

THE BABBLER

Newsletter of BirdLife Zimbabwe

April-May 2021 No. 159



eBird Global Big Day
– 3

AGM Notice – 4

Batoka Gorge & other
brief notes – 4

Mashonaland
News from the Branch
– 5

Mashonaland East
news – 5

Mashonaland West
news – 6

Tail Feathers – 9

Committee	MASHONALAND (Code 024)	MATABELELAND (Code 029)
Chairperson	Laurence Shadwell 0712-800905 adderley@iwayafrica.co.zw	John Brebner 0782-781108 brebnerj@acolchem.co.zw 2242634
Vice Chairperson	John Vekris 0772-381582 0779207325.jv@gmail.com	
Secretary	Patrick Shadwell 0715-979640 patrick.shadwell@gmail.com	Gaynor Lightfoot 0712-402341 gayetoes21@gmail.com
Treasurer	Donald Ruzungunde 0776-434877	Gaynor Lightfoot
Members	Geoff Lowe 0778-090632 d.i.systems@mweb.co.zw	Karen Learmonth 0772-231819 afspec@yoafrica.com 2244990 (w)
	Peter Verbakel 0787-357963 pwverbakel@gmail.com	Joan Banda (Youth) 0717-743691 joanbanda84@gmail.com
	Benhildah Antonio 0771-935954 benhildah16@gmail.com	Peter Makhusa (Youth) 0732-399651 peter.makhusa@gmail.com
	Jean-Michel Blake 0775-817114 frenchyjb@gmail.com	Helen Lewis 0772-262636 helen@betsiq.co.zw
Membership	Sylvia Muzavazi 2481496 (w) sylvia@blz.co.zw	Jenny Brebner 0783033505 brebsj@gmail.com
Babbler Editor	Ian Riddell 0772-117054 gemsaf@mango.zw	

National Office

Office hours: Monday to Friday 8.30 – 4.30

35 Clyde Road, Eastlea, P O Box RVL100, Runiville, Harare, Zimbabwe

Telephone: 024 – 2481496

E-mail: birds@zol.co.zw

Website: www.birdlifezimbabwe.org also www.facebook.com/BirdLifeZimbabwe

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

Julia Pierini
Sylvia Muzavazi
Fadzai Matsvimbo
Togarasei Fakarayi
Vengai Dengu

BirdLife Zimbabwe

The BirdLife International
Partner in Zimbabwe



National Global Big Day—8 May 2021



On 8 May, will you join birders from more than 175 countries and be a part of eBird's Global Big Day? You don't have to commit to birding for 24 hours - even 5 or 10 minutes of watching birds at home makes you part of the team. Last year, Global Big Day brought more birders together virtually than ever before. Help us break last year's records and make this year's Global Big Day bigger than ever before!

[Learn about Global Big Day 2021](#)

How to participate

- **Get an eBird account:** eBird is a worldwide bird checklist program used by millions of birders. It's what allows us to compile everyone's sightings into a single massive Global Big Day list - while at the same time collecting the data to help scientists better understand birds. [Sign up here.](#) It's 100% free from start to finish.
- **Watch birds on 8 May:** It's that simple. You don't need to be a bird expert or go out all day long, even 10 minutes of birding from home counts. Global Big Day runs from midnight to midnight in your local time zone. You can report what you find from anywhere in the world.
- **Enter what you see and hear in eBird:** You can enter your sightings [via our website](#) or download the [free eBird Mobile app](#) to make submitting lists even easier. Please enter your checklists before 11 May to be included in our initial results announcement.
- **Watch the sightings roll in:** During the day, follow along with sightings from more than 170 countries in real-time on our [Global Big Day page.](#)

Notice to All Members

Save the Date!

The **Annual General Meeting** of BirdLife Zimbabwe will take place in the Southeast Lowveld on Saturday 26 June 2021

Further details to follow. In the meantime, we're looking forward to meeting you all then.

