warm, sunny morning and the vlei was super-green. It was also prime time for spotting the bishops and widowbirds in their new breeding plumage; Yellow Bishop and Southern Red Bishop, Red-collared Widowbird, Yellow-mantled Widowbird and

Pin-tailed Whydah. From the reeds we could hear Little Rush-warbler, Lesser Swamp-warbler, African Reed-warbler and Great Reed-warbler while Common and Orange-breasted Waxbills dashed about in small flocks. There were cisticolas too, Levillant's, Red-faced, Croaking, Rattling and best of all, perched on a grass stalk at knee height, was a Pale-crowned Cisticola, the one that doesn't have a red cap.

Above us flew Grey-rumped, Barn, Pearl-breasted, Lesser Striped and Wire-tailed Swallow and African Palm-swift and Little Swift. Raptors were abroad too; Black-shouldered Kite, 4 Gabar Goshawks, Lizard Buzzard and a pair of Long-crested Eagles.

One first timer for the vlei species which Jimmy spotted on a partly-built house in the Meyrick Park section was a Familiar Chat who seemed very much at home on a concrete lintel. What a bonus!

SUNDAY 21ST JANUARY 2018

An African Marsh-harrier was the star of the regular monthly stroll round our local Ramsar site. This rose unexpectedly from the long grass when a group of our birders were trying to flush a Marsh Owl. The latter also put in an appearance a little later. Over 70 species were recorded despite the lack of rain. We did, though, have to wade through 20 cm of water supplied, not by the Almighty, but Harare Municipal who have still not repaired a reported burst pipe.

GREYSTONE PARK PRESERVE, SATURDAY 13TH JANUARY 2018

15 of us assembled on a sunny Saturday at this small but varied venue. No water to be seen due to lack of rain and a huge gap in the dam wall but 70 species of bird were not deterred. It is interesting to note that the wall was breached at about this date in 2017 and we had local residents with us who recalled that disastrous night. We are grateful to the Greystone activists who have rerouted the circular path so that we are still able to visit all parts but it is difficult to envisage what the preserve will look like if the promised good rains do eventually arrive.

A pair of Lesser Honeyguides led us off from the carpark and we gradually picked up all the usual woodland and a few reedbed species as we proceeded. A Lizard Buzzard called from a tall dry tree on the other side of

The widowbirds, whydahs and bishops are now abundant and in breeding plumage but only one Black Coucal was present. A large mixed group of swallows and swifts was gobbling up a hatching of termites near the golf course and a Cuckoo Finch gave super views along the stream. Cisticolas recorded were Zitting, Rattling, Croaking, Pale-crowned Cisticola, Red-faced Cisticola and Levillant's Cisticola. Above us we saw Black-shouldered Kite, Lizard Buzzard, Gabar Goshawk, and a Wahlberg's Eagle... or was it a Lesser Spotted Eagle?

We bemoaned the lack of rain but couldn't complain about the excellent light afforded by the sun. Normally, at this time, we would have been chasing flufftails and crakes in our gumboots.

Ken Dixon

Gaydon Road and Pin-tailed Whydah dashed about ahead of us.

The stars of the morning were, however, a Red-throated Twinspot, a Red-chested Cuckoo which gave us excellent views and photo opportunities and a serene, unconcerned Spotted Eagle-owl sitting out in the open on a dead tree only about 4m above the path in full view of all of us. Having been watched by one group of birders it waited patiently for the second group to turn up after being told where it was. Other exciting sightings were an African Cuckoo Hawk, Long-crested Eagle and Yellow-breasted Apalis.

Thanks are due to all those who maintain this fascinating little reserve.

Ken Dixon

VISIT TO LAKE CHIVERO FOR THE WATERBIRD COUNT, SUNDAY 14TH JANUARY 2018

How did so many of our members miss this memorable visit to the BLZ lakeshore sanctuary? A gorgeous day and only 10 of us took advantage of this opportunity to observe the wide array of water birds on the ample shore space. The late arrival of the rains has meant that the shoreline is still some 60-80 m from the raised bank from which we usually view the dam and rocky islands and the inland lagoon has no water at all. But there were plenty of birds, at least 40 species of waterfowl

jockeying for a place on the water or the shore. The cloudless sky was also alive with gulls, terns, herons, flocks of waders and ducks, Reed Cormorants and White-breasted Cormorants, a few swallows and African Fish-eagles.

