



THE BABBLER

Newsletter of BirdLife Zimbabwe

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Hi everyone,

As I compile this issue, the waterbird counts are underway. Let's hope the current problems haven't prevented too many people from participating. The rains have been somewhat intermittent but perhaps lower water levels will mean more wader space. Beira is underwater with the cyclone that has just swept along the coast and all we got in Harare was lots of cloud and chilly weather but no rain!

We had a smaller Birding Big Day in 2018 but thanks to all who took part - the results are reported on in this issue, as is the 2018 The Raptor Research Foundation Conference that was held in Kruger National Park.

I didn't exactly miss the Kadoma report but it appears separate from the Branch reports and after the Raptor report; thanks to the Charama Chicks for their interesting news and I hope your area snippets will continue.

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Branch News

Mashonaland

Branch overnight stay on Kent Estate, Sat/Sun 27/28th October 2018

During a fantastic morning's birding at Kent Estate on 26 August, we were told that each evening at dusk there was a flight of African Grass-owl over the grass-covered arable fields near the dam. As this species has become intermittent in recent years, it was decided to make a repeat visit to include an overnight stay so that we could view this phenomenon, have a social evening and then bird again the next morning. 15 members, including 4 from the youth group and a 7-month old baby called Jade, took up the challenge.

I was in the first group to arrive mid-afternoon at the campsite generously set up by our host, Alex, complete with toilets, a braai and a water bowser, in a delightful patch of miombo woodland. We postponed setting up camp in favour of a walk down to the dam where hundreds of water birds awaited us; Red-billed Teal, Comb Duck, White-faced Duck, Spur-winged Goose and Egyptian Goose, a Southern Pochard, Grey Heron and African Openbill were all present in numbers. On the shore stood huddles of Marabou Storks. Waders were more difficult to find but we soon had Common Sandpiper and Wood Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Black-winged Stilt, an African Spoonbill, Ruff and Kittlitz's Plover.

An hour or so later other vehicles found the campsite and we decided to set up camp, which took some considerable time, during which birding was forgotten. We needed to have the tents erected before going to the African Grass-owl site and due to the late arrivals, it was almost dark before we left. To make matters worse, Alex, who was due to lead us, was unavailable as he had been called away to fight a grass fire. Suddenly it was high time for our search to begin. In fact, it was already a tad too late and when we arrived at the appointed spot where Alex had erected poles for the owls to alight on all we saw was 3 Marsh Owls circling and a lone grass-owl cruising past us. Despite

driving all around the area in the gathering darkness, we found only one nightjar on the track. After an hour or so we abandoned our search and returned to camp where one of our group had lit the braai. The rest of the evening, for which we were joined by Alex and Pam and their three guests, passed very pleasantly. It was decided to rise early Sunday morning to renew our search for the elusive owls. Although African Grass-owl proved hard to find, African Scops-owl, African Barred Owlet and Pearl-spotted Owlet were heard during the night and the Barred Owlet had even been seen earlier.

At 5 a.m. we set out once again to scour the ploughed area but again to no avail. There were plenty of Swainson's Spurfowl, Orange-breasted Waxbill, Helmeted Guineafowl and others to reward our efforts. Back to camp for breakfast after which we embarked on miombo birding as planned. This too was less successful than on our last visit as it was windy and uncomfortably cold. An African Cuckoo Hawk was a good sighting and gradually we added Black-headed Oriole and African Golden Oriole, Willow Warbler, Croaking Cisticola and Rattling Cisticola, etc. to our list. On returning to the dam we found Giant Kingfisher and Pied Kingfisher and then flushed 5 African Snipes, 2 Cape Longclaws and 2 Yellow-throated Longclaws and a Kurrichane Buttonquail. Another welcome species was Collared Pratincole on one of the small islands.

When we went through the list, we discovered that we had seen 98 species, which later reached a century when Grey-headed Parrot and Southern White-faced Scops-owl were added by a late leaver.

We all wish to thank Alex and Pam for giving us a marvellous camping experience and we hope to return soon for the complete African Grass-owl performance.

Ken Dixon

HARARE BOTANIC GARDENS, Saturday 10th November 2018

Would you believe you could see or hear, even photograph, 69 species in a relaxed stroll

around those dry and dusty gardens in less than two hours? Well, 7 of us did.

The most thrilling sighting was a flock of 5 Magpie Mannikins that were first heard and seen with Bronze Mannikins in a clump of bamboo on the edge of the Lowveld Riverine section, from where they flew to the tall, dense Bindura bamboo thicket behind the Desert House. There we watched them cavorting in the open until they took off, perhaps for Ewanrigg. The other relative rarity was the Black-throated Wattle-eye, male, female and a juvenile being fed. This was also in the Lowveld Riverine and

afforded excellent views if you had the patience. Next in comparative rarity would be the Green-backed Honeybird.

The other 66 were more everyday species but it was rewarding to see so many birds in all parts of the Gardens on a cool and breezy morning. Sometimes, on such a walk, you feel lucky to see a bulbul or a Blue Waxbill. A venue worth frequent visits as you never know when you will strike lucky.

Ken Dixon

VISIT TO LAKE CHIVERO, Sunday 11th November 2018

After a productive Saturday in the Botanic Gardens, 7 of us enjoyed an excellent morning's birding at Chivero, where there was plenty of exposed shore and shallow water to encourage ducks and waders. We estimated about 300 Red-billed Teal and 150 White-faced Duck while the usual high numbers of White-breasted Cormorant crowded the large rocks out in the lake. As at Kent Estate the previous week, there were just two Southern Pochards. Little Grebes popped up and down further out. Above these, 100 Barn Swallows swirled through the clear blue sky and, above them, African Palm-swift and Little Swift.

As we walked along the shoreline Kittlitz's Plovers worked their way busily through the cattle footprints. There was also a group of 5 Little Stint, Black-winged Stilt, a few Wood Sandpipers and one Common Sandpiper, one Grey-headed Gull, one Common Moorhen, one Pied Avocet and a small group of African Spoonbills. All the egrets were present and a

fair number of Blacksmith Lapwings and African Wattled Lapwings. The only raptors were African Fish-eagle and a Black-shouldered Kite.

Our stroll through the woodland and back along the road produced Long-crested Eagle, Grey Penduline-tit, Yellow-fronted Canary, Purple-banded Sunbird, Variable Sunbird, White-bellied Sunbird, Scarlet-chested Sunbird and Amethyst Sunbird, Black Cuckooshrike, Willow Warbler and Striped Kingfisher. Orange-breasted Bush-shrike called continually.