1. Batoka Gorge

On 25 January 2021, BLZ together with our BirdLife partner in Zambia submitted a position paper highlighting our concerns on the development of the hydropower scheme on the Batoka Gorge World Heritage Site (IBA/Ramsar Site). We have shared it with the ESIA consultants but have also been sharing it widely - including to the UNESCO World Heritage Site committee.

2. On the wetland front, our advocacy work has now reached the highest levels of government, which is encouraging. However, there is still much to do in terms of tightening legislation and policy and reaching a consensus that in order to secure these fragile ecosystems, they need to be gazetted as ecologically sensitive with no development allowed on them and that they be restored to their natural state. There is a lot of pushback still on that issue as many contrasting interests involved.

3. With regard our vulture work, we are pressing ahead with the development of vulture safe zones in Save Conservancy (with a view to expanding throughout the SE and SW Lowveld partnering with stakeholders in Zimbabwe, but also in South Africa (Endangered Wildlife Trust and BirdLife South Africa) and Botswana (BirdLife Botswana, Raptors Botswana) and Gwayi Conservancy. This month we have also begun work on rapid response mechanisms for poisonings within the Kavango Zambezi TFCA (KAZA, which will include Hwange National Park) with BirdLife partners in Botswana and Zambia.

4. Since 2017, we have been looking at how we intervene on the mining front. Five of our 20 Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) have been encroached by mining. At present, we are busy working on an ecological report covering the impact of mining in the Chimanimani Mountains (a key area in Zimbabwe for endemism, e.g. there are 90 endemic plant species in Chimanimani in the TFCA) that we are intending to submit to the Minister of Environment and Parliament. In the meantime, we are supporting the training of community mountain guides who have already started providing their service to tourists on the hiking/birding routes in Chimanimani (and Chirinda Forest IBA).



Branch News

Mashonaland

Bird outings around and about Harare

Ken Dixon

MONA VALE VLEI SUNDAY 21ST MARCH 2021

Only 4 of us plus our guide turned out this morning but the birds were there. We saw 47 species in our 3 hour walk. Conditions were different from last month when the vlei was partially flooded. Now, the paths were rock hard, if you could find them in the dew-laden, thick grass. Much of this and the Cosmos and Mexican Poppies were far taller than any of us over much of the area.



African Crake nest found on the vlei by the Editor on 12th January

Perhaps the best sighting was an African Crake, which Dorothy saw along the road. As we set out, a Black-headed Heron stood atop an acacia surveying the grassland and European Bee-eaters called excitedly on all sides. Weavers were still building nests and the Yellow-mantled Widowbirds and Red-collared Widowbirds were as active as ever, along with Yellow Bishop and Southern Red Bishop. 2 African Black Duck overflew and a Long-crested Eagle was over the stadium. In the long grass we found Levillant's Cisticola, Croaking Cisticola, Red-faced Cisticola and Rattling Cisticola and Little Rush-warbler, African Reed-warbler and Dark-capped Yellow Warbler could be heard in the reeds. Some tardy Barn Swallows were among the Grey-rumped Swallows and Wire-tailed Swallows high above us.

Back on the road we added Black-throated Canary and Green Wood-hoopoe in a local garden. 47 species was a respectable count for our enjoyable visit.

Mashonaland East

*Mashonaland East Natural History Society MARONDERA
January/February 2021 Newsletter*

It was disappointing, but I guess anticipated, that lockdown would be enforced at the beginning of the year. This time of the year seems to be good for birding so it was a pity we were confined to our gardens.

I was given a little wireless speaker for Christmas by my son and all I have managed to call so far are the Arrow-marked Babblers. It was quite amazing how they responded to their call on my bird app. The other birds in our

garden have not been too responsive. I did however have some amusement watching the gardener peering into the shrubs looking for the birds calling. I think the African Fish-eagle call eventually gave it away.