As usual the rocks were covered with White-breasted Cormorants, about 200 at least. On the lake were rafts of Red-billed Teal, Little Grebe, White-faced Duck and Grey-headed Gull. On the muddy patches among the hyacinth were Wood Sandpiper, Kittlitz's

Plover and Common Ringed Plover, Common Greenshank, Black-winged Stilt, 2 African Spoonbills, 4 Pied Avocets, 14 Yellow-billed Storks, 70 Egyptian Goose, 17 Black Herons, 40 African Jacanas, 18 Little Stints, 5 Ruff, African Sacred Ibis and Glossy Ibis, 9 Squacco Herons, Blacksmith Lapwing and 120 Grey-headed Gulls. Of interest were 2 Little Bitterns, 2 Collared Pratincoles and 5 Greater Flamingos.

Both groups walked the length of the shore from Harare Safari Lodge to Marimba Fishing Camp and these figures are an aggregate of the birds seen. At the latter location large flocks of White-winged Terns and a group of 20 Grey Herons were seen. The walk also passed through the woodland but as so often is the case these days very little of interest was spotted there. In all 95 species were recorded.
Ken Dixon

News from the office...

Reporting Bird Mortalities

In the year 2017, BirdLife Zimbabwe together with Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority developed a joint **bird mortality form**. The purpose of the form is to prompt people to report bird mortalities in their areas or whenever they come across them. In addition to the bird mortality form a bird mortality database was also established to store the data submitted. The purpose of the dataset is to build long-term

trends of the causes of mortality in wild birds. When submitting the form it is important to give as much detail as possible and pictures where possible.

For the form or queries contact ZPWMA Ecologist Lovelater Sebele (slovelater@gmail.com) and BLZ Conservation Officer, Fadzai Matsvimbo (fadzai@blz.co.zw).
Fadzai Matsvimbo



BIRD MORTALITY REPORT FORM



Name of reporter			
Institution			
Position held			
Postal Address or Physical address			
Tel/ mobile number			
E-mail address			
INCIDENT DETAILS			
Date, time of incident			
Village/District/Province			
Specific Property			
GPS coordinates			
Number of each species killed & specific ID if applicable) e.g. 2 White-backed Vultures, electrocuted found dead below powerline/pylon. 1 vulture with Wing tag No. ZW-XbT-772345			
Number	Species	Comment	
Cause of death:			
Additional Information: (Please take detailed photographs and send them together with the form)			

Birding Big Day 2017

Ian Riddell

PART I

Did everyone enjoy their wet weekend? We did, though as was the case with many or most teams, our total was d(r)owned by the weather. Still, 22 teams participated, which was 6 more than last year. BirdLasser became part of the event and because of this the count was changed to 24 hours only on Saturday 25th November. Not everyone got the memo – Esigodini Pair did a 36 hour count but because of weather their total didn't contend with the rest. Others counted over half of Saturday into Sunday or on Sunday. I have included all these; after all, ► *To have fun and enjoy ourselves, while at the same time increasing awareness of our wonderful bird life and introducing more people to the joys of birding, is the largest part of the competition.*

Why BirdLasser? This is southern Africa's (maybe all of Africa!) foremost smart phone app primarily used for SABAP2 atlassing, an "easy

way to record your African bird sightings and share with friends, your community and contribute to conservation." In 2016 BirdLasser created an 'event' in South Africa for BBD whereby all records were uploaded in real-time to a site where anyone could keep track of teams' progress and the birds seen. A Zimbabwe site was created for 2017 with 12 teams participating.