From the road, we went back to the shore nearer the dam wall to follow the shoreline back to the meeting point but found only Three-banded Plover, African Jacana and more Wood Sandpipers plus five male Southern Pochards.

At the call, the other group added Red-chested Cuckoo, Lilac-breasted Roller, etc. and we reached a total of 82 species for the morning.

Ken Dixon

WALK ON MONA VALE VLEI, Sunday 18th November 2018

Although we have had very little rain, thanks to the Municipality's failure to repair broken pipes, part of the vlei is already flooded as those without gumboots can testify. And bird life is certainly there as our list of 51 species proves. There is little sign of breeding plumages yet but the Yellow-mantled Widowbirds' tails are getting longer. The most welcome sighting for most of us was a pair of newly arrived Red-backed Shrike and there were a few Abdim's Storks. Cuckoo Finch, Pale-crowned Cisticola and Capped Wheatear were other interesting sightings indicative of the season but the Diderick's Cuckoo and Black Coucal seen by Jimmy during the week did not show.

Another productive walk on the Ramsar site still threatened by greedy developers despite its status.

Ken Dixon



Cuckoo Finch © Ian Riddell

Birding trip in Kariba by the BLZ Youth Club and the BirdLife Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE)

Over the weekend of 26-28 October, 3 members of the BLZ Youth club, namely Ronnie Chirimuta, Abigail Karimanzira and John Zhuwao, were invited by their BirdLife Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE) counterparts to Kariba for a bird watching expedition. The journey to Kariba started late and this resulted in the crew only arriving after 10 p.m. at Nyamhunga Primary School where we were staying. Although tired when we arrived this did not stop the enthusiastic young birders from identifying the call of the African Wattled Lapwing that could be heard in the distance.

On Saturday morning before everyone woke up, Ronnie, Abigail and John left Nyamhunga Primary at 5 a.m. and headed towards the woodland that is adjacent to the Kariba turnoff. On the way to this woodland, a coucal flew into a tree and started calling. Everyone thought that this was a Senegal Coucal but on closer inspection a distinct white eyebrow was seen, making it a White-browed Coucal. As we were still looking at the bird a dove flew past us, John and Ronnie thought this was a Red-eyed Dove but Abigail stated that the bird was different from the more common Red-eyed Dove. Sure enough, the dove started calling and this bird was the African Mourning Dove. We then headed for our intended woodland and on arrival we had stunning views of Southern Carmine Bee-eaters. Three lifers within a few minutes was a good start for the group. 24 bird species were recorded in an hour of bird-watching and some of the recorded species included White-browed Scrub-robin, Black-crowned Tchagra, Yellow-billed Kite, White-browed Sparrow-weaver and Brown-hooded Kingfisher. On the way back to Nyamhunga Primary School 2 Mosque Swallows, Meves's Starlings, Wire-tailed Swallows and 2 Meyer's Parrots were identified.

After breakfast and a "cold" shower, everyone headed off to the dam wall, picking up Mr Laiton Kandiwire on the way, our guide for the day. Unfortunately, we did not get on the dam wall as some members of the group had left their IDs at Nyamhunga Primary. After this disappointment, we got onto the BUSE school bus and drove to the Crocodile Farm, spotting

11 Elephants along the road. On arrival, we recorded Marabou Storks and Yellow-billed Storks, Lilac-breasted Roller, Black-winged Stilt, Hamerkop, Little Egret and Helmeted Guineafowls. BUSE members were fascinated by an enormous Hamerkop nest. After the crocodile farm we drove to the banks of the Zambezi River where various waterbirds were present and this made it easier for the BirdLife BUSE members to try their identification skills. Some birds seen included Green-backed Heron, Wood Sandpiper, White-fronted Bee-eater, White-crowned Lapwing, African Jacana, Kittlitz's Plovers, African Fish-eagle and Whiskered Tern. Two Water Thick-knees were present and from their behaviour it appeared as if they were nesting as they were trying to fend off a Hippo whenever it got close to them. Looking closely at the Hippo, we discovered that there was a Red-billed Oxpecker on its back. After this interesting experience, we headed back to Nyamhunga Primary for lunch and on the way saw African Grey Hornbills and a White-backed Vulture soaring with Marabou Storks.

After lunch, thinking we were done with our birding for the day we went to Tamarind to swim, a memorable experience and a great way to cool off after a long hot day. After the swim, Crowned Hornbills and Red-billed Hornbills were seen flying above us and an African Fish-eagle was heard calling. We would have preferred to see the Southern Ground-hornbill instead of the other hornbills but luck was not on our side and it eluded us during the weekend. Following this, we headed back to Nyamhunga for supper, which was followed by a braai.

Next morning Abigail and Ronnie went birding close to Nyamhunga Primary and recorded Red-billed Firefinch, Green-winged Pytilia, Emerald-spotted Wood-dove, White-browed Robin-chat and 57+ Marabou Storks. On the way back to Nyamhunga Primary, Southern Masked-weaver and Village Weavers were seen, together with Glossy Ibis and African Sacred Ibis, whilst an African Reed-warbler and Red-faced Cisticolas were heard calling.

The dam wall was finally visited on Sunday morning and it is a majestic structure. Birds were observed on the wall and the species seen were Little Swifts, Lesser Striped Swallows, African Pied Wagtail, Brown-throated Martin and a Peregrine Falcon. A water monitor was seen struggling to eat a Little Swift that it had caught.

The drive back to Harare was characterized by different eyes looking into the surrounding

woodland in search of the elusive Southern Ground-hornbill but the bird was not to be seen.

In total 86 bird species were recorded throughout the weekend. Thanks to BirdLife BUSE Committee for organizing such a wonderful trip, Bindura University for availing their bus to transport the young birders, Julia Pierini and BirdLife Zimbabwe for supporting the BLZ Youths in their activities and to Nyamhunga Primary School for providing accommodation for the young group.

John Zhuwao

Matabeleland

Bulawayo Golf Course 3rd November 2018

On a somewhat blustery and chilly morning in early November, just six people turned out for the bird walk on the Bulawayo Golf Course. We set off a little after 7 a.m. and with the weather, I really wasn't convinced that we would see much. However, by the time we got to the end of the entrance road, we had already seen 12 species and there was a lot more to come! The walk lasted about 2½ hours and during that time we managed to tick off 44 species, which included a Wahlberg's Eagle perched at its nest! This was a really rewarding walk for those who braved the elements, beanies and all! Thank you for turning out.