Louis Jacobsz is continuing with his good work trying to raise Helmeted Guineafowl. Three of the youngsters that he has reared are 'Pearl Guineafowl' (white in colour) or perhaps white morphed. They are now free to roam the

Trust gardens, but generally confine themselves to the vicinity of Louis' garden.

The Abdim's Storks can still be easily found in the Trust property. There are a couple near the Bowling Green, some near the Frail Care block and quite a few in the New Development Block.

Malcolm Moodie and I regularly swap notes on our sightings of Amur Falcons near Mabvuku. Sue and I recently saw about 500 Amur Falcons perched on the powerlines very close to the Mabvuku turnoff on the Harare to Ruwa road. It was a mid-morning, miserable, cool and drizzling, so we were surprised to see so many of them.

Unfortunately, none of the MENHS members was able to make the trip into Harare to observe the Madagascar Cuckoo. That must have been an awesome sighting. We were sadly unable to do our usual waterbird surveys due to lockdown.

I received a few reports of some of the not-so-common visitors to the Trust. A Wahlberg's Eagle and an African Harrier-hawk were reported seen perched in a tree on different days near Hek De Jager's cottage. Jenny Milne reported seeing a couple of African Sacred Ibis feeding with the Abdim's Storks. We saw a Levaillant's Cuckoo on one of our monthly walks. I saw what I believed was a female Gabar Goshawk near Jo Denton's garden.

We did two bird walks around the Trust during the last two months. I managed to choose lousy weather days each time and the bird counts were not too great. We saw 29 species on the January walk and 35 different species on the February walk. We saw what we believed was a Purple Widowfinch. This was a first for most of us. We had a close-up of several Speckled Mousebirds perched on the Trust boundary fencing wire. They were

perched/hanging while facing the sun. They allowed us to get very close.

The lone Purple-crested Turaco that usually visits our garden has now become three. I have been trying ever so hard for several weeks now to get a pair of Black-collared Barbets to feed from my bird feeder. I hear them every morning and have occasionally seen them perched at the top of an avocado tree growing just outside the garden. I have tried apple slices, orange segments, banana chunks and pomegranates, all to no avail. The resident monkeys seem very grateful. The residents in the New Development houses boast seeing 6 or 7 turacos in their gardens (sighting confirmed) and 5 to 6 Black-collared Barbets perched on the powerlines.

There are a few owls around, but much less than normal. Patch Martin has reported seeing a lot of Cattle Egrets in the big trees on the Green in Marondera town. They seem to have taken over from the Grey Herons. A couple of Common Mynas are with them.

We had an interesting happening a few weeks ago. As Coral Baxter was about to open their garden gate leading onto the road a Lizard Buzzard swooped and picked up an agama (Goggo Manneljie) bathing on the warm tar a few metres in front of her. A couple of Red-winged Starlings appeared out the blue and chased the Lizard Buzzard who released the Goggo Manneljie. The Goggo Manneljie scampered up the nearby tree onto his favourite vantage point.

Phyllis Banks is back home after a successful knee replacement procedure. We look forward to her joining us again on our walks.

The MENHS AGM is planned for Sunday 21st March. It will be our 26th AGM. It is interesting to note that several of the founder members are still actively with us.

Gez Bester

Mashonaland West

Chegutu district has had a great summer season of abundant rain, reflected in the growth of fauna, flora, trees and grasses. From the end of January and all through February rain has fallen with little sunshine. My house at Kadoma has had a total rainfall of 1050mm to date (10th March).

Our excursions have been restricted but we have managed some outings without getting stuck in the mud.

The Black-headed Heron heronry near to the central police station has been so active. We counted 33 nests in the tall gum and jacaranda trees, with many chicks. Fledglings have gone to local farming areas for feeding so noise and

activity has diminished. A pair of Shikra with a juvenile are seen and heard outside the kitchen area of the police station.

