

THE BABBLER

ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE NEWSLETTER

ISSUE #11: MARCH/APRIL 1996

Mashonaland Branch

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MASHONALAND BRANCH ACTIVITIES

Outings

1. Mukuvisi Woodlands: Sunday 3rd March and 7th April 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 10th March and 4th April 1996. Meet at Marimba Shopping Centre at 6.30 a.m.

Saturday Afternoons

1. 23rd March 1996. Atlanta Farm (Mr D Stobart) Enterprise Road. Meet Chisipite Shopping Centre 2 p.m. Habitat dam and woodland.
2. 20th April 1996. Mr C G Tracey's farm Mount Lothian, Enterprise, opposite Ewanrigg entrance. Meet Chisipite Shopping Centre 2 p.m.

Sunday

1. No March outing because of the National AGM.
2. 28th April 1996. Mazowe Citrus Estate. Meet at Ashbrittle shops at 6.30 a.m.

Thursday evening

1. 21st March 1996. Mr Alex Masterson will talk on a subject of his choice. Venue: Alexandra Sports Club 6.30 p.m. Cash bar available.
2. 15th April 1996. Mr Mike Soroczynski will give a talk on raptors of the Jwaneng Mining Area in Botswana, especially accounts

of Martial Eagles and Lappet-faced Vultures breeding illustrated with slides. Venue: Alexandra Sports Club at 6.30 p.m. Cash bar available.

EASTERN DISTRICTS BIRD CLUB

Chairman: Mr X. Dixon 62882 Mutare
Recorder: Mr A B (Tony) Curtis 60181 Mutare

Outings

Saturday 9th March 1996. Penhalonga 2 p.m.
No other dates to hand. Contact Ken Dixon or Tony Curtis for details. The group assembles at the Museum in Aerodrome road at the time stated. It is always advisable to check on arrangements by ringing Ken or Tony.

MATABELELAND BRANCH

Outings

Sunday 17th March 1996: Circular Drive. A walk in the area above Hillside dams. Meet at 14 Stuttaford Road at 7 a.m. or contact Martin Smith. Bring morning tea.

Sunday 21st April 1996: Tarr's Farm Ntabazinduna. The last visit was years ago so it will be interesting to see the changes to the avifauna. Could see the rescued Cape Eagle-owl. Meet Ascot Car Park 7 a.m. Bring lunch.

Aisleby

This continues to produce excellent sightings. Contact the Coordinator or meet at the boom at 7.30 a.m.

Date	Coordinator	Telephone
Sunday 31st March	M Smith	42474
Sunday 25th April	W Goodwin/ G Banfield	64121 71624

Evening Meetings

Friday 1st March: Hillside Dams Ramble. Meet at the Aloe Garden Car park at 5 p.m. or contact Martin Smith.

Friday 5th April: Verreaux's Eagle meeting. George Banfield will brief us on allocation of nests and map out survey work for 1996. Venue: 49a Lawley Road Suburbs, 8 p.m. Prospective Eaglers welcome. Contact George Banfield - 71624.

From the Chairman

The year started with misted binoculars and damp feet. The waterfowl count at AISLEBY had a brief respite from the rain. Highlights were a Booted Eagle and an Allen's Gallinule. Interesting comparisons with last years count:-

Species	Jan 95	Jan 96
White-breasted Cormorant	11	39
Reed Cormorant	13	11
Cattle Egret	1237	762
Squacco Heron	22	20
African Sacred Ibis	367	269
Glossy Ibis	25	105
Ducks	1226(9 spp.)	471 (8 spp.)
Grey Crowned Crane	10	8

Please do continue with your support-subscription renewals. Martin Smith.

MIDLANDS BRANCH

Co-ordinator: Mr B W Beekes P O Box 55 Shurugwi 152-6422

Outings

9-10th March 1996. Moyo Ranch Kwekwe. For further details contact Bernard Beekes.

NATIONAL ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

29-30th March 1996 Mare Dam Nyanga.

La Rochelle is no longer available. The new venue is Mare Dam Nyanga National Park. Those who booked have had their bookings and payments transferred. Camping is available at Nyangombe Camp site. There are no further chalets available. If you wish to attend and do not wish to camp contact Jacko Williams Phone Harare 882206 as she has a cottage available which is 20 km from Mare.

REPORTS

Mashonaland Branch AGM. 18th January 1996.

This was well attended by 34 members. Business was short and sweet - the Chairman's report, Financial report and Mukuvisi report were given. Two new members were elected to the Committee namely Mrs Deborah Varden and Mr Dave Rockingham-Gill. The guest speaker was Mr Arthur Dunkley who spoke on Falconry in Zimbabwe and he showed some fantastic slides which he presented in the form of a quiz. He had a Peregrine hen and Tiercel (live) to illustrate the difference in their size. (Anyone who would like to read the reports is welcome to contact me. Ed.)

