

THE BABBLER

ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE NEWSLETTER

ISSUE #10: JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1996

Mashonaland Branch

Chairman: Mr B Elliot 302465
Secretary/
Treasurer: Mrs I Gray 885406
Members: Mr G Lowe 735507
Mr C Rawson -
PRO Mr K Barrow 732457
Editor: Mr D Gray 885406

Matabeleland Branch

Martin Smith 42474
Mrs P Feather 44034
Mr W Goodwin 64121
Mr M Smith 42474

Postal Addresses:

Committee: P O Box CY 161, Causeway
Sunbird: 14 Fisher Ave, Borrowdale

P O Box 44, Bulawayo
Barbet: P O Box 44, Bulawayo

MASHONALAND BRANCH ACTIVITIES

Regular Monthly Outings

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sunday 7th January and 4th February 1996. Meet at Paget Road entrance at 6.30 a.m. There will be a vehicle guard in attendance.
2. Lake Chivero Bird Sanctuary: Sunday 14th January and 11th February 1996. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre at 6.30 a.m. Beginners are especially catered for. Vehicles parked in a safe area. Bring your chairs and tea.

Saturday Afternoon Outings

1. 20th January 1996. Rainham Dam. Meet at Belvedere shopping Centre at 3.00 p.m. Bring your chairs and refreshments.
2. 17th February 1996. Gletwyn Farm (Mr Ian Ross). Meet at Chisipite Shopping Centre at 2.00 p.m.

Sunday Outings

1. 28th January 1996. Alex Masterson's Annual vleis walk. Come and learn about the LBJs, flufftails and bitterns - maybe a Black Coucal or two. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre at 6.30 a.m. Bring your wellies and waders!
2. 25th February 1996. David Whitehead Ponds Chegutu. Meet at Marimba shopping Centre at 6.30 a.m. Bring your chairs, lunch and liquid refreshments. Good for water birds.

Evening Meetings

1. 13th January 1996. Branch AGM. Mr Arthur Dunkley will speak on Falconry in Zimbabwe. Snacks and a cash bar available. Please complete the tear off at the back and return post haste

to help with the catering. A number of the Committee will be standing down. Please submit nominations to Bryant Elliot 7 Ashbrittle Close, Mount Pleasant. Venue: Alexandra Sports Club between Blakiston and Prince Edward Streets. Time: 6 p.m. for 6.30 p.m.

2. 15th February 1996. Slide Show by Geoff Lowe. Geoff has some excellent slides of a Cape Eagle-owl and chicks. Venue: Alexandra Sports Club. Time: 6.30 p.m.

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

Outings 1996

	Venue	Time
Saturday January 13th	Mutare Heights	2 p.m.
Sunday January 28th	Dorowa	5.30 a.m.
Saturday February 10th	Osborne Dam	2 p.m.
Sunday February 25th	Odzi - Mapor Estate	6.00 a.m.

The group assembles at the museum in Aerodrome Road at the time stated. It is always advisable to check on arrangements by ringing Tony Curtis on 60281.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Future Programme

Evening Meetings

Friday 5th January 1996: Video Evening - Two videos. 1. "Birds of the Burning Lakes" - Life on the Rift Valley Soda Lakes. 2. "The Kea Parrot". The life of the rare New Zealand Kea Parrot. Venue: 92 Arnold Way Burnside. Time: 8.00 p.m. Contact Penny Feather, Bulawayo 44034.

Friday 2nd February 1996: Matabeleland Branch AGM. Notice is hereby given of the Matabeleland Branch Annual General Meeting to be held at 3A Holdengarde Avenue, Hillside, Bulawayo at 8 p.m. The AGM will be part of a social braai. Braai fires, punch and desserts will be provided. Bring meat, salad, eating utensils and your swimming costumes. Contact Adrienne Smith 42474. Meet at 6.00 p.m.

Outings

Sunday 14th January 1996. Waterfowl Count - Lower and Upper Umgusa Dams. Hopefully levels will have risen attracting in plenty of birds. Your support will be most welcome. Meet at Aisleby boom 7.30 a.m. or contact the Chairman 42474.

Sunday 21st January 1996: Fort Rixon. We hope for a significant amount of inflow. All interested contact Penny Feather 44034.