28th January at Rio and sewerage ponds

A warm morning at 10 a.m. so walking was lovely. Total of 37 species.

The notable are a pair of Yellow Bishops, many pairs of White-winged Widowbirds, all in grassland. Lesser Striped Swallows and Barn Swallows, Rattling Cisticola and Zitting Cisticola, Spotted Flycatcher, Brimstone Canary, Streaky-headed Seedeater, Diderick Cuckoo, Jacobin Cuckoo, Levallant's Cuckoo, Striped Kingfisher, 1 pair of Red-backed Shrike.

At the ponds 20+ Cattle Egrets, Lesser Swamp-warbler, 1 Common Moorhen, 4 Red-billed Teal, 7 Reed Cormorant, 1 pair Blacksmith Lapwing.

20th February a cloudy but mild day with light breeze. Our 7 a.m. start to Suri Suri area was so refreshing

We stopped along the Airforce road at -18 12.205, 030 02.540. Many birds were out enjoying the dry day in the open grassland. Natal Spurfowl, Long-tailed Paradise-whydah, Rattling Cisticola, Croaking Cisticola and Zitting Cisticola, plus a flock of Orange-breasted Waxbills. Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Orange-breasted Bush-shrike, White-winged Widowbird & Yellow-mantled Widowbird male and female.

The Barn Swallows are nesting under a road bridge and actively feeding. Yellow-throated Longclaws joyously singing, Flappet Lark and Rufous-naped Lark.

Further along the road a handsome male Harlequin Quail leisurely crossed the road. In the mopane woodland we were rewarded with a happy group of 7 Scaly-feathered Finches, all tightly grouped along a tree branch enjoying the warm day. Also Black-headed Oriole, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Long-billed Crombec, Red-backed Shrike (♂ + ♀), Pin-tailed Whydah ((♂ + ♀), Black-chested Snake-eagle, White-browed Sparrow-weavers at the tree nests, Emerald-spotted Wood-dove, Red-eyed Dove and Cape Turtle-doves.

We proceeded to Suri Suri dam, but had to park the vehicle and walk, as parts of the road

were waterlogged. The dam is overflowing and spilling. We could hear the roar of water flowing over but not a bird to see! We enjoyed our tea break in the lovely woodland beside the rocks. Returned home at 1.30 p.m. with a total of 51 species.

27th February at Lion farm beside the Mushumavale River at the Kadoma toll

As we arrived at 7 a.m., fields of different coloured zinnias were a soothing sight to lift our spirits. The seeds are for export. The White-bellied Sunbird, Scarlet-chested Sunbird and Amethyst Sunbird were abundant, darting to and fro through the flowers. Nectar is plentiful and the flower heads had various insects feeding. Golden-breasted Buntings and Cinnamon-breasted Buntings were also darting in front of fields and into vegetation.

We walked through the unspoilt bush towards Mashuma River, finding White-crested Helmet-shrike, Black Cuckoo, Chin-spot Batis, Neddicky, Terrestrial Brownbul and Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Natal Spurfowl, Red-backed Shrike, Long-tailed Paradise-whydah, Green-winged Pytilia, and about Amur Falcon 20 feeding overhead, and African Fish-eagle. A total of 35 species.

4th March. At 4 p.m. we went to visit Hove Dairy farm

The weather was warm and overcast but dry. We parked the vehicle near the homestead where the handsome male Dwarf Bittern is seen daily. Bruce and Carole Newman walk along the road and he appears from the grassy swamp. Sitting in the tree later, he showed off his lovely long neck of stripes. They have also seen the African Crake. Hopefully both species are breeding this wet season.



Dwarf Bittern. Photo I. Riddell

As the daylight diminished, a pair of Yellow-throated Longclaws was having a long conversation, perched on the fence pillars. 14+ Little Bee-eaters also used the fence for end-of-day feeding. A large group of Village Weavers, resident in the garden palm tree, were noisy at day end. The resident White-browed Sparrowweavers occupy two acacia trees with many nests, all facing the west horizon.

