

THE BABBLER

(Incorporating The Sunbird and The Barbet)

ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE NEWSLETTER

Mashonaland Branch

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ISSUE: 1 July/August 1994

MASHONALAND BRANCH ACTIVITIES

Regular Monthly Outings

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sunday 3rd July and 7th August 1994. Meet at Paget Road entrance at 7.00 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard in attendance.
2. Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sunday 10th July and 14th August 1994. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre at 7.00 a.m.

Saturday Afternoon Outings

1. Glen Forest Farm. 23rd July 1994. Meet at T A Motors Borrowdale 2.00 p.m. New area.
2. Crest Breeders Farm. 20th August 1994. Meet at GPO Inez Terrace 2.00 p.m.

Sunday Morning Outings

1. Chinyeka Farm Bromley (Mr C Wintle) 31st July 1994. Meet at Beverley Service Station, Msasa. 7.00 a.m. Try to share transport (71 km from Harare)
2. Seke and Harava Dams. 28th August 1994. Meet at GPO Inez Terrace.

Evening Meetings (Vehicle Guard in attendance)

1. Wednesday 20th July 1994. Mr G Hough will show videos on raptors. Meet at the Museum at 6.30 p.m. Please note this date.
2. Thursday 18th August 1994. Mr C Rawson will speak on his Okavango Swamps trip. Meet at the Museum 6.30 p.m.

Rifa Camp. 29th September 1994 - 3rd October 1994. The attached form plus cheque made out to 'The Ornithological Association of Zimbabwe' to be sent to Dave Gray 14 Fisher Avenue Borrowdale by 1st August 1994.

OUTING REPORTS

CHRISTON BANK Nature Reserve – 16th April 1994

Although it was the week end of our AGM at Kyle, 10 enthusiasts turned up to visit the Christon Bank Reserve. The area is a rather pretty hilly, miombo woodland but not too many birds were around. The highlights of the afternoon were many excellent sightings of Whyte's Barbets, a near perfect view of a male Cardinal Woodpecker searching out the odd grub and a good view of Cinnamon-breasted Bunting. An interesting sight was a Red-headed Weaver coming out of breeding plumage. A total of 32 species was identified.

Colin Rawson

HARARE BOTANIC GARDENS 24th April 1994

On a rather cool, cloudy Sunday morning 12 birders set off for a 3 hour walk in the gardens. At the car park near the entrance a rather large bird party entertained us and aroused our enthusiasm which the unexpected weather had dampened somewhat! An African Hoopoe, Kurrichane Thrush, African Yellow White-eyes, a Whyte's Barbet and Crested Barbet were among these entertainers. The pond area did not reveal as much birdlife as was expected, although the Lesser Swamp-warbler and Common Waxbill were interesting to see. The lone Little Grebe and Common Moorhen brought as much interest to our visiting birders from overseas as the more "exotic" birds did to us local birders.

Moving into the more wooded areas, the sighting of the Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and Black-collared Barbets made the Family Capitonidae quite popular on this day. One of our more experienced birders managed to hear the call of the Tambourine Dove and subsequently sighted it. It was interesting to see a family of 5 Red-billed Firefinches – Mum, Dad and three young – to be able to compare their colouration and to detect the tiny white spot near the beaks of the immatures which helps assist the parents at feeding time.

The five of us who managed to finish the walk enjoyed a total of 43 species that morning. Thanks to Jacko Williams for leading us on this walk. Irene Johnstone

MAZOWE CITRUS ESTATES 29th May 1994

Some 15 stoic members braved the very cold, but clear morning on Sunday 29th May to visit the Mazowe Citrus Estates. We all assembled at the entrance gate near the Mazowe Dam wall and then continued along a winding dirt road into the newly established game conservation area. Once all accounted for, we were joined by Sue Fawcett who lives on the estate. We split into two groups and between us we saw a total of 63 species which is not at all bad considering the time of the year. Those of us lucky enough to accompany Sue on a tour around the surrounding hills and game area in a comfortable new Landrover saw a Verreaux's Eagle being mobbed by an African Hawk-eagle plus a fine view of a Black-chested Snake-eagle.