This year we had teams covering Harare, Bulawayo, Victoria Falls, Kadoma and Esigodini, with others in the 'sticks' at Mazunga, Nyanga, Honde Valley, Hwange, Save Valley, Malilangwe (Chiredzi) and Mazvikadei. A [spreadsheet](#) is available on our website for those who would like to explore the results in more detail.

*So, congratulations go to the
Bubye Bustards who birded
Mazunga with a total of 186.*

Results – Birding Big Day 2017

Table 1. Overall list ranking on number of species

Position	Species	Team name	Leader	Area
1	186	Bubye Bustards	J. Blake	Mazunga
2	153	Umgoosers	J. Varden	Bulawayo
3	137	Dodos	A. Masterson	Harare
4	117	Grey-headed Bushshrikes	L. Shadwell	Harare
5	114	Bhejane	S. Long	Hwange
6	113	Blue Swallows	I. Riddell	Nyanga
7	110	Charama Chicks	R. Paice	Kadoma
8	108	Friends of Hwange	J. Brebner	Hwange
9	108	Goosling Rescued	P. Ditchburn	Hwange
10	106	Zambezi Pratincoles	John Laing	Victoria Falls
11	103	Senuko Bustards	C. Stockil	Save Valley
12	102	Khushi's Kingfishers	B. Ranchod-Daya	Chiredzi
13	99	Wacko-Jacko Duo	M. Jackson	Bulawayo
14	98	Mazvikadei Honeyguides	A. MacDonald	Mazvikadei
15	97	Louw Toppies	I. Louw	Harare
16	82	Hammer Heads	D. Dube	Hwange
17	66	Is it a bird or is it nothing?	P. van Leenhoff	Harare
18	54	Victoria Falls Vultures	S. Ranchod	Victoria Falls
19	43	The Three Cuckoos	G. Lightfoot	Bulawayo
20	27	Bird Nerds	S. Hind	Honde Valley
21	25	Double S	S. Harvey	Bulawayo
22	45	Esigodini Pair ¹	L. King	Esigodini

¹ 36 hour

PART II – THE ORNITHOLOGICAL RESULTS

403 species were recorded and the Red-headed Finch from Esigodini is interesting. The last record was from Aisleby in March 2009 and before that in June-July 1995, though it was recorded more extensively in the southwest during the Atlas years.

The Common Ostrich was only recorded in Hwange by a single team and it was from here that the Little Grebe was seen by four teams; oddly no Harare teams saw it. Bhejane found Great White Pelicans but more interesting was the record from Norton area. African Darters were found by four teams but none were seen near Harare. The Bubyte Bustards and Khushi's Kingfishers had Black-crowned Night-heron but the only team lucky enough to find the White-backed Night-heron was Zambezi Pratincoles at Victoria Falls. The Mazvikadei Honeyguides found the Dwarf Bittern, as did Khushi's Kingfishers. White Storks didn't feature much with only Umgoosers finding it in the Bulawayo area, whilst the only Black Stork was found by Bubyte Bustards. Woolly-necked Storks were seen in Hwange, Mazunga, Save Valley and Chiredzi areas, and Charama Chicks and Bubyte Bustards were the only recorders of the Saddle-billed Stork. An interesting loc. for the Hadedda Ibis was around Bulawayo, seen by Umgoosers.

One Bulawayo, two Harare and one Hwange team found the Fulvous Duck.

The Secretarybird was confined to Hwange where seen by three teams. From the Norton area Is it a bird... found Hooded Vulture, White-backed Vulture and most impressively, Lappet-faced Vulture, the latter rarely found near Harare. Goosling Rescued was the only team to see White-headed Vulture and of course, in the Honde Valley, Bird Nerds saw the Palm-nut Vulture. Yellow-billed Kites were found around Bulawayo, Hwange, Victoria Falls and Esigodini and two Hwange teams had Black Kites. Mazvikadei Honeyguides were the only recorders of African Cuckoo Hawk, Bubyte Bustards the Verreaux's Eagle and Friends of Hwange the Steppe Eagle. Lesser Spotted Eagles were more common, seen in Victoria Falls, Hwange and Mazunga and the latter two had Martial Eagle. Bateleurs

were confined to these wilder areas – Hwange, Victoria Falls, Mazunga, Save Valley and Chiredzi. The sole Augur Buzzard was noted by the Blue Swallows in Nyanga. Pallid Harrier was the only harrier, seen by the Dodos, Bubyte Bustards and Blue Swallows, whilst Ospreys occurred in Hwange, Victoria Falls and Mazunga.