A list of birds seen is as follows

1. Blue Waxbill, 07:26
2. Black-collared Barbet, 07:26
3. Red-faced Mousebird, 07:27
4. White-browed Sparrow-weaver, 07:27
5. Golden Weaver, 07:28
6. Spotted Flycatcher, 07:29
7. Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler, 07:29
8. Brown-crowned Tchagra, 07:30
9. Cut-throat Finch, 07:31
10. Scaly-feathered Finch, 07:35
11. Tawny-flanked Prinia, 07:35
12. Crested Barbet, 07:40
13. Kurrichane Thrush, 07:40
14. Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, 07:46
15. European Bee-eater, 07:46
16. Laughing Dove, 07:48

17. Long-billed Crombec, 07:55
18. Green Wood-hoopoe, 07:57
19. Fork-tailed Drongo, 07:57
20. Pied Crow, 07:58
21. Dark-capped Bulbul, 07:58
22. Grey-backed Camaroptera, 08:01
23. White-bellied Sunbird, 08:02
24. Black-backed Puffback, 08:03
25. Red-billed Quelea, 08:05
26. Long-tailed Paradise-whydah, 08:05
27. Greater Blue-eared Starling, 08:06
28. Common Myna, 08:07
29. Tropical Boubou, 08:10
30. White-browed Robin-chat, 08:12
31. Green-winged Pytilia, 08:12
32. African Hoopoe, 08:16
33. Brown-hooded Kingfisher, 08:18
34. Groundscraper Thrush, 08:22
35. Swainson's Spurfowl, 08:25
36. Hamerkop, 08:27
37. Black-headed Heron, 08:32
38. Red-eyed Dove, 08:33
39. Scarlet-chested Sunbird, 09:20
40. African Palm-swift, 08:46
41. Wahlberg's Eagle, 08:46
42. Common Scimitarbill, 08:53
43. Red-headed Weaver, 08:53
44. Southern Masked-weaver, 08:56

Karen Learmonth

Chairperson

BirdLife Zimbabwe Matabeleland Branch

National

Birding Big Day 2018

Ian Riddell

Part I

It was a quieter BBD this year but I'm sure all those who joined in had fun, whether they dashed about like Peregrine Falcons or pootled around like Crested Francolins. We only had 12 teams (22 last year) and 7 of those used BirdLasser, where we could follow their 'ticks' online. All teams did 24 hours, some staggered over Saturday into Sunday, whilst the BirdLasser event was restricted to 00h00 to 23h59 on Saturday 24th November.

BirdLasser 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 and 2017 BirdLasser created an 'event' in Southern Africa for BBD whereby all records were uploaded in real-time to the site where anyone could keep track of teams' progress and the birds seen.

This year teams covered Harare, Bulawayo, Victoria Falls, Kadoma, Shamva, Vumba and Chimanimani. A spreadsheet is available on our BLZ site for those who would like to explore the results in more detail.

Congratulations to the winning team, *YAB Harare Harriers!* They birded around Harare with a total of 192.

Links:

<https://www.birdlasser.com/events/bbd2018zim24> (click in the **Position** box to show or hide the birds on the map; hover your mouse over any drop pin to see the species).

http://www.birdlifezimbabwe.org/b_conservation_11_sur.html Download the results on an excel file where you can filter detail you would like to see. Hopefully it will be on the site by the end of the month, or shortly thereafter.

Results – Birding Big Day 2018

Table 1. Overall list ranking on number of species

Position	Species	Team name	Leader	Area
1	192	YAB Harare Harriers	J. Blake	Harare
2	138	Umgoosers	A. Randell	Bulawayo
3	138	Vic Falls Turacos	G. Blair	Victoria Falls
4	108	Bunny Huggers	J. Brebner	Bulawayo
5	91	Kanyenganyenga Stars	J. Muropa	Shamva
6	91	Charama Chicks	S. Stone	Kadoma
7	90	Wiggwells	P. Wiggins	Harare
8	81	TJ	T. Wood	Harare
9	76	Dashing Dikkops	S. Hind	Harare
10	65	Louw Toppies	I. Louw	Harare
11	54	Mhandambiri Creepers	R. Chirimuta	Vumba
12	53	C.T.A.	T. Mudhluvi	Chimanimani
The teams that used BirdLasser				

PART II – THE ORNITHOLOGICAL RESULTS

345 species were recorded (298 on the BirdLasser leader board). The Dashing Dikkops had some suspect records: their Yellow-crowned Bishop was taken to be a mis-tick for Yellow Bishop and the Lesser Masked-weaver from Haka is in need of verification. The weaver is included in the total and doesn't affect their position, even if incorrect. Unfortunately, they didn't send in an entry form with contact details; *please would all teams do so, even if joining via BirdLasser.*

With the African Darter suffering from netting in the Harare area it was no surprise that it was unrecorded by most teams; only the Bunny Huggers (Bulawayo) and Vic Falls Turacos found it.

Bulawayo, Victoria Falls and Kadoma teams found Yellow-billed Egret, but only Kadoma had Black Heron. YAB Harare Harriers got Black-crowned Night-heron and Kanyenganyenga Stars were at Hippo Pools, a prime spot for White-backed Night-heron. Bunny Huggers were lucky enough to find Little Bittern.

The only Black Stork was seen by the Charama Chicks, but Abdim's Stork was ticked by 5 Harare teams and Umgoosers in Bulawayo. The Saddle-billed Stork proved difficult with the Bunny Huggers of Bulawayo the only team to find it, whilst Vic Falls Turacos were the sole recorder of Marabou Stork. Charama Chicks got Glossy Ibis, but both Umgoosers and Vic Falls Turacos found Hadedda Ibis – the Bulawayo record is a nice one.

White-backed Ducks were elusive and only found in Bulawayo by the Bunny Huggers and Umgoosers, and African Black Duck was only seen at Vumba by the Mhandambiri Creepers. Hottentot Teal also hid themselves with only one Harare team and the Vic Falls Turacos finding them, and the African Pygmy-goose was only seen at Bulawayo by the Bunny Huggers. The Spur-winged Goose was also tricky and only seen by the Vic Falls Turacos.

The Hooded Vulture was confined to Victoria Falls, whilst the White-backed Vulture was found there and by 2 Bulawayo teams. Two Bulawayo teams, one Harare team and Vic Falls Turacos managed to get Yellow-billed Kite, and the latter also found Black Kite. I presume a

Matopos trip turned up the Verreaux's Eagle for the Bunny Huggers, and around Bulawayo, the Umgoosers found the Lesser Spotted Eagle and African Hawk-eagle, whilst the only Tawny Eagle, Bateleur and African Goshawk were seen at Hippo Pools, this followed by the only Osprey, seen by the Vic Falls Turacos.