Other highlights included Whyte's Barbet, African Green-pigeon, African Crowned Eagle, Burnt-necked Eremomela, Retz's Helmet-shrike and Green-winged Pytilia.

This area is well worth another visit in the summer months when not only will it be a lot warmer but all the migrants will be available to boost the bird list.

Thanks to Sue Fawcett and Geoff Lowe for organising this outing. Steve Alpe

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

| | | |
|------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Chairman: | Mr. K. Dixon | 62882 Mutare |
| Secretary: | Miss G. Henning | 4 Mimosa Court 2nd Street Mutare |
| Recorder: | Mr. A.B. (Tony) Curtis | 60281 Mutare |

Future Fixtures

| | | |
|---------------------------|-------------|-----------|
| 9th July 1994 (Saturday) | Mutare Area | 2.00 p.m. |
| 31st July 1994 (Sunday) | Penhalonga | 6.30 a.m. |
| 13th August 1994 | No meeting | |
| 28th August 1994 (Sunday) | Osborne Dam | 6.30 a.m. |

All meetings assemble at Mutare Museum at the stated times. Queries/Transport/Confirmation of venues - Phone Ken Dixon 62882 or Tony Curtis - 60281.

Outing Report: 24th April 1994 DOROWA

One or more visits to Dorowa a year have become compulsory inclusions in the Club's programmes and are always well attended. Their popularity is not entirely because of Eric and Una's warm-hearted hospitality and melk-tart - birds are laid on too and the impression received is that any bird that fails to report on time, at the appointed place can expect at least a severe reprimand!

The trip on April 29th was excellent despite pessimistic reports that there were no birds about. Between about 0900 and 1300 we logged 85 species including several late-lingering migrants and a number of species unfamiliar to Eastern Highlanders. The list illustrates the special feature of Dorowa which is that extensive wetlands, a by-product of the phosphate mining and extraction process, exist in close proximity to very dry communal lands and the riverine vegetation along the Save River is only a kilometre or two away.

For most of the 8 visitors from Mutare, the most interesting sighting was the Cape Shovelers, a considerable distance north and east of their previously reported range. They have been present for more than six months and have bred successfully there. Other water birds and waders included Hottentot Teal and Red-billed Teal, Southern Pochard, a lone juvenile Black-winged Stilt, an African Spoonbill, Common Greenshank and other Sandpipers. One Yellow-billed Stork was seen. The drier areas brought excellent observations of Cut-throat Finch and Scaly-feathered Finches, Meves's Starling, Green-winged Pytilia (one seen at very close range feeding three fledglings), Grey-backed Camaroptera, Magpie Shrikes, Kittlitz's Plover and Temminck's Courser. The mixed bushveld was equally interesting with Long-billed Pipit [Wood Pipit?] and Marico Sunbird and in the Sandy Save River bed a tardy Yellow Wagtail caused some controversy. Above us the air was alive all day with Little Swifts, Horus Swifts, African Black Swifts and White-rumped Swifts were also seen and one Sand Martin. Raptors were scarce, but we saw a group of fifteen vultures which included one identified by Dave Burnett as Lappet-faced Vulture, the remainder being White-backed Vultures.

AB Curtis

MATABELELAND BRANCH ACTIVITIES

Future Programme

Evening Meetings

Friday 1st July 1994: Bring and Share Supper. George and Mary Banfield have kindly offered to host a mid-year social; as usual this will be on an organised bring and share basis. All wishing to attend should contact Mary. Tel: 71624. Venue: 49a Lawley Road at 8.00 p.m.

Friday 5th August 1994: 'Little Brown Jobs'. An evening of slides, calls and skins; looking at Pipits and small brown seedeaters. We will attempt to unravel some of the differences between these notorious groups; do bring your bird books and any notes you may have. Venue: 3A Holdengarde Avenue Hillside at 8 00 p.m.