22nd-25th February 1996. Sentinel Ranch Trip. Following Colin Bristow's interesting talk to the Branch we now plan to visit the Ranch and hopefully find some Limpopo specials. Numbers are limited and a special full board rate has been arranged. All interested contact Martin Smith 42474 as soon as possible.

From the Chairman

Welcome to 1996 and with it hopefully rain and plenty of interesting birdlife. Dry, hot, dusty conditions produced frustrated birders and extremely early activity by the birds. By the time my eyes had opened most birds had retired for the day! Migrants arrived later only appearing well into November. A Booted Eagle was identified at AISLEBY. Perhaps this year with rain Aisleby will continue to yield interesting sightings. Good birding. Martin Smith.

MIDLANDS BRANCH

Co-ordinator: B W Beekes, P O Box 55 Shurugwi. Phone 152-6422

Outings planned are:-

Late January/Early February 1996. A weekend camping on a farm in Lower Gweru - mopane on the lower levels, Miombo on the hills and some river frontage. Confirmation of venue will be notified.

Early April and Early June: To be advised.

Early September - Sebakwe Poort near Kwekwe. I am sure enough interest from Mashonaland and Matabeleland will be forthcoming to turn this into an inter branch visit. If the rains are good perhaps the Black Stork will have bred successfully.

NATIONAL ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1996

The National AGM will be held over the weekend 29th and 30th March 1996 at La Rochelle, Penhalonga.

Accommodation consists of fully supplied cottages. Self catering. The Cottages are:-

Virginia (Sleeps 6 - 2 Bedroom's)	\$60.00
Large Rondavel (Sleeps 2)	
East Wing (Sleeps 5 - 2 Bedrooms)	per person
West Wing (Sleeps 4 - 2 Bedrooms)	
Small Rondavel (Sleeps 2 - Double Bed)	per night
Bernard Wing (Sleeps 4 - 1 Bedroom)	
Fantasy (Sleeps 2 - Double Bed)	
Main House (Sleeps 8 - 4 Bedrooms - No catering facilities)	
Camping	\$20.00 per campsite of 6 people

Please complete the Tear Off at the back of the Newsletter and return to Mr Ken Dixon.

OUTING REPORTS

HOT SPRINGS Sunday 24th September 1995.

Only three birders including the writer went to Hot Springs. The Chairman was at the OAZ Rifa camp at Chirundu. Where were the others? Perhaps 0600 is too early - if so let the committee

know. Constructive ideas are always welcome.

But back to Nyanyadzi – we made the pumping station our base and began birding at about 7.30 a.m. with two Trumpeter Hornbills. Upstream produced a solitary African Green-pigeon and a small group of southern Yellow-billed Hornbills, Village Weavers, a few small waders and a couple of Hamerkops. A large tree in full flower on the opposite bank was attracting Greater Blue-eared Starlings and Meves's Starlings as well as Red-winged Starlings plus a Cardinal Woodpecker and a White-bellied Sunbird. Lower down river a flock of Yellow-bellied Greenbuls was mobbing a green snake. Two White-fronted Plover and a coucal were seen. Midday was uncomfortably hot and birds more difficult to find. We were satisfied with a total of 58 species so ate our sandwiches and returned to the city, only stopping briefly to check the sewage ponds at Zimunya. The most notable feature of most birding these days is the ABSENCE of so many birds which ought to be there. On this outing there were no raptors, finches, canaries, waxbills, widowbirds or whydahs. On the river banks only the larger trees remain. There is very little dense riverine bush. No reedbeds, no grass nor small vegetation - but plenty of goats. Discouraging to put it mildly. Tony Curtis.

CYNARA Farm, OLD MUTARE Saturday 14th October 1995

A group of nine braved the heat for another exciting outing to our local birding Mecca. We welcomed our Vumba expert Cecilia Manson, Andrew Taylor recently returned, Gilbert and Simbarashe from Boys High. Despite frighteningly low levels in the dams they haven't yet completely dried up. There were Yellow-billed Stork, a solitary Black Stork, White-faced Duck and 2 Comb Ducks plus the usual waders. A group of 30 Speckled Pigeon and a couple of Water Thick-knees were present as well as Giant Kingfisher and Pied Kingfisher. A welcome sight was an African Pygmy-kingfisher and the rarity of the day was the Cuckoo Finch not seen here for many years. The 74 species proved what an excellent venue this is. Ken Dixon