YAB Harare Harriers found Peregrine Falcon and them and TJ got Lanner Falcons, all around Harare. Vic Falls Turacos was the only team that saw Eurasian Hobby and YAB Harare Harriers the Amur Falcon.

The Red-necked Spurfowl is seldom heard about these days so it was nice that the Mhandambiri Creepers found it at Vumba, along this the only Buff-spotted Flufftail, whilst at Chimanimani team C.T.A. got Kurrichane Buttonquail.

The Charama Chicks were happy to find Greater Painted-snipe and Green Sandpiper, whilst YAB Harare Harriers found Common Ringed Plover, Pied Avocet and Collared Pratincole. White-crowned Lapwings and Rock Pratincole were restricted to Victoria Falls and a nice Harare record was the Bronze-winged Courser found by Wigwells.

Ngomakurira yielded up Speckled Pigeon for YAB Harare Harriers, and whilst Tambourine Doves were claimed for Harare, Hippo Pools and Vumba, the Lemon Dove was only recorded at the latter site. Vumba and Chimanimani turned up the Livingstone's Turaco.

Hippo Pools had African Emerald Cuckoo but only YAB Harare Harriers managed to find Black Coucals and Vic Falls Turacos the White-browed Coucal.

Victoria Falls and Hippo Pools got African Wood-owls and the Umgoosers and Charama Chicks had Southern White-faced Scops-owl. Verreaux's Eagle-owl was noted by Umgoosers and Kanyenganyenga Stars.

YAB Harare Harriers found the Freckled Nightjar at Ngomakurira, which is nice since they are there but not frequently seen. Even nicer, in this day and age, was the Pennant-winged Nightjar found by the Charama Chicks!

African Black Swift was only seen at Victoria Falls, where race *hollidayi* may one day be found

to be a separate species; the eastern highlands teams failed to find their swift.

Kanyenganyenga Stars got Narina Trogon, Half-collared Kingfisher and Swallow-tailed Bee-eater at Hippo Pools, whilst Umgoosers and Vic Falls Turacos had Woodland Kingfisher. Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills were restricted to Bulawayo this year.

Vumba and Chimanimani had a list of other 'specials' including White-eared Barbet, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, Square-tailed Drongo, Stripe-cheeked Greenbul, Olive Thrush, Cape Robin-chat, White-starred Robin, Swynnerton's Robin and others, and Harare turned up miombo birds such as Whyte's Barbet, Miombo Rock-thrush, Miombo Tit, etc. The White-throated Swallow was seen by Louw Toppies in Harare.

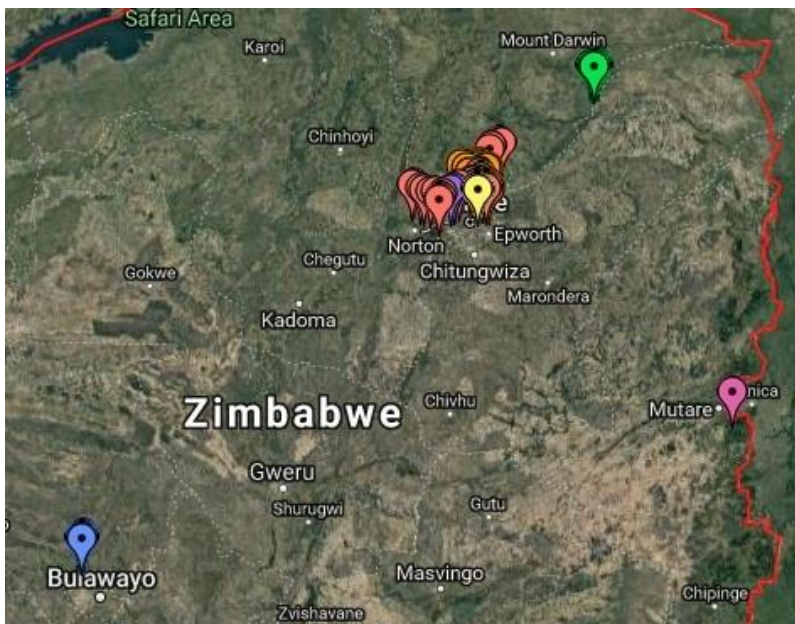
The Collared Palm-thrush was noted at Victoria Falls and Hippo Pools - there a very few records from the latter area.

The Broad-tailed Warbler from Haka Park is a nice record and Grey Tit-flycatcher was only

seen in the Kadoma area. Black-throated Wattle-eye was found at Hippo Pools and by two Harare teams, and Rosy-throated Longclaw was also seen by two Harare teams. Lesser Grey Shrike was ticked from Bulawayo and Harare, as was Common Myna, by two teams in both cities. Red-billed Oxpecker was only found by Vic Falls Turacos and Copper Sunbird by YAB Harare Harriers.

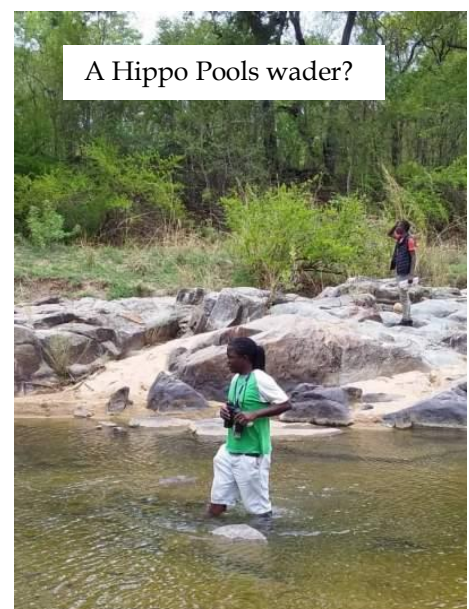
Black-faced Waxbill was restricted to Bulawayo and Orange-breasted Waxbill to both the main cities. Two Harare teams were lucky enough to find Magpie Mannikin.

This year's common bird was the Black-backed Puffback, seen by all teams. The Tropical Boubou, White-browed Robin-chat and Dark-capped Bulbul were next, seen by 11 teams. There was quite a list, 115 species, only seen once! More details on these and other birds on the excel file you can download from the BLZ website.



The map from the BirdLasser site, showing where teams were active for BBD 2018.