Friday 2nd September 1994: Video evening. Two topical videos details of which still have to be finalised; please contact the Secretary beforehand, Venue: 3 Bouchier Wray Avenue Hillside at 8.00 p.m.

Outings

Sunday 17th July 1994: Aisleby Waterfowl Count. As a result of our experiences earlier in the year we are aiming to become waterborne for this count and hope to enlist the help of T.S. Matabele. All those interested should contact the Chairman to aid organisation or meet at Aisleby boom at 7.30 a.m.

Sunday 21st August 1994: Details of this outing have yet to be finalised. We intend to head out along the Nyamandhlovu Road stopping at a number of places. Those interested should contact Penny Feather Tel. 44034.

Aisleby

Our monthly outings to Aisleby continue, outings now taking place on Saturday afternoons. Dates and Co-ordinators being:

| Date | Co-ordinator | Tel. |
|----------------------------|----------------|-------|
| Saturday, 30th July 1994 | Margaret Stone | 44097 |
| Saturday, 27th August 1994 | Penny Feather | 44034 |

Either contact the Co-ordinator or meet at the Aisleby Farm boom at 2.30 p.m.

From the Chairman

Welcome to our first efforts at National Unity; we hope you will be able to glean more information about our activities throughout the Country and participate in both Branch programmes. Please let us know your views and feelings on this new approach.

Reports

MATOBO Hills Verreaux's Eagle Survey Interim Report

At the time of writing, 28th May 1994, the members of the Verreaux's Eagle Survey team have been active having reported on 31 territories of the 37 within the Survey boundaries.

It would appear that 12 pairs are sitting, having probably laid eggs, another 3 pairs are active at their nests, building and showing signs of settling down. Of the other 16 territories visited, the pairs of birds have been recorded in their area, often displaying or perched nearby and later visits will decide the breeding position.

6 nests have as yet to be visited. Last year there were 27 attempts made by the 37 pairs in the Survey Area.

MATOPOS Raptor Research Group.

Other raptors, not the subject of special studies, are being reported. The Wahlberg's Eagle, Yellow-billed Kite and Steppe Buzzard have already left the area. 19 other raptor species have been reported to the end of May. The most common being African Hawk-eagle, Brown Snake-eagle, Black-chested Snake-eagle, Augur Buzzard and Rock Kestrel. An African Crowned Eagle is showing signs of breeding at its known nest. It was this pair that lost their young Eagle in January 1993. It was picked up dead below the nest.

GEA Banfield

Outings Feedback. Plumtree School. A small group of enthusiastic birders travelled to Plumtree School to join forces with the newly formed Plumtree Bird Club. Saturday afternoon was spent in the school wood and proved rewarding; at least 3 pairs of Crimson-breasted Shrike were spotted. All were calling vigorously and appeared to be displaying. Is this normal for this time of year or is there some other explanation? Amongst the smaller birds seen were Black-chested Prinia, an obliging individual called and then perched on a bush a few metres from us, enabling us to view his black chest. The following morning we moved on to Thekwane and Qusted dams where a multitude of species were sighted. In a single fig tree below the dam wall Dark-capped Bulbul and African Red-eyed Bulbul were present, the latter being a "first" for the area.

A variety of raptors were seen, the most impressive being a pair of Lappet-faced Vultures which circled overhead. In all – a rewarding and worthwhile trip.

AISLEBY Saturday 28th May 1994

Saturday afternoon's outing was well supported and after a smelly perusal of the sewage works, we made our way to the upper reaches of UMGUSA Dam. The water level had fallen attracting a reasonable number of waders, Wood Sandpiper and Marsh Sandpiper, Kittlitz's Plover and Three-banded Plover and a small flock of Curlew Sandpiper were all present. On the far shore large numbers of Egyptian Gooses were seen and 4 Greater Flamingo presumably stopping off whilst en route from their breeding grounds. The afternoon concluded at the Ibis

Dam to watch the Grey Crowned Crane flight in to roost accompanied by numerous Cattle Egrets and African Sacred Ibis. Martin Smith

TAIL FEATHERS

Verreaux's Eagle kill, CHIMANIMANI

This account is an observation made in the Chimanimani's near the Outward Bound School on 16th December 1993 involving two Verreaux's Eagles and a juvenile Klipspringer.