Friends of Hwange claimed a Red-footed Falcon, a very unusual bird in Zimbabwe these days and Victoria Falls Vultures were the only ones to see Dickinson's Kestrel.

Bhejane had Crested Guineafowl and, along with two other Hwange teams, also found Grey Crowned Crane. These Hwange teams, along with Bubyte Bustards, also had the Kori Bustard and all of them plus Zambezi Pratincoles had Red-crested Korhaan.

On the wader front Grey-headed Bushshrikes got Common Ringed Plover and Khushi's Kingfishers got Senegal Lapwing. The latter team and Goosling Rescued both found the Green Sandpiper. Three Harare teams and Charama Chicks ticked Pied Avocet, whilst the only Bronze-winged Courser was seen by the Bubyte Bustards. Being a special along suitable parts of the Zambezi it is no surprise that Zambezi Pratincoles were the only teams to see Rock Pratincoles, or that three Hwange teams found Whiskered Tern. The African Skimmer wasn't seen at Victoria Falls but at Hwange, by Bhejane.

Other birds with restricted distributions are the African Mourning Dove and Livingstone's Turaco; Khushi's Kingfishers saw the former and Blue Swallows the latter. Lesser Cuckoo is a rarity and was claimed by Khushi's Kingfishers but without a description to support it. The only Great Spotted Cuckoo of the count was seen by Bubyte Bustards and Goosling Rescued saw the only African Emerald Cuckoo. Burchell's Coucals were found by Senuko Bustards and Khushi's Kingfishers but the only White-browed Coucal was a Mazvikadei, where a few birds are established.

These days seeing the African Grass-owl is a happy event so it was great that Is it a bird... recorded it in the Norton area. Umgoosers at

Bulawayo and Dodos at Harare found Southern White-faced Scops-owl.

African Black Swifts were confined to Nyanga, though they should have been seen at Victoria Falls too, whilst Umgoosers were the only ones to find Horus Swift.

Hwange, Mazunga and Save Valley had European Rollers and all these areas as well as Chiredzi had the Purple Roller. Hwange teams found that range restricted bird, the Bradfield's Hornbill, and most Southern Ground-hornbill records came from there, as well as Mazunga and Save Valley. White-eared Barbet and Green-backed Woodpecker were restricted to Honde Valley and Whyte's Barbet to Harare and Nyanga.

Bubye Bustards found Sabota Lark and Victoria Falls Vultures found Dusky Lark but Red-capped Larks were more widespread and seen in Harare, Mazunga and Hwange. Blue Swallows were seen various times by the Blue Swallows, who were also the only team to see Eastern Saw-wings and White-necked Raven. Bird Nerds had Square-tailed Drongo and Bubye Bustards saw Eurasian Golden Oriole. No Harare teams found Miombo Tit so just as well that it was seen in Nyanga, whilst Southern Pied Babblers were more evident and Hwange, Mazunga and Chiredzi teams found those. Miombo Rock-thrush was elusive and only seen by one Harare team but Arnot's Chats occurred in Hwange, Save Valley and Chiredzi. Red-capped Robin-chat and Cape Robin-chat were only noted in Nyanga, whilst Boulder Chats were more widespread, in Bulawayo, Harare and Save Valley. Surprisingly Southern Hyliota was only found by Blue Swallows.