Thursday 19th October 1995. Richard Bell - Butterflies in relation to birds.

Those who missed this meeting missed a rare treat. Richard gave a fascinating and well-illustrated talk on local butterflies reminding us that they have migratory, breeding, feeding and camouflage habits. There are about 200 species in Zimbabwe, some of which are under threat due to habitat destruction. Although most of us know little about butterflies it is certain that we will look at them with more interest in the future. Thank you Richard.

Sally Perrett

Friday-Sunday 1st - 3rd December 1995. HIPPO POOLS - UMFURUDZI Safari Area. Words like Pallid, Grey-hooded, Red-faced and Fiery-necked must have made a young couple from USA wonder who they were mixing with but it was the Mashonaland Birdwatchers Club weekend outing to this delightful venue. We were well catered for by Sue and Ian Jarvis. There were beautiful walks in the riverine forest or the wooded hills. The highlights were Jacko's lifer - a Pel's Fishing-owl, Greater Painted-snipe Green Sandpiper, Black-throated Wattle-eye to name but a few and for some lucky people a Narina Trogon.

Collette Wiles

Sunday 26th November 1995. CYNARA Farm.

On our way to Cynara we stopped on the Nyanga road for some Capetonians to see Abdim's Storks a lifer for some. The new dam had the usual waders etc. and along the river we saw a Black-crowned Night-heron and Golden-tailed Woodpecker to name but a few. The old dam despite the dearth of water had a Yellow-billed Stork and a few Egyptian Goose. The woodland revealed Scarlet-chested Sunbirds nest and two Broad-billed Rollers - the latter being a new species for Cynara. The Raptor list included Rock Kestrel, White-backed Vultures, Steppe Buzzard and a Black-chested Snake-eagle. 90 species were counted in 4 hours. On our return at MUTARE Heights we saw Cabanis's Bunting, Miombo Rock-thrush and a Miombo Tit - all lifers for our visitors.

Ken Dixon

Sunday 9th December 1995. Eden Lodge, VUMBA.

This hotel is a must for visiting birders with a bird list of 140 species. Because of the inclement weather our list was a third. Lesser Striped Swallows were seen at the dam. In the field were whydahs, widowbirds, Yellow-bellied Waxbill, both Bronze Mannikin and Red-backed Mannikins and Brimstone Canary. Gorgeous Bush-shrikes and Olive Bush-shrikes sang but were unseen. We did have a good view of a Dark-capped Yellow Warbler singing. Eden Lodge is on our list for 1996. **Ken Dixon**

Saturday 13th January 1996. MUTARE Heights

Our first outing of the year was at the top of Christmas Pass.

Sometimes we produce an impressive list for this top quality area and sometimes hardly a bird is sighted. This outing was for the most part mainly the latter and we struggled to find any birds at all, apart from the Barn Swallows and Eastern Saw-wings. Fortunately Darryl Plowes gave us information about the trees and plants which greatly relieved the frustration. However on our return to my favourite spot birds began to appear including African Dusky Flycatcher and Spotted Flycatcher. The list total was 27 species.

Ken Dixon

Upper HILLSIDE Dam, BULAWAYO.

A failing memory forgets just when this dam last had water but it must be all of two or three years in which time it has been totally dry until a storm over Burnside brought a flush of water into it on 10th December - not nearly full as reported in the Chronicle. Enough water made it stretch back to the remains of the old dam wall that burst there about 100 years ago. I visited the area in the late afternoons off and on for the next fortnight which was very interesting.

Day 1. No birds the frogs went mad.

Day 2. 2 Black-headed Herons, 5 White-faced Duck. Frogs still frantic

Day 3. 4 Black-headed Herons, 3 White-faced Duck, 2 Little Grebe.

Day 4. 1 Red-knobbed Coot, 4 Little Grebe.

Day 5-9. No observations-spoilt by dogs and people over the weekend, but Red-knobbed Coot and Little Grebe still in evidence. A Reed Cormorant flew overhead.

Day 10. Red-knobbed Coot and Little Grebe.

Day 11. 1 Egyptian Goose, 6 Little Grebe, 2 Red-billed Teal, 2 Red-knobbed Coot, 1 Little Bittern.

Day 12. No observation.

Day 13. 8 Little Grebe, 2 Lesser Moorhen, 6 Red-knobbed Coot, 1 Little Bittern.

Day 14. 8 Little Grebe, 2 Lesser Moorhen, 6 Red-knobbed Coot, 1 Little Bittern.