At 10h12 while "shadowing" one of our Management Groups, my attention was drawn to the bleating of a Klipspringer (*Oreotragus oreotragus*) and the loud high pitched alarm call from the adult pair who was about 10 m from their offspring. It was clear that the juvenile was unaccustomed to moving about without its mother - obviously not long out of its rocky shelter - and it hesitated in a small grassy clearing between two large rocky outcrops. With no warning a pair of Verreaux's Eagles (*Aquila verreauxii*) came in over the western ridge, one slightly in front of the other. The juvenile Klipspringer darted back towards its rocky shelter but the leading Verreaux's Eagle swooped in and made contact with the screaming animal and knocked it off its feet. The trailing Eagle then took over using its talons to pin the unfortunate creature down. There was no attempt to kill the Klipspringer and instead the two birds began to rip at its shoulder tearing open a wound in no time while the squeals wavered and subsided as the animal went into shock. The two Eagles were then harassed by two White-necked Ravens (*Corvus albicollis*) who remained at the scene continually dive-bombing the pair who were obviously starving. They ripped at the young buck with savage vigour and within approximately 12 minutes of the initial contact the young Klipspringer appeared to be dead with the two Eagles working, in close co-operation, the whole time.

The systematic feeding procedure was fascinating and after consuming the flesh from the shoulders the abdominal region was opened and the intestines and other organs removed. This was done with a surgeon's precision. The carcass was moved about two metres and feeding continued on the hind quarters. At no time did any hair from the klipspringer become mixed up in the bloody flesh. The birds then split the sternum, pulled it apart and began to peck the intercostal muscles, the neck muscles and the flesh around the spinal cord. The whole time the White-necked Ravens screeched, dive bombed and generally harassed the feeding eagles. The whole feeding session took nearly 2 hours, and on inspection of the carcass (the birds had flown off a short distance with bulging crops) it was as if someone had prepared the buck for a spit braai - it was clean, spread out, split open and devoid of much flesh except for the head which was untouched. The White-necked Ravens came in to scavenge what was left.

The co-operation between the Eagles was unbelievable and the skill shown in tearing the little body apart with incisions made in just the right places was incredible. What a pity I did not have a video camera.

After reading Valerie Gargett's book *The Black Eagle* the section in Prey, Hunting and Adult feeding I would like to make the following suppositions:

1. Judging by the manner in which the birds collaborated and the deliberate co-operation in opening up the carcass they were a well-bonded male/female pair who came upon their prey by chance while on a long range hunting sortie.
2. This observation of definite "co-operative hunting" although opportunist in nature, confirms that in certain situations the Verreaux's Eagles are capable of very close collaboration not only in the hunt but in the actual feeding phase. This supports numerous other observations made in Valerie Gargett's book.

Fen Goodes

Warden OBZ

THE OAZ ZIMBABWE BIRD ATLAS

At the last Council Meeting a decision was made as to the form the OAZ Zimbabwe Bird Atlas would take. This will be a simple Atlas based much on the same lines as the

SABAP one, using the OAZ data recorded during the atlassing period.

It is intended that the Atlas will be small enough for Birdwatchers to carry easily in the field in conjunction with the available current field guides.

We wish to thank all Atlassers for their important contribution to this project which they undertook with great enthusiasm and hard work.

Further information will be announced when the editor returns from his overseas trip in September.

Jacko Williams President OAZ

BIRD SAFARI

Gordon McLean, Editor of "Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa" will be conducting a Bird Safari from 1st September 12th September 1994.

For further details contact Mrs Eleana Lowe, Mazuri Ranch

PO Box 154

Kwekwe

Rifa Camp

(See attached)