Predictably, Chirinda Apalis were restricted to the Honde Valley, whilst Red-faced Crombecs were seen in Nyanga. Senuko Bustards claimed Green-backed Camaroptera rather than Grey-backed, though I would have thought this a little out of range. A close study of these is needed from the area though the taxonomy is contentious. Green-backed would be expected to occur on the moist seaward-facing slopes and Grey-backed in the rain

shadow of the Save Valley. Bubye Bustards claimed the Barred Wren-warbler and Mazunga. Roberts's Warbler was only seen in Nyanga and Black-chested Prinia at Mazunga.

African Dusky Flycatchers and Cape Batis were seen by Blue Swallows and Charama Chicks were lucky enough to find Grey Tit-flycatcher, whilst Bird Nerds found the Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher.

The Dodos were the sole recorders of Wood Pipit and Rosy-throated Longclaw but Crimson-breasted Shrikes occurred from Hwange through to Mazunga. Black-fronted Bush-shrikes were restricted to the Honde Valley and Olive Bush-shrike to Nyanga.

Common Mynas were spread from Hwange to Bulawayo and Esigodini and down to Mazunga, whilst Miombo Blue-eared Starlings were at Mazvikadei and Harare. Victoria Falls, Hwange, Save Valley and Chiredzi had Yellow-billed Oxpeckers, whilst Red-billed Oxpeckers were at the first three localities as well as Mazunga.

In the eastern highlands Blue Swallows got Malachite Sunbird and Bird Nerds found Olive Sunbird. Only Grey-headed Bushshrikes saw Copper Sunbird in Harare, whilst Bulawayo had Marico Sunbirds.

Although the Cuckoo Finch can be a hit or miss bird three Harare teams found them, but only one team got the easier Yellow-mantled Widowbird. The Red-faced Crimsonwing was confined to Honde Valley and Violet-eared Waxbills to Hwange, whilst the Black-faced Waxbill was in Hwange and Bulawayo. Shaft-tailed Whydah is another range restricted bird seen in Hwange.

What was the commonest bird? This year the Dark-capped Bulbul topped the charts, seen by 21 teams. The Blue Waxbill (20) came next, followed by Helmeted Guineafowl, Tropical Boubou and Fork-tailed Drongo, all seen 19. Swainson's Spurfowl, Crested Barbet, Arrow-marked Babbler and Grey Go-away-bird were seen by 18. At the bottom of the list 110 birds, or 27%, were only recorded by a single team.

The Blue Swallows

Our team based up at Hidden Rocks in the Juliasdale area of Nyanga, in beautiful miombo

woodland that promised some good birds (we hoped) to start off our Birding Big Day. On the

evening before we heard both African Wood-owl and Barn Owl but predictably they kept silent on the day and deprived us of two species. One thing about being a bad sleeper was that I had a good opportunity to hear some of the night birds whilst everyone else was sleeping soundly and Rufous-cheeked Nightjar started off the list at 01h23 with Freckled Nightjars at 04h30. Since the event was 'live' on BirdLasser we could see that those extra-eager beavers, the Umgoosers, started at midnight and had clocked up a whole whack of birds by daybreak! As our group started rising our first more-or-less Nyanga bird was the African Dusky Flycatcher, with quite a few Cape Buntings on the boulders by the front door.



After and during a snacky breakfast the miombo birds started joining the list and off we went into the valley, adding Lazy Cisticolas and Red-faced Crombecs on the slopes. Southern Hyliotas were finally nailed down for Ronnie, one of many lifers he added on his first venture to the eastern districts, and Miombo Tits got us on their trail in the hope of finding Cinnamon-breasted Tits too – surely they must be here in this habitat, I said! Chasing bird calls through the miombo and with views towards distant Nyanga we got African Black Swifts and sitting on a branch against a kopjie Julia's chicken was transformed into an eminently more tickable Lanner Falcon! Over the next few days it transpired that there was actually a pair of them living on this kopjie and flying about the area. Striped Pipit and Bennett's Woodpecker were in the shallow valley below us and African Goshawks on another small kopjie.