Subsequent visits showed the bird population had stabilised with perhaps more skulkers in the fringe vegetation. Southern Red Bishops came into the grasses on the edge of the water and Yellow Bishops were seen higher upstream. Water continued to inflow gently and levels kept constant.

Martin Smith

TAIL FEATHERS

1. OAZ BIRDWATCH. 24th and 25th February 1996.

Cards available from Jacko Williams, 14 Harare Drive Borrowdale. Completed cards to be returned to Jacko not later than 11th March 1996. PLEASE. The area covered is a radius of 50 km from your central point. Teams must have at least 2 OAZ members. Let's have a good coverage this year.

2. "BIRDING BIG DAY 1996".

Zimbabwe's contribution to World Birdwatch Day. Sunday 17th March 1996. Organised jointly by Peter Ginn of Peter Ginn Birding Safaris, Derek Solomon of On Safari International, and Jacko Williams of OAZ.

Start and finish at Mukuvisi Woodlands, visit one of three check points during the day and in between, find your own birding spots. Be part of an effort by STRACHANS/SWAROVSKI to contribute to international bird spotting efforts and raise money for:

1. Environmental education at Mukuvisi Woodlands,
2. Environmental education at the Mavuradonha CAMPFIRE Project,
3. Environmental education at the Lowveld CAMPFIRE Project,
4. OAZ Bird Hide at Lake Chivero.

See how many different birds your team can identify. Win prizes for the top ten teams in the categories:

The most birds ticked, (there might even be one for the fewest birds ticked!)

Most sponsorship raised, plus extra prizes for spot identifications at check in points.

Have fun!

Entry: \$200 per team of 2 or 3 spotters, which, after costs, will be added to the opening sponsorship by STRACHANS/SWAROVSKI of \$1 per Bird per Team. Your additional sponsorship: Individual, friends, Company etc; will then complete the healthy support for these environmental projects. THE CHALLENGE IS TO EQUAL OR BETTER STRACHAN'S EFFORTS! (School teams may enter free, but still participate in the fundraising by obtaining sponsorship.) NO EXPERIENCE IS NECESSARY, BUT AN EXPERIENCED "BIRDER" CAN BE ALLOCATED TO YOUR TEAM IF YOU WISH.

Entry forms obtained from one of the above organisers.

OAZ Members are required to assist teams in bird identification. At least 20 members. Please give your names to Jacko Williams, phone 882206. Or put in your own team. Let's fly the OAZ

flag high and not to be found wanting. This is not a substitute date for OAZ Birdwatch.

3. 1996 Subscriptions

This is the final reminder before being struck off the mailing list. Grateful thanks to those members who have made donations to the Association. They are greatly needed and much appreciated.

On the other hand, what a shame, some family members have found it necessary to revert to ordinary membership, just for the sake of another \$10-00 a year.

4. Some things of Interest

a Amur Falcon Roosts

The CHITUNGWIZA roost was occupied in mid November and the TAFARA roost 1st December 1995.

b Mr. Harry Tucker reported that on 14 December 1995 an adult male Narina Trogon flew into his dining room window pane at 17 Ross Rd Colray, BULAWAYO; unfortunately it was killed.

c Tina Duncan of 11 Ambassador Rd, Chisipite HARARE reported that her cat had killed a White-starred Robin in her garden in December.

d Jacko Williams reported an Orange-breasted Bush-shrike in her [HARARE] garden on the 5th February 1996.

5. Report from FELIXBURG

In the past 12 months the Rockingham-Gill family and Rolf Chenaux-Repond have stirred up interest in the state of the vulture population on the Highveld. In Felixburg (QDS 1930B4 altitude approx. 1500m) regular visitors to the "take away" number over 100 and are usually seen in September/October flying high coming from a WSW direction. White-backed Vultures dominate with 2-4 Lappet-faced Vultures. My ambition is to positively identify a Cape Vulture but there are a number of immature birds in the fray which makes it difficult. The Lappet-faced Vultures seem to open up the belly and the fun only starts after they have landed. In my experience vultures will not tackle an ailing animal. They sit around for hours saying Grace although some months ago Coert Erasmus came across a cow not yet dead on which a number of vultures had started feeding. Our extended drought has depleted the water table and wetlands and the traditional nesting sites of our six resident pairs of Wattled Cranes were so exposed and degraded that there was no successful rearing last winter. Artificial islands have now been constructed. The good news is that on the 16 September 1995 38 Wattled Cranes were counted near DRIEFONTEIN Mission - the second highest number ever recorded. The highest of 86 was recorded in the 80s by Tracey Couto and me. The other good news is that Jaap Jovner has fenced off Widgeon Pan, where Alex Masterson discovered Melodious Larks easterly limit. This remarkable pan almost on the crest of the watershed held permanent water and was renowned for its duck shooting in earlier times and was even frequented by flamingo but persistent drought and trampling by cattle had virtually destroyed its vegetative cover. It will be extremely interesting to study its recovery under complete protection.