Harare was well covered.



Birding Big Day - Kanyenganyenga Stars visit to Hippo Pools

By K. Chiro, J. Muropa, J. Zhuwao

On 24 November 2018, an exuberant Kanyenganyenga Stars team consisting of Jimmy Muropa, John Zhuwao, Karen Chiro and John Vekris travelled to Hippo Pools in Umfurudzi to take part in the annual Birding Big Day competition. There was a great feeling of

anticipation and excitement on the way to Umfurudzi as all the team members were venturing into unfamiliar territory, with one shared goal of finding as many different bird species as possible, including lifers.

Hippo Pools Wilderness Camp is located inside the Umfurudzi Safari Area, 150 kilometres northeast of Harare (www.hippopools.co.zw)



Kanyenganyenga Stars with Tadius Ndadziira, Hippo Pools bird guide

Upon arrival at the camp, we were graciously welcomed by the Hippo Pools staff and introduced to Tadius Ndadziira, who was to be our companion and guide for the main bird walk the following morning. The campsite allocated to us was set in a beautiful environment with a great view overlooking the Mazowe River, only a few metres away. We quickly erected our tents and proceeded to prepare and later enjoy a well-earned supper, under the trees and the stars. Just after midnight, team Kanyenganyenga went to sleep to the sounds of the hooting African Wood-owl and that became the first entry on our Birding Big Day list.

On D-day, we woke up very early, to the calls of the Black-backed Puffback and a female African Goshawk in a nest on top of a nearby tree, demanding food from its mate. And, once we got up, it was a sight to behold various water bird species making an appearance on a little island on the Mazowe River, right across from our campsite. The birds included the Green-backed Heron, a Pied Kingfisher, Reed Cormorants, many Village Weavers and even a White-backed Night-heron.

At 0545 hours we set off, through the surrounding woodland and across to the nearby Umfurudzi River. The Livingstone's Flycatcher greeted us early on, not far from our campsite, but unfortunately, we could only hear it, never see it, high up in the tree canopy! When we reached Umfurudzi River, which is very low but

still flowing at this time of the year, we walked downstream to the confluence with the Mazowe River. Whilst sauntering along the partly dry riverbed, a Half-collared Kingfisher flew gracefully by and all team members were in awe as they were able to see clearly the bright colours of this beautiful bird. Back inside the surrounding woodland, Jimmy spotted a big Verreaux's Eagle-owl roosting on a tall, old Acacia tree and all the birders had a great view of the magnificent bird. Soon afterwards, we came across a lone Crowned Hornbill surveying the area atop another tree.

This was an invigorating and rewarding early morning birding walk, as Tadius helped the Harare birders to familiarise themselves with new bird species and their calls, and each member eagerly noted down the various finds. During this time, Team Kanyenganyenga actually learnt to identify the call of the Narina Trogon, the Red-chested Cuckoo (with its monotonous but distinct 'piet-my-vrou' call,) and the Grey-backed Camaroptera, which kept calling in the distance. 74 bird species were recorded during the three-hour walk and team members were able to check off several personal lifers.



Spotting hippos as well as birds!

After taking a breather, and enjoying a substantial brunch, we drove further afield to another section of Hippo Pools called T32, and walked further upstream along the Umfurudzi River. Walking along the banks of the river, the team came across raptors hovering and gliding about in the sky, including the Wahlberg's Eagle, the Bateleur, Steppe Buzzard and what we identified as a Tawny Eagle. It was quite a splendid scene as the four intrepid birders were able to clearly distinguish and differentiate the

various species of raptors present. As the team walked further along the river, the calls of the Narina Trogon could again be heard and another 14 bird species were recorded in this area, including the Bearded Scrub-robin and the Red-headed Weaver.

With the sun beginning to set, a visit to a nearby dam resulted in three more bird species being found, namely the Giant Kingfisher, the Red-billed Firefinch and the African Wattled

Lapwing, bringing our total up to 91 bird species.

All in all, team Kanyenganyenga Stars managed to turn the cumbersome challenge of walking several kilometres in difficult conditions into a fun-filled and rewarding expedition where a large number of species were recorded, while we had fun and appreciated the importance and beauty of nature in our very own Zimbabwe.

Mhandambiri Creepers, Vumba



BirdLife Zimbabwe Youth Club members Ronnie Chirimuta, Abigail Karimanzira, Farirai Jemwa and Vengai Dengu, who made up the Mhandambiri Creepers, travelled with Julia and Carla Pierini on 24 November 2018 to Seldomseen in Vumba to take part in the Birding Big Day (BBD) event that was taking place on 25 November. Buluwesi, the local guide at Seldomseen, welcomed everyone when we arrived. Buluwesi was going to be our guide on the BBD and show us the area on the morning of BBD.

The Mhandambiri Creepers were woken up next morning by the call of the Livingstone's Turaco; other birds seen and recorded near our cottage include Red-chested Cuckoo, Eastern Miombo Sunbird (previously known as Miombo Double-collared Sunbird) and Bar-throated Apalis. An unfamiliar call was heard and we later learnt from Buluwesi that it was the Orange Ground-thrush.

Weather elements were not in favour of the young birders as there were light showers and a thick mist throughout the day. However, this did not deter the Mhandambiri Creepers! Birds recorded in the morning's birding session include Square-tailed Drongo, Cape Batis, Willow Warbler, Chirinda Apalis, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher and White-starred Robin. All birds seen and heard were recorded on the

BirdLasser application (if you don't use the application please start using it, it's a great way to record your birds).

Most birds recorded are Eastern Highlands specials and were lifers for our group. It wouldn't be a trip to Seldomseen without getting the Swynnerton's Robin and fortunately the bird was seen and heard. A Buff-spotted Flufftail was heard and this was a treat. Vengai Dengu spotted a Black-fronted Bush-shrike, the first of 3 seen during the

day.

A short break for breakfast was taken and when we resumed our birding, we went to the Vumba Botanical Gardens. On the way African Stonechats, Pin-tailed Whydahs, Common Waxbills, Tropical Boubou and Spectacled Weaver were recorded.

At the entrance to the Vumba Botanical Gardens, a Tambourine Dove was seen flying whilst 2 Red-throated Twinspots were seen on the ground. Light rain showers had been continuous but the moment we got into the Botanical Gardens it changed to a drizzle. This made birding difficult but we soldiered on. Black-backed Puffback, Kurrichane Thrush, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and White-browed Robin-chat were recorded at the Vumba Botanical Gardens.