Then we started off for Nyanga proper, garnering various roadside birds and checking out movement in the short-short open grasslands. At one spot I was surprised to hear African Green-pigeons calling from a copse of trees and a few minutes later the first Eastern Saw-wings flew over. Everyone knows the line of Flat-top Acacias that grace the road near the Cumberland road turnoff and here we added Cape Robin-chat, Roberts's Warbler, White-necked Raven and a few others. Out next stop was Pine Tree Inn where we found Livingstone's Turaco, Olive Bush-shrike, Red-capped Robin-chat by the stream, Whyte's Barbet and a whole lot more whilst strolling around the grounds. At Juliasdale the local heronry gave us Cattle Egret and Black-headed Heron and some rain drops. Looking back we could see we were on the edge of a big shower that swept over our route whilst all over the area the clouds built up, promising to spoil the day for easy birdwatching.

Over the open grasslands of the Park, swifts and swallows swooped, amongst them White-rumped Swift and White-throated Swallow. Close to the Troutbeck turnoff we stopped for Wailing Cisticola and others, only to find 2 Blue Swallows, at last!, coasting along the drainage lines.

A quick detour to Nyanga village to pick up others and we were backtracking to Udu Dam where a cold wind and light rain greeted us. A stroll to the water gave us White-breasted Cormorant, Reed Cormorant and Little Grebe but where were the ducks today? Lesser Swamp-warblers were added from the reedbeds whilst part of our group sheltered under the eaves of a lodge as the rain got serious but we did find a few Greater Striped Swallows swooping through.

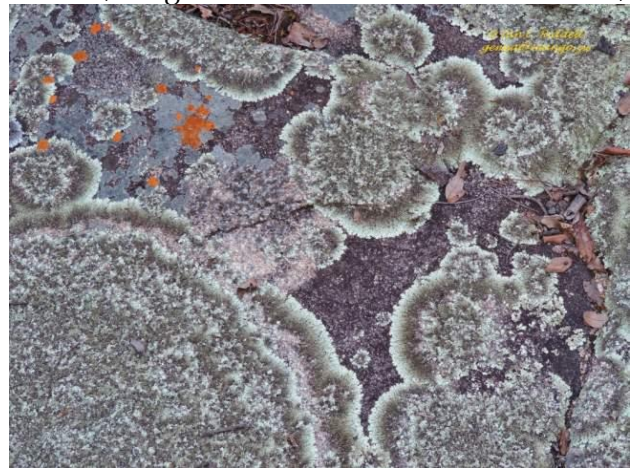


So off to World's View we went, where there appeared to be a bit of light beckoning through the total cloud cover. Red-knobbed Coots on the Troutbeck dams were new but little else as we arrived at a spot on the escarpment just before World's View. The hole-in-the-clouds was merely a cruel trick and it had moved off north over the communal lands where we could not follow. The ceiling came down low, a freezing gale threatened to blow us off the precipice and there was zilch chance of Scarce Swifts today but storm-petrels were likely! We did what any sensible person would do and retreated to Troutbeck for shelter, coffee and something to eat - it was lunchtime now anyway. We could birdwatch from the lounge or the lawn as the rain came and went and added African Black Duck, Mountain Wagtail, Malachite Kingfisher and African Pied Wagtail from the dam. A real goody was Half-collared Kingfisher at the trout ponds!



On the way back down the mountain we came across two beautiful pale Steppe Buzzards but reached for the camera too late. Stopping by a bridge near the bottom was a whole range of birds, most we had seen already but it was great to add three more Blue

Swallows, and at our previous Blue Swallow spot, a Long-crested Eagle. Then we were into the Park proper, and while Julia signed in at Rhodes Dam a small group of Yellow-bellied Waxbills fed in the grass. Off to Inyangani we went, to find Malachite Sunbird, only to get stuck behind some fool driving his two-wheel drive bakkie at a snail's pace. There was a flash of hope at the Mare Dam turnoff - he dithered briefly and, worst luck, turned left. I was all for a bit of road rage or an RPG! On the ascent from a stream Ronnie spotted a raptor perched in the small trees so we left the snail crawling ahead to checked it out. It was an Augur Buzzard and Capped Wheatears were added at the same time. Continuing on we found the bakkie had turned off to Nyamziwa Falls - yeah! - and in a stretch of grassland between woodland there was another Blue Swallow and a Malachite Sunbird. A little further on was a veritable mob of Yellow-bellied Waxbills, more than 50, a sight indeed! We arrived at the cold,