Of course, the many Cattle Egrets are tame, strutting amongst the dairy cows and feeding on whatever appears, including the flies! A tranquil, satisfying and comfortable end of the day in our natural bush.



Cattle Egret. Photo I. Riddell

Margaret Parrock *et al.*



More pics from the Lilian's Lovebird survey - see The Babbler #158

Above. BLZ Survey team at Ingwe Pan

Right. Measuring tree diameter



Useful Contacts:

CEO/Ringing Programme: Julia Pierini JuliaPierini@birdlifezimbabwe.org 0772-894562
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
Secretary: Gez Bester ges.bester@gmail.com
Honeyguide production: vacant

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 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!

Due to the instability of the local currency at present, subs are listed in USD, but may be paid in Zimbabwe Dollars at the Bank Rate on the day

Students	1.00
Youth Club Members (Unemployed)	1.00
Youth Club Members	5.00
Individual/Family members (incl. children under 17)	15.00
Pensioners (65 & over)	10.00
Schools (Government)	10.00
Schools (private), Educational Institutions	50.00
Rest of Africa (payable in forex)	40.00
Rest of World (payable in forex)	50.00
Corporate members	*100.00

* 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.

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.

Therefore, it is **ESSENTIAL** please that you advise us by e-mail of your transaction, or your payment will not be recorded. Please notify Sylvia sylvia@zol.co.zw phone 024-2481496 and Paula Dell paula.dell@strachansphoto.com when you have made your payments – and 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 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. \$400 entrance fee for BLZ members, \$500 others.

Greystone Park -17.746184, 31.127215. From Rolf Avenue/Harare Drive traffic circle, turn east onto Gaydon Road. After 2 km turn right into Halford Road and preserve is 200 m on left.

Mashonaland Branch

BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Calendar of Events: APRIL 2021

Saturday 3rd	Marlborough Vlei walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 4th	Mukuvisi Woodlands walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Saturday 10th	National Botanic Gardens Meet in carpark off Fifth Street	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Saturday 17th	Talk on Fothergill Island, Kariba Rob Fynn will give a presentation at the Mukuvisi Woodlands rondavel	Meet at 03.00 p.m.
Sunday 18th	Monavale Vlei walk	Meet at 06.30 a.m.
Sunday 25th	Mazvikadei Croc Farm Meet at CABS, Northridge Park	Meet at 06.30 a.m.

BirdLife Zimbabwe Mashonaland Calendar of Events: MAY 2021

Saturday 1st	Marlborough Vlei walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 2nd	Mukuvisi Woodlands walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Saturday 8th	Greystone Park	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Saturday 15th	Talk – t.b.a. Mukuvisi Woodlands rondavel	Meet at 03.00 p.m.
Sunday 16th	Monavale Vlei walk	Meet at 07.00 a.m.
Sunday 23rd	Gosho Park, Marondera Meet at Mukuvisi Woodlands, Hillside Road	Meet at 07.00 a.m.

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

Are you using the BLZ Mashonaland Calendar of Events on your smartphone?

On your Google account on your computer, click the Google Apps icon (9-dot square) and click **Calendar**. Under My calendars, on the left, tick the box for BLZ Mashonaland Calendar of Events, or try this [link](#).

On your phone go to your calendar – mine is called S Planner – and tap on *More* (yours might say something else but it is your calendar menu) and then *Manage calendars* or whatever yours says. Under Device, the phone, my Samsung has *My calendars* – make sure that is on/ticked, further down it has my Google account – turn on all relevant items and the BLZ Mashonaland Calendar of course. There may be a box/switch to sync your phone with your Google account and this must obviously be on.

Phones and their menus are different but hopefully you can work it out...
...and always have events easily available on your phone.

*Please send contributions for The Babbler 160
June-July 2021 any time before the 15th May.*