After the Botanical Gardens, the team drove to Leopard Rock and here we managed to identify the Common Fiscal, African Black Ducks, Little Grebe, African Jacana and a Trumpeter Hornbill. Samango Monkeys were seen and this was a welcome change from the Vervet Monkeys that are regular in other parts of the country. It then started raining heavily and birding became impossible.

A total of 68 species was recorded on Birding Big Day, which is far less than what we expected.

The Raptor Research Foundation Conference 2018

Merlyn Nomusa Nkomo

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The Raptor Research Foundation (RRF) is a membership based non-profit scientific society formed in 1965. Annually, a conference is held in which members from all over the world meet at a chosen venue for a few days. The purpose of the organisation and consequently the conference is to share and disseminate scientific knowledge in order to inform scientists and the public of the role of raptors and promote current conservation action.

Kruger National Park in South Africa was this year's host of the RRF annual conference, making history as the first time the conference was held on the African continent. The RRF is not a small group of scientists; it has a membership of about 900 people from 50 countries, over 275 people registered from 37 countries to attend the conference this year. The conference hosts, Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), RRF and BirdLife South Africa were amazed at the huge turn out and representation, but realised that Kruger National Park had an allure that many could not resist. Different people with different interests but a common cause for raptor conservation converged at Kruger, students; field scientists; university professors and staff; computer experts; anthropologists; falconers and many more, all with

information to share with the raptor research community. This year's main focus was vulture conservation although many other symposia were held concurrently and every aspect in the current trends of raptor research was covered. About 136 papers were presented: 7 workshops by experts; 60 posters by researchers and 3 plenary talks were given by veterans in raptor research, Munir Virani (Peregrine Fund), Keith Bildstein (Hawk Mountain Sanctuary) and William Bowerman (University of Maryland). The conference program was packed and fast paced, with tough decisions to be made to attend between 3, sometimes 5, seminar venues.

For an early career raptor biologist like me, the atmosphere was electric. All the greatest raptor research minds and ornithologists of the past, present and future were in the same place for a whole week, it was definitely the place to be! Tea breaks and meal times were the only very vital times when one could get the opportunity to network and meet new and old friends. All the delegates, no matter what age or stage in their career were very warm and friendly, eager to make friends and share each other's work. Everybody seemed to share the sentiment expressed by Keith Bildstein in his plenary talk when he said "*Collaborate or die!*"



On the first day of the conference, workshops were conducted and unfortunately, out of 7 workshops on offer, each delegate had time to attend only two, which were chosen according to interest expressed at the time of registration. I attended two of the workshops the first being:

Global review of raptor trapping, banding (ringing), tagging and tracking.

This workshop was facilitated by Munir Virani and José Tavares. It was a very interactive workshop with attendants splitting into three groups and discussing issues dealing with raptor marking and tracking. The groups were tasked with discussing problems they knew of and possible solutions to them and in a second leg of discussions, were tasked with comparing their countries' regulation systems with those of the United States of America and Canada. Group representatives made presentations when we all reconvened and interesting ideas and solutions arose. The next workshop I attended was:

Using drones to study raptors – by David Bird, Lourens Leeuwner and Mattheuns Pretorius.

Drones have become increasingly available and affordable over the years and with all the improvements to their technology and accessibility to different markets, various uses for them have emerged. I had a very narrow view of the potential of drones in raptor studies until David Bird presented the numerous ways drones have been useful in fieldwork and the massive potential they still have. EWT for example, is using drones to mitigate collisions with high-risk powerlines. These missions are usually very dangerous and costly, with a whole section of powerline being shut down for hours and a truck hired to lift workers up to the powerline; sometimes workers have to work from the edge of a helicopter and fit visibility flappers. EWT has innovated a new way of doing this using just a drone and an extension that has the flappers attached to it, hooking them onto the powerline upon contact. This is

very safe, cost effective and no power is cut while the job is being done. Drones are at the cutting edge of science, tackling inaccessible jobs, or doing what was too taxing in the past. However, their widespread use and increased affordability had become a cause of concern with governments and tough restrictions on their use have been instigated in many countries. Drones do have safety and security concern, but have the potential of changing the landscape of field research, especially for raptors. For this reason, we were urged to engage our governments to consider this when formulating policy and regulations, so that research efforts may not be hampered by tough regulations.



After seeing the quality of papers, presentations, talks and posters presented, I must say it was a privilege for me to present a poster on a project I am a part of in Zimbabwe. I presented the poster together with my professor, Prof. Peter J. Mundy, with whom I attended the conference. The co-authors on the poster showed how different institutions and organisations in Zimbabweans are collaborating on vulture conservation. The project incited interest in many that visited the poster; interesting questions were asked leading to interesting research ideas. I noticed that for most students (representing their universities and projects), myself included, the poster sessions were a good opportunity to present their work, get fresh ideas, create networks with possible collaborators and gain confidence in participating in an international event of this magnitude. For this reason, I encourage organisations with interns and young scientists to empower and support them in attending such events to ensure that Zimbabwe gets good representation on the global stage and improves their calibre. I was also glad to meet fellow past

trainees of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, it was inspiring to see the work they are doing and attend their presentations and posters. This goes to show the importance of traineeships and mentorships in helping young people realise their potential in science.



I would like to thank Professor Peter Mundy for introducing the conference to me (I did not know about it) and pushing to make sure I attended. I would especially like to thank Julia Pierini and BirdLife Zimbabwe for support and sourcing funds for my registration and travel expenses. BirdLife Zimbabwe is very supportive of young people from student stage to after graduation, they have continued to support me in many ways and I hope they continue to do this for many others pursuing careers in ornithology and conservation. I would also like to

thank Josephine Mundava-Maringa of the National University of Science and Technology for her help in the creation of our project poster and the co-authors, Ngoni Chiweshe, Fadzai Matsvimbo, Peter Mundy and Ranga Huruba, for being a part of this project and keeping it going from year to year. The next RRF conference will be held from the 5th - 9th November 2019 in Fort Collins, Colorado, USA. I encourage all interested to register and attend, especially students, as it is a great opportunity. I also encourage students to prepare for and plan to take part in the Pan African Ornithological Congress, which will be in Victoria Falls in the year 2020, for the first time ever in Zimbabwe.