wind-swept mountain in light rain with no sunbirds of any kind on the proteas, so paused just long enough for a loo-stop before retracing our steps. Sitting on the frigid upland we found a pair of Pallid Harriers, making the mountain excursion well worthwhile and further along was a Cape Canary party to add to Ronnie's lifers. Sod's Law was in effect and we got stuck behind you-know-who much where we had left him earlier. On a steep, slippery ascent he started wheel-spinning and skidding, obviously having no idea how to drive. As he rolled backwards he started slewing off the steep camber, about to get stuck sideways and block the road - expectations of a long detour back to the mountain and back via Mare brought on that sinking feeling...

Fortunately catastrophe was narrowly averted and we convinced him that speed was needed to tackle the wet, slippery slope, advice he followed against his better judgement. As night drew up a dark cloak to cover the grey and wet evening we crawled back to Rhodes Dam where, with relief, he turned off. Our last bird of the day was a Coqui Francolin crossing the main road just after the Honde Valley turnoff.

One always finds those missing birds after the event. I stayed behind when Julia went off to visit a school north of Nyanga village, finding White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Black-eared Seedeater, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, Miombo Rock-thrush and a few others. Spotted Eagle-owls called in the night. On Monday morning I leapt out of bed at 05h39 with some alacrity to the calls of Cinnamon-breasted Tits – there you are!

The Harare Wetlands Trust and the Harare Wetlands Advocacy Project

A Notarial Deed of Donation and Trust Protocol No 155 in favour of the Harare Wetlands Trust (HWT) was lodged in the High Court on 21 April 2016.

The purpose of the trust, a coalition formed by a number of concerned residents' organizations, is to address water resources availability to residents of Harare which are under ever growing pressures and urgently require protection and pro-active management. The wetlands which feed water into the supply reservoirs downstream of Harare are being depleted by development, agriculture, pollution including raw sewage discharge, industrial discharge, water abstraction and siltation. The water table which reflects the reserves of underground water is also rapidly receding due to loss of natural cover on the open surfaces feeding into the wetlands.

The Trust status thus gives credibility to residents when engaging government and donors. In June 2017 HWT was awarded funding through TRACE to implement a project entitled The Harare Wetlands Advocacy Project. Representatives from BirdLife Zimbabwe (BLZ provides the institutional capacity), Conservation Society of Monavale, Marlborough Environmental Action Group, Combined Harare Residents Association and Community Water Alliance are working on this project.

The intended impact of the project is that wetland ecosystems are protected, thus securing the primary source of Harare's water and assist in the preservation of the city's biodiversity particularly in the face of climate change through increasing the voice of citizens.

In order to achieve this we are engaging with communities on the ground adjacent to wetlands. Ten new communities have been selected and they are in the process of setting up Local Environmental Action Plans as provided for by the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) and the City of Harare (CoH). Vlei Scouts Jimmy Muropa and Ronnie Chirimuta are training 5 new Vlei Scouts with these communities, with trainings ongoing. This increases the strength of the resident communities to the authorities to protect wetlands. These activities have been very well documented in the print and social media.

We are seeing coalitions growing between communities, government and other stakeholders around issues of wetland preservation. Legal analysis has shown gaps and loopholes which need to be reformed. GIS and biodiversity mapping of 5 wetlands will take place 4 times during the project to show the improvements, hopefully. UNESCO Biosphere Reserve surveys are under way for the Zimbabwe Nomination. Wetland awareness plays a large part at all levels in the project with journalists playing a key part. We are working towards setting up a Harare Wetlands Governance committee with government. Options to construction and agriculture on wetlands are being discussed at stakeholder meetings. Court cases are taking place to stop development on wetlands. The Rhodesville Eastlea Bus Terminus Case was won by residents with HWT guidance. More and more resident communities around Harare are contacting HWT for assistance in halting illegal developments on their wetlands. A motion on

wetlands is to be debated shortly in Parliament. The link to the MP Maridadi who placed the motion came from the Tafara LEAP Community set up through the project.