Tarvie Farm, Guinea Fowl, GWERU Sunday 29th October 1995

We started at 0800 with a walk around Ted and Jacque Allen's garden and saw Village Weavers and Southern Masked-weavers and Miombo-double Collared Sunbird nesting. A male African Paradise-flycatcher and Tropical Boubou were playing in a peach tree and overhead were two Wahlberg's Eagles. We then walked through riverine and acacia woodland and saw White-bellied Sunbird, Golden-breasted Bunting and a Pied Crow chased by a Fork-tailed Drongo, Violet-backed Starling a Kurrichane Thrush and lots of Blue Waxbills. On our return to the house we saw Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, European Bee-eaters, swifts and Red-winged Starlings. In all we saw and heard 59 species. Thank you to Mr and Mrs Allen for this outing and our Bulawayo visitor for his attendance. Gordon Conway & Ian Hoffman

Valley Coffee BURMA VALLEY Sunday 29th October 1995.

The 5.30 a.m. start did not deter the faithful with nine of us responding to the call, the reward being an excellent day's birding at a new venue for the club. We went 17 km from the tarred road over a steep pass into a hidden valley facing the Himalayas in the distance.

We walked from the farm house through fields of vegetables into lovely miombo woodland to the site of a new dam. There were Amethyst Sunbirds everywhere, an African Paradise-flycatcher and an African Pygmy-kingfisher were seen - a Narina Trogon and Red-capped Robin-chat were heard in the heavily wooded valley - overhead was a Steppe Buzzard and a Martial Eagle? ...or was it a Black-chested Snake-eagle? Opinions are still divided. Grey-backed Camaroptera and an African Dusky Flycatcher were seen. After tea and fresh fruit at the farmhouse we set off in the Land Rover towards the river where the riverine vegetation was pretty dense but we all managed to get good views of a Narina Trogon and overhead we saw a Wahlberg's Eagle - not often seen here in recent years. Our final count was a hard-earned 65 species. I was so enthralled I forgot our hosts Lindsay and Ann Guild were due to leave for Harare at lunchtime. Sorry and thanks once again. Ken Dixon.

MOUNTAIN HOME, PENHALONGA Saturday 11th November 1995

This weekend last year we had a soaking at the Hurrell's Farm along the same road. None such luck this time; however the birding was good. We began at the Muchena with its vast plastic greenhouses and modest little dam at the bottom of a still damp valley which attracted Black-headed Herons, one Grey Heron, some snipe and African Black Duck and the usual waders. On the shore were Pin-tailed Whydahs in breeding dress - nearby we found a pair of Black Cuckooshrikes and a Greater Honeyguide. Yellow-throated Longclaw were numerous.

The area of indigenous forest was quiet when we arrived but as the sun went down more and more birds appeared - Singing Cisticola, Cape Batis, Collared Sunbird and Stripe-cheeked Greenbul. At the exit gate we stopped for Steppe Buzzard and a lone Common Peacock which we added to the Common Ostrich on the exotics list. K Dixon.

Video evening Thursday 16th November 1995

20 of us spent a delightful evening watching a 3 hour video on Garden Birds by George Jones of KADOMA. It was professionally edited and narrated and the quality and clarity of the photography was excellent. George spent six years compiling this work of art.

I do not know how many species there were but the highlight was the delightful record of successfully rearing a Kurrichane Thrush chick. For those who missed this video there is a copy in the OAZ Library. I would like to thank George for sharing this amazing record with us and Jacko for having the meeting in her house.
Jennifer Parker

Randall's Farm, UMGUSA Sunday 19th November 1995

A small group drove out to the former Southern Carmine Bee-eater colony and as in two previous years none were to be seen - only a single pair of White-fronted Bee-eaters was sighted. Despite this there was plenty of action. Along the water course Little Bittern and a Green-backed Heron and within the acacia a Pearl-spotted Owlet proved a useful lure for a variety of warblers, sunbirds and weavers.

Whilst having tea and commenting on the lack of raptors there

followed a rapacious squawk and we discovered we had been sitting under a Wahlberg's Eagle nest for 20 minutes. Closer inspection revealed the sitting bird and a variety of prey remains. It was surprising how easy it was to overlook the nest. Our thanks to the Randall's for allowing us access to their beautiful property. Martin Smith

Imbabala Safari Camp 10th - 12th November 1995

This picturesque camp is situated some 17 km downstream from the KAZUNGULA Border post. There are no other craft on the Zambezi as far down as the Katombora rapids. Because of the heat outings were early morning and late afternoon. Dr Kit Hustler was our tour leader.