Links:

1. Conference with the abstracts of all the papers, speed talks, workshops, presentations and posters presented:

https://raptorresearchfoundation.org/files/2018/11/2018_conference_book.pdf

2. Raptor research foundation membership info:

<https://raptorresearchfoundation.org/membership/>

Mashonaland West – Kadoma report

OCTOBER & NOVEMBER 2018

Photos and text by Sigrid Stone/Ruth Paice/Maggie Parrock

The Charama Chicks have enjoyed several interesting bird outings in recent months, grateful thanks to Sigrid Stone for giving of her time and kindly providing transport.

A mere 5 km drive from Eiffel Flats, the Muraga Wilderness (Charama) always provides a good day's birding. During the drier months, one can record a good number of bird species drinking at the various pans and small dams dotted throughout the property – Bushbuck pan being a firm favourite!

Of interest is the migrant European Honey-buzzard that provides much excitement as we drive through the tall woodland area between the Muraga Wilderness entrance gate and Charama Dam. This bird has been returning to the Charama woodlands for eight or more years. Each summer we eagerly anticipate its return – and it remains as elusive and camera shy as ever! It is possible that there could be more than

one of this bird species that rely on the extensive Charama woodlands for their winter migratory destination?

Bird species of interest that we have seen or heard during our various visits to Charama during the months of October and November are as follows:

Charama – Bushbuck Pan

A leucistic Dark-capped Bulbul, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater (03/09/18), Violet-eared Waxbill, Red-throated Twinspot, African Harrier-hawk, Natal Spurrow, Helmeted Guineafowl, Thick-billed Weaver, White-winged Widowbird, Greater Honeyguide and Lesser Honeyguide, African Yellow White-eye, Green-winged Pytilia, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, Black-crowned Tchagra and Brown-crowned Tchagra, Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler, Southern Masked-weaver and Spectacled Weaver, Striped Kingfisher, Emerald-Spotted

Wood-dove and Namaqua Dove, Brimstone Canary, Yellow-breasted Apalis, African Hoopoe, Long-billed Crombec, Golden-breasted Bunting, Bearded Scrub-robin and White-browed Scrub-robin, Pied Wagtail, Rattling Cisticola, African Paradise-flycatcher, Southern Black Flycatcher and Ashy Flycatcher, Grey Tit-flycatcher, Klaas's Cuckoo and Red-chested Cuckoo, Bearded Woodpecker, Hamerkop, Red-faced Mousebird, Yellow-throated Petronia, Tropical Boubou, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Terrestrial Brownbul and Violet-backed Starling.



It was interesting to observe a group of Bronze Mannikins that spent an extensive period of time probing and apparently finding some food source amongst mats of damp pondweed around the pool periphery. Ian Riddell suggested that they could in fact be eating the algae.

Charama Dam

In the latter part of October, we recorded one lone Spur-winged Goose, which appeared to have joined up with a flock of over 200 Comb Ducks. We have seen these ducks with regularity at the dam, dabbling in the shallows. Other birds recorded were as follows: Yellow-billed Stork (8), Grey Heron (2), African Fish-eagle, African Cuckoo Hawk, Three-banded Plover, Common Sandpiper & Wood Sandpiper, Pied Avocet (3), Black-winged Stilt, Striped Kingfisher and Brown-hooded Kingfisher.

Of interest were 3 raucous Broad-billed Rollers, two of which were in the throes of courtship which culminated in their mating ... and we had front row seats! Their intended nest-site was noted in a skeletal *Acacia galpinii* tree that stands in the water in front of the lodge. It was magical to hear an African Fish-eagle calling at the far end of the dam. Sadly, we are

seeing markedly fewer of these magnificent raptors in the district than in previous years.



Around the lodge area, many bird species could be seen busy foraging in the boughs of the Monkey Thorn, Fig and Red Milkwood trees. No doubt enjoying the cool shade and freshly watered lawn! It was here that we saw an exquisite emerald green Klaas's Cuckoo moving through the foliage with what looked like a juvenile of the same species ... is this considered an unusual sighting? We need to spend more time at this spot!

Mandalay Dam (05/11/18)

An early morning drive to Mandalay Dam, a short distance from Kadoma, proved worthwhile, with several interesting bird species recorded there. This dam has a generous covering of waterlilies and large stretches of bulrushes growing on the periphery. An ideal habitat and refuge for many waterbird species. Sadly, there is an ever-increasing amount of human activity around this dam. Despite this, it still supports a good variety of bird species. Birds recorded were as follows: White-faced Ducks (100), Red-billed Teal (8), African Pygmy-goose (7), Black Crake (8), Common Moorhen (21), Greater Painted-snipe (1), African Purple Swamphen (1), Squacco Heron (1), Black-winged Stilt (1), African Jacana (9), Pied Kingfisher (2), Red-knobbed Coot (immature 1), Yellow-throated Longclaw, Flappet Lark, Croaking Cisticola, Bushveld Pipit, Jacobin Cuckoo & Klaas's Cuckoo, White-winged Widowbird, Common Waxbill, Red-faced Mousebird and Tropical Boubou.

Many other more common bird species were seen.

Pasi Dam (12/11/18)

The weather was warm with beautiful blue skies overhead when we arrived at this picturesque dam. In recent years, there has been a huge increase in human activity around Pasi. Cattle come down from surrounding resettled

villages to water and graze couch grass growing on the dam periphery. Netting is a problem. Water is pumped into the Pasi from Claw Dam, thereby ensuring that the quality of the water is consistently good year round. A huge expanse of waterlilies covers most of the upper reaches of the dam – a breath-taking spectacle when in bloom!



African Harrier-hawk, Kadoma

We took up a position on the southern side of the dam, alongside the upper reaches. We watched a flock of well over 100 White-faced Ducks being repeatedly disturbed by villagers fishing and trapping fish in the shallows. The following birds of interest were recorded: Great Egret (3), Yellow-billed Egret (1), Little Egret (1), Reed Cormorant (7), African Jacana (25), Little Grebe (2), African Wattled Lapwing (4), Blacksmith Lapwing (3), Black-winged Stilt (4), Pied Kingfisher (1), Broad-billed Roller (2) and Kurrichane Buttonquail (1).



Thick-billed Weavers have reached Kadoma

A mystery raptor hovering over the far end of the dam was initially thought to be a juvenile African Fish-eagle. As it moved closer to our position on the southern shoreline, we realized it was in fact an Osprey! Our first sighting ever of this beautiful raptor – a fantastic addition to our list! Subsequent to this moment of excitement and awe, we retrieved a dead cuckoo (either an African or Common Cuckoo) from a group of children. It had been found next to a grove of

large *Diospyros* trees growing on the edge of the dam. It had been dead for several hours and was very obviously emaciated. The children had started removing its feathers and we are uncertain whether it had died from natural causes (starvation?) or had in fact been killed by somebody with a catapult. We froze the bird and it was taken to Harare for identification.