Whilst wetland awareness is being raised at all levels wetlands appear to be disappearing faster than ever. We now understand that

developers took advantage of the new Minister of Tourism Environment and Hospitality and encouraged him to sign many EIAs on wetlands during his brief tenure, when EMA had rejected them. Hopefully this will be reversed without the need to go to the courts.



Egg shape

Despite avian egg shape generally being explained as an adaptation to life history, we still lack a global synthesis of how egg-shape differences arise and evolve. A group of scientists led by Mary Caswell Stoddard developed specific software to measure egg shape – the “Eggxtractor” – that picks out the egg in any image and measures its length, width and shape. The team used the measurements to determine how far each egg was from perfectly spherical, that is, how pointy or elongated it was, for nearly 50,000 eggs from the 1400 species they measured. The authors built a family tree of 1000 bird species, and then discovered that each group of birds tended to have a characteristic egg shape. However, they found little correlation between that shape and the nest type, nest location or the number of young in a clutch, which were some of the previously proposed explanations for egg shape. Instead, the best explanation seems to be flying ability – the ratio of a bird’s wing length to its width. Good flyers tend to lay eggs that are more elongated and more asymmetrical, while birds that spend little or no time in the air, have more spherical eggs. The reason, according to the authors, is that round eggs require a wider pelvis than ones that are more elongated. Thus, egg shape correlates with flight ability on broad taxonomic scales, suggesting that adaptations for flight may have been critical drivers of egg-shape variation in birds.

Stoddard, M.C., Yong, E.H., Akkaynak, D., Sheard, C., Tobias, J.A. & Mahadevan, L. (2017) *Science* 356: 1249–1254.

For Sale

Rolf Chenaux-Repond is selling 50 copies of *HONEYGUIDE*, the journal of the Ornithological Society of Zimbabwe (now BirdLife Zimbabwe) Vol. 39 (Dec. 1962) to Vol.58/2 (Sept. 2012)

A new copy of *THE VULTURES OF AFRICA* (Mundy, Butchard, Ledger, Piper, 1992)

Contact Rolf on 303591 or rochen@mango.zw

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Eastern Districts: Sue Fenwick 0779-408557 ingram.sue@gmail.com
Mashonaland East Natural History Society: Chairman Peter Hadingham 04-497035
Secretary: Colin de Beer 0279-23931 jcdb1936@gmail.com
Honeyguide production: Julia Duprée daliadupree@gmail.com 09-246269

BLZ MEMBERSHIP

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

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, 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 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. You can find out about us and projects you as a member can get involved with, on our informative website 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: FEBRUARY 2018

Saturday 3rd	Marlborough Vlei walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 4th	Mukuvisi Woodlands walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Saturday 10th	Umwinsidale – Stuart Beverley (to be confirmed)	Meet at 07.00 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.	
Thursday 15th	DVD on “Winged Migration” Linda Fussell, Avondale Sports Club.	Meet at 5.30 for 6.00 p.m.
Sunday 18th	Monavale Vlei walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Sunday 25th	Haka Park	Meet at 6.30 a.m.

BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Calendar of Events: MARCH 2018

Saturday 3rd	Marlborough Vlei walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 4th	Mukuvisi Woodlands walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Saturday 10th	Harare Botanic Gardens Meet in the car park, -17.801679, 31.050834	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Thursday 15th	Waterbirds, paintings Clare Griffiths, Avondale Sports Club	Meet 5.30 for 6.00 p.m.
Sunday 18th	Monavale Vlei walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Sunday 25th	Ewanrigg Botanic Gardens Meet at CABS Northridge Park 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 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 for more details.

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

*Please send contributions for
The Babbler 141 Apr-May 2018
any time before the 15th Mar.*

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