Highlights seen from a hide in a nearby vlei were Grey Plovers and Long-toed Lapwings, Slaty Egret and Lesser Jacana. On the pontoon we saw Rufous-bellied Herons and 15 Black-crowned Night-herons, Coppery-tailed Coucals and White-browed Coucal, several pairs of African Pygmy-goose and an African Finfoot.

Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, White-fronted Bee-eaters, Little Bee-eaters and European Bee-eaters were everywhere and African Skimmers and White-winged Terns were a joy to watch.

A walk on the rocks at the Katombora rapids, being very careful not to disturb the hundreds of birds, we had very good sightings of Rock Pratincoles and Collared Pratincoles.

A night drive produced, besides several Hyaenas, an African Barred Owlet and African Scops-owl, Pennant-winged Nightjars and Swamp Nightjars. Our final count was 109 species.

Upper Sebakwe River - CENTRAL ESTATES MVUMA 25th and 26th November

The Southern Carmine Bee-eater colony was magnificent. In an area of about 10 x 15 metres 287 holes were counted of which about 75% were active with an estimated of 500 to 600 birds. The colony was on an almost flat sandy river bank with the holes going down into the ground. Recent rains had washed away some of the lower holes. Raptors were abundant. Tawny Eagle, Steppe [Steppe Eagle or Steppe Buzzard?], Wahlberg's Eagle, African Hawk-eagle and African Fish-eagles, Bateleur - a dark juvenile and Yellow-billed Kites. Vultures seen were Cape Vulture and Lappet-faced Vulture and White-backed Vulture. There was an almost total lack of seed and fruit eaters.

Three Midlands outings have been held and by coincidence they have been miombo or miombo edge areas and interesting similarities and differences have been noted. Future venues will be organised to pursue this theme.

BERT: In September four young eaglets were captured and collared. Initially all transmitters worked well but sadly after a few weeks due to a fault with the batteries, all of them failed. Despite this the experience gained capturing and handling eaglets will be invaluable when this exercise is repeated next year.

Martin Smith

TAIL FEATHERSWORLD BIRDWATCH Saturday and Sunday 7 & 8th October 1995

The response to this event by OAZ members was magnificent and a big thank you to all who participated from the garden bird watchers to the static game counters.

Mashonaland, Matabeleland branches and EDBC all reported on this event and the following is a resume.

In all 451 species were recorded and the list was sent to BirdLife International and to Japan by fax. This event was sponsored by the Japanese telecommunications company Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation NTT and they agreed to donate \$10 (US?) for every species recorded anywhere in the world. Funds raised will be used to support Birdlife International's work in the Philippines and Indonesia and the Endemic Bird Areas Project.

Let's aim at 500 species from OAZ for Birdwatch 1996, and please contribute to the revived Field Card Scheme which needs your support. Please use 'old' Atlas cards obtainable from Jacko Williams 14 Harare Drive Greystone Park Borrowdale and not Field cards.

HONEYGUIDE 1996

If your June 1995 copy has a page or pages blank, please return it to Jacko Williams and you will receive a complete copy.

FIELD CARDS

Stamped, self addressed envelopes (S.A.E.) must be sent with all cards otherwise they won't be returned.

Postage must be included with orders as follows:

8 cards for	\$8.00 plus 60c for postage
12 "	\$12.00 plus \$1.00 for postage
24 "	\$24.00 plus \$1.80 for postage

and a large size envelope please.

CHECKLISTS

5 for \$6.00 plus 60c postage plus large envelope

STOP PRESS

I urgently need YOU to be one of 80 volunteers to lead a Fun Day, around the Harare area, Sponsored Bird Count to raise funds for at least 3 charities. You will lead a group of 3 (mostly uninitiated people) and record as many birds as possible. This will happen some Saturday in February - details later. PRIZES, prizes donated by Swarovski whose products are promoted by Strachan's.

Please send your name now to Jacko Williams 14 Harare Drive, Greystone Park or phone 882206. This is a very urgent request and success depends on OAZ members. If you volunteer and then find you have double dated you may withdraw.