Keith Harvey

6. Grey Penduline-tits and Red-capped Larks at Birkdale

On October 3rd 1995 I watched a pair of Grey Penduline-tits gathering fluff from a nest (theirs?) and then flying off (to a new nest?). After a period of three weeks there was little trace of that nest. This occurred again in a leafless Muwanga tree which appears to be the favourite tree of these birds on Birkdale. On November 7th I watched a pair of Tits approaching their nest from different angles each time. Before and after entering they titivated the exterior of the nest.

On October 9th in a well grazed maize field I was watching Red-capped Larks when a really pale bird came in front of the stationary vehicle (my mobile hides). It was a Red-capped Lark with a pale rufous crown and pectoral patches. Its back was dirty white and its wings, tail feathers and breast feathers were pure white - beak and legs were pale grey. On 29th I watched this albino feeding either a mate or juvenile? On November 11th while studying the albino I was astonished to see a Rosy-throated Longclaw which has never been recorded on Birkdale.

Irralie Howland

7. Field Cards

Since Issue No 8 of the *Babbler* I have received 36 Field cards from near Harare i.e. Kent Estate, Stratford Estate and Langford Farm. Mrs Pat Bellingan from the latter says she has been contributing cards for the past 30 years. Also received from Aberfoyle, Nyanga Downs to name but a few.

Vincent Parker in Mozambique is devoting the next 10 years to atlassing that country so anyone who can help with cards of this area please send them to me and I will forward them.

Many people have reverted to ticks which simply mean presence. Field cards should record quantities e.g. 90 White Storks.

David Rockingham-Gill

8. AISLEBY Sightings

3/12/95. African Marsh-harrier flying low over Ibis Dam. Yellow Wagtail seen at waste dump.

10/12/95. Yellow Wagtail seen in same area. 10 Cape Longclaws - more than usual. 5 Cut-throat Finch not seen before - at termite exit.

16/12/95. At 16.30 5 Lesser Kestrels circling over Hillcrest catching and eating flying ants.

Clive Townsley

9. Question Answered

In answer to Mr R W L Stuttaford's comment re the Collared Palm-thrush not appearing in his 1991 Newman's edition, it appears on Page 330. It is indexed under 'Thrush'. Hoping this will be of assistance.

10. DYLAN ASPINWALL

It is with the deepest regret that the murder of Dillon of the Zambian Ornithological Society was reported in December 1995. His love and knowledge of birds will be greatly missed especially by those lucky to have met him at RIFA.

11. Australian Exotics

Some time ago I appealed for Information, anecdotal or documentary, of birds in Zimbabwe utilising eucalyptus and other exotic plants.

The response from readers has been encouraging and has given impetus for further observation and collection of material on the ways birds cope with Australian species in an exotic location. I would like to thank all those who wrote to me with details of their sightings or with references to published or soon to be published material. I am returning to live in Australia and further correspondence on this matter will be welcome. My address in Australia is 3/8 Spray Street, Elwood, Victoria 3184.

Doug Laing

12. Nesting boxes for sale. Contact Martin Smith Phone 19-42474.

TAIL TAIL FEATHERS

A well known Safari Club in Harare is issuing certificates commemorating the number of species seen. Here is a suggestion for another certificate.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT _____ IS A MEMBER IN GOOD STANDING OF THE INDOOR BIRDWATCHERS SOCIETY.

MEMBERSHIP IS GRANTED TO THOSE WHO HAVE IDENTIFIED THE FOLLOWING BIRDS THROUGH THE BOTTOM OF A MARTINI GLASS, WHILE SEATED:

1. EMERALD THROATED DOWAGER.
2. EXTRA MARITAL LARK, (whose call is 'kinsey, kinsey, kinsey')
3. RUFFLED SPOUSE.
4. DOUBLEBREASTED SEARSUCKER.
5. GREAT AMERICAN REGRET.
6. RED EYED VERTIGO
7. MORNING GROUSE.
8. GIMLET EYED TITWATCHER.
9. AFTER DINNER PEEWEE.
10. ROSY BREASTED PUSHOVER.
11. MIDNIGHT BED THRASHER.
12. QUICK GANDER.
13. FURTIVE NUTSCRATCHER
14. SWIFT HONEYMOON NOONER