Southern White-crowned Shrike, Doreen's Pride

Eiffel Flats

Black-chested Snake-eagles can often be seen soaring over the Eiffel Flats mining village and surrounding farmland. At night, it is a pleasure to listen to the screech of Barn Owls. In recent months, African Banded Owlets can be heard calling during both daylight hours and at night. To our great joy, two Spotted Eagle-owls chose to roost in our Kenya shade tree during the months of September and October. Their departure from our yard early every evening caused much consternation amongst our other feathered garden residents! A Southern White-faced Scops-owl is calling with increasing regularity from an *Acacia karroo* tree growing on the roadside outside our property. A mournful, muffled catlike 'miaow' I wonder if this white-faced owl is possibly the mate of another bird of the same species that I found squashed on the road in this exact location almost a year ago? Marsh Owls can be seen whilst driving through the Eiffel Blue maize fields in the evening. Two recently returned Abdim's Storks were seen feeding in freshly ploughed lands last week. We eagerly await the arrival of the White Storks. 20+ Black-headed Herons were seen feeding in patches of grassland not far from the Abdim's Storks.

At the Eiffel Blue/Harare Road junction, a pair of Red-breasted Swallows has returned from their winter migration and has possibly already started nesting under the culvert.

Useful Contacts:

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Rarities Committee: Ian Riddell gemsaf@mango.zw 0772-117054
BLZ Library: piumosso@zol.co.zw 2304298; 2481496
Special Species: Peta Ditchburn specialspecies@blz.co.zw 0775-940714, 029-2230075
Mashonaland South: Margaret Parrock 068-22005 or her daughter Coralee 0772-739370
Eastern Districts: Sue Fenwick 0779-408557 ingram.sue@gmail.com
Mashonaland East Natural History Society: Chairman Peter Hadingham 024-2497035
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Honeyguide production: vacant

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

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

In addition, your involvement with data collection through atlassing and submission of records is invaluable. As a member you get the newsletter, *The Babbler*, every two months and two issues of *Honeyguide*, our internationally acclaimed journal, every membership year. All for a very reasonable annual fee.

Especially in these difficult economic times, donations towards any of our projects are always much appreciated and you may consider mentioning BLZ in your will!

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Some members are not informing us when they pay their subscription and when members deposit into the banks, the name shown on the statement is often only the first name and therefore we may not know who you are.

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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 tip for the car guard. 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. \$5 entrance fee for BLZ members, \$10 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 charge of \$2 per person at the door please.

Mashonaland Branch

BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Calendar of Events: FEBRUARY 2019

Saturday 2nd	Marlborough Vlei walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 3rd	Mukuvisi Woodlands walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Saturday 9th	Ballantyne Park -17.773196, 31.099709. Meet at entrance off Wellburn Drive.	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 17th	Monavale Vlei walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Thursday 21st	AGM, African Cuckoo Hawk talk and photos AGM followed by talk by James Ball, Avondale Sports Club.	Meet 5.30 for 6.00 p.m.
Sunday 24th	Haka Park	Meet at 07.00 a.m.

BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Calendar of Events: MARCH 2019

Saturday 2nd	Marlborough Vlei walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 3rd	Mukuvisi Woodlands walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Saturday 9th	Harare Botanic Gardens	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 17th	Monavale Vlei walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Thursday 21st	Trip to the Central Kalahari Game Reserve Presentation by Tony Wood, Avondale Sports Club.	Meet 5.30 for 6.00 p.m.
Sunday 24th	Goromonzi (Clive Moore-Gordon) Meet at Mukuvisi Woodlands car park.	Meet at 06.30 a.m.

For further information, please contact Tony Alegria, tonyalegria47@gmail.com 0772-438697 or 2490375 (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 147
April-May 2019 any time before the 15th March.*

DebShan Ranch, Shangani : A New Nesting Haven for African White-backed Vultures

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DebShan

The De Beers Shangani (Debshon) ranch in central Zimbabwean savanna (29°13'E, 19°36'S) (Huruba et al. 2017) is managed for both livestock production and wildlife conservation. A section of the ranch is dedicated to holistic grazing management (Huruba et al. 2018). Two thirds was given to the government for the resettlement of small holder farmers during the land reform program in the year 2000.



Part resettled area has Wabai hill, an IBA and the only Cape Vulture roosting and breeding site known in Zimbabwe. Since the resettlement, Cape Vultures disappeared from the cliff possibly due to persecution and noise. A new roosting area has not been located.



The Project

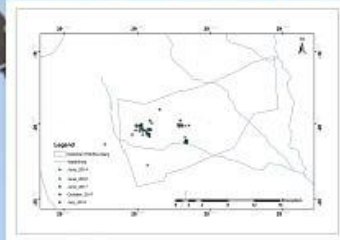
In 2014, 14 African White-backed Vulture nests were discovered on the ranch. Nesting surveys have been done to establish the importance of the ranch to breeding success, DebShan management re-established a vulture restaurant. Cape Vultures, Lappet-faced Vultures, Hooded Vultures and White-headed Vultures along with many other raptor species have been seen on the ranch. In 2016, a Lappet-faced Vulture bred on the ranch.

Cape Vultures on a loose colony of White-backed Vultures



Data collection

Breeding Survey Summary Map



Breeding Success

Nest numbers have increased from 14 active nests in June 2014 to 33 active nests in July 2018. The breeding success average is 73% per year.



Breeding pair on a nest



A peculiar chick, found hanging on a tree with nest sticks fallen, parent suspected to be an immature bird.

Other Raptors breeding include:



Juvenile Martial Eagle



One of a pair of breeding Secretary Birds

Mortalities

Some breeding attempts have been unsuccessful due to possible predation of eggs and chicks.



Pied-crow attempts to eat an egg



Predator of a dead chick perched on a branch



Predator on ground nest, possibly a bird, with the egg possibly eaten

Future plans

- To fit tracking devices on African White-backed vultures nesting on the ranch to understand their movement ecology and use of the resources provided by the ranch ecosystem throughout the year.
- To ring birds and put patagial tags.
- Use a drone camera in breeding surveys and camera trap at the vulture restaurant

Methodology

A total nest search is done biannually (June/July and October). First survey establishes occupancy and the second survey establishes nesting success.

Photography by Merlyn Nomusa Nkomo

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